

“Can’t Teach an Old Hoe New Tricks”:
An Analysis of Instagram Comments on Black Women in Hip-Hop

by Yelana Sims

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Thesis directed by

Ivy Ken
Associate Professor of Sociology

Erin Chapman
Associate Professor of History

Dedication

For my parents, as a testament to their hard work. For my siblings, as a testament of my love. For my friends, as a testament to their support.

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Introduction

You open your favorite social media platform, Instagram, and scroll to the “recommended for you” page. The app has generated hundreds of posts, users, and hashtags that you might be interested in. As you already follow many Black female celebrities, ranging from well-known actresses to lesser known music artists, many of your recommendations are similar figures. One catches your attention: Blac Chyna. You have heard her name, know her face, but are unsure if you want to follow her and see her image regularly on your feed. You decide to check out her most recent posts to be sure. You notice she has turned off the comment function; no one can currently comment on her photos, but you can see previous comments left before she turned the function off. Those comments provide you an unfettered view into how commenters engaged with her image, images of her family, her children. At that moment you understand why she restricted users from leaving comments. One comment sticks with you as you navigate away from her page: “You make me come on myself.” You shake your head and mutter, “People are sick.”

Within Patricia Hill Collins’s work *Black Sexual Politics* is a call for both action and nuanced understanding of not just the work’s titular theory, sexual politics, but also “the new racism.”ⁱ Collins’ sexual politics is defined as “a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women’s treatment of one another, as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others.”ⁱⁱ According to Collins, sexual politics has become a lynchpin in the propagation of racism. The new racism that Collins references is rooted in global capitalism but also hinges upon mass media to “reproduce and disseminate the ideologies needed to justify

racism.”ⁱⁱⁱ As stated by Collins, sexualized images of African Americans are the prime commodities disseminated by mass media to uphold racist ideologies. Therefore, to battle racist notions and political power, one must acknowledge the many-faceted approach that racism takes to laying its foundations and the power that gendered and sexualized racism has over society.

This project hopes to answer Collins’ call for action by analyzing the usage of the jezebel stereotype against Black female celebrities via social media. While social media is not the same platform as the mass media that Collins discusses, it is still a platform within which images are not only shared but commented on, and shared again, sometimes without the original subject’s knowledge or permission. I contend that social media and the comments left therein are indicative of the new racism that Collins posits in her work. By analyzing how this racism shows itself on a platform that reaches millions, we are engaging with how sexual and social images have been created around and against images of Black women’s bodies and their assumed sexuality. Such engagement can shed light on the foundations and current forms of the new racism that Collins describes.

Intersectionality

Central to Collins’ work and coined in Kimberle Crenshaw’s 1989 work *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, intersectionality is the basis of this study.^{iv} Intersectionality posits that individuals are not raced *or* gendered *or* classed but are instead raced *and* gendered *and* classed, especially during the moment of oppression. According to Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, Crenshaw

introduces intersectionality to “address the marginalization of Black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics”^v. Within *Demarginalizing*, Crenshaw’s focus is on antiracist and feminist organizations and how their focus is on a specific set of experiences or defining characteristics that do not “accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender.”^{vi} According to Crenshaw, feminism and antiracist movements do not acknowledge the interaction between race and gender due to operating from an understanding of additive oppressions, which is the thought that African American women experience both racism and sexism, but separately. In reality, Crenshaw argues, African American women experience racist sexism and sexist racism and therefore “the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating women’s experience or the Black experience into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.”^{vii} Crenshaw’s focus on Black women acknowledges the intricacy of their lived experiences as being both Black and women and the intricacies of the oppression that rises to meet them during that experience.

