

Hip Hop Honey or Video Ho: African American Preadolescents' Understanding of Female Sexual Scripts in Hip Hop Culture

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Abstract This qualitative study identifies African American preadolescents' acceptance and usage of Stephens and Phillips (2003) sexual scripts—the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama. These eight sexual scripts were found to be recognized and have shared meanings about sexual behaviors for participants. In turn, these were found to influence participants' conceptualizations of their own and general African American female sexuality, which differed significantly according to gender. Findings from this study are particularly important given the lack of research on sexual scripting among this population, filling a void of knowledge related to race and intraethnic variations in beliefs and attitudes about sexuality.

Keywords Sexuality · African American · Preadolescents · Hip Hop

African American preadolescents' beliefs about female sexuality differ in meaning and sexual behavior values when compared to preadolescents in other racial/ ethnic groups (Sterk-Elifson 1994; Wyatt 1997). Given the negative health statistics that characterize this population, it is particularly important to investigate the belief systems of African American preadolescent sexuality. Across preadolescent and adolescent female populations, African Americans experience the highest rates of HIV/AIDS transmission, gonorrhea, herpes, syphilis, multiple partners, unplanned pregnancy, non-voluntary intercourse, sexual abuse, and earliest ages of sexual onset (Centers for Disease Control [CDC] 2000). Among males aged 12–18, the

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rates of sexual activity and sexually transmitted diseases are highest among African Americans, followed by Latinos and Euro-Americans (CDC 2000).

Unfortunately, while many of these findings provide important behavioral outcome information, they are commonly drawn from research designs and questions that ignore race and intraethnic variations in beliefs and attitudes about sexuality (Benda and Corwyn 1998; McLoyd 1998). This is because there is a tendency for researchers to normalize Euro-American adolescents' experience, and it is against these conceptualizations of appropriate behaviors that other populations are compared (Few et al. 2003; Wiederman et al. 1996).

This study identifies how meanings about sexuality are developed by African American preadolescents through an examination of sexual scripts identified by Stephens and Phillips (2003). Sexual scripts are schema used to categorize norms regarding appropriate sexual beliefs and behaviors. Stephens and Phillips believed African American preadolescents have developed sexual scripts specific to and reflective of African American popular culture. These scripts include: the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama.

In this study, we argue that these sexual scripts do exist and that they identify ways in which African American preadolescents gave meaning and value to African American female sexuality and corresponding behavioral outcome expectations. Further, we believe these scripts are influential in African American preadolescent decision-making processes regarding sexual activity and behaviors.

Literature Review

Sexual Scripting

Sexuality constitutes a central feature of identity; individuals are to a great degree defined by themselves and others, both socially and morally, in terms of their sexuality (Foucault 1978; Giddens 1992; Plummer 1995; Weeks 1985). Human sexuality scholars refer to these sexual identity frameworks as sexual scripts. These are essentially schemas used to organize ideas about appropriate sexual experiences. Scripts influence norms for sexual behavior, and they are expressed and maintained through their usage (Simon and Gagnon 1984, 1986, 1987). Sexual scripts are also instrumental in the creation of one's belief system, developing a set of attitudes about one's sexual being, and outlining prescriptions for behaviors that not only influence individuals' evaluation of their sexual "beingness," but also impact others' perceptions and evaluations them (Simon and Gagnon 1987). People develop a sense of sexual meanings through social interactions and exposure to the sexual messages in sexual scripts. These meanings are part of continually changing cultural and social contexts (Longmore 1998; Stephens and Phillips 2005).

Although evidence supporting the importance and relevance of sexual scripts for understanding conceptualizations about sexual interactions, interpersonal relationships and general sexual health has been found among Euro-Americans and gays and lesbians (cf., Alksnis et al. 1996; Klinkenberg and Rose 1994; Maticka-Tyndale

1991; Rose and Frieze 1989, 1993; Ross and Davis 1996), research specifically on defined frameworks of sexuality illustrated via sexual scripts and their links to sexual meaning among different African American or other minority racial/ethnic groups is virtually non-existent (Bowleg et al. 2004; Stephens and Few 2007; Stephens and Phillips 2003).

African American Sexual Scripts

There is a body of literature that provides a foundation for examining sexual scripts in African American populations. These narrative studies focus on iconographic images of African American womanhood—the promiscuous Jezebel, asexual Mammy, breeding Welfare Mama, controlling Sapphire and emasculating Matriarch (cf., Collins 2000; Guy-Sheftall 1990). However, few researchers have empirically examined the relevance of these images in African American preadolescent sexual risk-taking processes today. Stephens and Phillips (2003) identified eight sexual scripts through an analysis of racial/ethnic specific messages about sexuality evident in media forums, namely Hip Hop television programming and music genres (Comstock and Scharrer 1999; Cowen et al. 1988; Hazel-Ford et al. 1992; Heaton and Wilson 1995; Malamuth and Check 1981; Smitherman 1977; Waggett 1989).

