

## Representin' in cyberspace: Sexual scripts, self-definition, and hip hop culture in Black American adolescent girls' home pages

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### Abstract

Despite the importance of media in the lives of girls, sexuality researchers have largely overlooked how Black American adolescent girls engage with media to construct sexual self-definitions and explore their emerging sexuality. This study investigated sexual scripts, self-definition, and hip hop culture in internet home pages constructed by Black girls aged 14–17 years residing in southern states in the USA. Although some girls in the sample constructed sexual self-representations that mirrored sexual scripts portrayed in the media, hip hop, and youth cyberculture, others resisted stereotypical representations of Black female sexuality. This paper discusses the dominant sexual scripts that emerged from in-depth analysis of 27 home pages constructed by girls residing in Georgia. The focus is on 'Freaks', 'Virgins', 'Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches', 'Pimpettes', and Resisters. Findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to sexuality education may fail to address key contextual issues of relevance to girls and young women. Innovative sexuality and media education strategies that respond to the significance of media in the lives of Black American girls and young women are needed.

### Résumé

Malgré l'importance des médias dans la vie des filles, les chercheurs spécialisés dans la sexualité se sont fort peu intéressés à la manière dont les adolescentes afro-américaines utilisent les médias pour construire leurs propres définitions de la sexualité et explorer leur sexualité naissante. Cette étude s'est intéressée aux scripts sexuels, à l'autodéfinition et à la culture hip hop rencontrés sur des pages d'accueil de sites web construites par des filles noires âgées de 14 à 17 ans et résidant dans les états du sud des USA. Bien que certaines filles de l'échantillon aient construit des autoreprésentations sexuelles reflétant les scripts sexuels rencontrés dans les médias, le hip hop et la cyberculture chez les jeunes, les autres ont résisté aux représentations stéréotypées de la sexualité des femmes noires. Cet article discute des scripts sexuels dominants qui ont émergé d'une analyse approfondie de 27 pages d'accueil de sites Internet construites par des jeunes filles vivant en Géorgie. L'accent est mis sur les qualificatifs de "Freaks", "Virgins", "Down Ass Chicks/Bitches", "Pimpettes" et Resisters. Les résultats suggèrent qu'une approche unique de l'éducation à la sexualité peut ignorer des questions contextuelles significatives en rapport avec les filles et les jeunes femmes. Des stratégies innovantes d'éducation à la sexualité et aux médias pouvant répondre à l'importance des médias dans la vie des filles et des jeunes femmes noires américaines doivent être élaborées.

### Resumen

Pese a la importancia de los medios de comunicación en las vidas de chicas jóvenes, los investigadores sobre sexualidad han ignorado en gran medida cómo las adolescentes norteamericanas de raza negra

utilizan los medios para construir sus propias definiciones sobre la sexualidad y explorar su sexualidad incipiente. Para este estudio se analizaron los guiones sobre sexualidad, las propias definiciones y la cultura del hip hop en las portadas de Internet construidas por chicas de raza negra con edades comprendidas entre 14 y 17 años que viven en los estados sureños de los Estados Unidos. Aunque algunas chicas en la muestra construían sus propias representaciones sexuales que eran un reflejo de los guiones sexuales retratados en los medios, el hip hop, y la cibercultura de los jóvenes, otras se resistían a identificar la sexualidad femenina de raza negra con estas representaciones de estereotipos. En este ensayo se argumentan los guiones dominantes de los roles sexuales a partir de un análisis exhaustivo de 27 portadas de páginas en la red construidos por chicas que residen en Georgia. Se prestó especial atención a la terminología utilizada, tales como 'Freaks', 'Virgins', 'Down Ass Chicks/Bitches', 'Pimpettes', y Resisters. Los resultados indican que un enfoque universal sobre la educación en materia sexual no puede solucionar problemas contextuales clave que podrían ser importantes para chicas y mujeres jóvenes. Son necesarias estrategias innovadoras educativas y de los medios de comunicación en materia de sexualidad que respondan a la importancia de los medios en las vidas de muchachas y mujeres jóvenes americanas de raza negra.

**Keywords:** *Black girls, sexual scripts, hip hop, internet*

## Introduction

Although hip hop culture has historically provided a space for disenfranchised youth of colour, including young women, to resist oppression (Rose 1994), there is widespread criticism of sexist and misogynist sexual scripts in mainstream rap and R&B music and videos, which are extremely popular among Black American youth (MEE Productions 2004). Concerned parents, scholars, colleges/universities, girl-serving organizations, magazines, filmmakers, rap artists, and Black women and girls have raised questions about the potential influence of derogatory sexual messages in hip hop-influenced popular culture on the sexual and psychological development of Black adolescent girls (Stokes and Gant 2002, Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2003, Wingood *et al.* 2003, MEE Productions 2004, Pough 2004, Weekes 2004, Stephens and Phillips 2005, Bullock 2006), who are disproportionately burdened by sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS (Wingood *et al.* 2003)—particularly in the southern region of the USA (Rangel *et al.* 2006). Some researchers speculate that hypersexual and deviant sexual scripts in hip hop music videos shape how Black girls view themselves (Stephens and Phillips 2003). However, few empirical studies have been conducted, and little is known about the potential influence of sexual discourses in the media and hip hop on Black American girls' emerging sexuality.