Since *Demarginalizing*, intersectionality as it denotes interlocking oppressive systems has been expanded into an understanding of how identity is formed within society. Concerning identity formation, intersectionality works against a one-axis approach to understanding identity formation. In the same way that African American women encounter intersectional oppression, their lived experiences and identities are formed at these same intersections and must be acknowledged as such. As intersectionality describes both oppressive systems and identity formations, it also allows space to analyze how these oppressive systems influence the actions of individuals, which is the goal of this paper. This project will be built upon research using

intersectionality theory, whether stated explicitly or not, and from a variety of subfields such as Marxist feminism and Hip-Hop Studies. By using information rooted in an intersectional view of research and outcomes, nuance is more fluidly achieved and displayed.

An example both relevant to this study and indicative of intersectionality as a research focus is Lisa Rosenthal and Marci Lobel's 2016 study that posited pregnancy as a point of intersection along with the traditional points such as race and gender.^{viii} Using intersectional theory as the foundation for their research, Rosenthal and Lobel conducted a study in which subjects saw a picture and read a description of a target woman and were told to describe what kind of person she was. The target woman's race and status as pregnant/not pregnant were the only points of variation. When the researchers changed the race and pregnancy status of a female target, their research subjects would respond differently along the lines of understood racial stereotypes.

Based on the stereotypes of Black American women about sexuality and motherhood that are connected to the jezebel and welfare queen archetypes, we hypothesized that a Black female target would be more likely to be perceived by participants as sexually promiscuous (engaging in more sexual activity), engaging in more unprotected sexual activity, currently having children or having been pregnant in the past, and having lower socioeconomic status, than a (w)hite female target.^{ix}

Rosenthal and Lobel found their hypothesis to be true, with the added finding that the race of the target image did not affect perceptions of her health behaviors (drinking, smoking, etc.) during pregnancy.^x This type of scholarship and outcome are indicative of

how scholars use intersectionality as a cornerstone for understanding not just the formation of identity within a subject but how society interacts with aspects of identity.

There have been recent calls for a reclamation of the term ‘intersectionality’ among scholars. Many academics, including Jennifer Nash and Brittney Cooper, recognize that intersectionality has become a buzz word for identity formation and a favorite among identity theorists, but this popularity has come at a high cost. Many scholars that use intersectional theory within their research today, or intersectionality as an adjective to describe their research, fail to remember the roots of intersectionality: a theory of both identity formation and oppressive structures. Commonly, an intersectional approach is one that nuances a subject’s position as raced, gendered, of a socioeconomic status, of a religion, of a sexuality; but the flip side to this acknowledgment is that oppressive systems, such as the jezebel stereotype, function at the intersections of these aspects of identity. As stated before, the play between intersectional oppressive structures and intersectional identity is one that will be scrutinized within this work. To do this, we must also have an understanding of how African American communities have responded to intersectional oppressive systems such as the jezebel stereotype. The jezebel stereotype will be introduced through a discussion of respectability politics in the next section.

Historical Creations

Historian Erin Chapman’s work *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* helps begin our understanding of gendered and raced cultural politics, as portions examine how racial and sexual identities were created and mitigated

within African American communities in the beginning of the twentieth century as a response to white supremacist propaganda. Due to the rampant nature of negative images and opinions spawned by white supremacist values, African American communities began to police the sexual actions of their members, male and female alike, while at the same time creating and dispensing representations of themselves. The policing was not just limited to sexual actions, but rather all actions that could be considered rooted in moral standing, essentially all actions. This moral valuation and policing came to be known as respectability politics, and still affects African American communities today. This phenomenon has a long past and is rooted in both intra- and inter-racial relations. In the past 100 years, ideas of respectability have transformed to fit their times, and as an integral aspect of African American culture, they have also expanded to fill the space provided by social media and the internet: spaces that provide a sense of interconnectedness previously unheard of.