Hip Hop is an African American urban-based culture of creativity and expression that has been referred to as “the CNN of young Black America” (Chuck 2001). Insiders to Hip Hop culture know that this phenomena encompasses a deep understanding of diverse cultural expressions, such as body language (e.g. Frith 1996), language usage (e.g. Smitherman 1997), clothing styles (e.g. Kim 2001), value and belief systems (e.g. Baker 1992), racial/ethnic identity (e.g. Ro 1996; Rose 1992; Rubio 1993), and general behavioral expectations (e.g. Henderson 1996; Venable 2001) than the music can convey alone. Hip Hop culture’s music is reflective of a very specific African American youth experience that began in the early 1980s reflecting their anger and fears about their present lives and unknown futures (Ransby and Matthews 1995; Smitherman 1977; Williams 1992).

Although the music began as an underground and often highly political art form, it was quickly appropriated and depoliticized by mainstream culture within the prevailing business climate of the late 1980s (Chuck 2001; Cutler 1999; Henderson 1996; Wahl 1999). Caught in the conflict were the images of young African American women whose relation to both the White mainstream and the emerging Hip Hop culture were being re-defined and re-negotiated. Neocolonialism has framed these new relationships among African American women, the music industry, the White mainstream, and Black youth culture. Neocolonialism within this paper refers to corporations and dominant group’s influence over another marginalized populations, areas or sectors by economic, language, cultural and political means rather than by the traditional colonialist methods of military-political take-over and direct control (Nkrumah 1965; Sartre 2001; Suret-Canale 1988; Young 2001). For African American youth, they experience this indirect control aspects of Hip Hop cultural life, including art, theatre, cinema and

television. We believe that a new media elite that may include White or Black men or women in positions of power have recolonized the Black female body.

We cannot, however, characterize Black women as mere victims of a neocolonizing process; this would overstate their lack of agency. Black women as a group have retained a dialogical relationship with the music industry and the larger culture. Thus, they have vitally shaped the discourse about themselves and their sexuality. What is particularly unique about the contemporary climate is the fact that African American youth, including young, African American women, have more influential power in the construction of their own cultural symbology (Rose 1994; Kitwana 2003). Yet, we cannot overlook that the self-definitions produced by this group are, sadly, far from devoid of the remnants of racism and sexism.

Hip Hop music videos are the most accessible providers of these sexual script frameworks. Music videos have emerged as some of the most popular genre of television programming among preadolescents. Hip Hop is the most popular genre of music shown on two of the most widely viewed channels among preadolescents and young adults—Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Music Television (MTV). Through clothing, camera address, and visual images, women in Hip Hop videos are depicted as having both great sexual power and sexual desires (Brown 2000; Roberts 1996; Stephens and Few 2007). The projected sexual scripts not only work to reinforce stereotypical beliefs of viewers living in predominately White communities who have little contact with members of other racial or ethnic groups (Heaton and Wilson 1995; Stephens and Phillips 2005), but also serve as representation of how African American preadolescent women are expected to view themselves.

Current Incarnations: The new stereotypes

From the Hip Hop foothold of African American culture, the *Diva*, *Gold Digger*, *Freak*, *Dyke*, *Gangster Bitch*, *Sister Savior*, *Earth Mother*, and *Baby Mama* (c.f. Stephens and Phillips 2003) unique sexual scripts emerged. In some ways, these scripts are contemporary manifestations of older stereotypes of Black womanhood—the *Jezebel*, *Sapphire*, *Welfare Mama*, and *Matriarch*. In this section, we describe the socially located characteristics of each script.

The *Diva* is characterized as being pretty based on Westernized standards of beauty (namely long straightened hair, light skinned, and having a slender build). Middle-class in its projection, the *Diva* script is commonly applied to women who appear independent yet select partners that primarily bolsters social status and provides companionship. Her sexuality is framed from a traditional view of power in relationships, such that males are viewed as central to defining who she is, although not necessary to get what she needs (Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Where trading social status for sex describes the *Diva*, it is the *Gold Digger* who uses sex to gain material and economic rewards (Jones 1994). *Gold Diggers* are aware that sexuality may be used to barter for basic needs (e.g. purchasing groceries, paying rent, or an electric bill) or leisure items (e.g. pedicures, new clothing, or vacations). But, if a woman decides to forego financial gains and only

seeks to satisfy her own sexual desires, she is labeled a *Freak*. The *Freak* is a “bad girl” who gains male attention through an overt sexual persona. She appears sexually liberated, empowered, and seeks sex solely for physical satisfaction, not for a relationship. A debate rages over whether the *Freak* reflects a true persona of sexual empowerment, or if she is simply reinforcing and falling victim to male desires about female sexuality.

In contrast, women who choose not engage in sexual acts with men and enter relationships exclusively with women are referred to as *Dykes*. Within this frame, heterosexuality is viewed as the natural emotional and sexual inclination for women, and those who go against this are seen as deviant, pathological or as emotionally and sensually deprived (Lorde 1984; Pharr and Raymond 1997). This script is commonly associated with women who appear to be a self-determined with a strong locus of control. No matter what her true sexual orientation is, she confronts men when disrespected or threatened. Clearly, the tensions around this script are about the strength that these women are able project without incorporating the sexual desires of men.

