

“A man is only a man among other men, but to his woman he is all things”: Hip Hop Video Vixens’ Impact on Singleness Crisis Rhetoric

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Launched in the early 1980s, music videos continue to garner global popularity on television networks such as Music Television (MTV), Black Entertainment Television (BET), and Video Hits1 (VH1). A four-to-six minute advertisement, the music video “sells music and the fabulous lifestyle signified by whatever material acquisitions are worn (or not), driven, or drank within its frames—all at a general sticker price between thirteen and eighteen thousand dollars (Sharpley-Whiting 25).” Within the hip-hop music genre, the acquisition of wealth and women creates what is known as the “booty video,” which derives from the popular cultural vernacular that references the video’s overwhelming representation of women’s backsides (Fits 211-235). One major component of the booty video is the lyrics, which tend to be misogynistic in nature, displaying the linguistic and sexual bravado of rappers (211-235). A second major component of the booty video is the “booty,” which represents hypersexual Black womanhood. Twenty-first century American hip-hop industry insiders continue to embrace the music video format as a platform to promote the sale of music recordings. Evidence suggests that within this video genre, more than music is being capitalized upon and consumed. The bodies of Black female models (also known within the entertainment industry as video vixens) are increasingly (re)colonized and exploited simultaneously via obscene images and degrading lyrics in what William Jelani Cobb refers to as “neo-minstrelsy” (Cobb 210). Because she is recognized within the music industry for her

exhibitionism and voluptuous figure, the video vixen's performance is reminiscent of the historical legacy of the captive Black female body as a site of sexual capital.

With the rise of a Black female presence in hip-hop culture, scholars, activists, consumers, and industry insiders are continually interrogating the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality function in (re)negotiating Black womanhood. Specifically, much of this discourse involves music videos (Bryant 356-380, Hunter & Soto 170-191, and Sharpley-Whiting). The critique of the hip-hop video vixen's objectification and exploitation is being largely supplanted with discourses of agency, empowerment, and resistance under the guise of feminism, as explored by Murali Balaji and Shayne Lee. In *Vixen Resistin': Redefining Black Womanhood in Hip-Hop Music Videos*, Balaji argues that video vixens are embracing sexuality and utilizing the erotic in order to achieve agency and empowerment in a genre of commercialized music saturated with patriarchal, racial, and gender hierarchies. Somewhat irresponsibly, Balaji juxtaposes the Otherness of popular female artists, such as Queen Latifah and Missy Elliott, to that of video vixen Melyssa Ford (Balaji 5-20). In *Erotic Revolutionaries: Black Women, Sexuality and Popular Culture*, Shayne Lee argues that Black people (perhaps even American society in general) should dismiss the negative sociohistoric iconographies of Black women in order to reconceptualize sexuality via a positive, feminist framework. In a chapter titled 'Confessions of a Video Vixen', Lee provides readers with a brief biography, quotes, and the career "trajectory" of popular video model Karrine Steffans (also known in hip-hop culture as Superhead). In order to legitimize his argument of Steffans as a feminist who is taking control of her sexuality in a patriarchal society, Lee compares her story to that of a fictional literary character from one of mainstream feminism's foundational texts,

Madame Bovary. What Lee fails to mention is that Emma (the story's protagonist) is a white, upper-class white woman who has one affair. Most importantly, he fails to mention that while she is indeed characterized as immoral, there is not a need to negotiate her sexuality in terms of race, or interrogate the historical implications of the genealogy of Sarah Bartman on controlling images of Black women. It is also important to consider that Flaubert intended for his audience to empathize with Emma, even in her death by suicide, while in contrast mainstream America does not empathize with video vixens but instead, generally loathes them.

