

# Is Black Motherhood A Marker of Oppression or Empowerment? Hip-Hop and R&B Lessons about “Mama”

Cassandra Chaney and Arielle Brown

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the lyrics of 59 songs (40 Hip Hop songs; 17 R&B songs; 2 songs that represented the Hip Hop and R&B genre) from 1961-2013 to identify the ways that Black male and Black female artists described motherhood. The songs were determined by Billboard Chart Research Services, and Black Feminist Theory provided the theoretical foundation on which the themes were identified. Qualitative analysis of the lyrics revealed Black motherhood in R&B and Hip Hop to be based on the following four typologies: (1) Motherhood as Source of Emotional Comfort and Support; (2) Motherhood as Source of Strength and Self-Confidence; (3) Motherhood as Superior to Fatherhood; (4) Motherhood as Teacher and Disciplinarian; and (5) Motherhood Instills Unconditional Endless Love. Supporting qualitative lyrics are provided to support each of the aforementioned themes.

For most Black women, the ability to create, nurture, and provide for their progeny holds boundless personal, cultural, and social significance. Although racism, sexism, and classism frequently make motherhood difficult,<sup>1</sup> becoming a mother is one of the most salient personal and social identity symbols for many Black women. Several years ago, Shirley A. Hill<sup>2</sup> wrote, “motherhood is a significant marker of womanhood. It provides a respectable social identity, an important set of child-rearing tasks, access to kin resource networks, and a space where authority, a sense of control, and self-expression can be cultivated.”

Given the salience of this “significant marker of womanhood” for many Black women,<sup>3</sup> however, with few exceptions,<sup>4</sup> very little scholarly attention has been given to how Black male Rap artists discuss Black motherhood, and we are aware of no studies to examine whether descriptions of Black motherhood demonstrate oppression or

<sup>1</sup> Katherine Fouquier, “The Concept of Motherhood among Three Generations of African American Women.” *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 43, no. 2 (2011): 145-153; Michele Barzey, “Thick Love: Motherhood in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*,” *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* no. 5 (2000): 9; T. Chedgzsey Smith-McKeever, Darryl Rowe, and Weihua Gao. “Socioeconomic and other Factors Influencing Depression: A Comparison of Black and White Mothers,” *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 21, no. 1 (2012), 1-19; Miri Song and Rosalind Edwards, “Raising Questions about Perspectives on Black Lone Motherhood,” *Journal of Social Policy* 26, no. 2 (1997): 233-245; Michael Rendall “Entry or Exit? A Transition-Probability Approach to Explaining the High Prevalence of Single Motherhood among Black Women,” *Demography* 36, no. 3 (1999): 369-376.

<sup>2</sup> Shirley A. Hill, *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective on Families and Relationships*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2005), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Lawson Bush, “Solve for X: Black Mothers + Black Boys = X.” *Journal of African American Men* 5, no. 2 (2000): 31-51.

<sup>4</sup> Tia Tyree, “Lovin’ Momma and Hatin’ on Baby Mama: A Comparison of Misogynistic and Stereotypical Representations in Songs about Rappers’ Mothers and Baby Mamas,” *Women & Language* 32, no. 2 (2009): 50-58.

empowerment. This study will extend the growing scholarly dialogue regarding the ways that the Hip-Hop and R&B genres speak to the personal, social, and cultural norms and values that are present in society.<sup>5</sup> While page constraints do not allow for a lengthy review of the difference between Hip Hop and R&B, it is important to note that these music genres are not the same.

Past scholars have found that while Hip Hop is a more radical genre that has historically advanced political activism and social consciousness and more recently, materialism and misogyny against women, R&B is a softer music genre that essentially encourages the free expression of romantic feelings.<sup>6</sup> Given the global appeal of both of these music genres,<sup>7</sup> this study will examine whether Black male and female artists in Hip-Hop and R&B discuss motherhood in terms of oppression or empowerment. Thus, the following four research questions will guide this study: (1) How do Black male and female Hip-Hop and R&B artists generally discuss motherhood? (2) How is Black motherhood a marker of oppression in Hip-Hop and R&B? (3) How is Black motherhood a marker of empowerment in Hip-Hop and R&B? (4) What, in any ways, have descriptions of Black motherhood in Hip-Hop and R&B changed over time?

This topic is important for four reasons. First, this study recognizes the current trend of single-parent births among Black women. According to recent statistics from the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) – African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI) (2013), although the rate for single parent households in America has increased societally, this trend is “especially alarming among African Americans.” Between 1960 and 1995, the number of African American children living with two married parents dropped from 75% to 33%. At this moment, 69% of African American births are to single mothers as compared to 33% nationally.” In light of this statistical reality, this study will bridge the family studies and Hip Hop cultural studies literatures by examining whether empowerment or oppression is the driving force behind these statistics regarding Black motherhood. Second, this study builds upon and

<sup>5</sup> Emerson, Rana, A. “Where My Girls At?: Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos.” *Gender & Society* 16, no.1 (2002): 115-135; Jamison, DeReef F. “The Relationship between African Self-Consciousness, Cultural Misorientation, Hypermasculinity, and Rap Music Preference.” *Journal of African American Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006): 45-60; Kopano, Baruti N. “Rap Music as an Extension of the Black Rhetorical Tradition: ‘Keepin’ it Real’.” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4 (2002): 204; Pough, Gwendolyn D. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 170-171; Taylor, Carl and Virgil Taylor. “Hip Hop Is Now: An Evolving Youth Culture.” *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 15, no. 4 (2007), 210-213; Watkins, S. Craig. *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson George, *Hip Hop America*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998); Robert J Price, Jr., “Hegemony, Hope, and the Harlem Renaissance: Taking Hip Hop Culture Seriously,” *Convergence* 38, no. 2 (2005): 55-64; Michael Ralph, “Hip-Hop.” *Social Text* 27, no. 3 (2009): 141-146; Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Be-Bop to Hip Hop*. (California: University of California Press, 2003); James B. Stewart, “Message in the Music: Political Commentary in Black Popular Music from Rhythm and Blues to Early Hip Hop.” *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (2005): 196-225; Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Price 2005 Ibid. Ramsey 2003 Ibid. Stewart 2005 Ibid. Watkins 2005 Ibid.

extends Tyree's (2009) work by examining how Black mothers have been perceived by male and female Hip-Hop and R&B artists over time. Thus, an historical lens allows us to better meet the objectives of the study and allows us to determine similarities and differences in how Black motherhood has been discussed in these music genres over time. Third, this topic builds on Black feminist scholarship by highlighting the voices of a historically marginalized group, Black men and women, in two very popular music genres among the Black populace (i.e., Hip-Hop and R&B) discuss how Black motherhood is demonstrated and perceived. Last, and most important, instead of highlighting the pathology of Black motherhood, this study is based on a strengths-perspective and seeks to understand the ways in which Black families in general, and Black mothers in particular, are strong. Our purpose in relying on a strengths-perspective is not to minimize the inherent struggles of Black mothers and their families, but to rather highlight the specific ways in which this unique demographic of Black women help their families to remain resilient in the face of multiple challenges.

## Review of Literature

In the following literature review, we provide an overview of scholarship related to Black motherhood. Included within this overview are the risk and protective factors associated with Black motherhood, how dichotomous ways in which Black mothers have generally been described in Rap music, how Black women perceive motherhood, as well as the role of spirituality in the lives of Black mothers. Next, we provide the theoretical framework on which this study was built. Then, we describe the methodology that was utilized in this study. Following this, we present Hip-Hop and R&B lyrics that support the primary themes that were foundational in this study. Finally, we discuss policy implications regarding how Black motherhood is discussed within Hip-Hop and R&B music for these women and their families.

## Black Motherhood

Interestingly, much of the current scholarship related to Black motherhood can be traced to a well-publicized national report that was published over four decades ago which cast a negative national light on Black women. In what is commonly referred to as "The Moynihan Report," the sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan<sup>8</sup> proclaimed the rise in mother-headed families was not due to lack of economic opportunities (e.g., stable jobs) afforded Black families, but rather a ghetto culture that encouraged and glorified out-of-wedlock childbirth. Several prominent Black scholars and civil rights leaders asserted the image of Black families and Black motherhood offered in The

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor (March 1965), [www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm](http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm).

