

EXAMINING
AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE
ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY WITHIN
MAINSTREAM HIP HOP CULTURE
USING A WOMANIST-ECOLOGICAL
MODEL OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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There is a growing body of research examining the influence of Hip Hop culture on African American female adolescents' sexual attitudes and behavioral outcomes. There is a need, however, to examine these phenomena systemically. We argue that social science research examining African American adolescent experiences has used theories that have been critiqued as problematic. Deviance and negative developmental outcomes historically have been the dominant foci of studies on Black family life (Bell-Scott, 1982; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; McLoyd, 1998; Stephens, 2000). Social science researchers often continue to represent African American experiences through

comparative quantitative data collected from predominantly White populations. Thus, the experiences of African Americans are defined in terms of difference from whiteness (Jones, 1991). As a result, many social science researchers have reinforced sexual stereotypes by failing to accurately differentiate African American adolescent sexuality identification processes from those of Whites when they focus solely on behavioral outcomes. Because of this practice, researchers either ignore or dismiss meaningful conceptual distinctions across race and gender in the interpretation of their data (Benda & Corwyn, 1998).

In keeping with the theme of this section of the *Handbook*, "(Re)Visioning 'The Family,'" we

recognize that the study of African American adolescent sexuality requires a theoretical framework that facilitates multilayered intersectional analysis. We propose an integration of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and womanist theory to help us uncover psychological and cultural nuances in the investigation of African American female adolescent sexuality, largely influenced by sexual scripts found in Hip Hop culture (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Because Hip Hop exists at the intersection of African American culture in all its richness and U.S. mainstream commercialism vis-à-vis the entertainment industry, it constitutes a uniquely precarious site for the unfolding of young women's sense of self and, in particular, sexual identity. We believe that this integration of ecological and womanist frameworks is a useful contribution to the growing body of research which indicates that multiple Hip Hop cultural contexts do influence various sexual risk-taking beliefs and behaviors among and about African American adolescents and emerging adults (Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Wingood, DiClemente, Bernhardt, et al., 2003; Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, et al., 2001). This knowledge, in turn, is particularly important given that this population is at the highest risk across their age and gender cohort for the majority of negative sexual health outcomes, including unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease/infection acquisition (particularly HIV/AIDS), nonvoluntary intercourse, and early sexual onset (Bachanas et al., 2002; Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2006). Examining sexuality through the multiple environments that shape Hip Hop cultural experiences is useful in identifying this population's sexual identity socialization processes.

Integrating the frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and womanism is a means of revisiting multiple levels in the lives of those who look through a Hip Hop cultural lens when making sexual health decisions. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecosystemic perspective, individuals' perceptions and beliefs of their reality do not develop in a vacuum, but are products of the larger society. Essentially, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model allows scholars to use a wide lens in examining variables of African American female adolescent sexuality socialization and development by being inclusive of both psychological characteristics and

various Hip Hop cultural environmental factors. Womanism, a racial/ethnic-based theory that places African American women at the center of analysis, allows researchers to explore African American women's unique sociocultural-spiritual standpoint (Collins, 2000). Womanism, which represents a culturally embedded pro-woman sensibility that reflects, but is not reducible to, both African diarchic notions of powersharing and Western feminist ideals of women's liberation and power, is a perspective explicitly embraced and tacitly used by many African American women. From a womanist perspective, African American women pursue their own empowerment (e.g., agency) as women and maintain strong interpersonal and communal relations with other women, men, and children simultaneously. Because womanism is an outgrowth of African American women's culture and history, it is inseparable from the African American experience, including Hip Hop culture. Indeed, Hip Hop feminism/womanism is an emerging theoretical perspective with its own distinctive features (Phillips, 2006; Phillips, Reddick-Morgan, & Stephens, 2005). Using a womanist perspective, researchers are able to interpret the ecosystem of African American female adolescents from a nuanced, nondeficit view.

As we focus on African American female adolescent sexuality in this chapter, we acknowledge that one feature of Hip Hop culture is its emphasis on sexuality, particularly women's sexuality. In this chapter, we first provide a brief overview of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and womanist theory as it pertains to the study of African American female adolescent sexuality. Next, we present how we understand Bronfenbrenner's ecological model from a womanist perspective to investigate African American female adolescent sexuality. Finally, we suggest possible practical applications of this integrated approach.

BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL APPROACH

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is particularly relevant for examining African American female adolescent sexuality, as it is inclusive of individual, interpersonal, and broader contextual factors. A tenet of the ecosystemic perspective is that

individuals' perceptions and beliefs of their reality do not develop in a vacuum but are products of the larger ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). Behavior is viewed as the result of interplay between the psychological characteristics of the person and of a specific environment (Bronfenbrenner). One cannot be defined without reference to the other. Thus, we cannot simply look at African American female adolescents' sexual health issues or decision-making processes as isolated individual acts; they must be assessed in relation to the world around them. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, family researchers gather all relevant information on a person's life, encouraging an examination of interactions with others and the environment rather than individual behaviors. Researchers must consider familial, immediate community, societal, generational, and sociobiological levels of influence. Bronfenbrenner identified five specific environments through which to analyze sources of influence: (a) chronosystem, (b) macrosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) mesosystem, and (e) microsystem. An individual's socialization processes are determined by what she experiences in these settings.

