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Female Body Image as a Function of Themes in Rap Music Videos: A Content Analysis

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Abstract A content analysis of rap music videos taken from the end of year countdowns aired on U.S. cable outlets (i.e. BET, MTV, and VH1) was undertaken. The analysis examined the body images of 258 female characters (87.6% Black, 5.8% White, 6.6% other) as a function of the thematic content in the videos (e.g., violence, sex). It was found that, overall, "thin" females were overrepresented in the videos. More interestingly, the body sizes of the female characters varied by three of the four video themes. When the music videos were high in sex, or high in materialism, women were more likely to have smaller body sizes. In contrast, when the videos were high in political awareness, women were more likely to have larger body sizes.

Keywords Body image · Rap music videos · African Americans · Theme · Content analysis

Introduction

Mass media are believed to play a critical role in the socialization process (Liebert and Sprafkin 1988; Sipiora 1991). One area that has been given increasing attention is the stereotyped ideal body images portrayed in the media. Content analyses suggest that thinness is consistently associated with attractiveness, and that the images of women

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in the media have become increasingly slimmer over the past 20 years (Fouts and Burggraf 2000; Silverstein et al. 1986; Wiseman et al. 1990). However, these content analyses have generally focused on mainstream media where the female models are predominantly White (Fouts and Burggraf 1999, 2000; Silverstein et al. 1986; Wiseman et al. 1990). Little research has been conducted to examine the nature of body images presented in the media geared toward Black audiences. Thus, the present study extends the literature by addressing this gap. Specifically, this study content analyzed the female body images portrayed in rap music videos aired on U.S. cable outlets. With a particular interest, we also sought to examine how female body images may vary based on the specific messages or themes conveyed by the videos. All related research reviewed in this paper concentrates on studies conducted in the United States.

Theories and Black Females' Body Images

Concerns over the media thin ideal lie in a fear that exposure to these images may have negative effects on female viewers. Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al. 1994) is one of the few theories that is commonly used by mass communication scholars to understand the relationship between media exposure and body image disturbance. According to this theory, the more time people spend watching television, the more their normative beliefs and attitudes reflect the world portrayed on TV. Because content analyses have shown that female thin images are prevalent on TV (e.g., Fouts and Burggraf 2000; Silverstein et al. 1986), cultivation theory would predict that heavy viewers of these images are more likely than light viewers to be unhappy with their bodies and physical appearance.

Despite the logic of the assumption, cultivation theory does not seem to have good predictability when it comes to African American women. African American women typically watch

more television than White women (Greenberg and Brand 1994), and many tend to have larger body sizes compared to their White counterparts (Mokdad et al. 1999). However, in the few studies that compared the media influences between these two groups, Black females generally reported more satisfaction with the shapes of their bodies (Abrams et al. 1993), and less susceptibility to the negative effects of media exposure than did White females (e.g., Botta 2000).

Why might African American women be less vulnerable to thin-ideal media? One plausible explanation concerns different standards of beauty held by Black cultures and high self-esteem among Black women. Different from White notions of beauty and attractiveness, Black culture tends to appreciate larger ideal body sizes with a lower concern for being overweight (Striegel-Moore et al. 1995). Findings from previous studies suggest that 1) Black women preferred a larger body size for themselves than White women (Kemper et al. 1994; Parnell et al. 1996), and 2) Black males preferred a larger female body type and associated more favorable characteristics with heavier women than did their White counterparts (Greenberg and LaPorte 1996; Jackson and McGill 1996). Thus, "Black" standards of beauty may help promote greater acceptance of a large body size and protect Black women from experiencing body dissatisfaction. In addition, it has been well documented that Black females have higher self-esteem than White females (Twenge and Crocker 2002). Research suggests that individuals with high self-esteem are likely to view themselves more favorably compared to others than do those with low self-esteem (e.g., Wood and Taylor 1991). A number of studies also found that self-esteem was positively related to people's satisfaction with their own bodies (e.g., Rosen 1990) and negatively related to eating disorders (e.g., Raciti and Hendrick 1992). In fact, two recent meta-analyses have demonstrated that, across studies, Black women judged their own bodies more favorably than White women (Grabe and Hyde 2006; Roberts et al. 2006). Taken together, "Black" standards of beauty and high self-esteem among Black women may operate together to buffer the undesirable comparison to unrealistic body ideals, thus they would be less affected by these images.