Integral to understanding Chapman's discussion of self-determination and political raced and gendered action is the sex-race marketplace; within which, "both the tangible goods and the intangible ideas that gave the goods meaning – the ideas, fantasies, thrills, hopes, judgments that were sold along with the goods – were steeped in racialized and sexualized language and significance."^{xi} African Americans and their practices of self-determination occurred simultaneously as ideas of primitivism and stereotypes began by white supremacist movements and politics; influencing not just the goods being sold but the ideas surrounding them. In this way, "while African Americans were consuming, they were also being consumed by others."^{xii} Chapman's work is highly important in understanding the creation of a social process such as respectability politics

and how it moves within communities. *Prove It on Me* is not meant to be a genealogy of respectability politics, but rather a look at the time period in which respectability politics was coming into being. Her chapters entitled “Mothering the Race: New Negro Progressivism and the Work of Racial Advancement” and “Solidarity, Sex, Happiness, and Oppression in the Words of New Negro Women” are integral to this, as they outline how African American communities responded to stereotypes of promiscuity and lasciviousness by creating moral codes concerning what they wore, their everyday activities, who they had sex and children with, how they spoke of sex, and a myriad of other social activities. In particular, Chapman references how African American women held each other accountable through this creation of moral codes, so that when a woman stepped out of line, she was considered fundamentally hurtful to the uplift of the race, and therefore unworthy of respect and social acceptance. Thus, policing African American women according to moral codes of acceptable sexual activities and natures became an integral aspect of African American communities.

This policing has existed in multiple fashions from the time of slavery through the modern era and is what most people think of when discussing ‘respectability politics’. It reconfigures itself to match the societal context and needs of the community. Within *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice* and *Gender and Jim Crow*, both Collier-Thomas and Gilmore speak to the association of religion with morality, education, and labor production for the “uplift of the race.” Within this religious association with assumed positive aspects of citizenship is housed a moral and religious condemnation of overt sexuality that is meant to both protect the image of African Americans and restrict the future possibility of maligning their sexual purity. Policing of sexuality is not an action separated from

understandings of morality and perceived societal needs; due to this, it lives as a belief system and is passed on generationally as an understanding of right, wrong, and gray areas in between. In functioning as an indicator of moral beliefs, respectability politics and the policing of sexuality evolve with the people who exercise the belief. As times change, these people change the ways they employ policing to match the environment, times, and perceived moral needs of the society. There are many academic works, blog posts, and think-pieces concerning the social institutions built around respectability politics, but what is missing are varied analyses of how respectability politics is functioning within technologically advanced spaces like social media. As understandings of stereotypes and their regulation change, it is important to analyze how those changes are being exhibited in everyday life and it is particularly important to examine how platforms that allow for expanded access to others and their images affect the movement of such a social process.

The primary function of respectability politics is not punishment, but rather the uplifting of the race through combatting racial and sexual stereotypes. One of the main stereotypes it was meant to combat was that of the jezebel. jezebel is a biblical figure in the Book of Kings, and is known for her manipulation or seduction (there is contestation) of the “Saints of God into sins of idolatry and sexual immorality.”^{xiii} As a cultural stereotype, the jezebel serves a different function. She is an overtly sexual image of African American women; she is lascivious, manipulative, and sexually deviant. The visual representation is normally lighter-skinned, young, slim, and attractive, an apt description of all four of the subjects of this study. Going back to our discussion of intersectionality, the jezebel archetype functions at the intersection of Blackness and

woman-ness, among other identity aspects. Association of the subjects of this study with this stereotype is not meant to be a judgment of their sexual autonomy nor an agreement with society's negative view of them. It is instead meant to be an acknowledgement of how all Black women have lived experiences associated with this archetype, especially those who are in the public's eye due to their work as entertainers. The jezebel stereotype is the perfect example of intersectional oppression or interlocking oppression, as it does not oppress all women nor all African American people. It is an oppression that must function at the intersection of sexism and racism, specifically designed to plague Black women.