Moynihan Report advanced negative stereotypes,<sup>9</sup> and since that time, a growing body of scholarship has been committed to highlighting the complexity of Black motherhood, sans the stereotypicality. In fact, some studies have offered a more fair and legally-balanced way of treating drug-addicted Black mothers<sup>10</sup> and have found that work, and not marriage, has been found to be a better way to decrease poverty among Black women than White women.<sup>11</sup> Motherhood has been found to be a salient protective factor for Black women in that they are less likely than White women to commit suicide.<sup>12</sup> While Moynihan's report ignored the consanguineal relationships that are typical in Black families, scholars have stressed the importance of extended family networks for Black families as well as how these networks contribute to global self-worth in Black mothers and their children.<sup>13</sup> To further support how motherhood may protect Black women from psychological distress, one study revealed that in spite of the external pressures that they frequently experience, Black mothers have lower depression rates than White mothers.<sup>14</sup> Even the academic success of Black women can be traced to their role as mothers in that a recent study found these women viewed college enrollment as a crucial step toward a positive self-definition and personal empowerment.<sup>15</sup>

Extant scholarship over the past several decades has relied on a multitude of lens to more closely examine the varied experiences of Black mothers. For example, one large-scale quantitative study that examined family stability within the context of early marriage and early motherhood found age at first marriage but not age at first birth to be significantly related to the increased probability of marital dissolution among Black and White mothers.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars have focused on the historical or negative impacts of slavery on Black motherhood,<sup>17</sup> how the poor socioeconomic position of Black

<sup>9</sup> William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*. (Vintage, 1976); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.

<sup>10</sup> Enid Logan, "The Wrong Race, Committing Crime, Doing Drugs, and Maladjusted for Motherhood: The Nation's Fury Over Crack Babies." *Social Justice* 26, no. 1 (1999): 115-138.

<sup>11</sup> Hilarie Lieb and Susan Thistle. "The Changing Impact of Marriage, Motherhood and Work on Women's Poverty." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 27, no. 1 (2005), 5-23.

<sup>12</sup> Robert M. Fernquist, "Does Single Motherhood Protect Against Black Female Suicide?" *Archives of Suicide Research* 8, no. 2 (2004): 163-171.

<sup>13</sup> Susan McMahan, Erika Felix, and Thara Nagarain. "Social Support and Neighborhood Stressors among African American Youth: Networks and Relations to Self-Worth." *Journal of Child & Family Studies* 20, no. 3 (2011): 255-262.

<sup>14</sup> T. Chedgzsey Smith-McKeever, Darryl M. Rowe, and Weihua Gao, "Socioeconomic and other Factors Influencing Depression: A Comparison of Black and White Mothers." *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 21, no. 1 (2012), 1-19.

<sup>15</sup> Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, "Learning to Resist: Educational Counter-Narratives of Black College Reentry Mothers." *Teachers College Record* 115, no. 4 (2013): 1-31.

<sup>16</sup> Kristin A. Moore, and Linda J. Waite. "Marital Dissolution, Early Motherhood and Early Marriage." *Social Forces (University of North Carolina Press)* 60, no. 1 (1981): 20-40.

<sup>17</sup> L. Barzey 2000, *Ibid*.

mothers creates and sustains generational poverty,<sup>18</sup> as well as the need to providing legal alternatives other than stigmatizing and punishing drug-addicted Black women.<sup>19</sup>

Over fifteen years ago, Song and Edwards<sup>20</sup> conducted a qualitative examination of the experiences of single Black mothers in Great Britain. For the majority of these women, their greatest frustrations with being a mother were associated with the lack of financial, practical, and emotional support they received from their children's fathers as well as the inherent difficulties of coping with poverty and racism. While this study was not conducted among Black mothers in the United States, more recent scholarship has revealed the aforementioned to be some of the greatest concerns currently among Black single mothers in America.<sup>21</sup> More recent scholarship has shown that the mothering experiences of mothers are not the same. To support this, while Latina, White, and Black mothers use individual responsibility, monitoring, and organized activities to keep their children safe, race, class, and gender realities in society necessitate that Black mothers engage in a form of "protective carework" that can better help their children navigate numerous "hostile environments."<sup>22</sup> A few years after the study offered by Song and Edwards,<sup>23</sup> Rendall<sup>24</sup> identified the poor socioeconomic position of African Americans as one of the primary reasons why these women are more likely than women in other racial and/or ethnic groups to rear their children in female-headed households. In spite of the many challenges that they face, single motherhood has been found to be a protective factor (buffer) against suicide among Black women.<sup>25</sup>

### Rappers and Their Mothers

Black motherhood has been described in a myriad of ways in the literature, and in general, Black mothers are held in high regard. In Tia Tyree's<sup>26</sup> study, in which she conducted a textual analysis of rap songs, Black male artists used positive terms such as "Queen," "Good Woman," "Strong Sista" to describe their mothers and characterized their mothers as comforting, trustworthy, supportive, and self-sacrificing. Rappers often expressed love for their mothers because of their self-sacrificing ways, and as a result, developed a strong desire to financially support and protect them. The financial support these men frequently offered their mothers was described in terms of buying their mothers extravagant gifts such as clothes and cars and moving their mothers out

<sup>18</sup> Rendall 1999 Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Logan 1999, Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Song and Edwards 1997, Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> McKeever, Chedgzsey, Rowe and Gao 2012, Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Sinikka Elliott and Elyshia Aseltine. "Raising Teenagers in Hostile Environments: How Race, Class, and Gender Matter for Mothers' Protective Carework." *Journal of Family Issues* 34, no. 6 (2013): 719 - 744.

<sup>23</sup> Song and Edwards 1997, Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Rendall 1999, Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Fernquist 2004, Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Tyree 2009, Ibid.

of impoverished and dangerous neighborhoods into lavish homes and neighborhoods that provided greater safety.

Overwhelmingly, these lyrics supported the idea that Black mothers are strongly loved and appreciated by their sons. Tyree posited that the high estimation of Black mothers can be supported by rappers' descriptions of their mothers as "pure, spiritual, domestic and worthy of protection." According to noted scholar Michael Eric Dyson,<sup>27</sup> the love a Black male has for his mother is only slightly below the love he has for God. Although Black male rappers often used positive words to describe their mothers, they oftentimes described their oppressive experiences as well.<sup>28</sup> Black male rappers often referred to financial hardships and the economic plight their mothers faced when raising them independently. Tyree postulated that these testimonies affirmed the negative stereotype of the "welfare queen" that was present in the rap songs that were textually analyzed in her study. Interestingly, most Black male rappers used positive terms to refer to their mothers, yet used condescending terms to refer to the mothers of their children.

### Baby Mamas

Tyree's study revealed distinct differences in how mothers are perceived. Although their biological mothers were highly regarded, Black male rappers' "baby mamas" were not given the same admiration and positive reference as the rappers' mothers in rap songs. Rap lyrics that described baby mamas were often saturated in misogyny and sexism and generally painted these women as opportunistic "gold diggers" and "drama queens." To support this point, in Tyree's study, 11 out of 12 songs contained negative content about the mothers of their children. Women were described as "gold diggers," who decided to get pregnant for the rapper only to secure her financial gain. After further analyzing the lyrics in rap songs, Weitzer and Kubrin<sup>29</sup> concluded the actions of "baby mamas" led Black male rappers not to trust or deem these women as worthy of respect. Correspondingly, Oware<sup>30</sup> hypothesized the misogynistic rap lyrics towards the mothers of their children can be explained by the expectations the Black male has for his partner. To make this point clear, Oware asserted that Black males may enter relationships with expectations to receive "motherly" love from their partners, or love that ensures despite their entrée into crime or other personal shortcomings. He further believed the Black male may desire this unconditional love because it reminds him of his mother and is an extension of the

<sup>27</sup> Michael E. Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Tyree 2009, Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin, "Misogyny in Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings," *Men & Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3-29.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Oware, "Decent Daddy, Imperfect Daddy: Black Male Rap Artists' Views of Fatherhood and the Family." *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2011): 327-351.

relationship that he has already established with his mother. Unfortunately, because of the general contempt for the “baby mama,” the unconditional motherly love that the Black male seeks is unattainable, and may thus be a perpetual source of conflict between these men and their “baby mamas.”