Several of hip-hop's most notable vixens (such as Carmen Byrant and Buffie Carruth) are utilizing the publishing platform in an attempt to redefine Black female sexuality, adding what they argue is an unconventional twist on Black feminist and hip-hop feminist paradigms. Using a comparative contextual analysis of DuBois' conceptualization of the Talented Tenth, Moynihan's *The Negro Family: A Case For National Action*, Karrine Steffan's *The Vixen Manual: How to Find, Seduce and Keep the Man You Want* and Jimi Izrael's *The Denzel Principle: Why Black Women Can't Find Good Black Men*, I argue that gender is irrelevant in the maintenance of hegemony and that the echoes of raced relationship critiques influence popular culture. Previous approaches have not adequately expressed the possibilities of hip-hop feminism as a critical literacy tool which ruptures hegemonic conceptualizations of gender roles and marriage as a barometer of success and social status. Through a critical analysis of the impact of contemporary marriage crisis rhetoric and of hip-hop as an agent of gender socialization, this paper seeks to challenge the fears of singleness among heterosexual African American female hip-hop consumers and the possibilities of hip-hop feminism to

function as an ideology and critical literacy tool which encourages egalitarian romantic relationships, and the (re)imagining of community and kinship through *othersistering* (influenced by *othermothering* as theorized by Stanlie James).

The next section will provide a historical account of feminism as it relates to Black women, the birth of hip-hop feminism, its function, as well as its dual and increasing presence in both Black feminist and third wave feminist ideologies.

Black, Third Wave, and Hip Hop Feminism(s)

Popularized during the late 1960s and in response to a hegemonic white middle class feminism that neglected the concerns of working-class women as well as women of color, Black feminism can be defined as a political ideology that theorizes and brings the lived experiences of Black women from margin to center. Black Feminism posits that since class often functions as a proxy for race, and that because classism, racism, and sexism are inextricably linked, an intersectional approach is necessary when considering how these factors affect the material and psychological conditions of Black women.

According to Crenshaw intersectionality is described as:

The methodology of studying the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations. The theory suggests, and seeks to examine how, various socially and culturally constructed categories such as gender, race, class, disability, and other axes of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality. Intersectionality holds that the classical conceptualizations of oppression within society do not act independently of one another but, are interrelated; creating a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw 1241-1287).

The genealogy of fetishization with body types that draw attention to the backside of women of African descent is often overlooked in history and popular culture. Specifically, this genealogy involves the legacy of sexual captive Sarah Baartman. Of several documented attempts to subversively deflect the male gaze, one of the most notable occurred during a three-day examination in 1815 in which Baartman covered her private areas with a handkerchief while a team of naturalists, anatomists, and zoologists attempted to study her genitalia, bribing her with candy and alcohol (Hobson 46). The pseudoscientific medical discourses generated by socially constructing race and pathologizing female sexuality supported theories such as the “great chain of being,” which positioned the Black race as antithetical to whites on the scale of humanity, genetically comparable to primates. Within these discourses, Baartman’s overall aesthetic represented unbridled Black female hypersexuality. The results from the aforementioned examination appeared in both the *Notes of the Museum d’ Histoire Naturelle* and *Histoire naturelle des mammiferes*, volumes dedicated to the study of mammals, in which Baartman was the only human (46). Applying theoretical frameworks such as male gaze theory and Bakhtin’s Theory of Carnival elucidate the notion that Baartman was unable to avoid the gaze even in death as her brain, skeleton, and genitalia were placed on display until the twentieth century. The pseudo-race and sexuality studies that represented Black women (and men) as lascivious, lewd, and hypersexual were accepted as universal truism and are evident in sexual stratification theory and the material history of American slavery, in which it was legally impossible to sexually assault or rape a female slave (not only because she was believed to copulate with virtually anyone or anything, but also because she was inhuman and regarded merely as property). Scholars continue to employ

a Black feminist hermeneutic in order to reconstruct the narrative accounts of subversive attempts at decolonization throughout history, as well as to expose documented accounts of subversion in order to demonstrate the ways in which these captive bodies sought to negotiate representation and resist negative iconographies. Additionally, the relationship between legal marriage and social unions has historically been fought with tension for Blacks, perhaps impacting modern marriage statistics and contemporary popular opinions regarding matrimony (Curran, Utley & Muraco 346-365 and Roberts).