Gangster Bitches are associated with women who live in the same squalid, poverty-stricken, drug-infested, violent environments that have traditionally focused on the “endangered African American male” in popular imagination for the past decade (Hampton 2000). The *Gangster Bitch*’s focus is on survival, and men are partners in this endeavor. They are not expecting long-term love from men. They have become emotionally hardened in that sex is viewed as a means to release stress and to feel good for that moment (Campbell 1991; Sanchez Jankowski 1991). Sexuality, then, not only becomes a tool to please men, but to prove their loyalty to them.

The *Sister Savior* script decrees that sex is to be avoided because of the moral issues it poses within a religious context. She projects a demure, moral, obedient attitude, particularly toward men, that reflects African American religious institutions’ foundation in a tradition of patriarchy that often places women in submissive and oppressed positions (Brown Douglas 1999; Grant 1992; Hoover 1993). Their sexual decision-making information is often framed using fear tactics, not a holistic understanding (Brown Douglas 1999; Wyatt 1997).

The *Earth Mother* script appears to have a more developed sense of self as expressed through an Afrocentric political and spiritual consciousness that is obviously part of their everyday discourse and worldview. Traditional views of beauty are openly challenged by the *Earth Mother*’s beauty expectations and ideals embedded within an Afrocentric framework. They are less sexualized as men tend to be intimidated by *Earth Mothers* (Amber 2001); this reality also decreases their pool of eligible interested partners.

Once an illegitimate child is born, the *Baby Mama* script is enacted. Her title aptly and wholly describes this woman’s role—she is basically the mother of a man’s baby and nothing more. This attitude reflects popular beliefs that the *Baby Mama* purposely becomes pregnant so that she could maintain a relationship while making the biological father financially indebted to her or to keep a part of him (Aaron and Jenkins 2002). The *Baby Mama* is assumed to desire her former or current sexual partner so much that she will sacrifice all other life plans to have his

baby (Aaron and Jenkins 2002; Wyatt 1997, p. 131). The Baby Mama uses all—including unethical—ploys to achieve her desire to attain the status of mother and/or a relationship.

Relationship to Behavioral Outcomes

While these scripts are widely recognized, empirical research assessing their existence and impact on decision-making processes has not been conducted. Some preliminary research indicates, however, sexual behaviors may be influenced by images of African American female sexuality in the media does influence on behavioral outcomes (Stephens and Few 2007). In one study, African American female adolescents who watched films with African American women engaging in sexually explicit behaviors were found to (a) be approximately twice as likely to have multiple sex partners, (b) have more frequent sex, (c) not use contraception during last intercourse, (d) hold negative attitudes toward condom use, (e) testing positive for chlamydia, and (f) to have a strong desire to conceive (Wingood et al. 2001). African American female adolescents who had greater exposure to Hip Hop videos with high levels of sexual content were twice as likely to have had multiple sexual partners, and 1.5 times more likely to have a sexually transmitted disease (Wingood et al. 2003). Gillum (2002) investigated the link between stereotypic images of African American women and intimate partner violence and found that a large percentage of African American men endorsed stereotypic images of African American women. Endorsements of the images, in turn, were positively related to justification of violence against women.

Unfortunately, these studies do not specifically identify or examine specific frameworks of sexuality through sexual scripting or the ways in which scripts give meaning to sexual behavioral norms for this population. This study sought to fill this void by clearly assessing the existence of sexual scripts as a framework for African American female sexuality. To explore these phenomena, we examined the following research questions about African American preadolescents' consumption of sexual messages in Hip Hop culture.

1. What role do images of women Hip Hop culture play in transmitting information about African American female sexuality?
2. How do these values and beliefs inform sexual-decision making processes and potential behavioral outcomes?

Methods

Qualitative data collection techniques were employed in this study as we assumed that the preadolescents' reality was socially constructed through individual or collective definition of their knowledge about Hip Hop culture (Firestone 1987). Qualitative research requires an examination of the processes by which individuals and specific groups construct meaning and a description of how those meanings are

interpreted and expressed (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). Researchers can use qualitative methods, particularly interviews or non-traditional data, to analyze various dynamics that shape sexuality, race, and gender interactions (Bell-Scott 1998; Few et al. 2003). More specifically, sexual health interviews conducted with preadolescents tend to provide rich descriptions that can detail experiences or nuances that are not easily captured by traditional quantitative methods (Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff 1996). For these reasons, we utilized focus group interviews to provide insight into our two research questions.

Participants

This study used purposeful sampling, which involved identifying participants who might give the most comprehensive and knowledgeable information about female sexual scripts in African American youth culture. Seven male and eight female African American preadolescents aged 11–13 participated in the study. Data was gathered from both sexes as the frameworks for African American female preadolescent sexual scripts are informed through heterosexual relationship expectations.

Participants resided in a large southeastern college town and were recruited from an after school program targeting working and lower class families. All attended public middle schools and had resided in the community all their lives. None of the participants were currently involved in a romantic or sexual relationship. The majority had never experienced any form of intimate sexual activity (i.e., hugging, kissing, or dry humping the opposite sex). All self-reported never had experiencing sexual intercourse. Only four boys and two girls indicated that they had ever kissed or “made out” with a member of the opposite sex. None of the participants reported currently being involved in an intimate relationship with a person of the opposite sex, although several discussed having “boyfriends” or “girlfriends” in the past.