WOMANIST THEORETICAL APPROACH

The term, *womanist*, was coined in 1979 by novelist Alice Walker, who originally defined a womanist as "a feminist, only more common." In 1983, in her now famous book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, she presented a dictionary-style definition of *womanist* that began with the straightforward assertion that a womanist is "a black feminist or feminist of color" and ended with the enigmatic statement, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (p. xii). From the mid-1980s forward, women of color from a host of disciplines adopted the term and used it to represent an autonomous, women-of-color theoretical, political, and spiritual orientation that differed in significant ways from feminism yet was not wholly incompatible with it (Phillips, 2006). Indeed, womanism proved to be a meeting ground for African American women who identified with feminism as well as those who actively rejected it.

Phillips (2006) identifies five overarching core characteristics of womanism: (a) antioppressionist

(i.e., simultaneously rejecting of all forms of oppression, named and unnamed, including but not limited to racism, sexism, classism, and other "isms"), (b) vernacular (i.e., grassroots in orientation, with street-level sensibilities), (c) nonideological (i.e., open and dialogic in a way that rejects firm party lines, upholds common values, and creates an inclusive politics), (d) communitarian (i.e., concerned with the wellness of the whole group, is perceived at successive levels ranging from the family to networks of like women and other identity-based groups and, ultimately, all humanity), and (e) spiritualized (i.e., affirming the reality and importance of an invisible spiritual dimension—distinct from religion per se—and its role in human life and affairs).

Womanism is a viable framework to use in any study focusing on the variables of race and gender because womanism affirms the nonseparability of identities and oppressions in the lived experience of women of color. While race, gender, class, sexuality, and other vectors of difference can be conceptually distinguished by researchers, each individual woman experiences these holistically as a dimension of her whole, integrated being. Thus, womanism provides language and perspectives that more closely approximate African American women's daily social reality and subjective, intrapsychic experience. When womanism is combined with an ecological perspective, an illuminating window into the experiences of African American women and adolescents is opened. The womanist perspective, with its ability to encompass both endogenous and exogenous dimensions of African American women's self-construction, is well-suited to the type of complex analysis that the ecological model demands. In summary, womanism provides a culturally based, culturally sensitive, and gender-specific filter to integrate into the ecological framework, enhancing its explanatory power.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

INTERPRETED FROM A WOMANIST LENS

We assert that African American female adolescent sexual socialization in the context of mainstream Hip Hop culture takes place at multiple locations. Furthermore, it is suggested that the degree of influence of these locations may differ as a function of various sources of influence.

Our integration of womanist and ecological theories allows us to examine Hip Hop culture's influence on the interaction of structures within a layer as well as interactions of structures between layers, thus gaining knowledge about the complexity of African American female adolescent sexual socialization processes (Darling, 2007).

Chronosystemic Analysis

To understand the sociohistorical contexts of mainstream Hip Hop culture, it would be useful to begin by considering the chronosystem. This outermost system refers to the sociohistorical conditions of African American women and adolescents in mainstream Hip Hop. This level draws on historical and current events as important life experience influences (Darling, 2007). Time is not the unit of measurement used in the chronosystem. Rather, this system involves the chronological ordering of significant environmental events and transitions over the life course. When considering the role of mainstream Hip Hop culture within a chronosystem framework, we explore the internal and external factors that create, continuously develop, and maintain the parameters of gender relations and a unique worldview over time.

Hip Hop began as an African American urban-based culture of creativity and expression that specifically expressed adolescents' concerns, beliefs, and worldviews. Young African American and Puerto Rican men used Hip Hop as a means of expressing their anger and frustration within a society that viewed them as worthless. While the most recognized genre of the culture is the music, Hip Hop encompasses a deeper understanding of cultural expressions, such as body language (Frith, 1996), language usage (Smitherman, 1997), clothing styles (Kim, 2001), value and belief systems (Baker, 1992), racial-ethnic and gender identity (Phillips et al., 2005; Rose, 1994; Stephens & Phillips, 2005), and general behavioral expectations (Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). A music genre that began as a reflection of African American youth's experiences in the early 1970s has since gone through various phases vis-à-vis the focus of messages being disseminated, the types of individuals controlling the industry, and the racial/ethnic/class make up of the cultures' consumers (Phillips et al., 2005).

The role of women in Hip Hop as artists, consumers, and industry operatives has evolved over the course of time. Since it began, women have participated in Hip Hop culture as MCs, DJs, dancers, and taggers (i.e., graffiti artists; Perkins, 1996; Phillips et al., 2005; Rose, 1994); their influence and visibility has consistently remained below that of their male counterparts. In the early days of Hip Hop, gender roles within Hip Hop were not as clearly delineated. During the mid-1970s, the "dis" tradition, which evolved from the practice of the dozens, emerged, in which female and male artists began to "talk back" at one another competitively. Also, in the mid- to late 1980s, a distinctly womanist/feminist trend developed, as female artists with women's empowerment messages—particularly around sexuality and resistance to violence—rose to popularity (Phillips et al., 2005). Artists such as Salt-n-Pepa, Queen Latifah, and Yo-Yo represented the first generation of this trend; a second, less hard-edged generation emerged in the mid-1990s, including artists such as Lauryn Hill, Missy Elliot, and Eve. Collectively, these artists, who spoke directly to young women about the daily challenges of sexism—although this academic language was rarely used—set the tone for women's empowerment subtext in Hip Hop. At the same time, these messages were intermingled with increasingly misogynistic themes expressed by mainstream male artists. Misogynist themes were popularized in gangsta rap, which surfaced in the early 1990s, and Dirty South rap, which is closely associated with Southern strip club culture, during the late 1990s. These latter trends, fueled by music industry promotion, managed to virtually eclipse the women's empowerment message purveyed by prowoman female artists (Keyes, 2000; Phillips et al., 2005). Instead, the music industry promoted women artists who emphasized their sexuality and sexual availability to men, primarily through the ascent of the "video ho" archetype (Edlund, 2004; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). While isolated female artists such as India Arie still carry a prowoman message, this music is no longer part of the mainstream Hip Hop that reaches the youngest Hip Hop consumers. Thus, while a Hip Hop-identified female adolescent's sexual sense of self may have been formed by self-respect and safer-sex discourses during the 1980s and 1990s, it is much more likely that the comparable influences today would be strip club culture and the pornography industry.