Or, maybe there is some other reason. According to the theory of attributional ambiguity (Crocker and Major 1989), people tend to make social comparisons to others who are similar to themselves on relevant characteristics. Given that the thin body images presented in mainstream media are predominantly White, it is plausible that African American women are likely to reject these images as appropriate referents for comparisons (Perkins 1996). Instead, they may compare themselves to other Black women within their own community—the members of their family, the friends they know, and more importantly, the Black female characters in the media. In fact, previous studies have suggested that African American people consistently showed their preferences for black-oriented media, and that they also rated the programs featuring Black characters as their most favorite programs (Allen 2001; Elliott 2003; O'Connor et al. 2000). Therefore, it is likely that Black female models depicted in the media may have the most effect on African American women's body image conceptions.

The first step in understanding whether the body images in Black-oriented media might have an effect on Black female viewers is to understand how these body images are portrayed. However, little is known about the nature of body images presented in media geared toward Black audiences. Previous content analyses of body images have generally focused on mainstream media where the majority of female models are White (Fouts and Burggraf 1999, 2000; Silverstein et al. 1986; Wiseman, et al. 1990). The present study thus attempts to fill this gap.

The second goal of the current study involves the suggestion that the media genre and even themes of a specific program may matter when we consider media effects on female body images. Although race-related, it appears that a basic assumption underlying the theory of attributional ambiguity is that the impact of media may vary depending on the images it depicts and messages it conveys. This idea is consistent with the recurrent criticism of cultivation theory on its treatment of all television content as relatively homogeneous (Cohen and Weimann 2000; Gunter 1994; Hawkins and Pingree 1982). Based on the homogeneity assumption, the theory suggests that the beliefs and attitudes cultivated by television should be roughly the same across all genres (Gerbner et al. 1994). However, critics have argued that the images of the world as shown on TV may be genre- or even program-specific, and that the cultivation effect should vary depending on what viewers are actually watching (e.g., Hawkins and Pingree 1982).

Evidence supporting this notion has been documented in the body image literature. For example, Harrison and Cantor (1997) reported that, compared to overall media consumption, exposure to "thinness-depicting and -promoting (TDP) media" (i.e., fitness and fashion magazines and thin-ideal television programs) was a stronger and more consistent predictor of women's eating disorder symptomatology and men's endorsement of thin ideal. Similarly, Eggermont et al. (2005) found that, although general TV viewing failed to predict body dissatisfaction, watching romantic youth drama had a significant and positive impact on female adolescents' body dissatisfaction.

If genre-specific media viewing matters, it would be reasonable to expect that exposure to different themes within a certain genre may also have a varying impact on women's body image perceptions. For this to be true, we are assuming that body images are depicted differently in

different contexts. However, no content analysis so far has ever addressed this issue. This was the second goal of the present study. Specifically, we are interested in examining whether female body images would vary as a function of themes. We believe that this is the first study that attempts to explore this venue. Rap music videos, one of the popular music genres that contains various themes (e.g., Dixon and Brooks 2002), yet remains under-examined, is the focus of the present study.

Rap Music Videos and Themes in Rap Music

Since rap music videos were introduced in the 1980s, they have become one of the most popular music genres among young people (Hansen and Hansen 2000). Rap music was born out of slave spirituals, blues, jazz and "soul" as a musical expression of African American traditions (Rose 1994; Zillmann et al. 1995). According to Dixon and Linz (1997), this tradition has been passed down to contemporary African American youth and contains cultural elements such as "toasting," "signifying," and "playing the dozens."

Researchers interested in the content of rap music have found various types of themes conveyed in the videos. Among them, four themes were frequently presented: violence, sex, political awareness, and materialism (e.g., Dixon and Brooks 2002; Englis et al. 1993; Kubrin 2005; Zillmann et al. 1995). Rap videos have long been accused of high levels of violent imagery and lyrics (e.g., Dixon and Brooks 2002; Smith and Boyson 2002). Gangsta rap, for example, tends to glamorize physical aggression and torture (Mackinnon 1993; Marsh 1994; Zimmerman 1992). One critic has even stated that violent rap is "the most dangerous genre of music that he has ever studied ("Trial Witness", 1993, p.71). Sexual content and sexual permissive messages are also common in rap music videos (e.g., Gan et al. 1997; Hansen and Hansen 2000). Moreover, female characters are often shown as sexual objects in rap videos with a heavy emphasis on physical appearance and sexual attractiveness (e.g., Gan et al. 1997).

