From Jay-Z to Dead Prez: Examining Representations of Black Masculinity in Mainstream Versus Underground Hip-Hop Music

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Abstract
The evolution of hip-hop music and culture has impacted the visibility of Black men and the Black male body. As hip-hop continues to become commercially viable, performances of Black masculinities can be easily found on magazine covers, television shows, and popular websites. How do these representations affect the collective consciousness of Black men, while helping to construct a particular brand of masculinity that plays into the White imagination? This theoretical article explores how representations of Black masculinity vary in underground versus mainstream hip-hop, stemming directly from White patriarchal ideals of manhood. Conceptual and theoretical analyses of songs from the likes of Jay-Z and Dead Prez and Imani Perry’s Prophets of the Hood help provide an understanding of the parallels between hip-hop performances/identities and Black masculinities.

Keywords
Black masculinity, hip-hop, patriarchy, manhood

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Introduction to and Musings on Black Masculinity in Hip-Hop

What began as a lyrical movement in the South Bronx is now an international phenomenon. Hip-hop is a mélange of lyrical stimulation filled with meticulous metaphors, tales from the ‘hood, and ruthless truth sayings about the social and economic injustices in the “land of the free.” Hip-hop is a popular music commodity for some, a creative canon for many, whose names we will never know, whose stories we will never hear. However, these dedicated listeners find representations of themselves in the music, so they listen and lean on what is familiar: the rhythms, the beats, the rhymes, the style, the stories from urban culture that make them feel relevant. There is liberation in hip-hop, in the sense that there is the freedom to tell one’s story in a non-conventional way. In her book *Prophets of the Hood* (2004), Imani Perry posits that, “ideologically, hip hop allows for open discourse. Anything might be said, or, for that matter, contradicted” (p. 4). However, in what ways does this freedom of speech promote patriarchal, hegemonic views, which at the root is the antithesis of why the hip-hop movement began? I will explore this question throughout the article.

Because Black males dominate hip-hop, I will examine representations of Black masculinity in mainstream versus underground hip-hop. Often, when I analyze hip-hop music and culture, the following questions come to mind: In what ways is masculinity performed? In what ways is race performed? How does the performance of race and masculinity impact Black male identity? These questions are pertinent to understanding the ways in which rappers play into stereotypical images of the Black male body in order to make profit. It is also important to take into account how much of these exploitative representations of Black male bodies in hip-hop culture are internalized by youth and other Black men who may be in search of an understanding of who they are and where they come from. These internalizations are in fact destructive and further promote patriarchy, sexism, and racism. In his book, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap and the Performance of Masculinity*, Miles White (2011) claims “the ways in which rap has been perceived and consumed have arguably had a deleterious effect on how Black people are viewed not only in the United States but in other parts of the world” (p. 88). However, I argue that although in some ways, hip-hop is a microcosm of patriarchal and hegemonic ideals promoting male domination physically, financially, and lyrically, I also encourage listeners and critics to acknowledge the undeniable sense of freedom hip-hop manages to provide to Black men, particularly those from working class communities. It is a kind of freedom that is tied to intellectual growth and camaraderie. Jenkins (2006) discusses hip-hop’s
merit as an alternative space of intellectual inclusion for Black men in his article, “Mr. Nigger: The Challenges of Educating African American Males in American Society.” Therefore, similar to other popular culture mediums, hip-hop includes an array of material that fits into the consumerism of American society. Yet still, without hip-hop, many Black men who feel ostracized from institutions and local communities would not have an academic space to express themselves.

Hip-hop critics argue that the music only promotes misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and blatant hypermasculine performances. There is certainly validity to these claims; nevertheless, these destructive elements are woven into the fabric of this capitalist, patriarchal society. In her book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2003), bell hooks asserts “At the center of the way Black male selfhood is constructed in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is the image of the brute, untamed, uncivilized, unthinking and unfeeling,” (p. xii). Although I think hook’s description is embellished, while simplifying the complexity of Black masculinity construction in this country, I do agree that an unemotional persona lies at the heart of Black masculine performances. This is often an act, a performance of sorts that asserts a manhood that is dominant and deviant, attempting to define itself in a world that has often tried to deny the very existence of Black men. Sometimes in an attempt to rewrite one’s story, while invoking a painful history, African Americans struggle to positively see themselves under the gaze of white supremacy, similar to W. E. B. Du Bois’s (1997) notion of double-consciousness in his groundbreaking text, *The Souls of Black Folk* (2007). According to Du Bois, “the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (p. 5). Thus, with regard to Black masculinity, it is difficult to decipher what is real and what is merely a performance instigated by a white gaze.