Sexual scripting theory (Simon and Gagnon 1986) identifies three levels of sexual scripts — cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts — which provide a conceptual framework for understanding how sociocultural and individual factors shape Black girls' sexual script development. Cultural scenarios are guidelines for sexual behaviours, and exist at the level of society or culture (e.g., mass media, peers, family, and religious institutions) (Simon and Gagnon 1986, Stephens and Phillips 2005). The media are an important source of information about sexual and romantic scripts for girls as they learn to negotiate their sexuality (Brown and Stern 2002). As girls and young women interact with others in social settings at the interpersonal script level, they draw from cultural scenarios and their own 'personal desires, fantasies, and intentions (i.e., intrapsychic scripts)' (Carpenter 1998: 158). The process of developing a sexual identity is particularly complicated for Black American girls, because they negotiate their emerging sexuality amidst contradictory and discrepant cultural scenarios from the mainstream media, hip hop culture, and peers that may conflict with those valued by their parents, and

the larger Black American culture (Stokes 2004, Stephens and Phillips 2005, Brown *et al.* 2006). This article examines the potential role of cultural-level sexual scripts in the media, hip hop culture, and youth cyberculture in shaping southern Black adolescent girls interpersonal sexual scripts online.

## Background

### *Sexual scripts in hip hop culture and Black adolescent girls' sexual development*

The sexuality of Black American women and girls is widely stigmatized in the academic and popular literatures, as well as in television shows, hip hop cinema (Pough 2004), and popular magazines. Denigrating representations of Black female sexuality have pervaded American culture and mass media since slavery (Wyatt 1997, Collins 2000). Stephens and Phillips (2003) argue that 'controlling' images (Collins 2000) of Black women and girls as hypersexual 'Jezebels', loyal 'Mammy's', emasculating 'Matriarchs', materialistic 'Welfare Queens' (Collins 2000), and foul-mouthed 'Sapphires' (Wyatt 1997) provide the foundation for similar sexual scripts in contemporary hip hop culture. While some aspects of hip hop are not misogynistic, commercialized hip hop has been extensively criticized for perpetuating hypersexual and deviant representations of Black women and girls (Stokes and Gant 2002, Stephens and Phillips 2003, Pough 2004, Bullock 2006). Although some Black women artists assert agency and resist derogatory representations of Black female sexuality, young Black women are often sexually objectified and portrayed in passive roles in popular rap, R&B, dancehall songs and music videos. In contrast, hip hop songs and videos often portray men as 'pimps' and 'thugs' who have more power in intimate relationships (Rose 1994, Emerson 2002, Neal 2005, Pough 2004, Stokes 2004, Ward *et al.* 2005). Moreover, strip club culture is increasingly pervasive in mainstream rap and R&B music and videos that feature female exotic dancers and other sexual content (Neal 2005, Bullock 2006).

Misogynistic cultural scenarios in the mainstream media and commercialized hip hop are concerning from a public health standpoint because they perpetuate gender inequality and glorify risky sexual behaviour, but rarely portray healthy sexual messages or possible negative health outcomes (Brown *et al.* 2006). This is potentially problematic in light of recent studies that show that the mass media influences Black young people's sexual attitudes and behaviours (Wingood *et al.* 2003, MEE Productions 2004, Ward *et al.* 2005). Wingood and colleagues (2003) found that sexually active African American adolescent girls residing in the southern region of the USA, who reported greater exposure to rap music videos at baseline, were significantly more likely than girls with less exposure to report multiple sexual partners or to have acquired a new STI over the 12-month follow-up period. However, as the authors noted, it is difficult to determine whether causal relationships exist because potential mediating factors were not examined. A recent longitudinal survey of racially and ethnically diverse American young people conducted by Martino *et al.* (2006) found that male and female youth who listened to music with degrading sexual content were more likely to 'subsequently initiate intercourse and to progress to more advanced levels of non-coital sexual activity, even after controlling for 18 respondent characteristics that might otherwise explain these relationships (pp. e430–e431). The limited body of existing research suggests that the media and hip hop may constrain Black girls' and young women's sexual development; however, limitations in the samples and assessment of media use hinder the validity and generalizability of the findings (Ward *et al.* 2005).

The large body of literature on girls' and young women's sexual and psychological development has been criticized for depicting adolescent girls in particular, as passive cultural consumers with limited control over their own identity construction (Bragg and Buckingham 2002, Emerson 2002, Stern 2002); and few studies have investigated girls' ability to resist sexual media content (Brown and Stern 2002) or the role of girls as media producers (Kearney 2006). Conversely, qualitative research has shown that some girls resist messages from the media and dominant culture by creating their own media. Although a handful of scholars have begun to investigate the role of hip hop in the lives of Black American girls, little is known about how this group interacts with or produces media.