Political awareness is another theme frequently found in rap music videos. Some researchers have suggested that much of rap music attempts to accentuate social problems as an expression of dissatisfaction with life and disaffection toward mainstream society (Rose 1989). In addition, rap music may also be used as a vehicle to fight oppression from the dominant culture (Zillmann et al. 1995). Lastly, the theme of materialism was suggested by researchers such as Englis et al. (1993) who found that rap videos frequently manifest consumption activities and material wealth through both lyrics and visuals.

These different messages in rap music convey different issues or different ideas and values. It is plausible that images in these videos (including female body images) may vary in order to appropriately reflect the particular theme. For example, because women are often objectified in videos that focus on sexual themes and pleasure (e.g., Dixon and Linz 1997), thin ideals may be more likely to occur in such contexts. On the other hand, in videos that focus on political themes, rap music may serve as a vehicle to challenge oppressive conditions, and to practice Black activism by resisting white supremacy and sexual stereotypes. In addition, these political themes may highlight refusing to conform to mainstream standards including "White" standards of beauty. If this is the case, female characters may be likely to have larger body sizes in these contexts. However, no content analysis so far has specifically examined how women's body images are presented in various video contexts.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study is to content analyze how female body images are portrayed in rap music videos. In particular, we seek to examine whether female body images differ based on the specific messages or themes conveyed by the videos. We chose rap music videos as the focus of this study for a number of reasons. First, as noted earlier, little research has specifically examined female body images in Black-oriented media. We could locate only one study that compared the most popular prime time situation comedies among the general population and among the African American population (Tirodkar and Jain 2003). The findings revealed that there was a broader range of body types in Black prime time shows with more overweight characters. However, because their study examined male and female actors together, it is unclear how female body images in particular were portrayed. Consequently, content analyses of women's bodies in Black-oriented media are needed before a clear conclusion can be made. Meanwhile, rap music is considered a predominantly Black form of music (Dixon and Linz 1997; Fried 1996; Rose 1994). The images in the rap videos feature an overwhelming number of Black women. Therefore, the content of rap music videos merits close investigation.

Second, rap music videos have long been accused of sexualizing women (Hooks 1992). Female characters in the videos often wear provocative clothes and behave in submissive ways (Dixon and Brooks 2002). Given that the sexual objectification of women would be closely related to their body image portrayals, it is important to examine how female body images appear in the videos. Because young Black females have a high level of exposure to rap videos (e.g., Wingood et al. 2003), doing a content analysis of body images will pave the way for the future effect research in this area. For example, this study may help researchers who are interested in the theory of

attributional ambiguity to examine the potential impact of body images in Black-oriented media on Black female audiences, which in turn may help explicate the myth of Black women's invulnerability to thin images in mainstream media.

Last but not the least, previous content analyses of body images have typically focused on measuring the body weights of female characters in the media (e.g., Silverstein et al. 1986; Spitzer et al. 1999), with little emphasis on the context where the body images are portrayed. Under which circumstances are thinner body images likely to be seen? Under which circumstances are larger body images likely to be depicted? What values are communicated about women in various video contexts? These aspects of female body images may not be reflected merely by specific body weights, but instead be reflected by the thematic content with which the body images are presented. Therefore, by taking into account the specific themes of rap videos while examining the body images, we hope to not only gain a better understanding of Black women's body images in media, but also make contributions to move the body of cultivation theory in an important direction to look at theme-specific cultivation "effects."

Hypotheses and Research Question

This study examines female body images in rap music videos to test one hypothesis and answer one research question.

H_1: Thin female characters will be overrepresented in rap music videos compared to the real population.

This hypothesis is posited based on findings from prior research. Studies found that there has been a trend in the mass media toward depicting extremely thin female characters. For example, Spitzer et al. (1999) analyzed Miss America Pageants and Playboy centerfolds from the 1950s to the 1990s. They found that although the body size of an average young Canadian and American woman increased significantly, the body sizes of Miss America contestants and Playboy centerfolds have become slimmer. Silverstein et al. (1986) examined 33 television programs and reported that 69% of female characters were rated as conspicuously thin, whereas only 5% of female characters were rated as heavy. Similarly, Fouts and Burggraf (2000) found in their content analysis of television situation comedies that 76% of the female characters were "below average" in weight, with 5% being overweight.