When I conceptualize Black masculinity in hip-hop, there is a merging of intellectualism and the clichéd “thug.” I use the term *thug* as a play on the stereotypical representations of Black men and masculinity in the media that present the image that Black men are too aggressive, violent, and angry. Rappers often exploit this stereotype, playing into the gaze of the White mainstream imagination in order to make profit. Intellectualism refers to the sophistication found in the lyrics of many mainstream hip-hop songs such as Jay-Z and Kanye West’s hit “Otis” (Jay-Z & West, 2011, track 4) when Jay-Z declares, “Build your fences, We diggin’ tunnels/Can’t you see? We gettin’ money up under you.” Through the use of wordplay, these lines connote the Underground Railroad and the luxuries of capitalism that dominate this society. In many ways, Black masculinity in hip-hop music is a performance, a
playing up or down of preconceived notions of what it means to be a Black man in America, and how that in turn, is tied to notions of race and socioeconomic status. Perry (2004) supports this notion when she states, “Hip-hop is subject to manipulation and mediation by powerful mainstream interests” (p. 29). However, the question Jenkins (2011) poses in his article “A Beautiful Mind: Black Male Intellectual Identity and Hip-Hop Culture” should be considered: “With all of the various ways that we can describe, label, and identify Black men, why are there only a few, limited, and stereotypical identities present in popular culture?” (p. 1239).

Mainstream Versus Underground

In hip-hop music and culture, there is a differentiation between mainstream and underground music: White (2011) argues that “in hip-hop, distinctions are considerably made stark between music that is considered mainstream commercial and seen as having dubious social merit, and that which aspires to some higher moral or socially redemptive purpose” (p. 55). Mainstream hip-hop refers to songs that cross over to White and international audiences, receiving considerable radio play. Artists, who are considered mainstream, are signed to major recording labels and often rap about issues that are popular: drugs, sex, crime, and violence. In the midst of the popularity of the music, every now and then, there are songs that veer from stereotypical representations of Black masculinity and offer narratives regarding social justice and police brutality, as represented in a popular song “Diallo” (2000) about the murder of unarmed African immigrant Amadou Diallo by New York City police officers. In one of the verses of the song, the speaker posits,

You said he reached sir
but he didn’t have no piece sir
But now he rest in peace sir
in the belly of the beast sir. (Jean, 2000, track 16)

There is clearly a critique of the state throughout the song, exposing how the police racially profile Black men, often leading to acts of brutality that end in death. The repetition of the word “sir” is mocking of the police, while portraying the hierarchical system in place that sees Black men as inferior. Wyclef Jean, mostly known as a member of the popular rap group The Fugees, experienced commercial success as a solo artist, and his music had a clear balance between partying, personal stories, and the political. Unfortunately, artists who have such a balance in the mainstream world are becoming a rarity due to the demands of
record labels that want to make as much profit as possible. As a result, many Black men become puppets, acting out masculine and racial performances.

Because of the desire of record label executives (mostly White) to make profit from hip-hop artists, the overwhelming message in mainstream hip-hop music emphasizes misogynistic images of women in music videos and hypermasculine behavior among Black men. In his book, *Hip Hop America* (2005), Nelson George declares that “without white entrepreneurial involvement, hip-hop culture wouldn’t have survived its first decade” (p. 57). It is important to note that sometimes the desires of the record label executives and hip-hop artists are conflated, due to desires of some Black men from economically deprived communities to prove their dominance via stereotypical images of masculinity that enforce hypersexual and hyperviolent behaviors.