The jezebel stereotype has its roots throughout the history of African American experiences within the United States, but found its deepest footing in visual media, including historical visual representations of lighter skinned Black women within newspapers, film, and print media. In 2003, Stephens and Phillips highlighted the evolution of the jezebel stereotype into the tropes of the Freak, Gold Digger and Diva.^{xiv} According to Stephens and Phillips, their interpretation of Hip Hop culture documents and empirical evidence show this association of African American women with these stereotypes as being relevant to sexual identity development, sexual risk-taking behaviors, and interpersonal relationship dynamics. The words "slut", "ho", and "thot" should also be tied to this stereotype, as they are often used to denote women that engage in premarital sex, supposedly have many sexual partners, and/or are not as selective about their sexual partners as society would like them to be.

Integral to our discussion of the jezebel stereotype is also a discussion of agency on the part of the women within this study. Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill co-wrote a

chapter entitled “Spicing It Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and *The Sex Inspectors*” within the anthology “New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity.”^{xv} This chapter is an analysis of a UK-based “sex makeover” show, *The Sex Inspectors*, in which couples, predominantly heterosexual and white, are filmed during sex and foreplay and then receive an intervention from two “sexperts” who help the couple “makeover their dysfunctional sex lives.”^{xvi} Gill and Harvey argue that in the process of this makeover, the female partner is pushed to become a sexual entrepreneur, in which her sexual willingness and skill is consumed by her partner: “*The Sex Inspectors* provides a very specific shopping list of activities to produce a normal sexual subjectivity, which is heterosexual, monogamous, and bound up with Western consumer culture.”^{xvii} Harvey and Gill’s analysis rests on society’s understanding of female sexuality as a commodity and that women must groom or improve this commodity to have a viable role within the relationship market. This commodification of sexuality is neither new nor undocumented. Within Harvey and Gill’s work, the link between labor, production, sex, and exchange of ideas of each is blatant. Within this study, there will be an expansion of the sexual entrepreneur title to embody a willing participant in the labor market that utilizes sex and sexuality to bolster the market value of her image, goods, or services. Such expansion and distinction is important to highlight the agency taken by these women; in the same breath we will be expanding a term that can seem to remove it from the women that participate in this market.

Unlike the unwilling or agency-lite commodification of sex analyzed by Harvey and Gill, there are Black scholars that point out that sexual commodification among Black female celebrities and Black men and women overall, sometimes has a decidedly

different use and outcome. In 2006, Jackson proposed scripting as a way in which African Americans take agency in defining themselves.^{xviii} Essentially, by acknowledging that the Black body is a text that is read continuously and deciding within themselves how they will present their body to be viewed and read, African Americans can reinvent themselves and how others see them. By putting Harvey and Gill in conversation with Jackson, we see social community differences in the handling of sexual commodification. In her 1992 work, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks argues

Many black women singers [and performers], irrespective of the quality of their voices, have cultivated an image which suggests they are sexually available and licensed. Undesirable in the conventional sense, which defines beauty and sexuality as desirable only to the extent that it is idealized and unattainable, the black female body gains attention only when it is synonymous with accessibility, availability, and when it is sexually deviant.^{xix}

Hooks' argument aligns with Jackson's proposal of scripting in a manner that complicates not only the jezebel stereotype (because does this mean there are *willing* jezebels?) but also how we must analyze and respond to the images supplied by Black female celebrities, especially those within hip-hop.

Beauvoir & Fanon

The jezebel stereotype and the history of respectability politics are related to the general social practice of "Othering," as theorized in feminist literature by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and in anti-colonial work by Franz Fanon (1952). In its simplest form, Othering is the method by which subsets of society place characteristics on others to

create understood truths about themselves and those being Othered. For instance, by stating what they believe Black people to be, others are stating what they know themselves *not* to be because they are not Black. The *Second Sex*, by Beauvoir and *Black Skin, White Masks* by Franz Fanon have become staples in disciplines such as African American Studies, Women's Studies, and Gender Studies due in part to their engagement with Othering. They have reached canonical status in these fields and are regularly seen on syllabi throughout the country.