Data Collection

Three data collection techniques were used: (1) semi-structured focus group interviews, (2) written feedback documentation, and (3) researcher notes. These multiple sources of data were collected in order to triangulate the data and to confirm emergent themes and inconsistencies in the data.

The focus groups coincided with the open period of the after-school programming schedule. The boys and girls were interviewed in a private classroom on separate days. A questioning route provided the framework for developing and sequencing a series of focused, yet flexible questions (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Probes were prepared for each question to elicit further information from the participants.

In addition, each participant was given a handout with an image of a female Hip Hop artist who personified the sexual scripts identified by Stephens and Phillips (2003). While they do not represent all potential images of African American

women in Hip Hop they have been found to provide a comprehensive overview of sexual scripts currently presented in Hip Hop culture (Mills 2007; Stephens and Few 2007; Stokes 2007; Ward et al. 2005). Further, as these scripts' descriptions and examples drew upon these artists and images consumed by these preadolescents (see Appendix). Participants listed beliefs about these scripts as they related sexual behaviors and attitudes from the perspective of (a) themselves, (b) their African American female cohort, and (c) their African American male cohort. The scripts were introduced individually, so that participants were not made aware in advance of what scripts were being discussed.

Throughout this process, researcher notes about the participant–researcher interactions, body language, subsequent interview questions, and outlines of possible categories, themes, and patterns were made.

Data Analysis

Principles of the constant-comparative method (Lincoln and Guba 1985) were used to guide data analysis in study. An integration of Simon and Gagnon's (1984, 1986) sexual scripting levels and symbolic interaction theory were used to develop the coding schemes. In this study, interviews were analyzed using a form of modified analytic induction (Gilgun 1995; Patton 2002). Inductive, rather than deductive, reasoning is involved, allowing for modification of concepts and relationships between concepts occurs throughout the process of doing research, with the goal of most accurately representing the reality of the situation. Analyses were tentative and provisional throughout the study and only became comprehensive once the data is completely collected.

Prior research and the body of literature on African American sexuality were integrated into this process, which sought to devise markers about the phenomenon being studied. Characteristics of the eight sexual scripts were used as markers to analyze the data. The researchers triangulated interview transcripts, participant feedback, and entries from the researchers' notes in order to identify and confirm inconsistencies, salient issues, and patterns. Reissman's (1993) levels of representation model guided continuing attempts through analysis to represent and interpret data.

Findings

African American Sexual Scripts

Each of the eight sexual scripts identified by Stephens and Phillips (2003) were recognized by the participants in this study. Their centrality in participants' daily lives was evident in two ways: (a) self-reported frequent consumption of the scripts, and (b) self reported frequent usage of the sexual scripts' labels. In terms of usage, participants were immediately familiar with the labels presented to them. There was never a need to clarify the meaning of the terms use to classify each script.

The participants acknowledged that these scripts were encountered on a daily basis as they embraced their “passion”—Hip Hop culture. They continuously listened to it throughout their day. Both female and male preadolescents felt it was an integral part of their daily lives, taught them things about life, and gave them a perspective on their role or position in society.

Tracy: I love Hip Hop. I love it. I listen to it everyday, all day. When I hear it... (*hitting a beat on table, laughter*). I love it. All day long I listen to it.

Keisha: It’s about us, you know. It’s about being in America and how [African American kids] are.

Tyrone: Yeah, yeah, it’s good. It tells you what’s going on. I love watching videos to see all the cars and stuff... you know what I mean? To see how others live, you know.

Due to this continuous consumption of Hip Hop, there was congruency in the definitions and meanings associated with each by both male and female participants. Because the labels of the sexual scripts were drawn from the language of Hip Hop culture, their meanings were widely disseminated. Participants referenced songs that used these terms and shared the accompanying lyrics that gave definitions of their meanings. Only the word Dyke was unfamiliar to these participants, although they understood the meanings and behaviors associated with this script. The Dyke script is understood as overtly masculine and the Dyke’s preference for same-sex intimate relationships were viewed as undesirable. The participants later discussed this further in the context of sexual behaviors.

Beyond the labels, the participants were able to easily identify examples of the sexual scripts enacted by others who embrace Hip Hop culture. These participants readily sang out lyrics from songs and identified artists that represented each script. Furthermore, through these associations, they were able to articulate their feelings and share the meanings they gave to these sexual scripts. They, in turn, would give real life examples of peers who they felt re-enacted key cues associated with these scripts. Two female preadolescents shared:

Leesa: I see it all the time at school ... One girl got in trouble for wearing a top like Tweet [Hip Hop artist]. She thinks she look like her and she tries to act, dress so she can be her. She think she’s like the Diva, right?

Pam: Everyone wants to look like Beyonce because she’s seen as pretty and sexy. Like in the “Survivor” video—she looked strong in those [army fatigues] but still pretty... Yeah, [female peer] wore something like that to school but she didn’t look anything like [Beyonce].

For these participants, music videos provided the most visible evidence of sexual script existence and the sexual behaviors associated with them. As demonstrated by the quotes below, gender expectations about sexuality are created through projections of acceptable male and female roles.