One cannot fully analyze Black masculinity in hip-hop music without thinking of larger societal structures in place. Society maintains structure through institutions that dictate human behavior. If one’s behavior proves to be deviant of what is deemed “civil,” there are systems in place that attempt to control or reproduce a particular kind of individual. In his book, *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics* (2009), Anthony Lemelle, Jr. argues that major social institutions managed the domination of the Black males. The basic four cultural institutions are military, jails, organized athletics, and the entertainment industry. In each case, masculinity is an image of machismo spectacle. In each role, expectations for Black males are to produce a particular brand of masculinity. (p. 52)

Due to many inner city communities with “failing” schools that include overwhelmingly high dropout rates for Black males, the athletics and entertainment industries are attractive sites where many Black males aspire to be, in hopes of discovering financial and creative freedom. Having money gives one access to power and privilege in a capitalist society, which many in working class communities often dream of, but never experience. Because athletes and entertainers are lauded as extraordinary and seemingly superhuman individuals, many Black men who are mainstream hip-hop artists graciously accept their role as entertainers. This role is almost always attached to hypermasculine and hypersexual identity construction. Furthermore,

Black men are expected to conform to dominant gender role expectations (e.g., to be successful, competitive, aggressive), as well as meeting culturally specific requirements (e.g., cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group) of the Black community, which often conflict. The negotiation of these varied contexts lends itself to the development of varied and complex conceptions of manhood. (Hunter & Davis, 1994, p. 24)
Underground hip-hop refers to songs that do not cross over (for the most part) to White and international audiences but remain known to those who are avid listeners of hip-hop music and loyal to what is known as the mix tape market. A mix tape is “a compilation of songs from various sources recorded onto a cassette tape or CD” (Mixtape, n.d.). Many artists also create their own mix tapes, which is a way to share new work, as opposed to collaborating with other artists. Underground hip-hop artists use the mix tape circuit as a medium to promote their music. These mix tapes are sold in urban communities by street vendors or in select local stores. Traditionally, underground hip-hop artists are signed to independent labels and do not receive significant radio play. In addition, their music videos are typically played on public access channels, hip-hop websites, and underground radio stations. The term underground is often attached to notions of authenticity in hip-hop, in the sense that the music is real while focusing on issues such as inequality, racism, the problems with mainstream hip-hop, and urban storytelling. Occasionally, an underground hip-hop artist or group will cross over to the mainstream, as was the case with the hip-hop band The Roots. Created in Philadelphia in 1987, The Roots created a local and national following, by performing live shows. Unlike other hip-hop groups, The Roots are unique due to their live band that combines jazz, soul, and rap. With album titles such as Things Fall Apart (1999), Rising Down (2008), and Game Theory (2006), The Roots push their audience to think sociocritically about ideologies that promote racism, sexism, and capitalism. Their popular song “What They Do” (1996) parodies rap video clichés and begins with several critiques of youth, mainstream hip-hop, and masculinity:

Lost generation, fast paced nation
World population confront they frustration
The principles of true hip-hop have been forsaken
It’s all contractual and about money makin
Pretend-to-be cats don’t seem to know they limitation
Exact replication and false representation
You wanna be a man, then stand your own
To MC requires skills, I demand some shown. (The Roots, 1996, Track 8)

The speaker cleverly paints a picture of the complexity of hip-hop and the ways that artists sell their souls for profit. Because the verse begins with “lost generation,” there is an implication that the youth need something more from
hip-hop than millionaire-making artists who often exploit the everyday realities of working class communities to appeal to the White supremacist gaze. The critique of manhood and the lyricism of mainstream hip-hop artists tie into the fact that commercial music is often diluted of truth and social justice, which The Roots are saying is the antithesis of “true” hip-hop.

Interestingly enough, the single “What They Do” (1996) was the group’s first album to hit the Billboard Top 40 chart, peaking at #34 (Powell, 1996). I vividly remember being 14 years old when the video came out and thinking to myself, wow, this is on MTV? The Roots’ mainstream success came as a shock to many hip-hop fans, who became accustomed to the corporate side of hip-hop that placed more faith in patriarchal pleasures than political pursuits. This example demonstrates that it is possible for Black men in hip-hop to represent a masculinity that is tasteful, intellectual, and transformative.