### How Mothers Perceive Motherhood

While it is important to highlight how Black males view their mothers and the mothers of their children, it is also important to understand the female perspective regarding womanhood to better understand how this construct could affect how these women perceive and demonstrate motherhood. In Chaney’s<sup>31</sup> qualitative study regarding how Black women define and experience motherhood, she found that most Black women attributed womanhood to feminine attitudes and behaviors. In particular, strength, sensitivity, and sensuality were definitive characteristics of womanhood. In addition to these attitudes, feminine behaviors such as familial care, physical appearance, and self-respect were also significant symbols of womanhood for these women. When asked about the experience or demonstration of womanhood, the participants emphasized domesticity, the ability of the woman to take care of her home, and leadership, the ability of the woman to lead in male absence.

Black mothers of rappers received several reaffirming messages via rap songs regarding their ability to successfully rear their sons as single parents, however, some Black mothers have expressed doubts regarding their ability to help their sons’ transition to manhood. In Bush’s<sup>32</sup> study, Black mothers had a great deal of love for their sons yet expressed concerns regarding their ability to teach their sons to be men. To support this point, Bush stated, “Logically, if there are aspects of manhood that only men can teach, then there must be aspects of manhood only mothers (women) can teach.” Thus, although rap lyrics generally affirm the competency of these women to successfully rear their sons to adulthood, the findings in this study reveal the desire of Black mothers to be strong parental supports for their sons.

In a somewhat different vein, scholars have revealed somewhat conflicting findings regarding the amount of stress that Black mothers experience. Case in point: Davis, Sloan and Tang<sup>33</sup> examined the relationship between involvement in multiple roles and psychological distress among 380 Caucasian and African American women aged 18-60, focusing on women’s roles as paid workers, wives, and mothers. Interestingly, the quality of the mother role was significantly associated with psychological distress, while role occupancy and role quantity were not. Furthermore, the African American and White women appeared to be affected similarly by the

<sup>31</sup>Cassandra Chaney, "The Character of Womanhood: How African American Women’s Perceptions of Womanhood Influence Marriage and Motherhood." *Ethnicities* 11, no. 4 (2011): 512-535.

<sup>32</sup> Bush 2000, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Cindy Davis, Melissa Sloan, and Catherine Tang, “Role Occupancy, Quality, and Psychological Distress among Caucasian and African American Women,” *Journal of Women & Social Work* 26, no. 1 (2011), 72-82.

quality of their experience in the mother role. Contrastingly, for most Black women, motherhood was a positive source of affirmation and empowerment.<sup>34</sup> Katherine Fouquier<sup>35</sup> conducted in-depth interviews with 18 Black mothers from three different generations. Generation 1 included seven women between the ages of 65 and 83 years, who became mothers between 1950 and 1970, prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Generation 2 included five women, between the ages of 51 and 58 years, who became mothers between 1971 and 1990, after the Civil Rights Movement. There were six women in Generation 3, between the ages of 30 and 41 years, who became mothers between 1991 and 2003. Interestingly, these mothers described how they protected their children from various “isms” (Racism, Classism, and Sexism), the communal role that ‘othermothers’ and spiritual mothers have in facilitating the transition to motherhood and providing strong social support. Fundamentally, for these women, motherhood was a positive experience and a source of power that provided meaning, satisfaction, and respect within the family and the larger community.

### Black Spirituality

When exploring Black motherhood, scholars have noted spirituality is frequently predicated on various aspects of the mother’s spiritual state, and Black mothers feel the need to be spiritual.<sup>36</sup> For most Black mothers, spirituality is associated with their involvement with a religious organization, having a personal and intimate relationship with God, or frequently reading the Bible and relying on it as a source of comfort.<sup>37</sup> It is particularly interesting to note that Black mothers and their children have a high regard for spirituality. Case on point: Black males frequently attribute the goodness of their mothers to their inherent spirituality and Black mothers expect their sons to become spiritual and further develop this spirituality once they reach manhood.<sup>38</sup> In Chaney’s<sup>39</sup> study, African American women viewed spiritual development as a definitive characteristic of womanhood. To support this, when asked how women demonstrate womanhood, one participant in her study responded, “Womanhood is demonstrated by believing in good morals and in God.” Thus, it is apparent that Black women believe that being spiritual is a conscious marker of womanhood as well as a definitive

<sup>34</sup> Shannon Trice-Black and Victoria A. Foster, “Sexuality of Women with Young Children: A Feminist Model of Mental Health Counseling,” *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 33, no. 2 (2011): 95-111.

<sup>35</sup> Katherine Ferrell Fouquier, “The Concept of Motherhood among Three Generations of African American Women.” *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 43, no. 2 (2011): 145-153.

<sup>36</sup> Cassandra Chaney, “The Character of Womanhood: How African American Women’s Perceptions of Womanhood Influence Marriage and Motherhood.” *Ethnicities* 11, no. 4 (2011): 512-535; Cassandra Chaney, “Religiosity and spirituality among members of an African-American church community: A qualitative analysis.” *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 11, (2008): 201-234.

<sup>37</sup> Bush 2000, Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bush 2000, Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Chaney 2011, Ibid.



## Black Feminist Thought

According to Patricia Hill Collins,<sup>44</sup> Black feminist thought involves Black women creating unique perspectives of self, family, and society by relying on their “outsider within” position. These notions are created by Black women and are helpful in understanding the viewpoints of this marginalized group. Collins posited three themes regarding Black feminist thought: 1) self-definition and self-valuation, 2) “interlocking nature of oppression,” and 3) magnifying the importance of African American culture. According to this scholar, self-definition for Black women is significant because it “...validates Black women’s power as human subjects.” Self-definition and self-valuation involve African American women choosing to define themselves beyond stereotypes created for them. For Collins, both self-definition and self-valuation are means through which Black women oppose their dehumanization by the dominant culture and create their own affirming identities. For example, images such as the mammy, matriarch, Black lady, queen, baby mama, and welfare queen have been used to control and oppress Black women. Cheryl Gilkes<sup>45</sup> stated these stereotypes have generally been applied to Black women because they have actively resisted various forms of oppression in society in order to protect themselves and their families. Moreover, examining this interlocking nature of oppression is important because when African American women render their viewpoint regarding societal tyranny, they are able to present a “clearer view of oppression”<sup>46</sup> due to being Black and female – neither of which are privileges in a White patriarchal society. Lastly, the importance of African American culture is included in the themes of Black feminist thought because this perspective allows scholars to focus on areas of African American culture that have not been thoroughly examined, such as how sisterhood bonds among Black women are established and maintained as well as whether Black motherhood is a source of oppression or empowerment. When studying Black motherhood, Black feminists scholars must examine the choices that are available to mothers who rear their children, how they perceive their children’s choices, as well as how they demonstrate motherhood.

## Method

This study used a qualitative approach that examined contextual themes present in song lyrics. In order to determine the songs that were chosen, several steps were taken. First, all songs had to be sung by Black artists in R&B or Hip-Hop and had to specifically be related to motherhood. Initially, we focused on songs that had the word

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): 14-29, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Cheryl Gilkes, “From Slavery to Social Welfare: Racism and the Control of Black Women,” pp. 288-300 in Amy Smerdlow and Helen Lessinger (eds.), *Class, Race, and Sex: The Dynamics of Control*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981.

<sup>46</sup> Collins 1986, p. 19.

“Mama,” “Mamma,” “Momma,” “Mommy,” or “Mother” in the song title, yet broadened our examination to include songs that were specifically related to motherhood that did not use any of the aforementioned words in the song title. Sole singers and groups were included in the analysis if the song’s title and/or lyrics met the aforementioned criteria. This involved analyzing the song titles of over 100 songs between the years 1961-2013 from Billboard Research Services. Second, the complete lyrics of all songs were then analyzed, which were obtained from the following websites:

<http://www.aalyrics.com>, <http://www.azlyrics.com>, <http://www.lyricsfreak.com>, <http://www.lyrics-now.com>, <http://www.metrolyrics.com>, <http://www.sing365.com> and <http://www.songs-lyrics.net>. [The song title, singer or singers, year released, the individual or individuals that composed the song and the genre are provided in Table 1].