Shawn: [Hip Hop artist] Snoop is a pimp. You see all ‘dem girls he’s got going off on him in [the music video]. You saw that video? Those girls were all over him... freaks all over him. Yeah, Snoop ran all that.

Susan: You see the Freak a lot in videos—she is always in the videos.

Nicole: No, there is the Diva. [Hip Hop artist] Ashanti is a Diva.

Tamika: But she is like a leader and everyone like her.

Crystal: Yeah, people don't really like [Freak persona] Lil' Kim.

Susan: She's good ... she has good songs. But she's not really respected. Boys want to sleep with her but not be with her long term.

Through this visual and audio forum, a hierarchy of desirable and undesirable scripts and associated behaviors are established. This gendering of behaviors and expectations expressed through sexual scripts was made evident in the dialogues with these preadolescents.

Sexual Behaviors

Discussions about sexual behaviors associated with these eight sexual scripts encompassed several issues related to sexual knowledge and appropriate sexual behaviors. It was found that both male and female preadolescents were able to give examples of sexual behaviors associated with each script by quoting from Hip Hop songs. However, this did not necessarily mean they had an accurate understanding of what those behaviors entailed or knew the correct terminologies.

Keisha: Well, Freaks also like to have oral sex.

Pam: What is oral sex? (*giggling*)

Tamika: It's when you blow on the guy's ... thing.

The second key issue was the actual behaviors, and more specifically, the value and meanings given to these behaviors. For example, kissing, hugging or cuddling were acceptable and not viewed as being associated with sex. In fact, sexual intercourse (specifically penile/vaginal penetration) and oral sex were the only two behaviors that these preadolescents defined as "sex." Sexual scripts that were perceived as including these behaviors were viewed as promiscuous and negative.

These frameworks of sexual knowledge shaped beliefs about sexual behaviors. The less sexualized the script, the less sexual risk the woman was assumed to present in terms of health and reputation. Sister Saviors and Divas were described as the most "clean" and healthy. Further, they were seen as the least likely to engage in sexual acts or do so only with select male partners. Male preadolescents believed that these were women who would not put them at risk for acquiring sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, these two scripts were described as being "good girls" and deserving of respect. To have sex with these women, deferential sexual advances were required. Female preadolescent responses agreed with assessments made by male preadolescents:

Anthony: [Divas] generally they don't have sex a lot.

Curtis: I basically think that they are good and clean.

In contrast, both female and male preadolescents labeled Freaks as "easy," meaning they had no inhibitions about engaging in sexual activity. It was felt

across all groups that males would not have to put any effort into convincing those associated with this script to have sex. Freaks were referred to as dirty, and required the usage of condoms as a means of protecting male partners from catching sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, both female and male preadolescents reported that by freely engaging in sexual acts with men, sexually aggressive women willingly put themselves at risk for negative reactions and behavioral outcomes.

Wayne: They want sex whatever it takes and whatever happens is fine. They like stripping, they show their body—they don't care.

Pam: I say that girls think Freaks are hos [whores].

Tamika: They are bitches, they are whores.

Keisha: Yeah, they walk into that.

Female preadolescents believed men would have sex with all the sexual scripts if they had the opportunity. The male desire for sex was reported as being innate and central to heterosexual relationships. As such, it was expected that boys or men would seek sexual interactions wherever and whenever they could. In fact, when discussions about male promiscuity arose, there was a greater level of acceptance in both female and male responses.

In reality, male preadolescents were willing to have sex with all the scripts except the Baby Mama and Dyke. The lack of interest in the Baby Mama was related to age and her desire to have children. Male preadolescents noted she has “babies with no daddy” and possibly “several daddies.” They viewed this script as being applicable to mature women who were more sexually experienced:

Shawn: She is older and will give it up, though she might have diseases.

Wayne: If they had sex one time, they can have it more than one time later probably.

Male preadolescents were willing to engage in sexual relations with a Baby Mama and even acknowledge they “would go out with them,” but not in this phase of their development. The fact that she was raising a child indicated maturity and a level of sexual experience they had not yet reached.

The attitudes toward Dykes' sexual behaviors were related to issues of morality and lack of knowledge. It was clear that these participants' homophobic attitudes were shaped by a lack of information about same-sex relationships. While they did not want to engage in same-sex sexual behaviors associated with the Dyke script, the participants clearly did not have a comprehensive understanding about what homosexuality is. They would reference issues of morality, stating that same-sex sexual behaviors were prohibited by the church, and were against what was “natural” human behavior. Male preadolescents appeared to be less disturbed by the Dyke script; five said that men would “get with them” with the belief that it could lead to a threesome with another woman. Female preadolescents were more negative in their assessment of the Dyke script, referring to them as “gayfers” and their behaviors as “nasty” in their notes. However, their reasons for why women might enact these scripts were diverse.

Researcher: So why do women become dykes then?

Nicole: Because they can't get a man. Because they can't get a man.

Crystal: Like she said because they can't get a man and maybe they think that women are prettier. Because there are some beautiful people out there.

Leesa: They might not want to get pregnant by men so.... So it is safer to be with women. You never know.

Susan: I think a dyke is.... I mean I don't think that it is right to be one, because if were supposed to be with another woman then we would.

