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The *Bad Bitch Barbie* Craze and Beyoncé African American Women's Bodies as Commodities in Hip-Hop Culture, Images, and Media

Crystal LaVoullé & Tisha Lewis Ellison

Abstract

In this special issue of *Taboo*, the authors use Beyoncé's album, *Lemonade*, to introduce the concept of the *Bad Bitch Barbie*, a term used to identify a woman who embraces her body while simultaneously using it as a commodity. Representing a Black body ideal in *Lemonade*, Beyoncé uses images of Black women's bodies to express empowerment, boldness, and resilience as Black women struggle to live in a racist and sexist society. There has been recent interest in the ways Black women have been portrayed in current media and popular culture, and many individuals have taken the opportunity to honor Black women's beauty, power, and resilience in the era of #BlackGirlMagic by paying homage to women who use music, sound, and the arts to tell their stories (Wilson, 2016; also see Jessica Care Moore's website, "Black Women Rock" [<http://www.blackwomenrock.com>]). In this article, our aim is two-fold: first, we offer a historical review of the ways Black women and their bodies have been portrayed in music as well as in the political, cultural, and social spaces associated with Black women's worldviews. Second, we review songs from *Lemonade* to describe the *Bad Bitch Barbie*, who welcomes glamorization and embraces the profitability associated with the racialization, sexualization, and subjugation of Black women's bodies. This information is vital in discussions about how young African American girls emulate the likes of Beyoncé, and represent themselves in a mainstream culture whose beliefs are informed by socio-historical experiences concerning sexual imagery. The *Bad Bitch Barbie* figure recognizes—and, to some

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extent, accepts—her objectification; she negotiates her image and helps to direct the ways in which she is represented.

Keywords: African American women, Black Barbie, Black music, digital media, female sexuality, hip-hop, misogyny, race, sexual imagery

Introduction

Music, music videos, and images play a pivotal role in the messages individuals hear and see. These messages can be positive or negative, and they can influence how consumers and producers respond to and interrogate them critically, socially, physically, and emotionally. When Beyoncé's visual and conceptual album *Lemonade* launched in 2016, it called attention to salient social and political issues faced by individuals of color. While its message of “every woman's journey of self-knowledge and healing” (via *Tidal*'s¹ announcement) drove the album's concept and title, other themes of emancipation, womanhood, identity, and sexuality became bold statements that left an indelible mark on viewers' lives. For instance, in the wake of *Lemonade*'s release, a global explosion of posts, tweets, memes, and video images flooded social media, sparking curiosity and interest about its content, and vehemently changing the face of pop music and culture for listeners.

As African American² women researchers and teacher educators, we credit Black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, whose activism is best known through their written and artistic work on feminism, civil rights, women's equality, and social consciousness for Black Americans—particularly Black women. For instance, Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) became a foundational text of concepts about the Black women's experiences, self-definitions, self-knowledge, and self-validation. Situating Black women's emerging power as “agents of knowledge” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 256), Hill Collins revealed how it is impossible to understand Black women in practice without acknowledging their agentive, dominant, and knowledgeable selves. Through its discussion of recurrent issues concerning identity, politics, race, and violence, which have continuously shaped the lives of Black women, Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1991) describes the overlapping intersections of social justice problems like racism, sexism, classism, and mental/physical health. These theories are significant when thinking about the ways Black women are represented and treated in today's world as well as how the current generation of young Black girls' desires to be seen and heard in their classrooms, communities, and in the media are similar to ideas expressed in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*.

As an extension of these theories, Black women's voices (like Beyoncé's) have entered pop culture, hip-hop, and other digital spaces to unapologetically express the deepest—and at times, the darkest—parts of Black women's lives. In an attempt to understand and react to Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, which has sold over 2.2 million units and garnered \$2.4 million, it is important to examine the ways

in which this album has surpassed its predecessors, Beyoncé's earlier LPs about love, monogamy, and self-reflection. *Lemonade* created massive controversy for its alleged anti-police rhetoric, its rallying of activists, its Black Panther imagery, its allusions to protests, its illustrations of Black rage (specifically that which was caused by racial apathy after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005), and its references to the continuous killings of Black men and women. In an article for *Time* magazine, Melissa Harris-Perry (2017) states that, with *Lemonade*, "Beyoncé publicly embraced explicitly feminist blackness at a politically risky moment." Because of this unforgettable album and its myriad perspectives on the social construction of Black womanhood, identity, and sexuality, Black women are now boldly occupying larger spaces wherein, although their everyday lived realities are not necessarily appreciated, they are at least now seen.