Second, after the songs were identified by the authors, the next part of the study involved: (1) identifying whether the song was provided by a solo artist or group; (2) determining the year that the song was released; (3) providing the individual or individuals that composed the song; (4) identifying the music genre; (5) providing direct quotes from the songs that directly supported Black motherhood; (6) providing a rationale regarding why the quotes selected directly supported Black motherhood; and (7) running statistical analyses on the aforementioned. The data were entered into a Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and frequencies revealed that of the total 59 songs related to motherhood that were identified, 40 songs represented the Hip Hop genre; 17 songs represented the R&B genre; and two songs represented the Hip Hop and R&B genre. In addition, 44 songs (74%) were provided by a sole artist; 8 songs (14%) were provided by a singing group; and 7 songs (12%) were provided by the artist and a featured artist. In addition, 30 songs (51%) were written by an individual or individuals other than the artist, 20 songs (34%) were written by the artist and another individual or individuals, and 9 songs (15%) were written by the artist. This systematic approach allowed us to respond to the questions of interest and established the validity and reliability of the research.<sup>47</sup>

Third, all songs were content analyzed using an open-coding process.<sup>48</sup> Although the research questions were determined at the beginning of the study, in keeping with normal open-coding techniques, no a priori categories were imposed on the narrative data. Instead, themes were identified from the lyrics. In order to concentrate on the primary themes that would serve as the focus of the current study, words and phrases were the units of analysis. This involved a *word by word* and *line by line* examination of the complete lyrics of all songs, keeping track of any emerging themes that were present, and using those themes to answer the question of scholarly interest. Essentially,

<sup>47</sup> Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures, and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

this method allowed the first author to determine the patterns within and between songs as well as identify the typologies related to Black motherhood that were described in the songs. In general, 3-5 phrases comprised each theme. For example, the word “love” or the phrase “unconditional love” or the extended phrase “I will always love my momma,” were all regarded as concrete descriptors of a mother’s unconditional love for her child as well as the unconditional love that a child feels for his or her mother. Through this process, the first author determined the five major categories related to Black motherhood and confirmed the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings by providing the lyrics of all songs to the second author and having her go through the aforementioned process.

To further increase the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of these categories and subcategories, the first author created a Word file that included the song title, author, and complete lyrics of the 59 songs that were included in the study. The second author was instructed to become familiar with the typologies of Black motherhood identified by the first author, to thoroughly read the lyrics of all songs, and indicate on a Word spread sheet the typology or typologies of Black motherhood identified in all songs by placing an “X” in the appropriate column. The identified typologies were not mutually exclusive in that in cases where a song endorsed more than one theme, the song was coded with as many themes were present in that song. After a 96% coding reliability rate was established between the first and second author, it was determined that a working coding system had been established, and thus minimized the likelihood that personal biases from the authors informed the outcomes presented herein.

Song Title	Singer/s	Year	Writer/s	Genre
<i>Mama Said</i>	The Shirelles	1961	Willie Denton	R&B
<i>Tell Mama</i>	Etta James	1967	Etta James	R&B
<i>I'll Always Love My Mama</i>	The Intruders	1973	Kenneth Gamble, Leon Huff, Gene Mcfadden and John Whitehead	R&B
<i>Sadie</i>	The Spinners	1974	Charles Simmons, B. Hawes, Bruce Jefferson, & Joseph Banks	R&B
<i>Thanks for my Child</i>	Cheryl 'Pepsi' Riley	1988	Full Force	R&B
<i>I'm Outstanding</i>	Shaquille O'Neal	1993	Alisa Yarbrough O'Neal, Erick Sermon, and Raymound Calhoun	R&B
<i>Keep Ya Head Up</i>	Tupac Shakur	1993	Tupac Shakur	Hip Hop
<i>Sadie</i>	R.Kelly	1993	R. Kelly	R&B
<i>Dear Mama</i>	Tupac Shakur	1995	T. Shakur, J. Sample, & T. Pizarro	Hip Hop
<i>Guess Who</i>	Goodie Mob	1995	Robert Barnett, Thomas Burton, Cameron Gipp, Willie Knighton, & Organized Noize	Hip Hop
<i>All I Got Is You</i>	Ghostface	1996	D. Coles, M.J. Blige, R. Diggs Jr., B.	Hip Hop

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	Killah		Gordy, D. Richards, A. Mizell, F. Perren	
<i>A Song for Mama</i>	Boys II Men	1997	Kenneth Edmonds	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>4 Page Letter</i>	Aaliyah	1997	Melissa A. Elliott, Timothy Z. Mosley	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Every Ghetto Every City</i>	Lauryn Hill	1998	David Axelrod, Lauryn Hill, Johari Newton, Tejunold Newton, Vada Nobles, Rasheem Pugh	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>I Honor U</i>	Canibus	1998	Germaine Williams & Wyclef Jean	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Mama Raised Me</i>	Master P. (featuring Snoop Dogg & Soulja Slim)	1998	Daryl Anderson, Calvin Broadus, Percy Miller, Jr., and James Trapp	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>I Love My Momma</i>	Snoop Dogg	1999	Broadus, Calvin/Williams, Lenny/Womack, Cecil	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Mom Praying</i>	Beanie Sigel	2001	Dwight Grant, Brad Jordan, Harvey Scales, Justin Smith	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>This Woman's Work</i>	Maxwell	2001	Kate Bush	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)</i>	Jay-Z	2001	Shawn Carter, Al Green, Roosevelt Harrell	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Survivor</i>	Destiny's Child	2001	Beyoncé Knowles, Anthony Dent, and Mathew Knowles	<b>Hip Hop and R&amp;B</b>
<i>Dance</i>	Nas	2002	Nasir Jones	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Big Mama (Unconditional Love)</i>	LL Cool J	2002	Simmons, Charles B./Hawes, Bruce/Jefferson, Joseph B./Smith, James Todd/Curry, Mark/Woolfolk, Joe	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Momma Knows</i>	Will Smith	2002	Lennie Bennett, Willard Smith, Lance Bennett, Lemar Bennett, C. Wilson	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Motherfather</i>	Musiq Soulchild	2002	Johnson, Taalib / Poyser, James Jason / Duplaix, Vikter	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>She's Alive</i>	Andre 3000 (Outkast)	2003	Kendricks, Andre Benjamin	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>To My Mama</i>	Bow Wow	2003	Gurd, Geoff / Lascelles, Martin / Foster, Gina / Hutchins, Jalil / Smith, Lawrence / Moss, Shad / Smith, Jonathan J / Sanders, Tenaia / Griffin, Rahman	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Momma</i>	Brand Nubian	2004	DJ Alamo; Al Green; Willie Mitchell	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Look at Me Now (featuring Mr. Porter)</i>	Young Buck	2005	David Darnell Brown (aka Young Buck) and D. Porter	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Nobody Knows</i>	Nelly (featuring Anthony)	2005	Jermaine Dupri, Paul Maurice Kelly, Cornell Haynes, James Phillips,	<b>Hip Hop</b>

	Hamilton)		Anthony Cornelius Hamilton	
<i>Reason</i>	Nas	2004	Schneider, Zoe/Manougazou,- /Kilger, Martin/Junco Wambrug, Mirta/Pyton, Ras	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>You Only Get One</i>	Skillz	2005	Shaquan Ian Lewis (aka Mad Skillz)	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Hate It or Love It</i>	The Game (featuring 50 Cent)	2005	Jayceon Taylor and Curtis Jackson	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Hey Mama</i>	Kanye West	2005	Kanye West, Donal Leace	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>We Ain't</i>	The Game (featuring Eminem)	2005	Songwriters: Rufus Cooper, Katari Cox, Jean Yves Ducornet, Michael Elizondo, Henry Garcia, Malcolm R. Greenidge, Curtis Jackson, Steve King, Marshall Mathers, Luis Resto, Delray M Richardson, Tupac Amaru Shakur, Jayceon Taylor, Andre Romell Young	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Benedicion Mami</i>	Fat Joe	2006	L. Brown, J. Cartagena, L. Glover, H. Gordy, A. Story, N. Warwar	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>I Made It</i>	Jay-Z	2006	Carter, Shawn C / Rachman, Khalil Abdul / Winslow, Dontae	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Freedom of Preach</i>	Ludacris (featuring Bishop Eddie Long)	2006	Bridges, Christopher Brian / Jones, William Larkin / King, Craig / Long, Eddie	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Dreamin</i>	Young Jeezy	2006	Jermaine Jackson, Bill Summers, Claytoven Richardson, Jay Jenkins, Larry Batiste, Andrew Harr	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Bury Me A G</i>	Young Jeezy	2006	Jay Jenkins, Kevin Crowe, Donald French, Clifford Brown, Mildred Jackson, Erik Ortiz, iii, Tupac Amaru Shakur, Iii Clifford Brown, Randy Walker	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Big Brother</i>	Kanye West	2007	Kanye West	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Mama</i>	The Dream	2007	Terius Youngdell Nash, Christopher Stewart	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Mama</i>	Chris Brown	2007	Christopher M. Brown, Eric Hudson, Atozzio Dishawn Towns	<b>Hip Hop and R&amp;B</b>
<i>No Hook</i>	Jay-Z	2007	Sean Combs, Shawn Carter, Barry Eugene White, Levar Coppin, Deleno Matthews	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>If (My Mommy)</i>	Saigon	2007	Brian Carenard	<b>Hip Hop</b>