Although The Roots became more mainstream in 1996, with their album *Illadelph Halflife*, they never lost focus of representing the societal inequalities in their music. In fact, their critiques of the state, the government, and mainstream hip-hop continued with even more zeal. Because their audience grew nationally and internationally, many listeners were receiving positive representations of Black masculinity that challenged the status quo and pushed against stereotypical representations of Black male performances in hip-hop. In this example, a group went from an underground following to a mainstream audience, without losing their underground “authenticity.” I cannot help but wonder why exactly were audiences so receptive to The Roots in 1996? Was it because they exposed what everyone else had been thinking all along regarding mainstream hip-hop? Or was it because they offered an alternative image of Black masculinity that forced people to reexamine their stereotypes? Whatever the reason is, the story of The Roots proves there is room in mainstream hip-hop for alternative notions of Black masculinity. It also proves that what would typically be considered “underground” in nature due to its subject matter regarding equality and anti-racism can also have mainstream appeal.

**Jay-Z, Manhood, and 99 Problems**

In many ways, Jay-Z represents the quintessential “from rags to riches” American dream narrative in hip-hop. Originally a drug dealer on the streets of Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn where he grew up, Jay-Z also started off on the underground mix tape circuit, selling his music independently out of the trunk of his car. According to an interview with journalist Charlie Rose in 2010, the rapper always believed he would be “a drug dealer who rapped.” He never imagined how successful he would become, starting from such humble beginnings on the underground scene. When Jay-Z was an underground
hip-hop artist, his music was a tongue-twisting melody of sorts, challenging listeners to decipher his fast-hitting words. On one of his first underground songs “I Can’t Get With That” (1994) he contends,

Straight to the track, my lyrics is phat,
I rip it the hell—down
More than a fluke, I’m regularly wreckin this joint
so what—now
With so many niggas that’s biting
it’s harder to detect who I be
Well check out the J, check out the A,
check out the Y, Z
Original rap, I’m makin it slap,
I’m hemmin it up like that
Stingin it, strikin it, swingin it fat,
Bring it back. (Jay, Z, 1994, Track 1)

One can see the trope of authenticity in hip-hop and the desires of Black men to determine who the “real man” is. Jay-Z clearly makes a distinction between himself and other rappers who “bite” off of others. “Biting” refers to stealing someone else’s style, lyrically. In the hip-hop arena, imitation is not the best form of flattery; it is actually considered theft, non-masculine, and “weak.” Yet still, there is something powerful about the way Jay-Z manages to put his rhymes together, so fluidly and meticulously. White (2011) argues that Jay-Z’s “rhythmic flow is unorthodox, athletic and dexterous, often using multiple meters of mixing them all up, jumping over bar lines as if they were prison bars trying to pen him in” (p. 83). Jay-Z’s flow, from the very beginning of his career, was unique, standing out from typical hip-hop lyrical styles. He could command an audience, due to his confident nature and fast-paced lyrics.

Another trope that is evident in the song is the reference to “original rap,” a common theme in underground hip-hop as expressed in the music of The Roots. Unlike The Roots, however, Jay-Z’s lyrics and performances did not remain true to “original rap.” Once Jay-Z became a mainstream success with the debut of his first album Reasonable Doubt in 1996, he became more performative in nature, acting out stereotypical images of Black masculinity in
hip-hop. His debut album tells tales of gangsterism and urban life as a drug dealer, particularly in songs such as “Can’t Knock the Hustle” and “Dead Presidents” where he addresses themes of making fast money in the underground drug economy and his desire to continue hustling despite his mainstream success. It is significant to acknowledge that the capitalistic nature of hustling paid for Jay-Z’s album production during his tenure as an underground artist.

Black male identity has been under constant surveillance dating back to slavery and even more so with hip-hop and professional sports, where there are large numbers of Black male performers and players. The construction of identity is relational to constructions of masculinity because “masculinity refers to the socially constructed characteristics that society expects for the male sex” (Lemelle, 2009, p. 3). I believe that Black masculinity in hip-hop is tied to these social constructs with regard to manhood, as well as socially constructed and racialized perceptions of Black men who represent “the bad man” or “the trickster.” The subversive nature of hip-hop music, which Perry (2004) defines as examples of the tropes of the “trickster” in African American oral traditions, helps further define performances of Black masculinity. Subversive lyrics that incorporate popular terms like hammer (code for gun) or let’s slide (code for sexual intimacy) embody a connection to Black working class life, in which language is constantly being recreated. Jay-Z is notorious for his play on words, as well as his use of coded language, representative of urban communities like Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. One can think of it as a Black masculinity secret society that although available for consumption to mainstream culture, still manages to incorporate code words that only those germane to working class communities can understand. Signifying is an essential component of hip-hop music. As Gates (1989) explains, signifying is a way of saying one thing and meaning another. In many ways, it opens up a transformative space for emcees to bring in cultural and historical links to their creativity. Overall, there are signifying displays of Black masculinity in hip-hop that are simultaneously public and interior.