Black Feminism has maintained an intersectional approach well into what some scholars refer to as the third wave of feminism, which gained notoriety in the 1980s. This wave came to public and leftist consciousness in the early 1990s as a movement comprised of new feminists voicing new concerns in a radically antiracist manner, emphasizing coalition building, global awareness and diversity inclusion. During this decade, hip-hop feminist Joan Morgan authored *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks it Down*, in which she argues the need for a new sect of Black feminism for the hip-hop generation (those born between 1965 and 1985 [Kitwana]). Hip-hop feminism serves as a race conscious space where men and women can simultaneously appreciate hip-hop music and culture, as well as to critique it and use it as an agent for social change (as it was originally intended). In speaking to the scholarship and activism hip-hop feminists are engaging in, as well as the tenuous relationship between rap music/hip-hop culture and feminism, hip-hop feminist and scholar Gwendolyn Pough asserts:

Some [activists] offer third wave feminist critiques that question how one can be a child of the hip hop generation, love the music and still actively speak out against the sexism...Most hip hop feminists believe that the needs of the hip hop

generation require new strategies and different voices. They have a strong relationship to the “self” and they connect their personal narratives with theoretical underpinnings and critique (vii).

The increasing popularity of video vixens on the hip-hop music video set has become a popular topic among scholars, hip-hop feminists, and hip-hop consumers. However, little critical attention has been paid to their post-hip-hop video pursuits, which is what this paper seeks to explore. The next section seeks to briefly review hip-hop’s impact on the academy, as well as its presence in mainstream American literature.

Hip Hop, the Academy, and Popular Culture

By dissecting lyrical content and analyzing the limited iconographies presented in mainstream hip-hop videos, scripting theorists and critical literacy scholars continue to explore the damaging effects of hip-hop on female adolescent development. Studies show that the media acts as a “super peer,” providing adolescents with information regarding sex and gender roles, that female adolescents have conflicting views about the role and reputation of the video vixen (as well as the imitation of her performance), and that new controlling tropes of Black womanhood are emerging within hip-hop culture that are predicated upon patriarchal power relations (Brown, Tucker-Halpern & Laden-L’Engle 420-427, Richardson 789-806, Stephens & Few 251-264). However, with the rising success of vixen memoirs, the power of print media (which is critiqued as outdated and obsolete) should not be underestimated as an agent of socialization within hip-hop culture. With three *New York Times Best Sellers* under her belt, Karrine Steffans leads the

movement of contemporary Black female pseudo-sexual revolutionaries. In each book, a motif of the importance of sexual and/or emotional connections with men is explored, elucidating the notion of a Black antifeminism that glamorizes hedonism, encourages risky sexual practices, reinforces traditional gender roles, and promotes the commodification of Black female sexuality (to achieve status and wealth) in the interests of patriarchy.

Why Black Women Can't Find a Man

Transitioning from narrative to how-to-guide, her last text aptly titled *The Vixen Manual: How to Find, Seduce & Keep the Man You Want*, Steffans (a recent divorcee who prides herself on her ability to engage in casual sex with multiple partners) provides tips for women to single-handedly maintain romantic relationships, implying that failure inherently lies with women. These tips include keeping a well-kempt house, remaining physically attractive to your mate, and “not being too worldbound” (Steffans 23). In an attempt to (re)conceptualize notions of independence, Steffans juxtaposes what she refers to as “homebound independence” to “worldbound independence.” “Homebound independence” means “you know how to cook and clean...you can do laundry without turning his whites pink. He can relax knowing that his woman has mastered their domestic terrain” (23). “Worldbound independence” on the other hand, is pathologized as deviant and resurrects the traditional controlling tropes of the emasculating matriarch, strong black woman, the careerist, as well as additional tropes meant to blame Black women for their singleness that I will later explore (Hill Collins, Beauboef-Lafontant, Harris-Perry 1-33, Spillers 67-81 and Stephens & Few 1-48, 251-264). To this woman,