Although these participants all stated that they had never been sexually active, they reported that these scripts could influence younger children and sexually active preadolescents. They believed it was important to address the behaviors in these scripts as a means of negotiating sexual relationship dynamics.

Discussion

Interviews revealed that all of the African American preadolescents in this study could identify the sexual scripts described by Stephens and Phillips (2003). Both female and male preadolescents framed their understanding of the scripts though consumption of African American music media and specific sexual behaviors. From participant quotations, we can infer that cultural influences are significant factors that inform preadolescents about the sexuality—real and imagined—of the opposite sex.

Identification of and values given to Sexual Scripts

Each of the eight sexual scripts identified by Stephens and Phillips (2003) was recognized by all participants in this study. Their daily consumption of Hip Hop culture normalized the script and increased participant recognition of these conceptual frameworks. This acknowledgement (or recognition) worked to ensure that there were general common understandings of the meanings and values given to these sexual scripts. Hip Hop is an African American, urban-based culture of creativity and expression that specifically expresses concerns, beliefs, and worldviews of individuals in adolescence and young adulthood. The music of the Hip Hop culture is reflective of a very specific African American youth experience that began in the late 1970s and continues today (Ransby and Matthews 1995; Smitherman 1977; Williams 1992). As such, Hip Hop now serves to maintain African American youth culture and its norms. These preadolescents made it clear that Hip Hop was important to them; they actively sought to consume or express aspects of it everyday. The centrality of Hip Hop to these participants ensures their daily observations of these sexual scripts. Still, Hip Hop is a vast culture with a matrix of meanings and values.

Studies examining risk prototypes and stereotypes may shed light on why this finding was reached. Research indicates that adolescents are generally very aware of and continuously develop social group identities, known as prototypes, within their social settings (Simmons and Blyth 1987; Skowronski and Carlston 1989). These serve as guides for categorizing behaviors and people associated with them (Chassin

et al. 1984; Feit 2001). Adolescents then realize that by engaging in the behavior, they are likely to be identified as being a member of a definable group or clique. For example, “typical” smokers or drinkers, “nerds,” or “jocks.” In this sense, accepting a prototype is part of the process through which individuals develop frameworks for understanding social hierarchies and networks in their social contexts.

Participants’ recognition of the eight sexual scripts may also be explained by stereotyping research that has shown African American preadolescents have a greater awareness of racial stereotypes than their Euro-American peers (Crocker and Major 1989; McCreary et al. 1996). As such, we assert that the acceptance and knowledge of sexual scripts, as frameworks for behavior within a specific racial context, are important for understanding the social structure of Hip Hop culture and African American preadolescent sexuality. Stephens and Phillips’ (2003) sexual scripts are important for understanding roles and attitudes as self-identified members of this culture. More specifically, these sexual scripts were shown to be central for the development of conceptual frameworks of appropriate gender, race, and sexuality attitudes that help individuals negotiate their roles in African American youth culture.

It is important to note that these scripts are also embedded within a framework of patriarchy, which includes the accumulation of material wealth and sexual conquest. The traditions of Hip Hop are embedded in a male culture; it is a space that was developed and initially controlled by men (Phillips et al. 2005; Smitherman 1977; Stephens and Phillips 2005). Women’s entrance was not readily accepted and still requires negotiation of male values and attitudes toward women. This reality was particularly evident in music videos where, for example, women are typically depicted as having great sexual desires, which they can only quench by being degraded for male pleasure (Brown 2000; Morgan 2002; Roberts 1996). Males, in contrast, are more often presented as having agency and control of their contexts in this male defined space (Iwamoto 2003; Kitwana 2003; Morgan 2002; Stephens and Phillips 2003). As a result, women are less likely to be depicted as individuals; rather they serve as backdrops with a focus on select body parts for male consumption. It is common in videos to have multiple women vying for one man’s attention through the use of highly sexualized verbal and non-verbal cues (Stephens and Few 2007; Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Participants were particularly aware of these projections and spent a considerable amount of time discussing their existence in various popular videos. Through these visual forums, concrete examples of the eight sexual scripts were made evident. Furthermore, they illustrated the culture and these preadolescents’ views regarding female sexuality. Although music videos are primarily a vehicle to promote particular artists and songs, this study supported prior assertions by Hip Hop culture researchers that videos reflect the content of the music, exposing the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of those consuming them (Farley 1999; Roberts and Ulen 2000; Rose 1994; Smart and Young 2002).

The continuous consumption of music videos ensured that these preadolescents would clearly recognize the eight scripts being discussed. They cited these videos as being important for “seeing what’s going on” in Hip Hop culture and the world in general. This supports prior research findings that indicate African American

preadolescents watch television programs for both entertainment and information (Botta 2000; Comstock and Scharrer 1999; Roberts 2000). The programs African American preadolescents choose to watch tend to involve characters and themes that reflect their racial/ethnic group (Brown 2000; Comstock and Scharrer 1999; Makkar and Strube 1995). As there were few television programs that center on African American youth at the time of data collection (Nielsen Media Research [NMR] 2002), it is suggested here that music videos served as one means of filling a void in culturally relevant programming. Simultaneously, frameworks for understanding African American female sexuality were being developed and maintained for this study's participants.