Womanism is germane to thinking about the evolution of Hip Hop culture vis-à-vis women and its messages to its female consumers in relation to sexual scripts and sexual identity. Women of the Hip Hop generation—a generation now broad enough to encompass both mothers and daughters and in some case granddaughters—are concerned with both self-expression *as women* and the pursuit and maintenance of relationships, whether intimate or communal. In addition, Hip Hop-identified women are concerned with political analysis but are averse to social change strategies that pit women against men or that negate the importance of spirituality (Phillips, 2006). Thus, to fully understand Hip Hop-identified women and adolescents, a womanist perspective is necessary.

As it became a highly profitable culture, Hip Hop was quickly appropriated and depoliticized within the individualistic business climate of the 1980s to become a booming mainstream music business. Today's mainstream Hip Hop culture has continued on this path of materialism; it has been aptly referred to as the *Bling Bling* period. *Bling-Bling*, which is sometimes simply referred to as "Bling," is a Hip Hop slang term that refers to expensive paraphernalia such as jewelry and flashy adornment. It also refers to an entire lifestyle of excess spending and flamboyance through ostentatious displays of material wealth (Oh, 2005; Westbrook & Westbrook, 2002). Success is measured by material acquisition, including acquisition of *multiple* women. Clearly, with this greater commercialization of mainstreaming Hip Hop culture, there has been an increase in the sexualization of African American women, as made evident through the connection between women and material goods. Within this context, African American women's value is male defined such that her greatest commodity is her sexuality and body (Collins, 2005; Morgan, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

This hypersexualization has been used to describe behavior and attitudes unique to African American women throughout history (Collins, 1994; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). The hypersexualization of African American female bodies has been further normalized as a fixed identity trait within academic and popular culture spaces exploring African American women's sexual health experiences. It should come as no surprise that heterosexuality and *heteronormativity* (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005) within the

context of African American men's desires have shaped mainstream Hip Hop's presentation of appropriate women's sexual behaviors. It was only after the rising prominence of racial-ethnic social science scholars, feminists, and womanists that these historical stereotypes of African American women as sexual conquerors and predators of men were challenged (Collins, 1994; Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

Macrosystemic Analysis

The macrosystem is composed of cultural values, customs, and laws. Within the macrosystem, researchers interpret how cultural values and laws justify or explain the behaviors of the population being studied and the population's interactions with the overarching institutional structures that reflect a society's cultural values (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). For instance, researchers can examine institutional decisions regarding funding or the basic existence of sexuality programs that target African American female adolescents. From these decisions, messages are transmitted to a targeted population to serve as guidelines for defining and organizing the institutional life of the society, including overarching patterns of culture, politics, and economy.

As outlined above, mainstream Hip Hop culture has continued on this path of sexual materialism that has led to the hypersexualization of women for economic gain. Toward this end, lyrics, videos portrayals, and general cultural values have presented African American women as sexually lascivious and available (Andsager & Roe, 2004; Morgan, 2002; Smart Young, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Because of the power of men within Hip Hop as artists, industry operatives, and consumers, their ability to influence sexual scripts for women in ways that reflect patriarchal, exploitative, or simply hedonistic desires is considerable. Without a comparable Hip Hop musical and visual corpus reflecting women's sexual desires and aspirations, African American female adolescents are forced to negotiate a form of male peer pressure, reified in the symbolic domain, as pertains to their sexual identity development.

It is important to note, however, that these presentations of African American womanhood as highly sexualized are not new; historical portrayals of African American womanhood have

always centered on this framework as it benefited male and European cultural frameworks (Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991). For example, Women's studies and African American studies feminist and womanist scholars have produced iconographic data that have led to the identification of the promiscuous Jezebel, the asexual Mammy, the emasculating Matriarch, the disagreeable Sapphire, and the breeding Welfare Mother as the foundational images of African American womanhood (see Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991). hooks (1992) noted that these images are part of the media landscape:

Just as nineteenth-century representations of Black female bodies were constructed to emphasize that these bodies were expendable, contemporary images (even those created in Black cultural production) give a similar message. (p. 127)

Remnants of the Jezebel, Mammy, Welfare Mother, and Matriarch images remain, as exemplified by the similar, yet more sexually explicit sexual scripts of the Diva, the Gold Digger, the Freak, the Dyke, the Gangster Bitch, the Sister Savior, the Earth Mother, and the Baby Mama sexual scripts (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). These eight scripts are widely accepted frameworks used to illustrate beliefs about African American female adolescent sexuality within the African American-based, heterosexual, male-dominated youth culture of mainstream Hip Hop (Nasheed, 2003; Stephens & Few, 2007a; Stephens, Few, & Neeves, 2008; Stokes, 2007).