Steffans warns: “Just don’t look up and find yourself lonely because you were trying to be too worldbound and dominant at home...If you make him feel there’s no claim he can stake with you in your world, he will move on to a woman who’s more open and accommodating” (23). Highlighted in pink, this passage’s explicit function is to scare women into conforming to traditional gender roles by threatening them with the prospect of singleness. Pink, a color traditionally associated with femininity, functions as a textual gender referent, helping to subconsciously further Steffan’s argument regarding the correlation between traditional gender roles and successful coupling for both male and female readers.

Steffans’ manual arrives at a time when Black women are being bombarded with marriage crisis rhetoric. Some of America’s leading news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Economist* and *The Washington Post* consistently provide intense coverage on the state of Black marriage, aimed at and primarily featuring the narratives of Black women. However, Black men are also beginning to participate in the discourse with their own narrative accounts and theories regarding declining marriage rates and increasing divorce rates in the Black community, which include anti and/or postfeminist rhetoric, as well as the traditional blaming of Black women for all ills plaguing the community. In *The Denzel Principle: Why Black Women Can’t Find Good Black Men*, reporter and cultural critic Jimi Izrael states:

People talk shit, but numbers don’t lie. According to smart white folks who know, two-thirds of all black marriages end in divorce, creating whole neighborhoods of single-parent families, usually headed by single mothers. This statistic really reflects less on black men and more on black women and their inability to make good choices (21).

Izrael is vague in his description of what constitute good choices, but one can assume that these good choices involve women participating in hierarchically gendered power relations within the context of a Black heteronormative, patriarchal relationship. Izrael uses a similar paradigm as Steffans in conveying dissatisfaction with assertive women who adopt feminist beliefs in a description of what he calls the “liberated woman”:

She’s independent and doesn’t need you for shit. She’s overly aggressive and will fight you about anything, anytime. She calls herself a feminist...She says she’s liberated, but she’s really enslaved to an outdated ideology that requires women to subjugate their men instead of being his complement (288).

In a similar vein, Izrael continues his verbal assassination of women who disrupt traditional gender schemas in his articulation of the “career woman”:

She has five undergraduate degrees, a PhD, and three cars, but can’t butter toast. She is so focused on being a successful black woman that learning the finer points of the womanly art of wifery has slipped from her agenda. She can perform outpatient surgery, but can’t keep the house clean and presentable...Naturally, she expects you to play wifey and clean up the house... (287-288).

Conceptualizing singleness crisis rhetoric across these Black narratives can be problematic for several reasons. First, Steffans’ and Izrael’s texts do not explore the benefits of egalitarian relationships or shared responsibility and accountability, concepts that are not radically feminist in nature. Secondly, both texts discourage higher education or professional career trajectory. Thirdly, unlike scholarly articles which employ dense theoretical jargon and are generally inaccessible to a large population of African Americans, these commercial texts are accessible, popular, and free of foreign rhetoric

and concepts. Steffans' and Izrael's texts seem to be speaking to one another, solidifying arguments of

familial dysfunction perpetuated by the broader news media, creating a contemporary version of the Moynihan Report. In her analysis of the new racism, Hill Collins argues:

...[R]ace, gender, and sexuality have ideological dimensions that work to organize social institutions. In the post-civil rights era, Black popular culture and mass media have both grown in importance in creating ideologies of inequality. Black popular consists of the ideas and cultural representations created by Black people in everyday life that are widely known and accepted. In contrast, mass media describes the appropriation and repackaging of these ideas for larger audience consumption. Black popular culture...is indicative of larger political and economic forces on the macro level of everyday behavior among African Americans. Conversely, everyday behavior becomes the cultural stuff that is mined by Black popular culture and a mass media with an insatiable appetite for new material (17).