*Adolescent girls' cyberculture and use of the Web for identity construction*

The population of young people on-line has grown rapidly in recent years (Lenhart and Madden 2005), and internet use among young urban women from diverse ethnic backgrounds is widespread (Borzekowski and Rickert 2000, Kearney 2006). While persisting racial/economic differences in internet access cannot be ignored, a recent survey administered to 2000 low-income urban Black youth aged 16–20 years residing in ten cities across the USA revealed that the overwhelming majority had internet access (MEE Productions 2004). Girls participate in a wide range of online social activities including using email and instant messaging, participating in and moderating bulletin board discussions and chat rooms, offering help with web design (Lenhart and Madden 2005), and hanging out in social networking sites. They also create online cultural productions by producing home pages, e-zines (electronic magazines) (Stern 2002, Mazzarella 2005, Kearney 2006, Polak 2006), and 'blogs' (Bortree 2005, Scheidt 2006).<sup>1</sup> Some girls 'remix' (manipulate) online content into new artistic creations for their peers and others (Stokes 2004, Lenhart and Madden 2005). Approximately 22% of online young people aged 12–17 report having created their own home page (Lenhart and Madden 2005). However, because a comprehensive directory does not exist, it is impossible to accurately estimate the total population of girls' home pages (Stern 2004).

Although the creative and empowering ways girls use the Internet have become overshadowed by the moral panic surrounding girls' vulnerability online (Mazzarella 2005), scholars have begun to explore sexuality and identity construction in girls' bulletin board postings (Smyres 1999, Grisso and Weiss 2005), blogs (Bortree 2005), home pages, and websites (Takayoshi *et al.* 1999, Stern 2002, Kearney 2006, Polak 2006). In an early study, Smyres (1999) observed online bulletin boards and interactions among members of *gURL.com*, the largest, and most popular website targeting teenage girls (Grisso and Weiss 2005). Girls in her study frequently discussed their sexuality, desire to attract boys, and body image issues (Smyres 1999). More recently, an investigation of constructions of sexual identity in postings on two *gURL.com* bulletin boards, revealed that girls used the site to perform sexual scripts and construct identity (Grisso and Weiss 2005). Taken together, studies of bulletin boards in websites for teenage girls reveal that some girls reproduce dominant patriarchal discourses and gender stereotypes (Grisso and Weiss 2005).

Several studies have investigated girls' presentation of self online and use of home pages as a medium for constructing identities (Stern 2002, Mazzarella 2005, Polak 2006). Stern's (2002) content analysis of 10 girls' home pages illuminates some of the ways in which girls use home pages as sites for sexual self-expression, self-disclosure, identity construction, and media appropriation. Despite these intriguing findings, published research to date on girls'

home pages is limited given its primary focus on white girls. The invisibility of Black girls' home pages in the empirical literature may be partially attributed to the common misperception that 'girls who currently create home pages are most likely White' (Stern 2002: 268) and have privileged access to web design skills as a result of economic privilege (Stern 2002, Kearney 2006). Consequently, Black girls' use of home pages to explore their sexuality has been overlooked, and deserves attention.

This paper fills a gap in the literature by investigating home pages constructed by Black adolescent girls in a youth-oriented website. The author argues that this new medium provides unparalleled insight into how Black girls use media, create cultural productions, construct sexual self-definitions (Collins 2000), and negotiate patriarchal cultural scenarios in a naturalistic setting. Drawing on scripting theory, performance theory (Goffman 1959, Butler 1990), and the Media Practice Model — which describes how young people choose, interpret, and interact with media based on their emerging identity (Brown and Stern 2002) — the author regards home pages as the stage for girls' rehearsals of sexual scripts (Stokes 2004). The main research questions were: how do Black girls use home pages to construct sexual self-definitions; what sexual scripts exist in Black girls' home pages; and how are Black girls' online sexual scripts related to dominant discourses in hip hop?

### **Context and methods**

This study is part of an ongoing investigation of Black girls' home pages that began in 2001 with a pilot study in 'NevaEvaLand' (pseudonym), a social networking web site with thousands of Black American adolescent members (Stokes 2004). NevaEvaLand provides an online space for young people to 'hang-out', connect with friends, and meet new people. The site provides template-based home page publishing tools, which allow girls to create personalized, searchable home pages without requiring knowledge of HTML. Girls create and modify their pages, which are connected to others via hyperlinks to friends' home pages. They receive feedback and validation from other users who can send private messages and post public comments. Some, but not all, girls in NevaEvaLand appear to create home pages in part to attract a romantic/sexual partner (Stokes, under review).

The data described in the present study were collected from December 2003 to February 2004. The author used the NevaEvaLand search engine to locate home pages authored by girls who were online during times of the day when adolescents were most active (e.g., evenings, weekends, and after school). Using domain-driven and opportunistic sampling, the author selected home pages that contained substantive, information-rich textual narratives and references to constructs of interest (e.g., sexuality, gender-role norms, dating, hip hop, self-definition). Given the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on Black women and girls in the southern states of the USA, other eligibility criteria were: being a female author between the ages of 14–17, who was 'Black', 'African American', or otherwise of African descent, and resided in the District of Columbia or one of seven southern states in the USA with Black Americans constituting 60% or more of the cumulative AIDS cases through June 2002 *and* incident AIDS cases reported from July 2001 through June 2002 (Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina).<sup>2</sup>

Age, gender, and race/ethnicity were determined from explicit references (i.e., self-reported demographic information in the authors' profile). Because home pages are in the

public domain, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted an exemption for examining these documents, without contacting the authors.