Historically, Black women's voices, views, and bodies have been questioned and politicized. However, with *Lemonade*, Beyoncé has formulated a new perception of reimagining and re-theorizing the Black woman as a *Bad Bitch Barbie*, a woman who celebrates and embraces her body while simultaneously using it as a commodity. We offer *Bad Bitch Barbie* as a conceptual framework that should not be viewed as negative or vulgar, but as an alternative characterization that embodies past and present research about the historical representations and perceptions of Black women, their bodies, and their voices. As an ode to Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, we introduce Beyoncé as a *Bad Bitch Barbie*.

Bad Bitch Barbie as a Conceptual Framework

The *Bad Bitch Barbie* is a contradiction in terms, because it represents both a western/European beauty ideal of long straight hair and keen features as well as Black standards of beauty: voluptuous hips, a small waist, and a large derriere. In the same way, the *Bad Bitch Barbie* represents direct objectification of the Black female body while simultaneously representing a performance in feminism. A *Bad Bitch Barbie* is an image of a woman who rises against opposition and stands her ground. She is both a Black feminist and someone who acknowledges that intersectionality and racism exist. The original Barbie, first introduced by Mattel in 1959, is a White, female cultural icon that some believe depicts the ideal image of a woman. Others have argued that Barbie's physical dimensions have been criticized for serving as an unrealistic depiction of how women—and particularly women of color—should look. The sometimes-curvy physiques of African Americans are not acknowledged by Mattel's previous attempts at Black dolls—the "Francine" and the "Colored Francine" dolls, which still had European features in the mid-1960s, and were later reintroduced as "Black Barbies" in 2009. However, in 2015, Mattel's "Black Barbies" have short, curly, kinky hairstyles and diverse body types.

Historically, the term "Black Bitch" was frequently used to describe Black women from blaxploitation films, such as actress Pam Grier, whose character played the he-

roic role in the 1970s. Later, Lil Kim and Da Brat extended this term in their music videos and music. To some, being a “Black Bitch” was empowering, but had other sexualized and materialistic exchanges that later became problematic (Dunn, 2008; Smith-Shomade, 2002). The *Bad Bitch Barbie* has a specific role in supporting Black women who are not over-sexualized commodities, but who understand the histories of racialized and sexualized representations of Black women. The term is not used as an attempt to garner attention as it has in various musical genres like hip-hop; for example, rap lyrics have begun to usher in a trend of sexually marginalizing women, as noted in Nicki Minaj’s album *It’s Barbie Bitch!* (see Figure 1). Minaj’s lyrics are laden with raw sexual innuendos that describe Black women as “Black Barbies in the city / [with a] Fat ass and pretty titties...the baddest bitch in America.” By describing herself in this way and emphasizes her dating preferences—e.g., she “only fuck[s] with ballers.” Such language creates a stigma that can potentially diminish the agentive and socially conscious ‘badass’ qualities that we associate with Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*.

In addition, while the authors note the stereotypical gender implication, we selected this quote as representative of the connotation derived from the missing comma in “I’m Barbie, Bitch!” This is an important point of clarity in understanding that Minaj is not calling herself a Barbie Bitch; instead, she is referring to herself as Barbie and to others as ‘bitch’. Many celebrities and hip-hop artists have used the term bitch to refer to themselves and others as a form of female empowerment. Through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the term “Barbie Bitch” has now become an identity that many actively claim for themselves.

In the sections that follow, we examine the myriad and often contradictory historical representations that have strong connections to the images and messages associated with Black women and their bodies. As we consider the need to address the *Bad Bitch Barbie* as a conceptual framework, we ask: how have some Black women historically recommissioned objectification of Black women’s bodies, learning to survive—and, in some cases, thrive—from them?

Historical Journeys of the Racialized and Sexualized Representations of Black Women’s Bodies and Images

The historical images we selected are significant to our conceptualization of the *Bad Bitch Barbie* image and Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*. This section guides our discussion about the ways mainstream culture shapes images and representations of Black women’s sexualities. We begin this historical journey through Black women’s objectification with Sara Baartman, also known as Hottentot Venus.