Stephens and Phillips (2003) outline the focus of each script. The Diva script projects a woman who has sex to enhance her social status, even though she may already be financially independent and middle class or above. The Gold Digger script, particularly when cues of economic disadvantage are included, illustrates a woman who intentionally has sex for money or material goods. When an African American woman is portrayed as desiring and engaging in "wild and kinky" sex with a multitude of partners for her own gratification, the Freak script is being enacted. The Dyke script projects a self-sufficient and "hard" woman who has rejected sex with men and may have adopted masculine postures. The script of the Gangster Bitch shows a "street tough" woman who has sex to demonstrate solidarity with or to help her man; she may also be involved in gangs or gang culture.

The Sister Savior script is that of a pious woman who rejects all but marital, procreative sex for religious reasons. In contrast, the Earth Mother script portrays a woman who has sex for spiritual or nationalistic reasons to show her support for "the race" or "the nation" (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Finally, a woman who has had a child by a man but is no longer his partner is projected as the Baby Mama script; she has sex to maintain a financial or emotional connection with the man through the child. (For a detailed discussion of each of these scripts see Stephens & Phillips, 2003.)

These representations go beyond providing a mental picture as they contribute to sexual identification processes and meanings of African American female adolescent sexuality in the context of Hip Hop culture (Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b; Stokes, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that these images are not simply pictorials, but this imagery promotes sexual scripts that delineate the progression of sexual behaviors. We suggest that it is more accurate to discuss these representations as sexual scripts, as sexuality is "socially scripted" in that it is a "part" which is learned and acted out within a social context, and different social contexts have different social scripts (Jackson, 1996). How an individual African American female adolescent thinks about herself, how she relates to others, and how others think about and relate to her are based on symbolic meanings that have been associated with sexuality. For African American female adolescents, the sexual scripts available to them in mainstream Hip Hop culture rely on negative stereotypes that have changed little over the past century (Collins, 2000; Staples, 1994; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Wyatt, 1997). It is important for family researchers to examine the influence of these scripts on sexual behavioral outcomes at this macrosystemic level, as activating a stereotype usually leads people to behave in stereotype-consistent ways (Wheeler & Petty, 2001).

Exosystemic Analysis

Elements of the exosystem represent external institutions in which African American female adolescents are not direct participants but are affected by decisions and policies of these external forces (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). This would include institutions such as the mass media, legal settings, social services, educational institutions,

health systems, governmental agencies, and other political venues. While some would argue that African American female adolescents do have the opportunity to influence these bodies, in reality the African American community has little control in these arenas. The relationship between the media and this population exemplifies this lack of bidirectional influence. African American female adolescents consume media daily and contribute to its existence through the purchasing of the cultural goods it purveys (Botta, 2000; Sherman & Dominick, 1986; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). African American female adolescents, however, are not part of the power structure that oversees the production process or shapes mainstream Hip Hop culture. Rather, these young women influence Hip Hop culture and related media indirectly as objects of desire by the adult men who run the industry as well as artists who produce its chief content (Morgan, 2002; Pegram, 2007; Roberts & Ulen, 2000; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007; Stephens & Few, 2003). A womanist perspective allows us to examine critically the ways in which African American adolescent women simultaneously resist, reshape, and reproduce images of themselves that have been repackaged for their consumption and, ostensibly, to influence their real life behavior and attitudes. In terms of Hip Hop-related media, one feature that demonstrates womanist influence is the presence of those female rappers who "represent for the women" and the ways in which young women process women-oriented Hip Hop at street level (Phillips, 2006; Phillips et al., 2005; Pough, 2004; Pough, Richardson, Durham, & Raimist, 2007).

Messages offered through the mass media are important tools for exploring exosystemic constructs, as they serve to both emulate and reproduce a range of racialized and gendered sexual stereotypes. For example, researchers have found that mainstream Hip Hop cultural consumption takes place primarily through television (Andsager & Roe, 2004; Greenberg & Hofschire, 2000; Smith & Boyson, 2002) and online (Stokes, 2007) viewing of music videos. The images and sexual meanings displayed through these visual presentations cannot be ignored by African American female adolescents. Content analyses of music videos have found that they contain on average 93 sexual situations in an hour of programming, including 11 scenes featuring intercourse or oral sex

(Lichter, 2000). Furthermore, these situations are often framed through racist and sexist perspectives (Andsager & Roe, 2004; Greenberg & Hofschire, 2000; Smith & Boyson, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

On a number of occasions, industry executives and artists have stated that these videos should not be critiqued but considered as simple entertainment (e.g., Hurt, 2006; Palca, 2005; Singh, 2007). On a basic level, music videos are a vehicle to promote particular artists and songs. Others also within the Hip Hop industry have alternatively suggested that these videos merely reflect the content of the music, in turn putatively reflecting the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of those consuming them (Smart Young, 2002). Unfortunately, traditional ideas about race, gender, and sexuality often continue to shape ideas about the sexuality of African American women (and female adolescents). For example, women in mainstream Hip Hop videos are depicted as simultaneously having great sexual desires and quenching these sexual needs by being degraded for male pleasure (Brown, 2000; Morgan, 2002; Roberts, 1996). In these videos, women are not individuals; rather, they are projected as characters and a mass of body parts for males' consumption. It is common in videos to have multiple women of color vying for one man's attention through the use of highly sexualized verbal and nonverbal cues, including clothing, eye contact, sexualized dance, and actual conflicts with other women (Morgan, 2002; Smart Young, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Thus, African American adolescents are being socialized as to what types of interactions with men and other women are acceptable and/or desired.