Support for the existence of sexual scripts and their recognition among African American preadolescents adds important information to the adolescent sexuality research literature. Clearly, preadolescents have conceptualizations about sexuality that are informed by gender and racial contexts. Building on this exploratory study, future research must seek to examine how these develop and get formulated into sexual scripts.

Influence on Sexual Behavior Attitudes and Beliefs

When considering participants' beliefs about the sexual behaviors associated with these eight scripts the control, meaning, and power of female sexuality appeared to be mediated by a patriarchal framework. Both within Hip Hop culture and the broader society, men are normally viewed as the aggressors seeking sex, while women are gatekeepers resisting male overtures (e.g., Carpenter 2001a, b; Jackson 1996; Lichtenstein 2000). Frameworks embracing these traditional scripts of female sexuality were found to dominate beliefs of participants in this study. Most notable were the normalization of heterosexuality and the celebration of female virginity.

Virginity has long been ascribed a high value for women in most cultures. Preserving female virginity until marriage is still celebrated, although not the norm, in the United States (c.f. Carpenter 2001a, b). Among these participants, virginity or low levels of sexual activity were viewed as positive for women; none of the female preadolescents identified themselves as sexually active and were not embarrassed about this. These values given to virginity (and in turn, promiscuity), directly informed attitudes about appropriate and healthy female sexual behaviors. For example, participants noted that sexual scripts that did not appear to assert sexuality (i.e., Sister Savior, Diva) were "safe" in terms of sexual risk. Both male and female preadolescents stated in their written notes that women enacting these scripts were sexually "clean" and "no condoms" were needed when engaging in sexual intercourse.

This observation reinforces prior research on college students that had found that the appearance of partners ("She doesn't look sick" or "She is too good looking to have AIDS") and familiarity with the partner ("I know them and the type of person they are") causes them to underestimate their AIDS risk and need to use condoms (Malloy et al. 1997). Lichtenstein (2000) similarly found that African American young women engaged in unsafe sex at first intercourse because their male partners said that neither would put them in jeopardy for sexual health risks (i.e., STDs) due to her virginity.

These female preadolescents relied upon stereotypic gender norms regarding female sexual passivity to guide their decisions. As in other studies (Dantzker and Eisenman 2003; Reiss 1967; Stephens and Few 2007; Werner-Wilson 1995), none of these preadolescent females endorsed a permissive or casual attitude toward sexual behaviors. The hypersexual sexual script challenged the “good girl” model of sexual behaviors that African American young women are usually socialized to accept (Fullilove et al. 1993; Windham 1995; Wyatt 1997). These female preadolescents responded to women’s interest in sexual pleasure as threatening to both themselves and the sexually empowered female. General cultural level sexual scripts portray unemotional and casual sex as negative for women. For our female participants, rejection of negative sexual scripts appeared to reflect the acceptance of traditional gender roles. If the goals of sexual desire for women entail interpersonal and romantic involvement (Regan and Berscheid 1996), being seen as promiscuous endangers these goals, particularly if men prefer partners with moderate sexual experience.

The negotiation of the balance between being promiscuous and virginal was evident when the Baby Mama script was considered. The presence of a child clearly indicated that these women had already engaged in sexual intercourse. However, some male preadolescents noted that they “may date” a Baby Mama in the future. It was felt that the degree of her sexual activity was important to consider. If the Baby Mama had multiple “baby daddies” or several male friends, then she was not an acceptable, sexually “safe” or “good” girl for sexual intercourse. However, if she appeared to have had just one child within confines of a committed relationship, she was still a potential sexual partner.

It is important to note that only heterosexual frameworks of sexuality were viewed as acceptable. Anything beyond these behaviors was viewed as promiscuous and abnormal. This observation was made particularly evident during discussions about the sexual behaviors associated with the Dyke script. Despite the fact that the Dyke is not a feminine or sexually wild script, she was still not viewed as sexless. Rather, her sexuality, in terms of engaging in same-sex intimate behaviors, was stereotyped by participants as repulsive, abnormal, and contrary to African American cultural norms. Their comments reflect findings from prior research on compulsory heterosexuality in African American communities (e.g., Chideya 1993; Lewis 2003; Smith 1994). This belief system fits with the frameworks about homosexuality embedded in African American youth culture. Hip Hop artists know that declaring one’s sexual identity—if it is not a typical straight one—is a huge risky personal decision that can have social, political, as well as financial and career repercussions (Coker 1999; Iwamoto 2003; Outlaw 1995; Venable 2001). These influences clearly extended to the participants in the study, particularly the female preadolescents, who expressed negative attitudes and intolerance toward the Dyke script sexual behaviors. As was found among men in prior research, the male preadolescents in this study shared the same resistance to accepting this sexual script, yet still found the potential of engaging in female–female–male sex alluring enough to lessen their rejection of women who appeared to follow this sexual script (e.g., Jackson 1997; Odih 2002; Rehin 2003).

Clearly, the acceptability of female sexual desire is inextricably linked to male expectations, beliefs, and goals. Essentially, a woman’s sexual identity is shaped not

only by her own behaviors, but the appraisals and evaluations of others viewing her actions. For example, female participants expressed that women who appeared to desire sexual pleasure may suffer rejection from a potential Black male partner.