Without critical hip-hop feminist literacies, participants who consume video vixen manuals are unable to connect vixen narratives to historic and contemporary discourses of sexism, racism, and market exploitation whereby Black masculinity and femininity, as well as the Black family, have been undermined by market forces and their intersection with the aforementioned systems of inequality.

In conjunction with the aforementioned texts and others like them, commercial hip-hop music continues to serve as an agent of socialization for individuals of all ages, impacting their thought processes and behavior within the realm of interpersonal romantic relationships. Danielle Wallace argues that the traditional gender socialization of Black girls (which is often times reinforced via hip-hop culture) involves a very

problematic message that encourages them to harness and assert independence, but only in preparation for being single and needing to support themselves and their offspring without male assistance (16). However, simultaneously, they are given the larger message that their primary goal should be “to snare a black man who will take care of them” (16). Wallace calls for a reconceptualization of gender role socialization that strays from dominant Euro-American notions of masculinity and femininity, which moves Black history and experiences from margin to center.

On opposite end of the gender socialization spectrum, the “cool pose” plaguing Black men (especially those engaged with hip-hop culture) directly impacts their heterosexual relationships and views of Black women. This performance is defined as “a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control” (Majors and Billson 4). As a coping strategy, it helps African American males confront the anger they harbor toward mainstream society. Arguably, the “cool pose” also breeds misogyny, creating difficulty in developing positive relationships with others—specifically women. According to Majors and Mancini Billson, “cool behaviors may prevent black males from developing authentic relationships with women. Being cool is paradoxical because the behaviors that afford black males a semblance of social competence and control elsewhere in their lives are the same behaviors that ultimately help run their relationships into the ground” (43). Hegemonic masculinity among Black males is a reaction to the cultural transmission of gender norms that emphasize toughness, manipulation, and sexual conquest (Oliver 199-203). The mainstream media emphasis hypersexualization and sexual conquest as a

primary socializing factor reinforce the idea that Black men are, and should be, more sexually active. There is a definitive link between sexuality and masculinity in American society, which equates sexual experience with manhood. A boy becomes a man with the completion of his first sex act, specifically, the loss of his virginity (11-22). At this point, he becomes a “real man” (11-22). Many Black boys are socialized that in order to assert manhood, they should have sex with as many women as possible. The ability to engage in sex that emphasizes conquest functions as a solution to remedy that lack of control and power Black men have in larger society, and functions as an area in which they can seek fulfillment, power and affirmation (11-22). The problem with this masculinity is that instead of solving problems, it creates additional ones which affect the African American community as a whole. Specifically, it causes them to regard women as property and subscribe to the belief that attention from the opposite sex can be purchased (Jamison 45-60). This partially explains the fascination with music videos and their relation to strip club subculture.

The next section seeks to consider the ways in which American society rewards heterosexual social and legal coupling, explains contemporary controlling images plaguing Black women (which are adaptations of historical controlling tropes), how and why the media perpetuates these images, as well as how such images affect interpersonal communication and homosocial bonding.

Woman-to-Woman: Interpersonal Communication and Popular Culture

Equally important to heterosexual romantic relationships are the interpersonal relationships women may or may not develop with other Black women because of issues of jealousy and competition. What popular texts about singleness do not mention is that this competition is a result of patriarchy, which trains women to fight for the favor of men. Patriarchy is also to blame for what social scientist Bella DePaulo refers to as *singlism*, beliefs and practices that stigmatize people who are single, and *matrimania*, the “over-the-top hyping of marriage and weddings” in American culture (10-15). Additionally, the way in which singleness is portrayed in the media deserves attention. For example, *Sex and the City* (one of HBO’s top ranking shows of all time) features the lives and sexual/romantic pursuits of four single, middle-class white women in New York City. With all of its diversity, women of color are largely absent until the first motion picture in which Jennifer Hudson portrays Sarah Jessica Parker’s personal assistant. While viewers constantly await the wild sexual escapades, it cannot be ignored that such behaviors in a show featuring a Black cast would garner even more controversy because of Black women’s sociohistoric legacy involving sexuality and the politics of respectability. Controlling images continue to plague Black women, stigmatizing and pathologizing them. These character types include:

- Vixen- considered sexually desired, but possibly unworthy of commitment
- Victim- presented as sexually, physically, or emotionally vulnerable. Her “baggage” prevents her from getting a man or keeping one without losing herself
- Emasculating Matriarch- never-married, divorced, or widowed woman thought to “run away” the men in life, including her male offspring
- Careerist- thought to be “wed” to her career and lack either the submission, social skills, or time for serious partnering
- Religious Zealot-women to whose religious devotion or ideals are thought to interfere with her marriage prospects (Williams).

Singlism and matrimania encourage women to desperately seek male attention and coupling—even at the expense of our sisters’ emotional well-being. Singleness crisis rhetoric also causes class tensions among Black women. Most Black singleness crisis rhetoric is aimed at middle-class women, who society conditions to believe that because they are educated and financially stable, that they deserve a man more than their working class counterparts. In an interview with *Essence Magazine*, author Helena Andrews speaks with Relationships editor Demetria Lucas on the topic of “dating while bourgeois.” After appearing in a *Washington Post Article* titled “Successful Black and Lonely,” Lucas questions Andrews’ feelings of entitlement to a relationship because of her credentials (Lucas 98). Similarly, in an ABC segment titled “Single Ladies: Successful Black Women Search for Mr. Right,” middle-class women such as television personalities Jackie Reid and Sherri Shepherd discuss singleness with actors Steve Harvey and Hill Harper (who have also written books on Black heterosexual romance), as well as Jimi Izrael to an auditorium full of single Black women. Shepherd goes on to discuss her dating standards, which she explicitly states that blue collar men need not apply (“Single Ladies: Successful Black Women Search for Mr. Right”). It is well documented that women outnumber men in their matriculation through and graduation from post-secondary institutions. In a 2004 *Essence Magazine* article titled “Girl Fight,” the emotional and even physical battles between Black female students over a small pool of Black male students has become an increasing problem since 2000 when 1.1 million Black women were enrolled in college, compared to approximately 635,000 (Saunders 210). This gap widens at the postgraduate level, causing a disparity in earning power and opportunity. Arguably, this type of intra-racial conflict revives Du Bois’

notion of the “Talented Tenth,” a patriarchal and discreet form of eugenics that encourages middle-class marriage and reproduction for racial uplift.

The Possibilities of Hip Hop Feminism

Gwendolyn Pough encourages hip-hop feminists (both male and female) to “move beyond counting the amount of time a particular rapper says the word bitch or ho” to a focus on what we consider to be equally important or larger issues (2007). Arguably, the commodification of Black female sexuality and the pathologizing of Black romance via publishing that creates a manufactured singleness crisis is one of those issues. It is hip-hop feminism’s obligation to complicate discourses of agency regarding vixen authors. While Steffans has become financially successful, we must remind our sisters about the genealogy of Sarah Bartmaan on Black female sexuality, as well as the critical relationship between silence and confession in Black female literary tradition as a means of sexual self-protection. While some scholars argue that we should remove ourselves from negative iconographies, we must keep in mind that these iconographies have real implications that can affect all Black women (2007).

Patricia Hill Collin’s conceptualization of the new racism is reliant upon mass media and global technologies to disseminate hegemonic ideologies regarding race, sexuality, and gender which obscure the systemic nature of oppression (54-55). When conceptualizing agency, hip-hop feminists must convey that agency may be deceiving because “the new racism is also characterized by a changing political structure that

disfranchises people, even if they appear to be included” (34). T. Deanean Sharpley-

Whiting argues:

The sad irony about the notion of “choice” and “autonomy” for us black women who choose to appropriate and protect the twin myths whether as rap artists, “video ho’s” or Jane Does...is that the choice is never fully ours, and thus the sexual freedom is an illusion...(66).

The twin myths refer to Black women’s hypersexuality and easy accessibility, a result of an on-going and tenuous negotiation of the politics of respectability and sexual liberation popularized during the second wave of feminism. This also applies to vixen authors.