One of Jay-Z’s most popular songs at the height of his mainstream reign and domination was “99 Problems” (2003), in which the chorus boasts, “If you’re having girl problems I feel bad for you son/I got 99 problems but a bitch ain’t one”. When you hear the chorus, you would imagine the narrative in the song to be purely misogynistic. However, the song actually flips the popular title on its head, addressing problems Black men face such as racial profiling and hip-hop critics who claim mainstream rappers are not making “real music.” Yet still, there are examples of hypermasculinity and violence throughout the song as expressed in the third verse:
Now once upon a time not too long ago
A nigga like myself had to strong arm a hoe
This is not a hoe in the sense of having a pussy
But a pussy having no God Damn sense, try and push me
I tried to ignore him and talk to the Lord
Pray for him, cause some fools just love to perform
You know the type loud as a motor bike
But wouldn’t bust a grape in a fruit fight. (Jay-Z, 2003, Track 9)

In the song, a man is identified as being “a pussy” because of his false bravado. Because the said man would not “bust a grape in a fruit fight,” the suggestion is that he is not a man, because he cannot exert violent force onto another man. Often in mainstream hip-hop, one has to prove his manhood by committing violent acts in order to maintain his “street credibility.” You gain “street credibility” by being hyperviolent, homophobic, and heteronormative, while degrading women. Thus, we can see that someone as powerful in the hip-hop world as Jay-Z often succumbs to these performances of Black masculinity in order to make profit. The performances are seen as entertainment, another way of hustling and embodying the trickster. What is ironic about this particular verse is when the speaker says “some fools just love to perform . . . ,” it is almost as if Jay-Z is aware of his own performance, as he calls out that of another Black man. However, the fact that he decided to use a chorus that denounces women in order to discuss the daily life of Black men in America, exemplifies a homosocial bonding with other Black men through the music as expressed here, “And I heard Son do you know why I’m stopping you for?/Cause I’m young and I’m Black and my hat’s real low” (Jay-Z, 2003, track 9). However, the question I am left pondering on is this: How do marginal spaces for women in hip-hop impact Black masculinity and Black male subjectivity?

**Dead Prez: Revolutionary but Gangsta**

Dead Prez is a hip-hop duo that formed in New York in 1996 and is known for their revolutionary declarations and social justice themed music. Dead Prez, although known internationally, is still considered more of an underground hip-hop group because their music is not often played on mainstream radio and television stations. The duo denounces corporate control of hip-hop music and culture, while rhyming about the concept of true freedom and Pan-Africanism.
It is not shocking to know that audiences are not overwhelmingly in love with Dead Prez. The White supremacist mainstream gaze is dimmed when it comes to this duo because they are actively critiquing the gaze and challenging its very existence.

The duo met in college and connected as a result of their similar political views and love of music. One of the main elements of Dead Prez’s performances is a critique of capitalism in the United States. As a result, the artists often burn dollar bills during their performances. Additionally, the burning of American money symbolizes the name of their group, “Dead Prez,” as it identifies the dead White men one can see on money in the United States. Because these actions do not play into the trickster character in hip-hop, people turn away from the music, labeling it “militant” or “too radical.” However, they offer a version of Black masculinity that is connected to the civil rights movement and anti-racist rhetoric, themes that are celebrated in underground hip-hop music.

One of Dead Prez’s most famous songs “It’s Bigger Than Hip-Hop” (2000) offers a scathing critique of commodification of hip-hop artists and music:

One thing ’bout music when it’s real they get scared
Got us slavin for the welfare
Aint no food, clothes, or healthcare
I’m down for guerilla warfare . . .
This fake ass industry gotta pay to get a song on the radio
Really though, dp’z gon’ let you know
It’s just a game of pimps and hoes
And it’s all ’bout who you know. (Prez, 2000, Track 16)

The speaker denounces the government for its ill treatment of people who live in working class environments. At the same time, the speaker is obviously frustrated by the way that the hip-hop music industry respects money over talent, leading to the commodification of Black men at the expense of perpetuating stereotypical representations of Black masculinity. The notion that “real music scares people” indicates the underground hip-hop scene that is not privileged due to its “authentic” subject matter regarding social and economic injustice. Unlike Jay-Z, whose debut album *Reasonable Doubt* (1996) features the hit track “Dead Presidents” as a glorification of money, underground drug economies, and hypersexuality, Dead Prez use their stage
name as a way to degrade the racist, capitalist workings of the United States. These two contradictory representations of Black masculinity highlight the opposing viewpoints found within mainstream and underground hip-hop.