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<i>I'm Only Human</i>	Rick Ross	2008	James III Harris, Rodney Kohn, Terry Lewis, Johnny Mollings, Leonardo V Mollings, J Newman, William Roberts, E Williams	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Superwoman</i>	Alicia Keyes	2008	Alicia Keys, Linda Perry, Steve Mostyn	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Momma Can You Hear Me</i>	Talib Kweli	2008	Talib Greene	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Woman</i>	Raheem DeVaughn	2008	Braun, Robin Hannibal Moelsted, Michael Edward Milosh	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Mother</i>	Ashanti	2008	Ashanti	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>3 Peat</i>	Lil' Wayne	2008	Dwayne Carter, Vaushaun Brooks, Colin Westover	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Playing with Fire</i>	Lil' Wayne	2008	Dwayne Carter, Nicholas M. Warwar, Jason Joel Desrouleaux	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Blessed</i>	Jill Scott	2011	Andre Harris and Vidal Davis	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Mama Nem</i>	Tech N9ne	2011	David Sanders II, Watson, Yates	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>I Love My Momma</i>	E-40	2011	E. Stevens, Mic Conn, and R.O.D.	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>Look What You've Done</i>	Drake	2011	Graham, Jesse Woodward, Shebib	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>I'm Sorry</i>	Ne-Yo (featuring Cristal Q)	2008	Shaffer Smith	<b>R&amp;B</b>
<i>Maybach Curtains</i>	Meek Mill (featuring Nas, Rick Ross, and John Legend)	2012	Rick Ross, Robert Williams	<b>Hip Hop</b>
<i>I Love My Mama</i>	<b>Lil' Wayne</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Lil' Wayne</b>	<b>Hip Hop</b>

Table 1

## Results

## Typologies of Black Motherhood

An analysis of the 59 songs (40 Hip Hop songs; 17 R&B songs; 2 songs that represented the Hip Hop and R&B genre) revealed Black motherhood to be based on the following four typologies: (1) Motherhood as Source of Emotional Comfort and Support; (2) Motherhood as Source of Strength and Self-Confidence; (3) Motherhood as Superior to Fatherhood; (4) Motherhood as Teacher and Disciplinarian; and (5) Motherhood Instills Unconditional Endless Love.

There were three aspects of these songs that were particularly noteworthy. For one, one song was first offered by a singing group and the same song was later offered by a solo artist. In particular, the song "Sadie" was originally produced by the R&B

group The Spinners in 1974 and later released by the R&B artist R. Kelly in 1993. Second, three songs shared the same title, save for different spellings for the word Mother. These songs were: (1) *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg; (2) *I Love My Momma* by E-40; and (3) *I Love My Mama* by Lil Wayne. Lastly, The Dream and Chris Brown shared the same song title (*Mama*) but the genre of these artists differed. Specifically, The Dream is an R&B artist while Chris Brown is both a Hip Hop and R&B artist. Interestingly, The Dream and Chris Brown both released their songs in 2007.

Further analysis of the songs revealed 27 songs represented only one theme. These songs were: (1) *Mama Said* by The Shirelles; (2) *Tell Mama* by Etta James; (3) *I'll Always Love My Momma* by The Intruders; (4) *Keep Ya Head Up* by Tupac Shakur; (5) *All I Got Is You* by Ghostface Killah; (6) *4 Page Letter* by Aaliyah; (7) *Every Ghetto Every City* by Lauryn Hill; (8) *I Honor U* by Cannibus; (9) *This Woman's Work* by Maxwell; (10) *Survivor* by Destiny's Child; (11) *Momma Knows* by Will Smith; (12) *Look at Me Now* by Young Buck; (13) *Reason* by Nas; (14) *Hey Mama* by Kanye West; (15) *We Ain't* by The Game (featuring Eminem); (16) *Big Brother* by Kanye West; (17) *Dreamin* by Young Jeezy; (18) *Bury Me A G* by Young Jeezy; (19) *Mama* by Chris Brown; (20) *No Hook* by Jay-Z; (21) *Superwoman* by Alicia Keyes; (22) *Momma Can You Hear Me* by Talib Kweli; (23) *3 Peat* by Lil Wayne; (24) *Playing with Fire* by Lil' Wayne; (25) *Blessed* by Jill Scott; (26) *I'm Sorry* by Nayo (featuring Candice Jones); and (27) *Maybach Curtains* by Meek Mill (featuring Nas, Rick Ross, and John Legend).

In addition, 25 songs represented two themes. These songs were: (1) *Sadie* by The Spinners; (2) *Sadie* by R. Kelly; (3) *Dear Mama* by Tupac Shakur; (4) *A Song for Mama* by Boys II Men; (5) *Mama Raised Me* by Master P (featuring Snoop Dogg & Soulja Slim); (6) *Mom Praying* by Beanie Sigel; (7) *Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)* by Jay-Z; (8) *Dance* by Nas; (9) *Motherfather* by Musiq Soulchild; (10) *She's Alive* by Andre 3000; (11) *To My Mama* by Bow Wow; (12) *Momma* by Brand Nubian; (13) *Nobody Knows* by Nelly (featuring Anthony Hamilton); (14) *Hate It Or Love It* by The Game (featuring 50 Cent); (15) *Benediccion Mami* by Fat Joe; (16) *I Made It* by Jay-Z; (17) *Mama* by The Dream; (18) *If (My Mommy)* by Saigon; (19) *I'm Only Human* by Rick Ross (featuring Rodney); (20) *Woman* by Raheem DeVaughn; (21) *Mother* by Ashanti; (22) *Mama Nem* by Tech N9ne; (23) *I Love My Momma* by E-40; (24) *Look What You've Done* by Drake; (25) and *I Love my Mama* by Lil Wayne.

Moreover, 4 songs (*Guess Who* by Goodie Mob; *Big Mama* by LL Cool J; *You Only Get One* by Skillz; and *Freedom of Preach* by Ludacris (featuring Bishop Eddie Long)) represented three different themes, and 3 songs (*Thanks for my Child* by Cheryl "Pepsi" Riley; *I'm Outstanding* by Shaquille O'Neal; and *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg) represented four different themes.

The "Motherhood as Source of Emotional Comfort and Support" theme was based on words and/or phrases related to the ability of mothers to emotionally soothe their children through encouraging words during times of disappointment or distress to make them feel better or rewarding their children when they have behaved well.

A total of 13 songs (22% of the songs) exemplified this theme. These songs were: (1) *Mama Said* by The Shirelles; (2) *Tell Mama* by Etta James; (3) *Thanks for my Child* by

Cheryl “Pepsi” Riley; (4) *I’m Outstanding* by Shaquille O’Neal; (5) *Sadie* by R. Kelly; (6) *A Song for Mama* by Boys II Men; (7) *Every Ghetto, Every City* by Lauryn Hill; (8) *Mama Raised me* by Master P (featuring Snoop Dogg and Soulja Slim); (9) *To My Mama* by Bow Wow; (10) *Nobody Knows* by Nelly (featuring Anthony Hamilton); (11) *Woman* by Raheem DeVaughn; (12) *Mama Nem* by Tech N9ne; and (13) *Look What You’ve Done* by Drake.