The Second Sex is considered one of the first attempts to confront the whole of human history through a feminist lens. Beauvoir's main argument is that women are at all points of their life Othered. Beauvoir's Othering refers to the patriarchal tradition of placing value on manhood, masculinity, and its supposed signifiers by juxtaposing them against signifiers of womanhood and finding women lacking. Women, then, are not born with particular characteristics, but are rather Othered throughout life and are pushed into the status of woman through their social, educational, and economic relationship to men. Because gender has to be accomplished and pursued, Beauvoir famously argues that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman."^{xx}

Franz Fanon's work *Black Skin, White Masks* is known for a similar short quote: "Look! A Negro!"^{xxi} This scene within *Black Skin, White Masks* recounts Fanon's visceral reaction to being Othered by a small white child. Writing concerning this pivotal example of racial Othering, Amey Adkins says "To consider what it means to look, and what it means to be looked upon, is a concern taken up by a multiplicity of disciplines engaged in questions of identity and embodiment, questions inflected for Fanon in the puissant shouts of a small boy to his mother."^{xxii} Fanon's writing of the scene allows for

an understanding of Othering through the external, white, imperial gaze and how the Othered feels during such a moment. Fanon walks his reader through a reaction involving laughter, fear, embarrassment, and a host of other fluid emotions. “I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Y a bon Banania*.”^{xxiii} Fanon uses similar language to Beauvoir to describe his state during the encounter, such as the term “object”, which emphasizes the subject/object dynamic of most social interactions. Within this dynamic, each part is searching for subject-hood, and many find it through the objectification of others. Normally this objectification is rooted in the purposeful misrecognition of the humanity and agency of the other party through the process of Othering. This integral aspect of *Black Skin, White Masks* has become the beginning point in many discussions of racial Othering.

In 2013 Amey Adkins wrote “Black/Feminist Futures: Reading Beauvoir in *Black Skin, White Masks*” which seeks to read Fanon and Beauvoir together, despite the fact neither cites the other. Adkins reads these works together and against one another to create a literary intersection as well as a intersectionality-based analysis. She describes her essay’s goal as “to hold together the fragments of these two critical and contemporary realities, not only given Beauvoir and Fanon’s historical location, but because a close reading of Fanon’s groundbreaking analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* reveals a pattern of analysis uncannily similar to Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.”^{xxiv} The two works share not only the existence of a canonic quote, but also similar approaches to analyzing Othering as an ongoing and highly situational process.

Via Fanon's pointed exclusion of Beauvoir from his analysis and "categorically negative assessment of women,"^{xxv} Adkins concludes that Fanon's goal of becoming a Subject as opposed to an Other is rooted in "masculine sameness"^{xxvi} in which the quest of subjectivity lies in the quest for masculinity as the Other has been historically feminine, and the usage of emasculation towards Black men a key tool of their Othering. "For as much as Fanon centers on the concerns of the black man, he requires the black woman to effectively do so. To be a black subject, Fanon must find a surrogate black object to bear his own experience of crushing objecthood;"^{xxvii} in this way, Fanon is a prime example of Beauvoir's insistence that masculinity and indeed the patriarchal system use othering of women as the driving force behind their creation and sustenance. He calls women of color "frenzied" and "frantic for a white man" in his endeavor to paint them as wayward from their race and their gender.^{xxviii} Fanon's writing demonstrates how the Othering and sexualization of Black women is participated in by all of society, and is not only a tool of white men and women. This allows us to look at responses to Black women by all people of all genders and races to analyze how society responds to their images. The trend of Othering Black women along both racial and gendered lines was neither invented by Fanon nor did it stop after his publication. By approaching *The Second Sex* and *Black Skin, White Masks* as two axes of an intersectional discussion of Othering, we gain a glimpse into how African American women experience the social process of Othering and some of the tools that are often used against them during this social process. It is important to position Othering as an intersectional oppressive tactic, as the stereotype of the jezebel, which is the focus of this paper, is a byproduct of

Othering at the intersection of race and gender. We must analyze how intersectional oppressive systems work and function to fully understand this.