Another less popular song from their debut album, “They Schools” (2000), includes a lyrically packed criticism of public schools in the United States:

Why haven’t you learned anything?
Man that school shit is a joke
The same people who control the school system control
The prison system, and the whole social system
Ever since slavery, nawsayin”? (Prez, 2000, Track 3)

The historically driven song discusses the ways in which schools reify the status quo, perpetuating social, state, and governmental control, ultimately providing lackluster educations to inner city youth. The song is aptly titled “They Schools,” referencing the fact that public schools belong to the government and not the people. Once again, Dead Prez offers a version of masculinity that encourages Black people to take control of their communities and schools as a way of achieving true freedom. Unlike the rhetoric found in the music of mainstream artists like Jay-Z which puts monetary gain on a pedestal, Dead Prez puts liberation on a pedestal, as a way of attempting to transform dominant hypermasculine discourses in hip-hop music.

One can make the argument that Dead Prez’s college background is what contributes to their political and revolutionary lens within their music. Many believe that Dead Prez’s songs represent the “original hip-hop” Jay-Z refers to in his underground song “I Can’t Get With That.” However, who can truly define what is real in hip-hop? It can also be argued that Dead Prez is performing a hypermasculine, counter-hegemonic masculinity as a way to stand out in the world of hip-hop clichés. Although several claims can be made concerning the “authenticity” of underground and mainstream hip-hop, one concept is clear: Representations of Black masculinity in each realm are drastically different. The truth is that Black youth connect more to Jay-Z than Dead Prez. Unfortunately, the claim made in Dead Prez’s “It’s Bigger Than Hip-Hop” that “real music scares people” is true. Why is it that the White supremacist mainstream gaze is accepting of lyrics that perpetuate the Black man as the “bad man” as opposed to the image of the Black man as an activist and intellectual? Perhaps it is because Black masculinity performances in mainstream hip-hop continue to uphold patriarchal and racist ideologies, while Black masculinity in underground hip-hop pushes the need to
transform urban Black communities from the bottom up. How can hip-hop become more of a transformative space that allows the aesthetic of performance to take place without compromising the integrity and humanity of Black masculinity?

Conclusions

Furthermore, hip-hop does not adhere to one ideological framework or one form of Black masculinity. Because hip-hop was birthed in the United States, it is a conglomeration of the good, the bad, and the ugly. It swims through the shores of racism, sexism, double-consciousness, patriarchy, and hegemony, exploiting and rejecting its treasures for survival, as well as acceptance. As articulated through the examples of Wyclef Jean, The Roots, Jay-Z, and Dead Prez, hip-hop is a multivalent art form, encompassing the struggles and triumphs experienced by Black men in America. Hip-hop has been liberatory, lyrically and financially, for many Black men like Jay-Z, who grew up in a working class community. Ideally, there is room within mainstream hip-hop for voices like Dead Prez, but that is not always proven to be the case. How can mainstream and underground hip-hop merge for the betterment of Black communities and a more inclusive understanding of Black masculinity that does not sexualize and degrade women and indict gay men? The answer to this question is vital for moving forward with a more positive depiction of hip-hop that can potentially promote social, economic, and racial change in this nation. I think it is important to understand that although mainstream and underground hip-hop are different when it comes to the representation of Black masculinities, there are also contradictions found within both genres. I would like to think of Black masculinity as plural, encompassing all that is constructive and destructive, spiritual and blasphemous, salty and sweet, scantily clad and fully clothed, and male and female. Black masculinities cannot be relegated to one box but instead to the boxes that reflect truth in its most commodified, commercialized, double-conscious, underground, Afrocentric, Eurocentric, dread-locked, straight haired way.

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