Mainstream Hip Hop music videos today also often have X-rated versions aired nightly on BET's top-rated program, *Uncut*. What is only alluded to in the mainstream versions of Hip Hop music videos is clearly stated in these unconcealed visual expressions of male desire (Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b). Hip Hop has evolved into a popular genre of pornography. Uncensored, sexually explicit videos by Eminem, Dr. Dre, Jay-Z, Shaggy, Jadakiss, and others can be purchased via DVD compilations such as *Hardware: Hip Hop*. The Playboy Channel has also hopped on board with a Hip Hop-themed series called *Buckwild*, featuring segments titled "Sex Tip of the Day," "That's Ass," and "Eye Candy." Playboy has also entered

a production deal to present uncensored Hip Hop music videos to customers. Furthermore, specific women featured in mainstream Hip Hop music videos can also often be viewed at your leisure in sexually explicit DVD sets such as the *Hip Hop Honeys* volumes. This foundational program has spawned dozens of male Hip Hop artists who host porn DVDs for their music fans; some include Master P (*Master P Ice Cream Party series*), Lil' Jon (*American Sex Series*), and Ice T (*Pimp'n 101*). Snoop Dogg was awarded two awards for his *Snoop Dogg's Doggy Style* collection at the 2002 Adult Video News Awards, the Oscars of the pornography industry (Adams, 2002). His follow-up release, *Snoop Dogg's Hustlaz: Diary of a Pimp*, sold more copies than any other adult video release of 2003 (Edlund, 2004).

Several studies have found that the more African American adolescents watch sexualized images in mainstream Hip Hop music videos, the more likely they are to endorse and engage in sexually risky behaviors (Brown et al., 2006; Brown, Halpern, & L'Engle, 2005; Wingood, DiClemente, Bernhardt, et al., 2003; Wingood DiClemente, Harrington, et al., 2001). Brown et al. (2005) also found that early-maturing African American female adolescents reported more interest than late-maturing African American female adolescents in viewing sexual contact and in listening to sexual content in music. Early maturers were also more likely to interpret the messages they saw in the media as approving of teens having sexual intercourse (Brown et al., 2005). Stephens and Few (2007a, 2007b) found that African American adolescents not only recognized stereotypical sexual scripts in mainstream Hip Hop videos but saw them as accurate portrayals of real life behavioral guidelines for their peers. The results showed that these adolescents used sexual scripts from Hip Hop culture to predict behaviors of their peers and potential partners (Stephens & Few).

These beliefs, research shows, inform African American female adolescents' decision-making processes, translating into behavioral outcomes. Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, et al. (2001) found that African American female adolescents who viewed films with high levels of African American sexual content were approximately twice as likely to have multiple sex partners, to have more frequent sex, not to use contraception during last intercourse, and to have a strong

desire to conceive. There was also some association between watching images with excessive sexual content and increased likelihood of having negative attitudes toward condom use and testing positive for chlamydia (Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, et al.). In a related study, African American female adolescents who had greater exposure to Hip Hop videos were twice as likely to have had multiple sexual partners and 1.5 times more likely to report a sexually transmitted disease (Wingood, DiClemente, Bernhardt, et al., 2003).

Stephens and Few (2007b) found that adolescent males and females felt that women who enacted highly sexualized scripts from Hip Hop culture were at fault if they were the victims of rape. Male adolescents in this same study also stated that they were less likely to use condoms with women who presented themselves as one of the "good girl" sexual scripts, such as a Diva or Sister Savior. In contrast, the men believed that women who reflected highly sexualized scripts from Hip Hop culture (e.g., Freak or Gold Digger) necessitated condom use and should only be used for short-term pleasure and not a relationship (Stephens & Few, 2007b). These findings serve to reinforce the broad-reaching impact of mainstream Hip Hop messages disseminated at the exosystem level in that Hip Hop sexualized messaging has influence on African American female adolescents' sexual socialization processes.

Mesosystemic Analysis

The next level at which it is useful to examine the development of African American female adolescents' sexual health development in mainstream Hip Hop culture is the mesosystem. The mesosystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), is "a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (p. 25). The sites of importance at this level are influential community institutions that have a role in African American female adolescents' socialization processes. These can include places such as hair salons, churches, community health clinics, nightclubs, or local small spaces. These places are economic and political forces in larger society and have a direct relationship with individual African American female adolescents. These places serve as connectors between microsystem and macrosystem forces, creating a unique cultural

space for African American female adolescents. One important site to include in one's analysis is the Hip Hop nightclub. As a social space that centers and celebrates this culture, it is a salient context through which to examine the ways in which African American female adolescents' sexuality is influenced and expressed.