Social Media, Hip-Hop and Modern Understandings

As society has evolved, so too have the methods of regulating its populations within the social sphere, including social media. While the theories and works outlined above are seemingly disparate, they all combine to give us as scholars and myself personally as an African American woman, a glimpse into the sociopolitical structures that impact a portion of our society daily. As intersectionality gives us a schema by which to understand oppression as interlocking and interweaving, intersectionality also gives us a lesson in context. By acknowledging that different structures of oppression can work together against a singular body or group of bodies, we also acknowledge that we must contextualize the body and the oppressions. This project does so by engaging with social media and hip-hop as sites where structures of oppression shape the usage and movement of the jezebel stereotype.

Hip hop has affected both the social and economic landscape of African American culture since the late 1970s. Studies and cultural observations such as blogs, editorial postings, etc. attribute African American youth's clothing style, word choice, and attitudes toward sex to hip hop, both the music itself and the culture that has evolved alongside it. Because hip-hop is such an important site of cultural production, I focus in this project on the social media presence of four famous Black women that are either working within hip-hop or have been associated with it: Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, Blac Chyna, and Amber Rose. Both Nicki Minaj and Cardi B are current female rappers.

Minaj had her big break around 2010 while Cardi B's rise to fame came more recently, with her first big break through reality television. Blac Chyna and Amber Rose are social media personalities enmeshed in hip-hop culture through their relationships with rappers and their business and labor pursuits. I briefly introduce each of these celebrities below.

Cardi B's real name is Belcalis Almanzar, born in the Bronx in 1992.^{xxix} She is of Dominican and Trinidadian descent. Many have questioned Cardi's claim to Blackness due to her Hispanic origins. Cardi has responded numerous times, stating that she considers herself Afro-Latina (someone of mixed African and Latina descent *or* someone of Latin descent with supposed Black physical characteristics) due to her upbringing and family. Before her rise to fame, Cardi worked as a cashier before turning to stripping at age 19.^{xxx} Cardi B gained her social media and fan following through comedic Instagram videos and later appeared on the hugely popular "Love and Hip Hop: New York," a reality show from Vh1 chronicling the love lives and drama of various couples and singles in the hip-hop industry. Cardi B's first season on the show was season six, which aired from December 2015 to March 2016.^{xxxi} Her placement on the show was due to her status as an up and coming local rapper, but most of the nation had not yet heard her name or music. Her first mixtape was released in 2016, entitled *Gangsta Bitch Music Vol. 1*.^{xxxii} In December 2016, she announced that she was leaving "Love and Hip Hop: New York" to focus on her rap career^{xxxiii}, later signing a deal with Atlantic Records^{xxxiv} and releasing the Summer 2017 hit "Bodak Yellow" which topped the Billboard charts for consecutive weeks, making Cardi only the second female rapper to ever do so without another artist appearing on the track.^{xxxv}

Nicki Minaj came to prominence purely through the rap industry. Minaj was born Onika Tanya Maraj in December 1982,^{xxxvi} making her the oldest of the four celebrities and the most established within music and film with three platinum albums, popular mixtapes, and voice and acting appearances in *Ice Age: Continental Drift* (2012) and *Barbershop: The Next Cut* (2016), among others.^{xxxvii} She has won numerous awards, including American Music Awards (AMAs), BET Hip Hop Awards, Billboard Music Awards, People’s Choice Awards, and has had 10 Grammy nominations. Nicki has always been heavily involved with social media. In fact, the CEO of Dirty Money Records, Fendi, reportedly first heard Minaj’s music on the social network site MySpace and signed her to his label.^{xxxviii} Through this recruitment, Nicki was later introduced to Lil Wayne and the recording group Young Money, with whom she became a household name. In 2009 Nicki signed a recording contract with Young Money Entertainment; that same year saw her name consistently in the Billboard Hot 100 with tracks like “5 Star Bitch” with Yo Gotti, Trina, and Gucci Mane, and “BedRock” with the rest of Young Money.^{xxxix} The following year, Minaj released *Pink Friday* which constituted her largest breakout moment in the hip-hop industry.^{xl} In 2014, Nicki scored another hit with her album *The Pinkprint*, and the same year, she made her movie debut in *The Other Woman*, opposite Cameron Diaz.^{xli}