### *Data analysis*

There were three stages to the data analysis. First, ethnographic and quantitative content analysis methods were used to code pages meeting the eligibility criteria and to analyse their narratives, sounds, and images. Consistent with ethnographic content analysis (ECA) (Altheide 1996) and Stern's (2002) study of girls' home pages, the author used a protocol to guide data collection in the early stages of fieldwork, and wrote descriptive summaries of each page, including a general description of the tone, stylistic features, images, multimedia content (songs and music videos), appropriation of hip hop and youth culture, and the authors' description of her appearance. Home pages were collected until the content became redundant. The final core sample included 216 pages, which were approximately evenly distributed across states, and by ages within states, with the exception of home pages from Georgia, which were over-sampled ( $n=101$ ) in response to the disproportionate impact of HIV and AIDS on Black women and girls residing in Georgia. Because home pages are evolving documents that are updated and deleted unpredictably, the author downloaded electronic copies of each home page to facilitate ongoing coding (Stokes 2004).

A smaller sample of 27 Georgia pages that reflected the preliminary themes uncovered in the larger sample was selected to facilitate in-depth analyses ('in-depth sample'). ECA methods (using ATLAS.ti 5.0) were used to analyse the in-depth sample. Emergent coding was used as new patterns and themes emerged (Altheide 1996), and whenever possible, in vivo codes were used to retain the original language and meanings. This technique generated a rich and useful context for understanding the content. Data were reduced into major categorical themes, and home pages were coded until new categories and relations among categories were no longer being discovered (Miles and Huberman 1994). The in-depth analysis revealed themes related to girls' sexual scripts that were present in the core and in-depth samples. The most pervasive patterns yielded five conceptually clustered categories for classifying pages. Conceptually clustered matrices were created to display the data related to sexuality, self-definition, and romantic/sexual partner preferences for each page in the in-depth sample. Matrices assisted with detecting themes across and within the pages and verifying descriptive conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1994).

During the third phase, preliminary conclusions were verified by consulting with an expert panel of 10 Black young women aged 14–18 years who resided in the Atlanta, USA area; were familiar with the Internet and/or were NevaEvaLand home page authors; and were knowledgeable about American hip hop and southern Black youth culture. In order to address regional differences in girls' vernacular and music preferences, the panellists were recruited from Atlanta-based mentoring programmes for Black girls (two were recruited through snowball sampling). The demographic characteristics of the panellists were similar to the home page authors. Informed consent was obtained from parents and legal guardians of the panellists and note takers, and written assent was obtained from each girl. Each participant was given a US \$15 cash incentive at the end of the meeting. IRB approval was obtained for consulting with the panellists. During the meeting, feedback was solicited on excerpts from pages that illustrated the most salient themes. The panellists confirmed the emerging themes and clarified questions about Black online youth culture, girls' home pages, songs, celebrities, geographic nuances, images, and vernacular. A pseudonym was

assigned for the panellists' names and home page authors' screen names to protect their privacy. Unless otherwise indicated, the findings reported here are from the 27 home pages in the in-depth sample.

## Findings

### *Demographic characteristics of the in-depth sample*

The core and in-depth sample shared similar demographic characteristics. The mean age of the in-depth sample was 15.6 years. Most (81.5%) of the girls reported that they were enrolled in high school; 14.8% reported that they were in junior high (3.7% did not respond). As part of setting up their profile, prospective NevaEvaLand members were asked to check one or more boxes corresponding with their 'race' (options include 'Black', 'Asian', 'Latino', 'Native American', or 'White'). The majority (66.7%) self-identified solely as 'Black'. The remainder selected 'Black' and 'Latino' (3.7%); 'Black' and 'Native American' (14.8%); 'Black' and 'Asian' (3.7%); or 'Black', 'White', and 'Native American' (11.1%). Girls were also asked to report their sexual orientation. While the majority selected 'Heterosexual' (63%), the remainder selected 'Bisexual' (11.1%), 'None of Your Business' (3.7%), or deliberately concealed their sexual orientation (22.2%). Most of the girls reported that they were single (40.7%). Fewer reported that they were 'dating' (25.9%) or 'involved' with a 'partner' (33.3%). While the girls reported listening to a range of musical genres, the five most popular were rap (100%), R&B (96.3%), Caribbean/reggae (51.9%), pop (40.7%), and dance (29.6%).

### *Sexual self-expression and sexual scripts*

Girls in NevaEvaLand constructed technologically sophisticated home pages that addressed a variety of topics. The authors widely adopted the hip hop cultural practice of 'representin' (also known as 'reppin') — in other words, constructing self-definitions to elevate their social status and align themselves with desirable persons, places, or things (e.g., friends, neighbourhoods, clubs, clothing brands, etc.). For example, 'sweetiepooh' wrote: 'I stay in Atlanta and go to NevaEva High School (pseudonym). Representin' the class of "06" HOE'. Girls expressed their sexuality by aligning themselves with physically attractive cartoon dolls that were dressed in revealing clothing and popular hip hop fashions.<sup>3</sup> Some selected images of dolls in sexy poses and sexual positions, or engaged in sexual acts. Consistent with previous research, girls' screen names were a vital part of their online identities (Stern 2002), and appeared to be selected in part, to 'represent' and/or to attract potential romantic/sexual partners (Stokes 2004).