In summary, previous studies generally suggest that the distorted and stereotyped thin ideal is a dominant portrayal of the female body image in the mass media, and that the proportion of female characters with below-average weight is overrepresented compared to the real population (Fouts and Burggraf 2000; Silverstein et al. 1986; Spitzer et al. 1999). Given that sexually objectified women are claimed

to be prevalent in rap music videos (Dixon and Linz 1997), we expect that, consistent with the findings from past research, rap videos will portray more "thin" women than in reality.

RQ_1: How will female characters' body images differ based on the themes featured in rap videos?

As noted earlier, past research found that the rap music videos convey various themes (e.g., Dixon and Brooks 2002; Englis et al. 1993; Kubrin 2005; Zillmann et al. 1995). Because different messages communicate different values or issues, the female body images may vary in different video contexts. However, it is unclear whether and how these images may differ. The present study thus attempts to explore the answer to the research question proposed above.

Method

Sample of Videos

The sample was taken from the end of year countdowns for 2005 aired in 2006. These countdowns represent music videos that were played most often in the year of 2005 on the following cable stations: Music Television (MTV), Black Entertainment Television (BET), and Video Hits 1 (VH1). Because these stations are the top music video outlets, and because the countdown lists were based on requests made from the audience during the year, our sample is likely representative of the most popular and commonly consumed videos of the year. Furthermore, the use of the countdowns from each music video outlet allowed the study to standardize across the three outlets' different programming schedules and formats.

The sampling frame of this study has some limitations, however. For instance, the use of only 1 year's countdowns precludes the inclusion of classic videos not premiered during the year as well as privileges the videos shown later in the year because they are more readily available in the viewer's memory. Nevertheless, since our main goal was to analyze the current state of music videos, we believe that these countdown videos fulfill the purpose of this study.

The Apple music website for I-Tune provides a comprehensive catalog of music genres for videos. We used it as a means to determine which music videos were rap. All videos that were labeled as rap music were included in the sample. This yielded a total of 108 videos for analysis.

Levels of Analysis

The present study involved two levels or units of analysis: the video level and the individual character level. At the

video level, the following themes were coded: (a) *violence*, (b) *sex*, (c) *political awareness*, and (d) *materialism*.

At the character level, we coded for *main characters* and *supporting characters*. *Main characters* were operationalized as individuals who are performing or singing the song identified by the name in the title of the video. *Supporting characters* were defined as individuals in the video who appear in more than five scenes with the main character or who appear in more than 10 scenes (regardless of whether or not they are with the main characters). To further clarify this, we defined scenes as segments within the video between swipes on the screen or when the camera changes focus. In addition, supporting characters appearing with the main character had to appear within 1 ft of the main character, interacting with the main character or performing/dancing with the main character. Because the present study focused on female body images in music videos, only female characters were identified and coded. Four music videos either contained no females or did not feature females who satisfied the definitions of *main characters* and *supporting characters*. Therefore, they were excluded from further analysis. As a result, a total of 258 female characters (87.6% Black, 5.8% White, 6.6% other) from 104 videos were coded. Eighteen percent of the female characters were identified as main characters and 82% were identified as supporting characters.

For each main character and supporting character, we further coded for *body size* and *race*. Body size of the female characters was coded from 1 (extremely thin) to 9 (obese). This was done by visually comparing the character's body to the nine adult female figure drawings developed by Stunkard et al. (1983). The character's race was coded based on three categories: African American, Caucasian, and other.

Thematic Variables

The thematic variables described below were each assessed dichotomously with 0 indicating low occurrence of a theme and 1 indicating high occurrence of a theme in a particular video.

Violence

Using a conservative definition set forth by the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) (Wilson et al. 1998), we defined violence as the depiction of the threat or use of physical force with the intentions of harming another or an animated being. *Violence* was assessed by the following indicators: 1) characters are shown attempting to or harming other characters in the video by hitting, shoving, etc., 2) characters are shown as successful criminals, outwitting the police and defeating their competitors, and/

or 3) the appearance of a weapon. An example of a violent video would include repetitive brandishing of weapons and a physical altercation between two characters.