Hip Hop nightclubs are defined spaces for consumers and those embracing the culture to gather. In many communities, they are one of the few places where fans of Hip Hop can meet as a group. Because these fans come from all sectors of society, including different neighborhoods, work environments, and educational and income levels, the nightclub functions as a mesosystem. The significance of nightclubs as a Hip Hop mesosystem is highlighted by their presence in music videos; it is common for Hip Hop artists to use nightclubs as backdrops for these media presentations (Steffans, 2005; Wilson, 2007). In addition, nightclubs serve as the sites for up-and-coming artists to perform and connect with others in local Hip Hop communities (Cunningham, 2008; Hamilton, 2007; Hutchinson, 1999; Muñoz-Laboy, Weinstein, & Parker, 2007; Wilson, 2007).

Beyond being a social space, nightclubs serve as a site for meeting intimate partners and developing friendships. There is a small body of research examining this phenomenon. Hutchinson (1999) conducted an ethnographic study to explore male-female relationships in a nightclub setting. Within this space, there were hierarchies reflecting Hip Hop cultural scripts for both men and women. Male-female interactions were based on values and scripts presented in Hip Hop songs and music videos. For example, in Hutchinson's study, participants ranked drug dealers at the top, and they were ranked according to their financial status. Participants ranked women according to their association with the various males and sexual expression. Women were to be sexy but not too sexual, or they would be given a negative reputation. As found in prior research on mainstream Hip Hop sexual scripting (Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips, 2003), good girls and marriageable partners were distinguished from bad girls/sexual partners according to sexual expression.

Muñoz-Laboy et al. (2007) also found that gender dynamics in nightclubs were integral to understanding attendees' sexual experiences. These researchers argue that Hip Hop club

scenes represent a context where (a) young men's masculinities are contested by the social environment, (b) women challenge hypermasculine privilege, and (c) young people can set the stage for what happens next in their sexual and emotional interactions. They found that individuals expressed themselves using Hip Hop cultural cues yet were able to define for themselves what it meant to be a sexual male or female. For example, even during the highly sexualized form of dance known as grinding, in which bodies rub against each other, the women were consistently vigilant about maintaining control over their bodies and space on the dance floor.

Muñoz-Laboy et al. (2008) explored how contextual factors of the mainstream Hip Hop scene may be associated with young adult African American and Latino males' condom use and condom use self-efficacy. Although a self-identified affiliation with Hip Hop culture was not statistically associated with condom use self-efficacy, attending Hip Hop nightclubs did affect behavioral outcomes. The researchers found that the more often a man went to a Hip Hop nightclub, the lower the probability that he used condoms during intercourse (Muñoz-Laboy et al.). However, the researchers noted that having sexual intercourse within a context that supports risky sexual behaviors is likely to be the major reason for limited condom use. Thus, as a mesosystemic space, the nightclub serves to reinforce sexual behaviors and attitudes about African American womanhood celebrated in portrayals of mainstream Hip Hop culture.

We find in the womanist literature on young African American women's engagement with Hip Hop nightlife that the womanist mindset—which simultaneously identifies with and resists certain aspects of women's sexualization and normative gender roles—both allows young women to use the nightclub and similar venues as a site for the pursuit of sexual liberation and self-validation and presents challenges for the navigation of sexual and emotional risk (Morgan, 1999; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). What makes womanism a compelling perspective for viewing the mesosystem through the eyes of an adolescent African American female is that it neither oversimplifies the risks and rewards of her multilayered social context nor idealizes her participation in them. It forces researchers to understand that, even among adolescents, as

among adults, some risks are consciously chosen while others are artfully avoided.

Microsystemic Analysis

The immediate social settings in which African American female adolescents are involved are referred to as the microsystem. The microsystem is the layer closest to the individual and contains the structures with which she or he has direct contact. Within this system, the focus is on face-to-face interaction and relationships, particularly among family members, intimate partners, and peer groups (Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Stephens, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model emphasizes the role of family and primary relationships when explaining human behavior (Darling, 2007). These close-knit relationships carry out physical and psychosocial functions for their members, for themselves collectively, and for the common good of society. Furthermore, close relationships are integral to the establishment of beliefs, values, and behaviors (Darling). These are not merely reactive interactions; rather, these relationships have impact bidirectionally. For example, an African American female adolescent's parents influence her beliefs and behavior just as she influences the behavior and beliefs of the parent. Termed *bidirectional influences*, ecological approaches demonstrate that these relationships shape how African American female adolescents give meaning to behaviors and messages at all levels of environment. Prior research suggests that the microsystem's bidirectional influences are strongest and have the greatest impact on behavioral outcomes, particularly as they relate to sexual socialization (Darling). In this subsection, we specifically present parents and peers as microsystem influences in Hip Hop cultural contexts. From a womanist perspective, the emphasis in the microsystem is on how intimate social networks such as family and friends are often women- (or girl-) centered, but not women- (or girl-) exclusive—a fact that has both intrapsychic and material implications.

Families

Families play an important role in microsystems, particularly in the context of sexual health messaging. Familial units establish the foundational beliefs, values, and behaviors for interactions, including those that are sexual (Bubolz &

Sontag, 1993). Prior research has shown parental sexual messaging is instrumental in mediating relationships and sexual health messages adolescents receive outside their home. Specifically, parental communications about sexuality have been widely noted to be instrumental in shaping African American adolescent behavioral outcomes (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999; Wilson & Donenberg, 2004). Contemporary behavioral research supports that increased sexual intercourse is associated with decreased parental monitoring of African American adolescent sexual activity (Dittus & Jaccard, 2000; Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Researchers have found that African American parental conversations about sexuality with their children buffer adolescents from sexual risk taking (Dittus, Miller, Kotchick, & Forehand, 2004; Pistella & Bonati, 1998; Whitaker & Miller, 2000).