Cultural ideas about appropriate gender behaviors were further reinforced when preadolescent females suggested and accepted the belief that males would have sex with any woman who was willing. As was found in other studies (Faulkner 2003; Fullilove et al. 1993), male desire for sex was perceived as being innate and central to the relationships with females. This greater level of acceptability of males' permissive sexual behaviors was exhibited in responses by both female and male preadolescents. Furthermore, the possibility of men engaging in sexual relations with women who followed even the most vilified sexual scripts was not viewed as problematic. Instead any negative projection may lay with the woman who allowed a man to have sex with her. Hence, women are constructed to be the gatekeepers while men are the conquerors of sexuality. This finding supports prior research that has shown African American women are commonly socialized to be "good" and non-sexually aggressive, while promiscuity among men is accepted, if not encouraged, through parental messages (Adimora 2001; Fullilove et al. 1993).

These double standard messages regarding male–female sexuality "rules" do not provide women with the skills and attitudes required to negotiate sexual practices effectively (Gomez and Marin 1996). When preadolescent females are presented primarily as objects of male desire rather than sexual agents in their own right, the cultural script of women as sexually powerless is perpetuated and ignores their possible experience of desire (Fine 1988). However, there is also debate that questions the legitimacy of the projection of female's self determination in those sexually aggressive scripts. It is suggested that these scripts do not represent a position of empowerment as they just recreate male desire. Marriott (2000) asks us to consider: Are women projected as the subversive manipulators or the ones being manipulated? Are they exploitative in their own right, or complicit in their own exploitation? These questions are an important concern for forthcoming research to consider, especially given that male preadolescents in this study were the only ones to note that some women may "just want to have sex." Clearly, researchers examining sexual behaviors need to be conscious of and integrate understandings of how gender expectations and desires for both men and women can inform behavioral outcomes. Sexual scripts provide a context for this examination.

Implications for Research and Practice

The usage of sexual scripts for understanding sexual risk behaviors does inform research about the simultaneous influence of gender and race with sexual meanings. Given this, intervention programs and projects about sexuality should acknowledge and integrate discussions about sexual scripts. Unique cultural messages that influence these decision-making processes must be acknowledged to achieve positive, healthy behavioral outcomes (Benda and Corwyn 1998; Irvine 1994). As the scripts were found to be immediately recognized by African American preadolescents, it is possible they will experience a sense of comfort discussing

sexuality through these frameworks. These preadolescent may feel empowered by being able to actively deconstruct sexual meanings and values with minimal guidance using these scripts. Furthermore, for African American female preadolescents, discussions using sexual scripts can provide a safe forum to engage in explicit talk about sexuality. Like a child abuse survivor pointing to an anatomically correct doll to talk about his or her victimization, female preadolescents can look at pictures of women who represent certain scripts to discuss their understanding of sexuality and expectant behavioral outcomes. A doll or a photograph can allow individuals to step “outside” of themselves to communicate ideas, feelings, or values about a specific topic. Preadolescent African American females require tools, such as these sexual scripts, to help visualize and identify sexual behaviors within a specific gender and racial context. Scripts provide an innovative, accessible way for both participants and researchers to understand the dynamic evolution of African American female preadolescent sexuality.

Conclusion

Understanding the link between sexual script and sexual risk taking behaviors is clearly important for researchers seeking to understand the unique experiences of African American women. This study has provided evidence that the eight African American female preadolescent sexual scripts identified by Stephens and Phillips’ (2003) do exist and inform the sexual health development of this population. Although we recognize that this is a small sample collected in the Georgia college town of Athens, we believe this exploratory study has merit for further investigation. These findings provide unique insights into African American preadolescent attitudes about sexuality. Data collected at this phase of the life span is of particular importance, given that the average age of sexual onset among African American preadolescents is 13 (CDC 2000). Thus, the responses of our participants provided information about the beliefs and attitudes of those on the cusp of potential sexual initiation. Furthermore, although these preadolescents may not have yet engaged in sexual activity, this study supports previous findings that preadolescents at this age have well defined attitudes and beliefs about appropriate sexual behaviors (e.g., Simmons and Blyth 1987; Skowronski and Carlston 1989).

More broadly, this study reinforces assertions that African American preadolescent sexuality must be understood as being larger than just behavioral outcomes. It encompasses personal, cultural, and interpersonal interpretations of sexuality that are often outlined through the use of sexual scripts. Operating on multiple levels, the socialization sources for African American preadolescents provides them with information about their sexuality within a specific racial and gender context. For this population, it is particularly important to understand the development and usage of sexual scripting through the expression of Hip Hop culture. Further, by using sexual scripts specific to cultural nuances, researchers will be better equipped to develop questions, research designs, and critical analysis of their findings so that accurate and extensive information will be made available for other researchers, practitioners, and educators in across fields.

Appendix


Participants' Handout

DIVA

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS




GOLD DIGGER

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS




FREAK

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS



DYKE

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS




GANGSTER BITCH

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS



SISTER SAVIOR

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS



EARTH MOTHER

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS



BABY MAMA

YOU

GIRLS

BOYS



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