Sex

Because sexual content in the media can be presented both implicitly and explicitly (e.g., Ward 2003), the variable *sex* was assessed by adding the values of two dichotomous indicators: 1) *implicit sex*, and 2) *explicit sex*. *Implicit sex* was defined as instances in which themes of sexual attraction are predominant, or serve as a concurrent focus with another theme. This includes scenes that suggest or seem to elicit sexual arousal and/or appeals to the erotic such as pelvic thrusts, long lip licking, or stroking. *Explicit sex* was defined as instances in which themes of sexual action are predominant. This includes scenes in which genitalia or breasts are being touched or bodies are touching and moving together in a way suggestive of intercourse.

Political Awareness

This variable was defined as advocating a political position. It was assessed by two indicators: 1) the artist advocates a political position around a specific issue (e.g., poverty, homelessness, or urban development), and/or 2) the video contains victims of social injustice or crusaders against it. The theme political awareness did not have to include only the actions of the character but also objects they were next to or settings in which they were featured. For example, Kanye West's video "Diamonds" coded as high in political awareness features depictions of the diamond mining occurring in Sierra Leone which is causing political turmoil.

Materialism

This variable was defined as the expression of one's wealth. Coders recorded high occurrence of materialism when characters were shown in purchasing and consuming expensive clothing, jewelry, and cars as well as living a lavish lifestyle continually throughout the video. For example, one video coded as high in materialism shows that a main character drives an expensive convertible and shops for diamond jewelry.

Coding and Reliability

Four graduate students (3 females and 1 male) performed the coding of data. They were from diverse racial groups including Caucasian, Puerto-Rican, and Asian. Additionally, a prominent male, African American scholar assisted in overseeing the development of the codebook and the coder training. According to Potter and Levine-Donnerstein

(1999), a diverse set of coders creates more validity. All coders were trained through a 30-hour process of group discussion of the coding task, group coding of music videos, and individual coding of music videos. During training, discrepancies were discussed and solved, and the codebook was refined. Diagnostics were run in order to determine when coders were prepared to begin coding individually.

All coders coded 25 identical music videos along with their individually assigned coding tasks. The data from these 25 videos were then used to establish reliability for this study. Cohen's Kappa (Wimmer and Dominick 2000, 2005) was used to compute reliability for all dichotomous variables formed at the video level as well as the character level nominal level data. Intra-class correlation coefficient (Bartko 1966; Fleiss 1981; McGraw and Wong 1996) was only computed for *body size* because it was the only continuous variable examined in this study. Results show that all variables had high intercoder agreement: *violence* (.97), implicit *sex* (.80), explicit sex (.91), *political awareness* (.96), *materialism* (.81), *body size* (.89), and *race* (.92).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Thematic Content

As shown in Table 1, across all 104 rap videos, emphasis on *materialism* (47.1%) and *sex* (45.2%) occurred most frequently, followed by *violence* (13.5%) and *political awareness* (8.7%). The Chi-Square analysis revealed that there were significantly more videos with low violence than videos high in violence ($\chi^2 = 55.54$, $p < .001$). Similarly, there were significantly more videos with low political awareness than videos high in this theme ($\chi^2 = 71.12$, $p < .001$). However, no significant difference was found for videos with themes of *materialism* and *sex*, suggesting that *materialism* and *sex* were just as likely to be high in occurrence as low in occurrence in the videos.

Female Body Size

Our first hypothesis proposed that thin female characters will be overrepresented in rap music videos compared to the real population. To test this hypothesis, we compared the proportion of thin characters found in this study with the actual prevalence rate of thin women (i.e., 24%) in real world reported by National Center for Health Statistics (1994). This data were based on a nationally representative survey of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds in U.S. in the year of 1994.

In order to create a "thin" measure, we followed a categorization scheme employed by Fouts and Burggraf (2000). Specifically, the body sizes of female characters in the rap videos that were coded 1–3 on Stunkard et al.'s scale (1983) were categorized as "thin." We then calculated the percentages of "thin" female characters portrayed on the videos. Results showed that 51% of the female characters were rated as "thin" in this study.

In order to determine whether thin female characters were overrepresented in the rap videos, we subtracted the proportions of thin characters (51%) found in this study from the actual proportion of thin women reported by National Center for Health Statistics (i.e., 24%, 1994). The resulting difference also called the percentage point differential was 27.

Finally, we undertook a difference of proportion test. Because there was sampling error in our estimate, we calculated a 95% confidence interval for the proportions to be compared (Moore and McCabe 1999). If the percentage point differential exceeds the 95% confidence interval, it suggests a statistically significant difference between the proportion reported in our study and the proportion reported by National Center for Health Statistics (1994).