Hottentot Venus

In the early nineteenth century, Saartjie “Sara” Baartman became a widespread symbol of female sexuality for African American women. Baartman, a South Afri-

can native labeled as “Hottentot Venus,” was objectified and demoralized because of her extremely large derriere and large labia (see Figure 2). After she was lured

Figure 1
Nicki Minaj as Barbie



to Europe and sold to a traveling circus, her naked body was paraded in front of Whites, and was used to justify claims that Black women were genetically inferior and sexually primitive (Jackson & Weidman, 2005). Her body's objectification continued even after her death at age 26, when her reproductive organs were put on display for 150 years, and a wax mold of her body and skeleton were displayed in the French National Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Man, respectively (Qureshi, 2004).

Caricatures also exaggerated parts of Baartman's body, depicting them as massively abnormal (Scully, 2009). These overemphasized features were used to degrade not only Baartman, but all Black women, and ushered in an era of the intense male gaze onto Black women's bodies in popular culture (see Figure 3). Baartman's treatment serves as a demonstration of the significance of imagery in representing Black women's sexuality. Though there are several scholarly debates regarding whether or not Baartman willingly presented her body for exhibition, the authors contend that, regardless of her complicity, Baartman's experiences provide a historical foundation for the objectification of the Black female body. In addition to being characterized as bizarre and unnatural while simultaneously exotic and enticing, the display of Baartman's body was a means for her survival.

Figure 2
Sara "Saartjie" Baartman



Baartman's body is credited for serving as the basis of Black women's proscribed sexual scripts (Crais & Scully, 2008; Gilman, 1985; Magubane, 2001; Qureshi, 2004;

Figure 3
1810 Caricature of Baartman by British Artist William Heath



Stephens & Phillips, 2003); however, Black female objectification is not limited to Hottentot Venus's 1810 appearance in Europe. Similar to Baartman, who was continuously compared to animals in both her physical appearance and intellect, women performers in the twentieth century (such as Josephine Baker and Dorothy Dandridge) were also portrayed as animalistic women who sexually taunted men with their bodies. In addition to perpetuating the ideal that Black women were always sexually available, these images gave the impression that Black women also took advantage of their physical characteristics as a tool to attract men.

Plaçage

Indeed, although the objectification of Black women continued long after Baartman's death, the ways in which some Black women advocated for themselves within those modes of objectification changed. For example, as a form of survival, some women in the French and Spanish colonies of the New World participated in *plaçage*, the practice of making African and Native American women of mixed racial heritage sexually available through unofficial unions with wealthy White men. Though *plaçage* existed throughout the colonial period, it was most popular between 1769 and 1803 (Gould, 1998). The system was supported through "quadroon balls," which were social gatherings for women who were considered one-fourth Black because they often had one White and one biracial parent. During these balls, eligible quadroons were encouraged to enter into common-law marriages with wealthy White men. Although biracial women also participated in the balls, women with a more European appearance—with long hair and fair skin—were considered more desirable (Guillory, 1997). The unions were negotiated on the woman's behalf by their mothers, and typically included emancipation for the woman and the children who resulted from the union, property settlement by contract, educational and financial support, and physical protection. Although the system of *plaçage* was not legally recognized, the women, known as "left-hand wives," could inherit up to one-third of the property of their deceased common-law husbands (Gould, 1998). Initially used as a means for survival, *plaçage* became a tool for social agency, as the women were able to usurp limited control over their own bodies, change their economic circumstances, operate businesses, and amass wealth through property ownership—all because of the ways in which their bodies were used as sexual commodities (Chandler, 2016).

Over time, *plaçage* contributed to a community of mixed-race people who increasingly became known as Creoles: French-speaking descendants of French colonists (Voltz, 2008). Beyoncé herself has embraced and lauded her Louisiana Creole ancestry. Although the authors do not suggest that her ancestors participated in *plaçage*, Beyoncé's reference to her Creole heritage in a sexually suggestive way is reminiscent of *plaçage* history. For example, in the song "Creole," Beyoncé (2016) embraces the fantasy and mystique associated with women of mixed racial heritage, rewriting the sexual script to her advantage:

baby, I see you
 that look in your eyes
 hips that keep shaking
 mysterious style
 exotically tempting
 familiar to me
 that Creole sexy—it's all over me

Like women who participated in *plaçage*, Beyoncé has successfully used her body as a commodity, exerting control over the representation of her sexuality.