The in-depth analysis revealed six pervasive sexual scripts with roots in controlling images of Black female sexuality (Collins 2000): 'Freaks' ( $n=9$ ); 'Virgins' ( $n=3$ ); 'Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches' ( $n=4$ ); 'Pimpettes' ( $n=4$ ); and Resisters who disrupted stereotypical sexual scripts ( $n=7$ ). With the exception of the Resisters, the names of the scripts are in-vivo codes used by the girls to describe themselves. The home pages in these categories were differentiated by their overall content, degree of sexual self-expression, and tone. Although these sexual scripts were overlapping to some degree, they were conceptually distinctive, and provide a useful method for organizing the home pages into meaningful categories.

*'A lady in the street, but a freak on the Web': The 'Freak'*

Consistent with sexual scripts in hip hop, one-third of the girls in the in-depth sample distanced themselves from the 'good girl' script (Tolman 2002) by portraying themselves as 'Freaks'—a contemporary manifestation of the sexually insatiable 'Jezebel' image (Collins 2004).<sup>4</sup> The panellists described a 'Freak' as a person who is sexually adventurous and 'down for whatever' (willing to 'do anything' with a person they are intimately involved with). 'Sexeylaffemme' (age 15) wrote, 'I AM A FREAK. FA SHO ... I like to run sh!t in and out tha bed. I am wonderful in bed ... I am down fo whateva'. Acknowledging sexual double standards, the panellists emphasized that 'boys can be freaks too'. The panellists reported that 'freaky' girls like to touch people and do 'stuff' they 'wouldn't do around their parents'. They made an important distinction between being a 'Freak' and being 'freaky'—emphasizing that 'virgins' can be 'freaky'. Reciting lyrics from the song, 'Yeah!' (Usher 2004)—'we want a lady in the street but a freak in the bed'—the panellists explained that it is considered socially acceptable for a girl to be 'classy' [elegant] and a 'lady' in public, but selectively freaky in private, behind closed doors, or on the Web. Moreover, the panellists distinguished 'hoes' from Freaks, arguing that hoers will 'do anything' and 'mess around with everybody they see' (engage in sexual activity). In contrast, a Freak may be 'down for whatever', but she may not *act* upon her sexual desires. For instance, a 14 year-old girl from Mississippi, USA described herself as 'Somewhat of a Freak, but Never a Hoe'—a fairly common attitude expressed by Freaks in the in-depth sample.

Four types of Freaks emerged among the home page authors: (1) hard-core Freaks who were 'down for whateva'; (2) soft-core Freaks who were 'kinda freaky'; (3) 'closet'/ 'undercover' Freaks who were unwilling to publicly associate their off-line identities and reputations with their freaky home page performances; and (4) girls who gave off the impression that they were 'freaky' because their pages were dominated by explicit sexual references and sexual media content. Collectively, one-third ( $n=3$ ) of the Freaks included positive references to religion, and all reported listening to a wide range of music including rap and R&B ( $n=9$ ), reggae ( $n=7$ ), dance ( $n=5$ ), pop ( $n=4$ ), Latin ( $n=3$ ), alternative ( $n=2$ ), and jazz ( $n=1$ ). In the latter category, 'MiaX-Rated' (age 17) selected the sexually explicit rap song, 'P-Poppin' (pussy poppin') (Ludacris 2003), which played in the background. Moreover, she selected a background image of the rapper Trina and several pornographic images. A few of the girls posted sexually explicit imagery and pornography featuring humans and cartoon characters engaged in sexual acts. Some of the Freaks expressed sexual subjectivity and desire (Tolman 2002) by including references to giving and receiving sexual pleasure. The panellists suggested that girls perform the Freak script in order to attract attention from prospective romantic/sexual partners in NevaEvaLand.

*'My goodies stay in the jar': The Virgin*

Despite the pervasiveness of sexual content in NevaEvaLand, three of the girls proudly described themselves as 'Virgins'. Similarly, Grisso and Weiss (2005) found that girls performed virginity in gURL.com bulletin boards. The Virgins created home pages that were more polite and friendly in tone than the others (excluding the Resisters), and presented themselves as well rounded—emphasizing their intelligence, positive personality characteristics, and life goals. Collectively, the Virgins reinforced the 'good girl' image that Black girls have been historically encouraged to adopt by their parents and other adults (Wyatt 1997, Stephens and Phillips 2003). Some of the girls selected images that supported their virginal self-representations. For instance, 'EastsideMami' (age 16) programmed a

scrolling marquee that moved across her home page with the text, 'IM A PROUD VIRGIN BABY'. Collectively, all of the Virgins listened to rap, R&B, and pop music (two also listened to jazz). With the exception of one girl who selected sexually explicit anime images, Virgins did not include content that suggested that they might be sexually experienced (e.g., sexual quizzes, sexually explicit images, etc.). Instead, in order to construct an image of respectability in a sexualized online environment, these girls warned viewers not to ask them about 'freaky' matters. Virgins also informed viewers that they are not 'Freaks' and do not perform certain sexual acts such as oral sex. Although none of the Virgins in the in-depth sample included violent or aggressive content in their home pages, two included religious references.