Unfortunately, mainstream Hip Hop culture further offers unique challenges for parental media monitoring of sexual messaging. Unlike African American-based musical forms of the past, Hip Hop lacks cross-generational involvement (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Some argue that because Hip Hop culture spans more than three decades, it is possible to find Hip Hop-identified parents and Hip Hop-identified children living in the same household. Thus, many mothers today are intimately familiar with Hip Hop culture and have learned to negotiate their own racial, gender, and sexual identities as Hip Hop messages have differed over the years (Emerson, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Phillips et al., 2005; Roberts & Ulen, 2000). There has been a significant growth in narratives detailing mothers' and post-young adulthood women's remorse over and subsequent rejection of current commercialized mainstream Hip Hop culture because of the centrality of misogyny and hypersexualization in its presentations (e.g., Morgan, 2002; O'Neal-Parker, 2006; Pegram, 2007; Roberts & Ulen, 2000). At the forefront of the movement to challenge negative sexual imagery, lyrics, and messaging in Hip Hop are former "Hip Hop Heads," now adult mothers who are concerned about the current culture's negative influence on their daughters' psychological well-being (Morgan, 2002; Pegram, 2007; Stephens et al., 2008). This movement is womanist because the mother-daughter tension (Walker, 1983) critiques the problematic aspects of Hip Hop

while acknowledging and appreciating the ongoing cultural relevance of Hip Hop music and culture to both mothers and daughters.

This potential parent-child disconnect is further problematized by the fact that African American adolescents are rarely watching television and other media forums with a parental presence (Roberts, 2000). Thus, parents' ability to monitor sexual beliefs and attitudes that are being transmitted in this context may be more difficult. This is troubling, given that research has shown that parents influence their adolescents' media consumption by directly monitoring the amount of viewing time and the content of various media forms that their adolescents consume (Gentile & Walsh, 2002). Furthermore, by covieing and discussing media messages, parents can further inform their adolescents' beliefs about sexuality, decreasing the negative messages youth receive from media (Gentile & Walsh).

Despite these barriers, there is research that has found that parental messaging does play a role in African American female adolescents' negotiation of mainstream Hip Hop culture values. Stephens et al. (2008) found that African American preadolescent girls viewed their mothers as primary sources of sexuality messaging. Furthermore, mothers were regarded both as models of appropriate sexual behaviors and as the parent most responsible for monitoring mainstream Hip Hop sexual image consumption. These results indicated that there were two specific ways in which maternal influence influenced adolescents' negotiation of sexual images: (a) maternal enactment and/or modeling of the sexual images and (b) direct communication of maternal beliefs regarding sexually scripted information transmitted in mainstream Hip Hop culture. These findings support prior research that indicates that mothers serve as the leading source of sexual health information and values for adolescent girls (Feldman & Rosenthal, 2000; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998; Rosenthal, Senserrick, & Feldman, 2001). African American maternal conversations about sexuality buffer adolescents from sexual risk taking (Karofsky, Zeng, & Kosorok, 2000).

This does not mean that fathers do not have a role in shaping their adolescent daughters' understandings of mainstream Hip Hop culture's sexual messaging processes. Stephens (2008) found that African American adolescent women's

fathers made them aware of inappropriate and appropriate sexual scripts in mainstream Hip Hop culture. Referring to Stephens and Phillips's (2003) eight sexual scripts, these female adolescents noted that their fathers would not want them to enact behaviors associated with highly sexualized images. These participants stated that the Freak, Dyke, and Gold Digger images were viewed by their fathers as inappropriate models for sexual behaviors. In contrast, the Sister Savior and Diva, both of which are portrayed as "good girl" images, were viewed as acceptable models of behaviors by fathers. Participants also reported that they felt that these paternal values directly affected their usage and negotiation of sexual imagery in Hip Hop culture. This finding reinforces prior research that African American fathers' opinions have a direct and immediate impact on sexual risk-taking behaviors (Dittus, Jaccard, & Gordon, 1997; Jaccard et al., 2000). In light of the importance that the preadolescent girls gave to their fathers' opinions about these sexual images, there is a need for future research to move beyond focusing on the mother-child dyad. Fathers need to be more directly targeted in sexual imagery research before the importance of parental relationships with their adolescents can be definitively stated (Miller, Forehand, & Kotchick, 2000).

Peer and Intimate Relationships

Research on peer influence consistently shows the importance of friends in shaping adolescents' beliefs and behavioral outcomes. Studies examining the importance of friends in shaping adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors find that adolescents often rely on peer acceptance to define and gauge their behaviors (Prinstein, Meade, & Cohen, 2003). As a peer culture, mainstream Hip Hop serves a space through which African American female adolescents are able to satisfy their needs for acceptance and yet be different from the adults in their life, a central developmental task during this phase of the lifespan (Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997). Stephens and Few (2007b) argue that it is important to examine peer influences on adolescents' usage of sexual images in mainstream Hip Hop culture as peers shape adolescents' ideas about racial and cultural norms, particularly within spaces

defined as African American. This may be explained by prior research that found that African American adolescents who feel least assured of their emotional connection with friends may be most likely to yield to peer pressure to feel included, which can engender troublesome behavior (McCreary, Slavin, & Berry, 1996). Thus, even if an adolescent develops a negative attitude toward unhealthy sexual behaviors, she or he may not possess the skills to resist strong social pressures to conform to peers who do not share that attitude (Crockett, Raffaelli, & Shen, 2006; Prinstein et al., 2003). Wodarski, Smokowski, and Feit (1996) found that the rate that African American adolescent sexual activity progressed and the extent to which condoms were used were both associated with the perceived behavior of friends.