Framing Beyoncé as *Bad Bitch Barbie*

The *Bad Bitch Barbie* concept acknowledges the objectification of Beyoncé's body and redirects it by navigating the objectification to her own benefit. A *Bad Bitch Barbie* develops ways to move from survival to success, embracing the body while using it as a means for self-empowerment. As such, Beyoncé is a *Bad Bitch Barbie*. Through visual representation, she challenges the sexual script by taking command of her own body. For example, in "Don't Hurt Yourself," Beyoncé disrupts the sexual script with an unapologetic opening line: "Who the fuck do you think I is? / You ain't married to no average bitch, boy." With this line, Beyoncé acknowledges herself as a "bitch," but makes it clear that she is not an ordinary woman. Indeed, the authors argue that Beyoncé is a *Bad Bitch Barbie* because she is both confident in and aware of her own value. She continues to demonstrate her authority with lines like, "You keep your money, / I got my own," which express her financial independence, a key requirement of being a *Bad Bitch Barbie*. Using both the music and video imagery of "Don't Hurt Yourself," Beyoncé establishes her *Bad Bitch Barbie* status, thus demonstrating both bodily and monetary control.

Prior to releasing *Lemonade*, Beyoncé established herself as a *Bad Bitch Barbie*, excepting her dominance as an artist. For example, in the song "Bow Down/I Been On," Beyoncé exhibits female dominance over her competitors due to her tremendous success and longevity in the entertainment industry. As Beyoncé sings, "I know when you were little girls, you dreamt of being in my world, / don't forget it, don't forget it, / Respect that: bow down bitches," she is attempting to exhibit dominance over newer female competitors. And yet, in spite of their power, *Bad Bitch Barbies* are not flawless. They merely use their voices to supersede their flaws. In the hip-hop influenced song "Flawless," Beyoncé samples Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TEDx Talk "We Should all be Feminists" (2012) to demonstrate the ways in which we begin limiting Black women's voices in girlhood:

We teach girls to shrink themselves: you should aim to be successful, but not too successful; otherwise, you will threaten the man. We raise girls to see each other as competitors—not for jobs or for accomplishments...but for the attention of

men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are, for fear of being labeled as promiscuous. (Adichie, 2012)

The racialized and sexualized representation of Black women's bodies provided by Hottentot Venus, provide a historical context for understanding the development of the *Bad Bitch Barbie*. Likewise, *plaçage*, which made Black women systematically sexually available, links female objectification with profitability, and contributes to the tensions surrounding images of African American women. As a *Bad Bitch Barbie*, Beyoncé offers a counter-narrative, embracing the power of her sexual image and using it as a commodity, as seen in Figure 4, wherein she is photographed dressed as a Barbie doll, thus affirming this representation of her image.

Lemonade: A Multi-dimensional Presentation of Black Women

In *Lemonade*, this album demonstrates self-reflective statements of female empowerment that frame Beyoncé as a *Bad Bitch Barbie*, demonstrating that Black women can be cognizant of and qualified to challenge their own depictions in popular culture. Through *Lemonade*, Beyoncé presents multi-dimensional representations of Black women demonstrating what it means to be fearless and beautiful while admitting feelings of weakness, vulnerability, and ugliness. Acknowledging Black women's diversity disrupts the sexual script that began with Sara Baartman, which depicted Black women as independent and promiscuous. The authors view *Lemonade*'s portrayal as a counter-narrative because its women are complex characters. *Lemonade*'s visual album represents the continuum of emotions and expressions felt by women who are hurt, betrayed, vindicated, and loved. Through visual imagery and song, Beyoncé presents a multi-dimensional narrative that acknowledges some women's struggles, highlighting the diversity of Black women's bodies as sexually suggestive, seductive, demure, powerful, youthful, hurt, confused, and forgiving, because Black women themselves are indeed all of these things.

In the same way that Julie Dash used her film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) to cinematically present Black women as diverse characters, Beyoncé uses *Lemonade* to demonstrate the dimensions of Black women. *Lemonade* visually illustrates the concept of "BlackGirlMagic," but also portrays Black women who are afraid, unsure and struggling for self-acceptance. *Lemonade* portrays Black women as triumphant, but also shows Black mothers who have lost sons to police violence and other social injustices (including Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, who was murdered by a Neighborhood Watch coordinator; Lezley McSpadden, the mother of Michael Brown, who was killed by police; and Gwen Carr, the mother of Eric Garner, who was also killed by police). *Lemonade* also highlights Black wives who demonstrate anger, rage, and ultimately forgiveness after infidelity (e.g., in songs like "Formation" and "Intuition: Pray You Catch Me").