While Cardi B and Nicki Minaj are rappers, the two other subjects of this project are affiliated with the hip-hop industry, but not as artists. Blac Chyna and Amber Rose are social media personalities, philanthropists, business owners, and “video vixens.” Amber Rose is the ex-wife of rapper Wiz Khalifa, while Blac Chyna is the ex-fiancee of

both Rob Kardashian and the rapper Tyga. Both are former exotic dancers (Cardi B is as well), and the two are known to be good friends.

Blac Chyna was born Angela Renee White on May 11, 1988 in Washington, D.C.^{xlii} News outlets have differing opinions on what constituted Blac Chyna's breakout moment. Not much is published or posted about her life before her beginnings in stripping at the famous King of Diamonds strip club in Miami. In 2010 she posed for the cover of *Dimepiece* magazine, was mentioned in Drake's single "Miss Me" and made an appearance as Nicki Minaj's stunt double in Kanye West's "Monster" music video. *Us Weekly* believes her true breakthrough into the hip-hop and popular culture scene was her role in rapper Tyga's music video for "Rack City,"^{xliii} while the Wikipedia page devoted to Blac Chyna states Drake's "Miss Me" shout-out as the moment things began to take off.^{xliv} Either way, by the end of 2011 Blac Chyna was a well-known name with a variety of magazine appearances lined up for 2012, and she was also in a committed relationship with Tyga. In October of 2012, the couple welcomed their son, King Cairo Stevenson. Soon after, the two announced their engagement.^{xlv} They split two years later in 2014, around the time Blac Chyna opened Lashed Bar in Encino, California. According to the salon's website, the salon offers services ranging from teeth whitening to lash extension, as well as make-up parties, lessons, and consultations.^{xlvi} After the split with Tyga, Chyna continued to be a name in hip-hop with magazine spreads, shout-outs in hip-hop songs, and appearances in music videos such as rapper Future's "Rich \$ex" video in 2015. January of 2016, Chyna began dating Robert Kardashian, brother to household names Kim, Khloe, and Kourtney Kardashian.^{xlvii} Chyna had been friends with Kim for years at this point, even making appearances on the Kardashian's reality show

Keeping Up with the Kardashians. Her ex, Tyga, was currently in a tumultuous relationship with the youngest Kardashian-Jenner sister, Kylie, which created a fair amount of drama according to Bossip, Vh1, and a variety of other sources.^{xlviii} Chyna and Rob's relationship moved quickly, with the two announcing their engagement in April 2016, after only a few months of dating.^{xlix} In May of 2016 the news broke (with varying accounts of where it broke first), that the two were expecting their first child together. Dream Kardashian was born on November 10, 2016.¹ Chyna and Rob's relationship did not last long after Dream was born, with a custody battle for the child taking up most of 2017. As of the writing of this work, Chyna has been seen dating other rappers and industry figures, and has maintained her work in modeling and her business ventures.