*'Ain't scared to fight a ho': The Down-Ass Chick/Bitch*

Four of the girls in the in-depth sample performed a sexual script from hip hop and popular culture — the 'ride-or die' 'Down-Ass Chick/Bitch', which has origins in the 'controlling' images of the confrontational Sapphire and the loyal, self-sacrificing, and nurturing Mammy, who put the needs of others above her own (Collins 2004). This script is glamorized in songs by popular rap and R&B artists, such as 'Down-Ass Bitch' (Ja Rule 2001), 'Bonnie and Clyde Theme' (Yo-Yo 1993) (Pough 2004, Stokes 2004), and 'All Good' (Lil' Kim 2005). These girls defined themselves in relation to male partners by portraying themselves as fiercely loyal girlfriends who are 'down for their man' and willing to engage in destructive behaviours, including committing or being an accomplice to crimes for his benefit. According to Duncan-Mao (2006), the Down-Ass Bitch will 'hold his stash [money], hide his gun, take the weight [accept responsibility] and go to jail for him — all in the name of love' (p. 82). Pough (2004) points out that the Down-Ass Chick/Bitch lifestyle is a reality for some Black girls who have internalized the notion that it is acceptable to commit crimes for their partners. This is concerning, because Black women comprise the fastest growing prison population in the USA (Pough 2004). The expert panellists emphasized the importance of loyalty also, and reported that a Down-Ass Chick/Bitch would never snitch on her man or friends. 'Blazinhotmami' (age 17) personifies the Down-Ass Chick/Bitch mentality:

ima tell u what type of chick i am 2 my man...  
 if u broke both arms i would write uh flow [rap lyrics] fo ya,  
 if uh gurl scratched ya car i would fight tha ho 4 ya...  
 i would go outta town and get tha dough [money] 4 ya...  
 if u cant buy weed [marijuana] i would grow fo ya...  
 if u go to jail i would come and getchu out...;)

All of the Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches selected rap songs for their home pages, and they were more likely than the other girls to report that they listened to rap and R&B music exclusively (one girl reported that she also enjoyed reggae); and none included religious references. The girls in this category resembled some female rappers in that they performed a hard-core, confrontational, and sometimes violent persona in their pages (Pough 2004) — describing themselves as 'loud', 'gangsta girls', 'head bussas', and 'thug misses', who 'ain't scared to fight a ho'. Moreover, 'BaDunkaDunk' (age 17) emulated female rappers who have reclaimed and redefined the word bitch — such as Lil' Kim and Trina. Likewise, she proudly defined herself as a 'bitch' and adopted an aggressive persona directed towards other girls: 'i can be the biggest and meanest B Y T C H if u F U U C K wit me in the

wrong way and if u want i will be more than happy to prove it'. While, the girls in this category appropriated ghetto-centric imagery and aligned themselves with rap artists/groups and others with hypermasculine and tough personas (e.g., Trillville, T.I., 50 Cent, Three 6 Mafia, Trick Daddy, etc.), some emphasized the importance of sexual pleasure, honesty, and trustworthiness. Others resisted the notion that it is acceptable for males to cheat on their partners or exert power over females (Stokes under review).

*'Ladies is pimps too': The Pimpette*

Four of the girls in NevaEvaLand responded to the influence of pimp culture in hip hop, youth culture, and American culture by defining themselves as 'Pimps', 'Pimpettes', and 'Pimpstresses' who redefined traditional gender dynamics. The origins of the Pimpette persona can be traced to several controlling images: the materialistic Gold-Digger (a contemporary manifestation of the Matriarch/Welfare Mother images), Bad Bitch, Sapphire, and Jezebel (Collins 2004). While the Pimpette script is connected to hip hop culture and the sex trade and street economy, the public discourse and academic literature has overlooked girls who define themselves in relation to pimps. The expert panel described a Pimpette as a 'female pimp' who is able to manipulate a relationship for sexual and/or economic gain while maintaining a romantic/sexual network consisting of more than one romantic/sexual partner. Describing the difference between a pimp and a 'player', one panellist noted, 'pimps have benefits, players don't'. Even though the expert panel suggested that sexual activity was involved in 'pimpin', the Pimpettes in the in-depth sample created home pages with minimal sexual content in comparison to the Freaks.