The “*Motherhood as Source of Strength and Self-Confidence*” theme was based on words and/or phrases related to the ability of mothers (or, young mothers) to be strong, to get strength from her children, to rear children to be strong (even though their children are afraid), and to instill strength and self-confidence in her children, even though at times, being a mother is very difficult. A total of 22 songs (37% of the songs) exemplified this theme. These songs were: (1) *Sadie* by The Spinners; (2) *Thanks for my Child* by Cheryl “Pepsi” Riley; (3) *I’m Outstanding* by Shaquille O’Neal; (4) *Sadie* by R. Kelly; (5) *Guess Who* by Goodie Mob; (6) *A Song for Mama* by Boys II Men; (7) *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg; (8) *Mom Praying* by Beanie Sigel; (9) *This Woman’s Work* by Maxwell; (10) *Dance* by Nas; (11) *She’s Alive* by Andre 3000; (12) *Reason* by Nas; (13) *You Only Get One* by Skillz; (14) *We Ain’t* by The Game; (15) *Benediccion Mami* by Fat Joe; (16) *Freedom of Preach* by Ludacris (featuring Bishop Eddie Long); (17) *Dreamin* by Young Jeezy; (18) *If (My Mommy)* by Saigon; (19) *Superwoman* by Alicia Keyes; (20) *Woman* by Raheem DeVaughn; (21) *Mother* by Ashanti; and (22) *I Love my Momma* by E-40.

The “*Motherhood as Superior to Fatherhood*” theme was based on words and/or phrases related to the elevated status of mothers over fathers. Although mothers willingly take on the responsibility to financially care for her children, fathers, make the decision to abandon their family and/or leave their children (as a result, their children never knew them), do not financially support their children, or be actively involved in the lives of their children. A total of 17 songs (29% of the songs) exemplified this theme. These songs were: (1) *Thanks for my Child* by Cheryl “Pepsi” Riley; (2) *Keep Ya Head Up* by Tupac Shakur; (3) *Guess Who* by Goodie Mob; (4) *All I Got Is You* by Ghostface Killah; (5) *I Honor U* by Cannibus; (6) *Mama Raised me* by Master P (featuring Snoop Dogg and Soulja Slim); (7) *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg; (8) *Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)* by Jay-Z; (9) *Big Mama (Unconditional Love)* by LL Cool J; (10) *Motherfather* by Musiq Soulchild; (11) *She’s Alive* by Andre 3000; (12) *To My Mama* by Bow Wow; (13) *Hate It Or Love It* by The Game (featuring 50-Cent); (14) *Freedom of Preach* by Ludacris (featuring Bishop Eddie Long); (15) *I’m Only Human* by Rick Ross (featuring Rodney); (16) *Woman* by Raheem DeVaughn; and (17) *Look What You’ve Done* by Drake.

The “*Motherhood as Teacher and Disciplinarian*” theme was based on words and/or phrases related to the ability of mothers to verbally teach their children the difference between right and wrong (e.g., values; religiosity; spirituality) or physically administer discipline (e.g., spank their children) to their children to prevent them from going down the wrong path or to help their children find and/or remain on the right path.

A total of 19 songs (32% of the songs) exemplified this theme. These songs were: (1) *Sadie* by The Spinners; (2) *I’m Outstanding* by Shaquille O’Neal; (3) *Sadie* by R. Kelly; (4) *Dear Mama* by Tupac Shakur; (5) *Guess Who* by Goodie Mob; (6) *4 Page Letter* by

Aaliyah; (7) *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg; (8) *Survivor* by Destiny's Child; (9) *Big Mama (Unconditional Love)* by LL Cool J; (10) *Momma Knows* by Will Smith; (11) *Momma* by Brand Nubian; (12) *Hate It Or Love It* by The Game (featuring 50-Cent); (13) *I Made It* by Jay-Z; (14) *Mama* by The Dream; (15) *No Hook* by Jay-Z; (16) *Mama Nem* by Tech N9ne; (17) *I Love my Momma* by E-40; (18) *I'm Sorry* by Neyo (featuring Candice Jones); and (19) *I Love My Mama* by Lil Wayne.

The "Motherhood Instills Unconditional Endless Love" theme was based on words and/or phrases related to children feeling unconditional and endless love for their mothers due to the many personal sacrifices that their mothers made for them and/or the family. In addition, this unconditional and endless love causes children to honor, admire, and respect their mothers, motivates them to think about ways to move their mother out of poverty, to financially provide for their mothers, to view their mothers as unique and irreplaceable, to appreciate their mothers in life and to wish they were still alive after death.

Thirty-three (34) songs exemplified this theme. These songs were: (1) *I'll Always Love My Momma* by The Intruders; (2) *Thanks for my Child* by Cheryl "Pepsi" Riley; (3) *I'm Outstanding* by Shaquille O'Neal; (4) *Dear Mama* by Tupac Shakur; (5) *I Love My Momma* by Snoop Dogg; (6) *Mom Praying* by Beanie Sigel; (7) *Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)* by Jay-Z; (8) *Dance* by Nas; (9) *Big Mama (Unconditional Love)* by LL Cool J; (10) *Motherfather* by Musiq Soulchild; (11) *To My Mama* by Bow Wow; (12) *Look at Me Now* by Young Buck; (13) *Momma* by Brand Nubian; (14) *Nobody Knows* by Nelly (featuring Anthony Hamilton); (15) *You Only Get One* by Skillz; (16) *Hey Mama* by Kanye West; (17) *Benediccion Mami* by Fat Joe; (18) *Big Brother* by Kanye West; (19) *I Made It* by Jay-Z; (20) *Freedom of Preach* by Ludacris (featuring Bishop Eddie Long); (21) *Big Brother* by Kanye West; (22) *Bury Me A G* by Young Jeezy; (23) *Mama* by The Dream; (24) *Mama* by Chris Brown; (25) *No Hook* by Jay-Z; (26) *If (My Mommy)* by Saigon; (27) *I'm Only Human* by Rick Ross (featuring Rodney); (28) *Momma Can You Hear Me* by Talib Kweli; (29) *Mother* by Ashanti; (30) *3 Peat* by Lil Wayne; (31) *Playing with Fire* by Lil' Wayne; (32) *Blessed* by Jill Scott; (33) *Maybach Curtains* by Meek Mill (featuring Nas, Rick Ross, and John Legend); (34) *I Love my Mama* by Lil Wayne. [Typology of Black Motherhood, Description of Black Motherhood, Lyrical Examples, Songs and Singers that Demonstrate the Typology of Black Motherhood are presented in Table 2].

Typology of Sensitivity	Description of Sensitivity	Lyrical Examples	Songs and Singer/s that Demonstrate the Typology of Black Motherhood
<b>Motherhood as Source of Emotional Comfort and Support</b>	A version of motherhood based on words and/or phrases related to the ability of mothers to emotionally soothe their children through	"I want you to tell mama what you want and I'll make everything all right"  "And you took up for me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tell Mama</i> by Etta James (1967)</li> <li>• <i>A Song for Mama</i></li> </ul>

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	encouraging words during times of disappointment or distress to make them feel better OR rewarding their children when they have behaved well.	when everyone was downin' me"  "My mother always thought I'd be a star, But way before my record deal"	<b>by Boys II Men (1997)</b>  • <i>Every Ghetto Every City</i> by Lauryn Hill (1998)
<b>Motherhood as Source of Strength and Self-Confidence</b>	A version of motherhood based on words and/or phrases related to the ability of mothers (or, young mothers) to be strong, to get strength from her children, to rear children to be strong (even though their children are afraid), and to instill strength and self-confidence in her children, even though at times, being a mother is very difficult.	"With you right here with me, I'll have the strength to go on"  "You always did understand, You gave me strength to go on"  "You taught me strength you gave me guidance, Whenever faith was lost, you were there to find it"	• <i>Thanks for My Child</i> by Cheryl "Pepsi" Riley (1988)  • <i>A Song for Mama</i> by Boys II Men (1997)  • <i>Mother</i> by Ashanti (2008)
<b>Motherhood as Superior to Fatherhood</b>	A version of motherhood based on words and/or phrases related to the elevated status of mothers over fathers. Although mothers willingly take on the responsibility to financially care for her children, fathers, make the decision to abandon their family and/or leave their children (as a result, their children never knew them), not financially support their children, or be actively involved in the lives of their children.	"Daddy wasn't home so mama raised me"  "Momma loved me, pop left me"  "Daddy ain't around, prolly out committin' felonies"	• <i>Mama Raised Me</i> by Master P (featuring Snoop Dogg & Soulja Slim) (1998)  • <i>Blueprint (Momma Loves Me)</i> by Jay-Z (2001)  • <i>Hate it or Love It</i> by The Game (featuring 50 Cent) (2005)
<b>Motherhood as Teacher and Disciplinarian</b>	A version of motherhood based on words and/or phrases related to the ability of mothers to verbally teach their	"You taught me how to care, You taught me how to share (f' real), You taught me how to love and to	• <i>I Love My Momma</i> by Snoop Dogg (1999)