The songs from *Lemonade* consequently reveal a distinction between women who use hypersexualized images such as the *Bad Bitch Barbie* as agency, versus women

who are victimized and marginalized by these stereotypical images, is not crystal clear. Stephens and Few (2007) have reminded us that “everyday consumption of cultural and interpersonal messages regarding sexual images” not only has a direct impact on Black women, but also in how young African Americans sexually self-identify, behave, and experience life (p. 2). Black girls’ and women’s bombardment with media images that depict their bodies negatively, yet describe other women’s bodies in more positive terms, demonstrates the ways racism is used to render the

Figure 4
Beyoncé as Barbie



Black female voice powerless through the degradation of her body. In *Lemonade*, however, the *Bad Bitch Barbie* figure rejects White beauty norms and the silencing of Black women's voices by offering a parade of Black women's bodies that are both sexual and beautiful. In this way, the *Bad Bitch Barbie* survives and thrives in a world that desires her while despising her. Displaying confidence and a willingness to confidently utilize her desirability to her own advantage while facing the world on her own terms are all essential elements to being a *Bad Bitch Barbie*.

“Sorry”

The media bombards young impressionable girls with a standard of beauty that is highly sexualized. Richardson (2013) has explored the ‘twerking’ phenomena with adolescent girls, acknowledging the ways in which this dance phenomenon illustrates how countless young girls’ identities are influenced by social constructs such as rap music and rap videos. Nevertheless, although Serena Williams twerks in Beyoncé’s video “Sorry,” the authors would argue that the song and video represent resilience. In the video for “Sorry,” Beyoncé offers a parade of beautiful women who are unapologetically asserting their independence. The lyrics also reinforce Beyoncé’s status as a *Bad Bitch Barbie* who recognizes the likelihood of partner infidelity and chooses to address it with a barrage of strongly-worded phrases. Masculine gestures and lyrics such as “suck on my balls ‘cause I’ve had enough” offer an opposing view to the visual femininity displayed on screen.

“Sandcastles”

The overarching theme of “Sandcastles,” which is framed with images of Beyoncé and her husband, Jay Z, is forgiveness. Through the lyrics and images, Beyoncé reminds the viewer that “every promise don’t work out that way.” The authors conclude that this sentiment balances some of the album’s more confrontational approaches to the unpredictable nature of love. Weidhase (2015) has contended that *Lemonade* “serves as a catalytic moment that frames the themes of bodily and monetary control evident in Beyoncé’s earlier work as explicitly feminist” (p. 121), but feminist and singer from the 80s rock group, The Eurythmics, Annie Lennox has offered an opposing view, describing Beyoncé’s feminist stance as feminism-lite (Lennox, 2014). Lennox suggested that, on a spectrum of feminism, Beyoncé’s brand of feminism would be at one end, with grassroots feminism on the other. Lennox stated that the twerking seen in the “Sorry” video is not feminism, and that there was nothing liberating and empowering about it. In one way, Lennox attempted to limit Beyoncé’s value as a feminist, reducing the performer to a single, sexually suggestive act, yet in another, she delivered a more involved thought:

...twerking is not feminism. That’s what I’m referring to...It’s not liberating. It’s not empowering. It’s a sexual thing that you’re doing on a stage. It doesn’t empower

you. That's my feeling about it, but, you know, actually maybe this is a good thing because it creates debate. (Lennox, 2014)

Indeed, although a feminist spectrum may exist, it is inequitable to suggest that one cannot be a 'true' feminist if one presents a sexual performance or image. Black women have the unique challenge of navigating gender and race, creating a vastly different 'feminist' experience that might not be adequately addressed through a traditional feminist reading.

Feminism and Hip-Hop Feminism

Hip-hop feminism, as defined by Joan Morgan (1995), is grounded in Black feminism, but specifically considers the issues of women who are a part of the hip-hop generation. Morgan (1999) has described hip-hop feminists as those born after 1964 who deconstruct and reconstruct feminism within the context of their own unique experiences, including the world of hip-hop. Hip-hop feminism provides a framework specific enough to examine Beyoncé as a *Bad Bitch Barbie* and examine the images of women of color that are presented in *Lemonade* because it directly confronts issues and concerns of Black women who are part of Beyoncé's generation.