Moreover, like the Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches, the Pimpettes were more likely to listen to rap and R&B exclusively (one girls also listened to reggae, and another listened to dance), and none of the Pimpettes included religious references. The Pimpettes' home page performances reflected themes addressed by female rap artists such as Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown, Trina, and Gangsta Boo—such as being in control of their lives and romantic/sexual partners, refusing to tolerate violence from males, bragging about their sexuality, and demanding female pleasure (e.g., emphasizing that males should be sexually experienced) (Pough 2004, Rose 1994). In contrast to the Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches who exhibited extreme loyalty to one male partner, Pimpettes are expected to be in control of their romantic/sexual partners and emotions (e.g., 'never fighting over a nigga'). To this end, several of the Pimpettes indicated that they do not tolerate abusive boys or 'cheaters'. Two of the Pimpettes in the in-depth sample also included violent and/or aggressive content directed toward males, similar to revenge fantasies described by some female rappers (Rose 1994).

*The Resisters*

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues that 'when self-defined by Black women ourselves, Black women's sexualities can become an important place of resistance' (p. 128). The author labelled seven of the girls 'Resisters' because they resisted the sexual scripts performed by other girls in the in-depth sample through self-representations and counter discourses that disrupted the dominant cultural scenarios in NevaEvaLand. What distinguished the Resisters from the other girls is that they have begun the critical process of creating independent self-definitions. The Resisters were similar to the Virgins in that they rejected the Freak script and described themselves as well-rounded, personable, and

'sweet', but none explicitly stated that they were 'virgins'. 'Downsouthgagirl' (age 17) wrote: 'I'm a southern gurl so I'm sweet and I have manners and all that good stuff'. Moreover, the seven Resisters listened to the widest range of music including rap and R&B ( $n=7$ ); reggae ( $n=4$ ); pop ( $n=4$ ); dance ( $n=2$ ); jazz ( $n=2$ ); latin ( $n=2$ ); rock ( $n=2$ ); alternative ( $n=1$ ); and world ( $n=1$ ). More than half ( $n=4$ ) of the Resisters included positive references to religion or spirituality. Although most of the girls appeared to create and maintain home pages in part, to attract a potential romantic/sexual partner, 'DatGirlRightThurr' (age 16) wrote 'I'm just on here to pick up a couple friends and talk to a couple of the ones I already have (and improve my HTML skills while I'm at it)'. None of the Resisters posted sexual photographs of themselves or included violent/aggressive content.

The Resisters subverted media stereotypes about Black girls and created their own safe spaces within a homophobic online peer culture saturated with contradictory messages. In this regard, Resisters follow in the tradition of Black female performers, songwriters, and producers who challenge controlling images of Black womanhood within blues, rap, and R&B music through resistant narratives and counter discourses within the male-dominated music industry (Rose 1994, Emerson 2002). For instance, 'SugarPlum' (age 16), described herself as 'fun BUT NOT HO-ISH', and provided the following self-description:

if u looking for a fashion model  
 u got da wrong 1  
 if u looking for a girl wit DOUBLE D's (.) (.) [breasts]  
 U GOT DA WRONG 1  
 If u looking for a free ride hoe  
 u really got da wrong 1  
 so dont even read any further.

## Discussion

This paper enhances knowledge of Black American girls' sexual scripts and media production in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This research introduced the home page as an informative medium for investigating Black girls, and expands upon the methodologies used to investigate girls' home pages. It also provides an unprecedented examination of how Black girls represent *themselves* and define their own sexuality. This is significant because Black girls' voices have been underrepresented in the academic literature and public discourses regarding their sexuality, and Black women and girls have had limited control over representations of their sexuality in the mass media. Moreover, this study challenges assumptions that girls are passive consumers who are unable to engage with, interpret, or resist media messages.

The Web provides girls with a potentially anonymous space to experiment with their sexuality without the potential embarrassment or risks of face-to-face encounters. Many of the girls reproduced gender inequality and stereotypical representations of Black female sexuality in their home pages — but they also claimed space on the Web to try on identities and resist dominant sexual script discourses and sexual double standards. It can be argued that the Freaks resisted the 'good girl' sexual script, while simultaneously performing the hypersexual Jezebel script. In contrast, the Virgins and Resisters subverted hypersexual scripts of Black female sexuality and resisted sexual pressure from their home page viewers. Although the Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches performed a potentially problematic identity, they

resisted dominant discourses of sexuality and femininity by adopting traditionally masculine attitudes. However, they fail to express sexual subjectivity, given their focus on their partners' needs and subordination of their own identities. The Pimpettes resisted patriarchal masculinity ideologies by reversing traditional gender role expectations. Although the Resisters appeared to be the most successful in disrupting stereotypical female sexual scripts in NevaEvaLand, some of their home pages contained contradictions, and not all were able to resist problematic ideologies simultaneously. Robinson and Ward (1991) point out that there is a critical difference between 'resistance for survival and resistance for liberation'. The latter occurs when 'Black girls and women are encouraged to acknowledge the problems of, and to demand change in, an environment that oppresses them' (p. 89). In contrast, it appears that some girls in NevaEvaLand responded to oppressive gender politics by adopting short-term survival strategies that may ultimately impair healthy development. However, it would be naïve to expect all girls to consistently challenge and resist oppression, amidst the numerous contradictory messages and struggles they face in their daily lives.