	children the difference between right and wrong (e.g., values; religiosity; spirituality) OR physically administer discipline (e.g., spank their children) to their children to prevent them from going down the wrong path or to help their children find and/or remain on the right path.	give" "As a young boy you gave me whoopings to save my life....Cursed me out, to keep me out the streets at night" "I go to work, I don't quit. Mamma taught me this"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Big Mama (Unconditional Love)</i> by LL Cool J (2002)</li> <li>• <i>I Love My Mama</i> by Lil' Wayne (2013)</li> </ul>
<b>Motherhood Instills Unconditional Endless Love</b>	<b>A version of motherhood based on theme was based on words and/or phrases related to children feeling unconditional and endless love for their mothers due to the many personal sacrifices that their mothers made for them and/or the family. In addition, this unconditional and endless love causes children to honor, admire, and respect their mothers, motivates them to think about ways to move their mother out of poverty, to financially provide for their mothers, to view their mothers as unique and irreplaceable, to appreciate their mothers in life and to wish they were still alive after death.</b>	"Breakfast was on the table you gave me unconditional love" "And you never put no man over me, And I love you for that mommy, can't you see?" "Mama always did little things like that, Mama always will know I love her for that"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Big Mama (Unconditional Love)</i> by LL Cool J (2002)</li> <li>• <i>Hey Mama</i> by Kanye West (2005)</li> <li>• <i>Mama</i> by Chris Brown (2007)</li> </ul>

Table 2

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether Black male and female artists in Hip-Hop and R&B discuss motherhood in terms of oppression or empowerment. To

do this, we examined the lyrics of 59 (40 Hip Hop, 17 R&B, and 2 Hip Hop and R&B) songs to determine how Black artists in these genres generally discussed motherhood. Fundamentally, Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Theory was particularly compatible with the goals of this study as this theory highlighted the ways that Black Hip-Hop and R&B artists defined motherhood as well as the value that they placed on this particular dimension of parentage, uncovered the potential oppression experienced by Black mothers, as well as gave greater attention to the salience of Black culture. Earlier in this paper, we presented four questions that were foundational to our study, and in the paragraphs to follow, we will respond to each of these questions.

### How Black Male and Female Hip-Hop and R&B Artists Discuss Motherhood

Fundamentally, there are three ways in which Black male and female artists in Hip-Hop and R&B discussed motherhood. First, Black male and female Hip-Hop and R&B artists provided lyrics that highlighted the instrumental (physical) and expressive (emotional) salience of motherhood. In particular, these mothers could be depended on for physical care, emotional comfort, and stable parenting. Second, Black male and female Hip-Hop and R&B artists did not have the same regard (emotional attachment) to their mothers and fathers. Several years ago, Tia Tyree's<sup>49</sup> textual analysis of rap songs revealed Black male artists used positive terms such as "Queen," "Good Woman," "Strong Sista" to describe their mothers. This study built upon Tyree's work by drawing attention to the strength of Black women as well as placing Black mothers who financially support and are actively involved in the lives of their children as superior to Black fathers who abdicate this responsibility. Third, the male and female Hip-Hop and R&B artists' lyrics highlighted the ways in which Black motherhood should be rewarded. In particular, several artists mentioned how they provided their mothers lavish and expensive gifts as tokens of their boundless appreciation and gratitude. This finding lends strong support to Tyree's textual analysis of rap songs in that rappers generally bought expensive homes and gifts for their mothers to express how much they truly appreciated their mother's unconditional love and self-sacrificing support.

### How Black Motherhood Is a Marker of Oppression in Hip-Hop and R&B

There were three ways in which motherhood was a difficult experience for Black mothers. First, consistent with the findings offered by Song and Edwards,<sup>50</sup> several artists recognized the financial, emotional, and spiritual hardship on Black mothers who reared their children without help from their child's father. Interestingly, although many of his lyrics have expressed misogyny toward women ("*I Get Around*" and "*How Do You Want It*"), in the song *Keep Ya Head Up*, Tupac Shakur (1999) recognized the

<sup>49</sup> Tyree 2009, Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Song and Edwards, 1997, Ibid.

many inherent difficulties associated with single mother parenthood. To support this, Shakur first admitted that his song 'gives a holler to his sisters on welfare,' and that "Tupac cares, and don't nobody else care." Even though the "welfare queen" is a recurring negative stereotype in Hip Hop songs, this Hip Hop lothario recognized the tears in the eyes of these women, who are oftentimes verbally antagonized by the men in their lives and neighborhoods. Another form of oppression that this artist recognized were the many women that are rearing their children alone due to paternal negligence ("You know it makes me unhappy (what's that) when brothas make babies, and leave a young mother to be a pappy"). Essentially, in this song, Shakur did three things: he acknowledged how difficult it is for Black mothers to be both mother and father to their children, he truly empathized with the plight of these women, and he encouraged these mothers to 'keep their heads up,' confident that their lives would improve.

Another form of oppression that our study revealed was the Black mothers who were physically abused by the men in their lives. A closer examination of song lyrics related to this form of oppression against Black mothers revealed these abusive men were not the fathers of their children, but rather, men with whom these women were romantically involved. Although domestic violence was not a major theme in our study, it was mentioned in two songs, namely "Playing With Fire" (by Lil' Wayne in 2008) and "You Only Get One" (by Skillz in 2005). Interestingly, both of these Hip Hop artists discussed domestic violence within the context of defending their mothers from physical harm. For example, Lyrics such as, "...14, I fought a man for putting his hands on my mamma" (in "You Only Get One") and "...remember when your pussy second husband tried to beat you, remember when I went into the kitchen, got the cleaver..." (in "Playing With Fire") highlight an ugly reality that is present in the lives of many Black mothers as well as the extent to which Black sons would go to protect and defend their mothers from physical harm. Furthermore, in addition to the external stressors with which they must contend (i.e., poverty, racism), domestic violence is an internal form of oppression that simultaneously strips Black mothers of their personal safety and their young Black sons of their childhood innocence. As evident in the aforementioned lyrics, Skillz 'fought a man for putting his hands on his momma' at the tender age of 14 while Lil Wayne was forced to use a kitchen utensil (cleaver) as a weapon to protect his mother from her abusive second husband, who was also his stepfather. Clearly, the actions of these young men placed them in physical danger yet strongly support the literature in which the gratitude and love that Black male rappers have for their mothers unequivocally motivated them to protect their mothers at all cost.<sup>51</sup>

### How Black Motherhood Is a Marker of Empowerment in Hip-Hop and R&B

The analysis of the song lyrics revealed four ways in which motherhood was a source of empowerment or strength among Black women. First, the Cheryl "Pepsi"

<sup>51</sup> Oware 2011, Ibid.

Riley song *"Thanks for My Child"* in 1988 was the first lyrical anthem to celebrate single Black motherhood. Interestingly, the love that this mother had for her child was not contingent on her child's father being a part of her life. In this song, Riley sings: *"And even though my man has left me behind, I don't regret a thing for having you."* More important, even though she birthed a "love child" (a child born out of wedlock) and was abandoned by her child's father, this single mother had gratitude for the new life with whom she was committed to rear to adulthood. In essence, this child gives its Black mother the "strength to go on." Secondly, the song *"Superwoman"* provided by the R&B singer Alicia Keyes compared Black single mothers to the Marvel-comics "Superman" hero who could easily and successfully manage a multitude of formidable obstacles while appearing calm, cool, and collected. This offering by Keyes is the first and only song to date in which the strength of the Black mother is synonymous to that of a white male superhero that is highly revered in the dominant culture.