There were more thin female characters found in this study (51%) than those reported by National Center for Health Statistics (1994). Given the confidence interval of 6%, this is a statistically significant 27 percentage point difference. Therefore, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Fouts and Burggraf 1999, 2000), our finding suggests an

Table 1 Overall video themes (N=104).

	Low in occurrence	High in occurrence	χ^2
Violence	86.5%	13.5%	55.54***
	(90)	(14)	
Sex	54.8%	45.2%	.96
	(57)	(47)	
Political awareness	91.3%	8.7%	71.12***
	(95)	(9)	
Materialism	52.9%	47.1%	.35
	(55)	(49)	

***p<.001

overrepresentation of "thin" women in rap music videos. The first hypothesis was supported.

Further analyses were conducted to examine whether both Black and White thin characters were overrepresented in rap music videos. Approximately 49.6% of Black female characters (percentage point differential was 25.6) and 53.3% of White female characters (percentage point differential was 29.3) were rated as "thin" in the rap music videos. Given the confidence interval of 11% for Black female characters and 25% for White female characters, these percentage point differences are statistically significant. In other words, both Black and White thin characters were overrepresented in the videos.

Body Size Differences in Video Themes

Our research question asks whether the body sizes of the female characters differ as a function of themes in the videos. Recall that body size is interval variable ranging from 1 being extremely thin to 9 being obese. To answer the research question, a series of t-tests were performed to compare the mean scores of body sizes between videos of low and high themes. As Table 2 shows, significant differences were noted for three of four themes: sex $(t(257)=2.94, p<.01)$, political awareness $(t(257)=-2.16, p<.05)$, and materialism $(t(257)=2.26, p<.05)$. Women in music videos that were high in sex $(M=3.33, SD=.82)$ were more likely to have smaller body sizes than women in videos of low sex $(M=3.64, SD=.88)$; Women in videos that were high in materialism $(M=3.36, SD=.86)$ were more likely to have smaller body sizes than women in videos of low materialism $(M=3.60, SD=.84)$. Conversely, women in videos high in political awareness $(M=3.93, SD=1.03)$ were more likely to have larger body sizes, compared to women in videos of low political awareness $(M=3.44, SD=.84)$. No significant body size difference was found for the theme of violence.

Because the female characters analyzed in this study include main and supporting characters, one may ask whether these body size differences occur as a function of character type. To answer this question, we conducted two sets of t-tests, one for each type of character. For supporting characters, results were consistent with the findings noted above. However, for main characters, sex was the only theme where the body size differences were found $(t=2.13, p<.05)$. Specifically, main characters in music videos that were high in sex $(M=3.19, SD=.83)$ were more likely to have smaller body sizes, compared to main characters in videos that were low in sex $(M=3.72, SD=.80)$.

Racial differences in female body images as a function of the thematic content are another interesting aspect worthy of being examined. However, because of the small sample sizes for White female characters $(n=15)$ and those coded as "other" $(n=16)$, further analyses were unable to be conducted.

Discussion

This content analysis of popular rap music videos revealed two main findings. First, thin female characters in the videos were prevalent and overrepresented compared to the real population. Furthermore, both Black and White thin characters were overrepresented. Second, the body sizes of the female characters tend to differ as a function of themes in the videos. When the music videos were high in sex or materialism, women were more likely to have smaller body sizes. In contrast, when the videos were high in political awareness, women were more likely to have larger body sizes.

Video Themes and Thinness

Women tended to have thinner body sizes when the rap videos had a greater emphasis on sex. These videos usually present a male character engaging in sexual activities (either

Table 2 Body size differences between videos with themes of high and low occurrences.

Video themes	Low in occurrence		High in occurrence		t Value
	M[a]	SD	M[b]	SD	
Violence	3.44	.81	3.78	1.28	−1.83
Sex	3.64	.88	3.33	.82	2.94**
Political awareness	3.44	.84	3.93	1.03	−2.16*
Materialism	3.60	.84	3.36	.86	2.26*

Body size was coded from 1 (extremely thin) to 9 (obese)

*p<.05, **p<.01

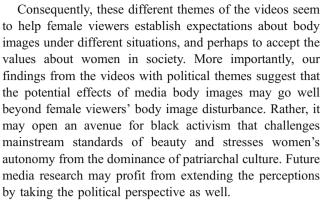[a] Mean values of body sizes in rap music videos with low themes