As a theory, hip-hop feminism gives voice to years of dominating opposition, sexism, and discourses that attempt to dis-empower women of color and render them powerless in the utilization of their own bodies. As a movement, hip-hop feminism uses the political, cultural, and racial climates of the hip-hop era as a backdrop (Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013; Morgan, 1995; Pough, 2004; Rose, 1991; Rose, 1994). Thus, hip-hop feminism presents a critical view of Black women of the hip-hop generation, including the roles these women select for themselves, and the ways in which Black women are viewed, positioned, and portrayed in the media.

Beyoncé's claim to feminism was met with skepticism with feminist scholars, who discounted her because of the ways in which she uses her body as a commodity. However, the authors argue that Beyoncé's "femme" persona does not negate her status within the feminist realm. A sexualized woman can be a feminist. In fact, to take the issue of Black women's hyper-sexuality out of feminism ignores the ways that Black women have been historically presented, misrepresented, and depicted through sexualized images. Musically, the world hears evidence of Beyoncé's feminist journey in her earlier songs about independence (such as "Independent Woman"), and sexual freedom (such as in "Baby Boy").

Beyoncé's feminism can also be seen on the page. In her *Shiver Report* essay, "Gender Equity is a Myth" (Knowles-Carter, 2014), she raised important issues concerning economic equality for women, and offered some foundational insight into her own feminist views. In *Lemonade*, however, the entertainer chose to express her feminist views through a combination of music, poetry, and visual representations. Although Beyoncé has begun to publicly announce her feminist stance, the authors agree with Durham, Cooper, and Morris (2013), who have argued that Beyoncé's approach to

feminism may be more closely identified as hip-hop feminism. The “critique (too much sex, too little ‘actual’ feminist work) that removed Beyoncé from the discourse of feminism place[s] Beyoncé firmly in the discourse of hip-hop feminism and its motivation to move feminism beyond the walls of academia through the privileging of popular culture as ‘space for a new generation of feminist theorizing’” (Durhan, Cooper, & Morris, 2013, p. 722). Consequently, the authors use hip-hop feminist theory to examine the narrative Beyoncé portrays in *Lemonade*.

An examination of Beyoncé as a *Bad Bitch Barbie* helps to place the social circumstances of Black women’s bodies within a historical context. Through hip-hop feminist theory, we argue that the rise of the *Bad Bitch Barbie* craze is symptomatic of a variety of issues, including (but not limited to) the ways women view themselves and the ways Black women’s images are circulated, interpreted, and critiqued in the media. Venus Evans-Winter (2005) and Venus Evans-Winters and Jennifer Esposito (2010) have challenged society to redefine resiliency for Black and Latina girls, and we contend that this new definition also applies to Black women. Morris (2016) has demonstrated the ways in which Black girls and women are still subjugated to the Jezebel stereotype, and labeled as hyper-sexual, sassy, loud, and cunning. Through a careful examination of school institutions, Morris (2016) discussed the multidimensional stereotypes and debilitating narratives that portray Black girls and women in a negative light. The ways in which Black girls are often typecast as promiscuous ‘bad girls’ is reminiscent of the Jezebel image that is part of our social history. Why are Black girls and women so easily typecast as ‘angry,’ even when we display appropriate levels of responses? Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) has shared ways that hip-hop can be used to work successfully with Black girls. By celebrating the Black girl, we can help to change the narrative used to stereotype Black girls and women. Likewise, Beyoncé uses *Lemonade* and a medley of hip-hop beats to offer a counter-narrative, a positive way of viewing Black and Brown girls and women. In the same way that the website “Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths” (<http://solhot.weebly.com/>) creates a digital space to celebrate Black girlhood, *Lemonade* provides a space for black women’s creative performance and expression.

Bad Bitch Barbie represents the complexities of being a woman during the era of hip-hop. Beyoncé is widely acknowledged and accepted in the hip-hop community, due to her collaborations with hip-hop artists and her marriage to rapper Jay Z. As a genre of music, hip-hop influences how individuals embody the self, and how they use media and digital tools as a space to create meaning for themselves and others (Lewis Ellison, 2014; Lewis Ellison & Kirkland, 2014; Petchauer, 2012; Pough, 2004; Stokes, 2007). Beyond the deep analysis of lyrics and beats lies a culture that combats the enforcement of outlandish and demeaning images and narratives of women (particularly African American women), and serves to encourage those women to compete against both males and each other in healthy ways in the industry. We live in a culture where hip-hop music and reality television shows such as “Love and Hip-Hip [Atlanta/Hollywood/New York]” and “Sisterhood of Hip-Hop” have infiltrated

the airwaves, digital media, and social networking sites with known and unknown artists who intend to make a name for themselves. Examining the *Bad Bitch Barbie* image through a hip-hop feminist lens acknowledges the complexity of all of these individuals' portrayals of Black womanhood.