Although these findings provide valuable information about Black girls' sexual scripts, there are several methodological limitations. First, the findings should not be considered as representative of all Black American girls, or those who author home pages. Second, it is important to point out that although the sexual scripts identified here are robust, they overlap in some ways, and should not be interpreted as discrete categories. For instance, although four of the girls in the in-depth sample performed the Pimpette script exclusively, one Freak, one Down-Ass Bitch, and one Virgin included references to this script. The author also observed additional sexual scripts in NevaEvaLand that were not pervasive in the in-depth sample. Third, because the author was prohibited from contacting the authors, it was not possible to determine whether any of the girls performed conflicting scripts through multiple home pages. As the panellists pointed out, girls can pretend to be anyone in cyberspace — thus, the data presented in this article should be interpreted with caution, and additional research is needed to determine whether girls' online performances reflect their real life identities. However, it should be noted that who girls are pretending to be online may provide insight into their sexual development offline. Consulting with the panellists in person was extremely beneficial because the girls were able to provide valuable insight into Black girls' home pages. Whether or not all of the girls provided truthful portrayals about themselves or were experimenting with their sexuality, their unique cultural productions provide considerable insight into the previously hidden world of Black girls' home pages and sexual lives on the Web.

Although a number of important findings emerged in the present study, additional research is needed to better understand Black girls' sexual scripts, home pages, and resistance strategies. Future research should aim to refine the categories presented in the current paper by investigating possible connections between girls' online sexual scripts and offline sexual scripts and behaviours, as well as the ways in which girls may shift between scripts in different settings, blend them together, or perform other scripts not described in the present paper. In addition, the finding that Pimpettes and Down-Ass Chicks/Bitches were more likely to include violent or aggressive content and report listening exclusively to rap and R&B music — whereas Resisters and Virgins listened to the widest range of musical genres — suggests that there is an association between Black girls' sexual scripts and hip hop music. Additional research in online and offline settings is needed to understand the relationship between messages in hip hop music and girls' sexual script development. Although it is important to investigate the potential influence of the mass media in shaping

Black girls' developing sexuality, it is also important to conduct research on how this group produces their own media. Finally, researchers should respect girls' online spaces and perceptions of privacy by not subjecting them to unwanted adult surveillance or intrusions (e.g., by reporting screen names, quotations, or other information that might inadvertently reveal their identities through web search engines).

In sum, this study complicates the understanding of Black adolescent girls' sexuality and suggests that sexuality education programmes that ignore the role of media in the lives of Black girls may be ineffective. While efforts to encourage commercial media producers to distribute more balanced portrayals of Black women and girls are important, this study sheds light on the sophisticated ways in which Black girls have taken control of their own representations. The findings provide evidence of the need to develop multidimensional approaches to health and sexuality education to help girls construct healthy sexual self-definitions and navigate the multiple and contradictory sexual messages they encounter in their daily lives. Parents (and other relatives), schools, health care providers, girl-serving organizations, religious institutions, and mentors should work with Black girls to provide safe spaces for them to critically analyse gender politics, examine their own self-definitions and attitudes about sexuality, and develop healthy, affirming, mutually respectful, and equitable sexual identities and relationships. Such strategies might identify and consult with girls who demonstrate resistance to oppressive cultural scenarios and utilize them as peer educators. These programmes should demonstrate respect by (1) collaborating with girls; (2) building on the empowering aspects of hip hop and youth culture; and (3) recognizing girls' as knowledgeable about the role of media in their lives.

This research suggests that media literacy education targeting parents, health care providers, and practitioners may be beneficial in helping concerned adults stay informed about youth culture and the empowering aspects of media. Although media literacy education is important, girl-centred media education programmes that 'move beyond the protectionist approach of the media literacy movement' are also needed to critically engage girls in challenging oppression by creating their own media (Kearney 2006: 109). One example of a girl-centred media education programme that builds upon this research is exemplified by the work of HOTGIRLS, Inc. (Helping Our Teen Girls In Real Life Situations), a non-profit in Atlanta, Georgia, USA that seeks to foster healthy sexual development in Black adolescent girls by integrating health and media education with peer leadership development and training in web design and media production. In conclusion, while much of the media attention has focused on condemning individual artists and regulating content on commercial media distribution channels (e.g., Black Entertainment Television), it is important to emphasize that media messages and girls' self-representations in home pages reflect racism, misogyny, patriarchy, and capitalism in American culture (Stokes 2004). Thus, the most promising strategy for transforming denigrating representations of Black female sexuality is to eliminate the pervasive social inequalities that perpetuate the oppression of Black women and girls.

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## Notes

1. Short for weblog, a blog is ‘a frequently modified website that allows updating with items that are grouped primarily by the time and/or date of posting. Entries usually appear in reverse chronological order’ (Scheidt, p. 194).
2. Although US states are required to report AIDS cases, HIV infection reporting is voluntary (Reif *et al.* 2006). Because accurate state-level HIV/AIDS data for Black adolescent girls aged 14 to 17 are not available for all US states, the author used the latest state-level incident and cumulative AIDS case data available from the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation State Health Facts Online database (Kaiser Family Foundation 2003)
3. Cartoon dolls are the virtual version of paper dolls, and are created using graphic design and paint programs (Stokes 2004)
4. The ‘freak on the web’ phenomenon is described in the rap song ‘MySpace Freak’ (C-Side 2006).

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