[b] Mean values of body sizes in rap music videos with high themes

implicitly or explicitly) with a female character whose body is beautiful and thin. These images may suggest that women's physical appearance, and particularly their body sizes, is important in sexual contexts. A woman is considered attractive and sexually desirable to a man, if she is thin. In fact, past research has found that although White males liked slimmer female body types more than did Black males, both ethnic groups preferred thinner bodies to heavier bodies (Greenberg and LaPorte 1996). Larger women were often judged unfavorably especially in terms of sexuality and courtship (Regan 1996; Sobal et al. 1995), whereas thin women were generally found to be most sexually desirable by males (Harris et al. 1991; Spillman and Everington 1989). These findings may help explain why female characters were more likely to have smaller body sizes when the rap videos were high in sex.

Second, women tended to have thinner body images when the rap videos had a greater emphasis on materialism. Typically, these videos show male rap stars living a lavish lifestyle with thin female characters behaving provocatively and submissively around them. This seems to convey a message that if a man has money, he will desire thin women. This might be illuminated, in part, by an evolutionary perspective which stresses sex differences in mating strategies. While pregnancy and child rearing are related to great costs for a woman, a man can theoretically be free from these responsibilities (Buss 2003). Consequently, men may be more likely than women to maximize reproductive outcomes by having sex with multiple partners (Buss and Schmitt 1993). Applying this perspective to materialism acted out in rap videos, it is plausible that, for men, materialism means success, and success means having lots of women. Because Black materialism is generally tied to adopting and transforming white culture and values (Watts 1997), and because the thin ideal reflects White standards of beauty, these may help explain why female characters tended to have thinner body images in videos high in materialism.

Finally, women tended to have larger body images when the rap videos had a greater emphasis on political awareness. This may suggest that people privilege intellect over appearance in the political world. Therefore, whether a woman has a large or small body size is less important in a political context. It is also possible that thin female images may signify weakness and vulnerability in a society with a patriarchal culture, whereas larger body sizes occupy more space, which may imply more power. Thus, in order to gain political authority and individual autonomy, women should empower themselves with larger body sizes. Overall, the videos with high political awareness seem to resist against the traditional gender role that treats women as passive, dependent and sexually attractive. Instead, these videos may convey an idea that women should be strong and independent to gain power and to support themselves. Women's bodies should be a source of strength rather than sexual objects to be controlled by men.

Consequently, these different themes of the videos seem to help female viewers establish expectations about body images under different situations, and perhaps to accept the values about women in society. More importantly, our findings from the videos with political themes suggest that the potential effects of media body images may go well beyond female viewers' body image disturbance. Rather, it may open an avenue for black activism that challenges mainstream standards of beauty and stresses women's autonomy from the dominance of patriarchal culture. Future media research may profit from extending the perceptions by taking the political perspective as well.

Our analysis further reveals that the body sizes of main characters were less likely to vary based on the video themes compared to those of supporting characters. This finding seems to make sense, given the different roles that may be played by these two types of characters. Supporting characters tend to be in the videos for their physical appearance, while main characters are there for artistic ability. In addition, female supporting characters often behave submissively to main characters, especially to male singers (Hansen and Hansen 2000). Therefore, their body shapes may be more important in order to attract male rap stars. Given that the majority of main characters were male in the videos examined (i.e., 79%), this may explain why female supporting characters tended to be thin in more video contexts than female main characters. Interestingly, however, the shapes of the bodies became crucial for all women when they were in the videos with a sexual theme. Our results seem to suggest that female rappers have to be thin and sexually appealing if they are there promoting sex.

No significant body size difference was found for the theme of *violence*. It was unclear why this is so. Perhaps violence is traditionally a male-dominated theme where aggression and conflicts may be more of a focus than women's body images. In addition, because it is male-oriented, female characters occurred far less frequently in violent theme than in other nonmale-dominated themes (such as *sex* and *materialism*). With small number of female characters in videos of high violence, we may have insufficient power to detect a potential effect.

Thin Body Images and the Theory of Attributional Ambiguity

The thin body images of female characters were prevalent in rap music videos. The overrepresentation of extremely thin women suggests that, like the mainstream media, rap music videos tend to present a skewed and unrealistic picture of female bodies.