While choice rhetoric has been theorized in terms of sexual labor within popular feminist discourses, the material affects on consumers has largely been ignored.

According to Keeling, common sense “refers to the general form of a collective historical endeavor...These past images are called forth by a present (image’s) appearance to an eye” (Keeling 42). In this case, the collective historical endeavor is the genealogy of the captive Black female body as sexual capital. Although many scholars and cultural critics argue that film and television do not reflect real life, labor (affectivity) is required by the Black viewer/consumer employing common sense, as well as non-Black viewers who are “required to live in and make sense of the world organized by the cinematic” because “each appearance of a black image to an eye is an appearance of every black” (42-43). Additionally, Fanon argues that for Blacks to divorce themselves from a genealogy of exploitative bondage and colonization, they must adopt a freedom which requires them to transcend oppression by not viewing slavery as a component of self-definition. Fanon states that, “the body of history does not determine a

single one of my actions. I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom” (117). Fanon argues that Blacks must break from their past, which will make “authentic communication” between blacks and whites possible by creating “the ideal conditions of existence” (117-118). With these images and ideologies dominating mainstream mediums, it is arguably impossible for Blacks to divorce themselves from such iconographies in order to construct a new common sense. Being inundated with such images does not allow Blacks to transcend historical social or capitalistic bondage, nullifying Fanon’s argument. Although such self-directed efforts at freedom may be helpful at the individual level, at the macro level, many Blacks (especially youth) use hypersexual media images as a tool for self-definition. A large percentage of hip-hop music videos arguably perpetuate new racism by globally disseminating negative images, reminding viewers of the material history of sexual slavery and positing that innate hypersexuality and hedonism plague the Black community, reviving pseudoscientific discourses and theories of racial inferiority.

Hip-hop feminism must seek to encourage and produce alternative representations of Blacks and hip-hop consumers. It must also complicate traditional gender role socialization, which would promote egalitarian relationships. America is no more “post-feminism” than it is “post-race.” Patriarchy can be blamed for the negative iconographies, stereotypes, and the cattiness among Black women prompted by singleness crisis rhetoric. When a former vixen-turned-millionaire offers to Black audiences that a man should be all things to his woman, she is explicitly implying two things. First, that a man should be the most important person in a woman’s life, which devalues other

relationships (temporal or spiritual), education, career trajectory, and hobbies or interests. Second, that a woman is an object of possession, belonging to a man rather than to herself. Unsuspecting and uncritical audiences internalize these ideas, believing that they account for the reasons why Black women are viewed as less desirable and more likely to be single. Ironically, these popular texts neglect to mention that singleness is not an issue solely affecting Black women. Americans in general are getting married later and most will spend more years of their adult lives unmarried (Beamon xii). Hip-hop feminism must articulate to the Black community the ways in which singleness crisis rhetoric is not truly a crisis, but a strategically organized and manufactured ploy to direct our attention away from white supremacist capitalist practices that actually do promote singleness, such as the systemic mass incarceration of Black men, or welfare policies that prohibit men from being present in the home (which also contributes to the dismantling of the Black family). Instead of psychologically abusing ourselves and other women over manufactured crisis, we should in a traditional Black woman's literary tradition, encourage a single blessedness model. This ideology held that being single and useful to others was better than marrying the wrong man for the wrong reason. It is important to note that because this model was proven to help sustain couples, families and the community, it is in no way anti-marriage or anti-relationship. Single blessedness redefines kinship, forcing us to be accountable to the experiences and feelings of other Black women. The cultural practice of *othermothering* (or the caring of non-related children by women in the community) continues to be a part of African American history, with roots in the slave era as response of a growing need to assist in the emotional and physical care of children (James 44-54). Hip-hop feminism must also

explore the possibility of *othersistering*, in which Black adolescents and women are able to emotionally and physically care for their peers, which is truly a hip-hop feminist endeavor.

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