Thirdly, in several songs such as *"Hey Mama"* (by Kanye West in 2005), *"I Made It"* (by Jay-Z in 2006), *"Look What You've Done"* (by Drake in 2011), and *"I Love My Mama"* (by Lil Wayne in 2013), Hip Hop and R&B artists openly give credit to their mothers for their international acclaim, fame, and success. Thus, instead of merely thanking their mothers for their unconditional love, financial support, teaching and discipline, as well as the many sacrifices that they made, these artists empower the women in their lives by publicly declaring that they owe their success to them. Lastly, several songs positively depicted motherhood as a source of wisdom and morality. This supports Bush's<sup>52</sup> study in which Black mothers considered spirituality to be a definitive marker of manhood. Songs such as *"Sadie"* (by The Spinners in 1974 and R. Kelly in 1993) and *"I Love My Momma"* (by Snoop Dogg in 1999) recognized that being spiritual is encouraged, revered, and desired among these women.<sup>53</sup> In *"Sadie"* and *"Mama Nem"* (by Tech N9ne in 2011) the artists mentioned that their mothers required them to attend church. The lyrics in songs such as *"I Love My Momma"* (by Snoop Dogg) are not saturated in spiritual nomenclature, such as Christian, "good morals," "moral obligation," and "religious" found in Bush's study, but they depict moral teachings that are oftentimes rooted in scripture. Lyrics such as 'You taught me how to love and to give' (in *"I Love My Momma"*) and 'she taught me right from wrong' (in *"Momma"* by Brand Nubian in 2004) highlighted moral teachings that were not exclusively described in religious terms.

### How Descriptions of Black Motherhood in Hip-Hop and R&B Have Changed Over Time

There are four ways in which the lyrical conversation regarding motherhood has changed over time. First, there has been a significant increase in the number of Hip Hop and R&B songs in which Black male and female artists praise Black motherhood. Case

<sup>52</sup> Bush 2000, Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Chaney 2011, 2008, Ibid.

in point: While 1961 was the first year the all-female group The Shirelles, lauded Black motherhood, since 2000, 42 songs (or 71% of our total sample) have focused on this form of parentage. Second, there has been a steady increase in the number of songs in which Black men specifically state in the title and song lyrics the depth of their love for their mothers. For example, almost 40 years after The Shirelles released their song "Mama Says," Snoop Dogg (one of the originators of "Gangsta Rap") was the first Hip Hop artist to openly proclaim "I Love My Momma" in 1999. Since Snoop Dogg offered this public declaration of love for his mother 14 years ago, two Hip-Hop artists, namely E-40 in 2011 with "I Love My Momma" and Lil Wayne in 2013 with "I Love My Mama" both created songs with the same title. Thus, it seems that within this context, motherhood has transitioned from a general sentimental narrative to a more personal one for most Black male and female Hip Hop and R&B artists. Third, although there was only one Hip Hop song in 2013 related to Black motherhood ("I Love My Momma" by Lil Wayne), this song provided very little context regarding how this Hip Hop artist was reared, what he gained from his mother's guidance, or his mothers' background or personality. Thus, in addition to expressing love for their mothers, the lyrics of future Hip Hop and R&B songs could potentially provide deeper insight into the personality and psychology of this unique subset of the Black female population.

Lastly, in support of the findings offered by Bush, Chaney, and Tyree,<sup>54</sup> spirituality was tantamount in the lives of Black mothers. What was particularly interesting, however, was how spirituality in these songs morphed over time. For example, in the song "Sadie" (provided by the Spinners in 1974 and later by R. Kelly in 1993) the Black mother admonished her child to get "to Sunday school." Thus, it seems that instead of directly speaking about God, religion, or the Bible specifically, Black male and female Hip Hop and R&B artists took an alternate route to spirituality by discussing the values that are generally encouraged in religious institutions and that help them to be successful in their adult lives. Case in point: In the song "Survivor" by the Hip Hop and R&B group Destiny's Child, these women acknowledged that they refused to castigate ("diss") an individual that caused them public emotional grief because their 'mama taught them better than that.' Thus, it seems that relying on God, prayer, faith, and hope were used individually and in tandem to help these Black men and women to successfully deal with obstacles, remain focused, and be successful in life.

### Limitations of the Current Study

There were two limitations of our study. For one, our focus on Black artists in Hip Hop and R&B limits the generalizability of the findings in this study to Black male and female artists who represent other music genres (i.e., Alternative, Blues, Country, Gospel, or Pop). For the example, the song "I Remember Mama" and "No Charge" by the Black Gospel artist Shirley Caesar was excluded from our analysis because our focus

<sup>54</sup> Bush 2000; Chaney 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Tyree 2009, Ibid.

was on Hip Hop and R&B songs and their lyrics. Although this song was a musical outlier, in this song, Caesar held very fond memories of her mother and frequently sang she remembered “Mama in a happy way.” Furthermore, that the overwhelming majority of the songs were representative of the Hip Hop genre further limits the generalizability of our findings. Secondly, as the majority of the songs analyzed were created by Black male sole-artists or groups (50 songs or 85%), this makes it difficult to generalize the findings of our study to Black females in Hip Hop or R&B who only provided a small amount of songs (9 songs or 15%) for our analysis. Lastly, the songs that were analyzed in this study essentially provided a snapshot of Black motherhood by a particular artist in time. In other words, as the majority of artists only provided one song related to Black motherhood, this makes it difficult to examine how these artists’ views on Black motherhood may have remained stable or changed over time.

In spite of these limitations, however, this study builds on the work of previous scholars related to Black motherhood<sup>55</sup> and provides a strong counter narrative to the negative representation of Black motherhood originally offered by Moynihan several decades ago. In particular, instead of viewing Black motherhood as a banner of shame and oppression, these songs reveal that, even in light of multiple challenges, Black mothers emotionally comfort and support their children, instill strength and self-confidence in their children, are highly regarded by their children, are strict teachers and disciplinarians that help their children become responsible adults, and demonstrate unconditional love for their children which their children return to them.

#### Directions for Future Research

There are four ways that future scholars can build upon and expand the findings that were outlined in this study. First, future research can more closely examine how Black male and female Hip Hop and R&B artists discuss the counterpart of Black parenthood, namely Black fatherhood. Although several songs presented in this analysis briefly touched on the unavailability of many Black fathers in the lives of their children, future work in this area may reveal a level of Black male involvement that is not generally seen in the mass media nor the academic literature. Second, future research can explore how other genres of music besides Hip Hop and R&B discuss Black motherhood. Additional work in this area would reveal the similarities and/or differences between the themes related to Black motherhood featured in this paper juxtaposed against those in other forms of music such as Alternative, Blues, Country, Gospel, or Pop genres. Third, scholars may wish to explore how childhood is discussed in Hip Hop, R&B, and Hip Hop and R&B songs. This could possibly highlight if and how disciplinary methods have changed over time, plights, and the role of the artists’ parents in their childhood. Lastly, future research can explore how non-parent caregivers (i.e., grandparents, uncles, aunts, and family friends) are discussed in

<sup>55</sup> Chaney 2011, Ibid; Elliott and Aseltin 2013, Ibid; Fouquier 2011 Ibid; Oware 2011, Ibid; Song and Edwards 1997 Ibid; Tyree 2009, Ibid.

multiple music genres. This could support or refute recent literature that discusses the role of non-parent caregivers and how it is discussed differently and similarly in music compared to the role of biological parents.

## Conclusion

Given the salience of motherhood for many Black women, it is our hope that the findings in this study encourages the highlighted artists to create more songs that give greater attention to this form of parentage, as well as motivate a larger number of Hip Hop and R&B male and female artists in these and other genres to do the same. Furthermore, the findings of this study beg future scholars to contribute to the growing dialogue on the various forms of support to Black mothers as well as how they are perceived by their children. Although the stereotypicality advanced by Moynihan's<sup>56</sup> national report introduced the assumption that Black motherhood was an oppressive burden to women and the children in their care, the 40 Hip Hop and 17 R&B lyrics provided in this study provide a strong counter narrative to this claim. Even though Black mothers lack the financial, practical, and emotional support that is generally enjoyed by white women, and must deal with the inherent difficulty of coping with poverty and racism,<sup>57</sup> the lyrics of these songs provide resounding proof that Black mothers are a lot stronger than society gives them credit. In spite of a myriad of challenges, Black women are a source of emotional comfort and support for their children, instill strength and self-confidence in their children, are viewed as superior to fathers by their children, are steady teachers and disciplinarians, and show unconditional love for their children, and in return, motivate their children to feel and demonstrate unconditional love for them. In sum, Black motherhood is a symbol of meaning, satisfaction, empowerment, and respect within Black women, the Black family and the Black community, more broadly.

*This is article 1 of 2*

<sup>56</sup> Moynihan 1965, Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Song and Edwards 1997, Ibid.

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