The theory of attributional ambiguity suggests that people tend to compare themselves to similar others (Crocker and Major 1989). Based on this assumption, it is not surprising

that some studies have found that Black women are less influenced by thin images on mainstream media where most of the characters are White (e.g., Botta 2000). However, if Black-oriented media are replete with thin images as what we have found in this study, can Black female viewers still be immune to these images, or will they be impelled to narrow the gap as a result of the comparison? Our findings from the content analysis of rap music videos provide a necessary means through which the tenets of attributional ambiguity can be tested. Future research could make great contributions to the body image literature by examining to what extent Black women compare their bodies to female characters in Black-oriented media genres such as rap videos, and how these comparisons might impact their body image conceptions.

Video Themes and Theme-Specific Cultivation Effects

For researchers who are interested in cultivation effects, our findings have important implications as well. As mentioned earlier, one major criticism of cultivation theory challenges the homogenous content of TV by arguing that the images on TV may be genre-specific (e.g., Hawkins and Pingree 1982). Because we found that women's body images vary by different themes of the videos, the present study apparently furthers the argument by suggesting that, even within a certain genre, images may differ depending on the theme or context in which they are depicted. Consequently, these findings suggest that not only might genre-specific media viewing matter, but also exposure to specific content within a genre could have differential effects. Future research employing the cultivation approach would profit from exploring how exposure to different themes may be associated with various beliefs and attitudes regarding body images.

To further elaborate on this, it is plausible that even if Black women watch the same program genre (e.g., rap music videos), chances are that they may experience different effects if the themes of what they watch are different. For example, women who watch rap music videos with themes that tend to depict female characters of smaller body sizes may have more weight concerns, and be more dissatisfied with their body shapes, compared to women who watch videos with themes that tend to depict female characters of larger body sizes. With this in mind, studies which find that Black women are less affected by media portrayals compared to their White counterparts should really be cautious before any conclusions are made. Although media exposure may be less related to Black females' body image perceptions in general compared to their White counterparts, it does not mean that Black viewers are affected in a manner equal to other Black viewers. Depending on the specific content they watch, it is likely that some women may be affected more, but some less. Therefore, it is critical to consider the themes of a particular program. Without doing so, a conclusion would be limited and even misleading.

One thing worthy of mentioning is that recent technological advancements allow viewers to watch music videos online. Compared to TV, the Internet provides more content options and a higher level of selectivity. As audiences are able to choose whatever videos they like to watch, exposure to specific themes of rap music videos can be made more frequent. That being said, it is plausible that the theme-specific cultivation effects associated with rap video viewing may be even more intensified.

Limitations and Future Research

Only rap music videos in the year of 2005 were examined. Although this sample represents current "popular" rap videos, it does not draw from the entire population of rap music videos available. It is possible that some more obscure or classical videos that are influential may not be included in this specific sample. Future research should take this into account by testing for differences that may occur between these videos and the current popular videos analyzed here.

Although this content analysis found that the body images of female characters differ based on the thematic content delivered by the media, the results are based on rap music videos only. Future research should replicate the study by analyzing other types of programs (e.g., situation comedies, dramas, reality shows) and media (e.g., magazines, movies). By doing so, it would help provide a broader picture as well as a better understanding of how women are valued through different portrayals of body images under different situations. Additionally, it would be helpful to examine how Black and White female body images are portrayed in the media over time. Although there is little doubt that ethnic disparity in body dissatisfaction exists, some recent studies have found fewer differences between Black and White women than previous research (e.g., Abrams et al. 1993; Shaw et al. 2004; Wilfley et al. 1996). It is plausible that the number of thin Black images presented in the media has been increasing over the years so the "White" standards of beauty may become more internalized by Black females. Future studies that compare earlier media with more recent media may help to address this issue.

Lastly, the present study has only examined female body images in rap music videos. It is unclear how men's bodies are presented in the videos. Previous content analyses on TV commercials (Lin 1998), and magazines (e.g., Kolbe and Albanese 1996; Leit et al. 2001) have revealed that men's body images have become increasingly muscular with emphasis on broad shoulders and slim waists. Might the similar body image ideal be promoted in music videos? How might music videos portray images of male bodies for different ethnicities? Answers to these questions await further content analyses in this area.

In conclusion, the content analysis of rap music videos reveals that, consistent with mainstream media, there is an overrepresentation of "thin" women in rap videos compared to the real population. More importantly, the body sizes vary by different themes of the videos. Empirical studies that examined media effects on women's body images typically focus on the overall exposure of certain media/programs. However, results from our content analysis would suggest that exposure to the particular themes may also matter.

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