Discussion and Educational Implications

The *Bad Bitch Barbie* image developed out of the history of oversexualization and commodification of Black women's bodies. The authors used *Bad Bitch Barbie* as a conceptual framework to contend that the rise of the *Bad Bitch Barbie* craze is indicative of both the ways Black women view themselves and the ways the world views Black women. The authors found that the *Bad Bitch Barbie* image, although highly controversial, serves as an example of female sexuality and agency as well as of misogynistic representations of Black women. The *Bad Bitch Barbie* image can be viewed as an example of women asserting their sexual freedoms, and of these women's repurposing of stereotypical representations of Black women's bodies. Nevertheless, the body ideal presented by Beyoncé as a *Bad Bitch Barbie* offers a narrowly defined standard of beauty that is unattainable to countless girls and women. What does it take to look like Beyoncé? What lengths should women go to obtain the *Bad Bitch Barbie* look? Equitable representations of Black women within the hip-hop community and digital media are required to counter-act the controversial nature of the *Bad Bitch Barbie* image and the negative words associated with this type of representation. While Gourdine and Lemmons (2011) have argued that negative words and portrayals of women are unacceptable, we in turn argue that the steady stream of highly sexualized images places an unrealistic, unnatural and limited view of women within hip-hop. The authors encourage Black girls and women to critically examine the images presented in media and use their own voices to challenge limited, racial, and misogynistic representations of women in hip-hop.

At the center of the *Bad Bitch Barbie* image is the desire to be accepted and seen, and to be in control of the ways in which one's body will be used. Adolescent Black girls and women are under extreme pressure to be highly sexualized (hip-hop standard of beauty) while also being intelligent. Some television shows like "Dance Wars" and "Bring it!," which almost exclusively feature African American teenage girls, portray young Black girls with long hair weaves, tight clothing, and dancing in ways that are reminiscent of the images portrayed of women in rap videos. Gourdine and Lemmons (2011) found that, given the amount of time youth spend listening to rap music, *Lemonade* can potentially influence their perceptions about it. Frequently listening to rap music without the ability to critically analyze what one hears may be problematic. As hip-hop lovers and connoisseurs, we do not condemn hip-hop, but we do contend that women must learn to analyze the messages and meanings they consume, and learn to develop their own voices. Collins' Black feminist theory

(1990) has argued that women can use their own voices to control the messages about themselves, such as the central participant in Oesterreich's (2007) study, who utilized her written rap lyrics as a method for establishing her voice and becoming visible. In another case study, adolescent girls whose self-advocacy was informed by feminist theories helped transform teacher practices. The authors suggest that educators must problematize the ways in which Black girls are portrayed in the media and establish opportunities for girls to replace oppressive images with their own voices. Hip-hop feminism could challenge educators to view these forms of expression as valid cultural capital and examples of social activism (Oesterreich, 2007). Culturally relevant curricula could support the combating of negative imagery and serve as a foundation for Black girls to create their own images, repositioning themselves as beautiful, healthy and whole, both in the presence and absence of the male gaze (American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007).

To further extend this research, we challenge scholars to examine the ways in which the *Bad Bitch Barbie* craze influences women in other fields, including women like Serena Williams, whose physical body is beautifully powerful and strong, and who refuses to conform to or be controlled by mainstream standards of beauty. Her beauty is continuously questioned, discussed, and debated as much as her athletic abilities, and continues to be an anthem of how African American women are portrayed and acknowledged. However, as educators, we are concerned that, with a click of a button, young girls and boys can watch these portrayals and come to view them as the new normal for African American women and hip-hop without first understanding how performers like Beyoncé are not merely passive replications of sexism and misogyny, but potentially bring awareness to self-empowerment.

Notes

¹ Tidal is a music streaming service owned by Shawn "Jay Z" Carter, Beyoncé Knowles, and a variety of musical performing artists.

² The constructs "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably.

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