Within mainstream Hip Hop culture, peers serve to influence attitudes toward appropriate sexual scripting in mainstream Hip Hop culture. Stephens and Few (2007a) found that African American adolescents clearly recognized and felt that sexual scripts in mainstream Hip Hop culture shape attitudes and beliefs about sexuality among their peers. Female adolescents rejected the idea of being friends with a peer who enacted behaviors and attitudes associated with the Freak script, explaining that they did not want to be associated with their reputations. Similarly, other adolescents and women who enacted the Sister Savior script were viewed as potentially “good friends,” as they were good and kind. These results show that African American female adolescents were aware of what kinds of Hip Hop scripts were viewed acceptable by their peers.

In addition, the importance of “fitting in” with peers’ acceptable usage of mainstream Hip Hop culture is highlighted in Stokes’s (2007) study of African American female adolescents’ MySpace pages. An online Web site targeted for peer social networking, MySpace creates peer cultural spaces where individuals can express themselves as they choose. Stokes found that African American female adolescents present themselves on their pages using sexual imagery grounded in Hip Hop culture. These adolescents’ presentations of themselves to their peers online illustrate the influence of microsystem-level influences on the establishment of beliefs, values, and behaviors as well as illustrating the

womanist value of activism, or resistance to self-negating stereotypes and scripts, through creative self-expression.

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATIONS OF A WOMANIST-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The use of a womanist-ecological lens to examine African American female adolescents’ sexual health is vital in helping family studies researchers create a link between research and practice. This approach systemically illustrates the value of examining mainstream Hip Hop culture as a context for providing valuable insights into the intersectionality of African American adolescents’ racial, gender, and sexual identities. For family studies researchers, a womanist-ecological framework comprehensively provides a visual illustration of the current research on African American female adolescent sexuality in mainstream Hip Hop culture. Womanism contributes an African American woman-centered point of view of the developing person, while the ecological model provides a complex structure for examining environmental influences on the African American female developing person. When reviewing the literature, family studies researchers using this model will be better able to identify the varied hidden and spoken sexual health messages being disseminated in this cultural context and to assess the impact of these messages on behavioral and psychological outcomes. Furthermore, this model’s flexibility allows for the integration of various individual identity factors such as age and geographic norms and beliefs (i.e., belief systems common in specific regions, or regionalism), particularly as they relate to music preferences, race, sexuality, and gender.

We cannot ignore the fact that theoretical models must have utility for practice; soundness of theory is useless if the problem that is addressed has little relevance to client needs or service delivery. Fortunately, the knowledge gained from this model will help (outsider and insider) practitioners understand a culture in which African American female adolescent sexual identities are processed. Directions for practice, policy, and curriculum development are nuanced with the knowledge gained from a cultural insider perspective. For example, prior

research has found that programs seeking to achieve changes in the attitudes toward and beliefs about racial-/ethnic-minority sexuality that fail to recognize the unique cultural messages that influence these processes are likely to fail (Baldwin et al., 2008; DeLamater, Wagstaff, & Havens, 2000).

The lesson for family studies researchers and public health workers is that mainstream Hip Hop culture goes beyond being a musical expression, ultimately serving as a full-fledged subculture that provides a support system and social structure for its consumers, including African American female adolescents. Thus, intervention programs and projects that address African American female adolescent sexual health issues that are based on an integrative model such as the one presented here can better address their clients' needs. Furthermore, discussions framed within the context of mainstream Hip Hop culture provide a safe space to engage in explicit talk (Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). African American female adolescents may need tools, such as the sexual imagery in Hip Hop culture, to help them identify and critique sexual behaviors within a specific gender and racial context. Including discussions of sexual images can increase individuals' comfort with sexual topics and their sense of general empowerment (Stephens, 2000).

In conclusion, there is a critical need for further theory and research in the area of adolescent sexuality and mainstream Hip Hop culture. The emerging research continues to provide evidence that mainstream Hip Hop plays a pivotal role in shaping and informing young people's attitudes and beliefs about sexuality. A significant portion of the lyrics and themes in mainstream Hip Hop culture reflects high-risk sexual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of African American adolescents (Smart Young, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2005). Within this context, traditional ideas about race, gender, and sexuality perpetually inform projections of African American female sexuality (Morgan, 2002; Roberts, 1996; Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips, 2003, 2005). For these reasons, the integrative womanist-ecological theoretical framework is useful for comprehensively and accurately framing this phenomenon. This process begins with an examination of what is currently being conveyed about sexuality in mainstream Hip Hop. Family studies researchers

can now use this framework for the next step of identifying innovative, alternative interventions from a nondeficit position that are reflective of the unique experiences of African American female adolescents. Clearly, there is need to address the total developing woman in process, as is highlighted by womanist theory. That is, the experiences of African American female adolescents, specific to their multiple identities, must be central concerns when analyzing their behaviors within the influential culture of mainstream Hip Hop.

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