Amber Rose was born Amber Levonchuck on October 21, 1983 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.^{li} Her mother is of Cape Verdean descent and her father is of Irish and Italian descent. Despite humble beginnings, Rose has created the most diverse portfolio among the four women. Her story normally begins with her days as an exotic dancer, during her teenage years. There are conflicting accounts concerning her break out moment, but it is clear that 2008 was her year. It began with her appearance in the music video for Ludacris' "What Them Girls Like"; according to some outlets, this was the moment she caught the attention of Kanye West, who then recruited her for the "Put On" video featuring him and Young Jeezy.^{lii} Kanye West and Amber entered a relationship soon after, one that would last until 2010. Amber has described the relationship negatively, citing rampant cheating on the part of West, including with his future wife Kim Kardashian. Soon after breaking it off with West, Rose began dating, and eventually married, Wiz Khalifa, a popular rapper. They had a child together, Sebastian Taylor

Thomaz, in 2013.^{liii} The next year, Rose and Wiz Khalifa divorced, maintaining joint custody of their son. Rose's influence is not just via music video appearances, though. Since 2007 she has appeared in numerous short films, full-length films, and television series. In 2015, she began the Slut Walk, mirrored from a similar protest that happened in Toronto in 2011 in response to a police officer's sexist and rape-culture based suggestion that women should avoid dressing provocatively in order to avoid sexual assault.^{liv} Rose has worked tirelessly through this movement, putting on a Slut Walk yearly since 2015, in order to combat the stigmas against sexual assault victims and also the stigmas against sexually liberated women.^{lv} Also in 2015, Rose released her first book, *How to Be a Bad Bitch*, stylized as a self-help book.^{lvi}

Among the numerous things that tie these women's stories together is their usage of social media as a method of expanding their image and engagement with their fans. All four have over one million Instagram followers, and post regularly, meaning at least once a week, but usually once every two or three days. Social media has become an ever-present factor in most Americans' lives. With the invention of smart phones, apps, and inter-connecting social media platforms, people are able to remotely connect to each other in ways that were unimaginable twenty-five years ago. Due to this, most celebrities use social media as a tool to reach millions of people in a single post. Social media has become a non-physical space in which cultural norms are constructed, enacted, communicated and enforced, through screens rather than face to face interactions. In this manner, users of social media platforms create communities and often speak candidly regarding both their like and dislike of other users.

In 2002, Richard Bagozzi and Utpal M. Dholakia published an article entitled “Intentional Social Action in Virtual Communities” in the *Journal of Interactive Marketing*.^{lvii} This article is important, as it began the marketing world’s understanding of how community is formed and felt among those who participate in internet activities, including forums and other interactive sites. Though this article was written before most modern social media sites gained great notoriety, it provides an extensive framework and understanding of the internet and how it engages with already created social structures. “We posit that virtual community participation constitutes *intentional social action* in that the community member acts *intentionally* (i.e., engages in purposive and goal-directed action that remains under the individual’s volitional control), and that these actions have a *collective basis* in that both *what is done and why it is done* in the virtual community are determined by the community’s social characteristics.”^{lviii} When Bagozzi wrote this, the internet was limited to textual forums and social media was not nearly as interconnected or dynamic as it is today, but the argument still holds, as communities form on social media regularly. These communities form from commonalities and boundary-setting practices around race, gender, religion, region, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and a host of other social locations.

Within the context of this project, social media constitutes a non-physical community wherein individual responses to and engagements with a person’s image and words are recorded and therefore can be analyzed. Through the interconnected and deregulated space of the internet, opinions held offline can be made visible, providing a unique source of interactions among celebrity fans and detractors. In this study of respectability politics and gendered and racialized stereotypes, what follows is an

analysis of people's engagements with the images of four Black female hip-hop celebrities and an analysis of what these engagements may tell us about how the jezebel stereotype functions culturally.

ⁱ Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Sexual Politics* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), 33.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 34.

^{iv} Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989: 139.

^v Devon W. Carbado et al., "INTERSECTIONALITY: Mapping the Movements of a Theory," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10, no. 2 (October 2013): 303-312, <https://doi.org/10.017.S1742058X13000349>.

^{vi} Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing*, 140.

^{vii} *Ibid*.

^{viii} Lisa Rosenthal and Marci Lobel, "Stereotypes of Black American Women Related to Sexuality and Motherhood," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (September 2016): 414-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684315627459>.

^{ix} *Ibid*, 417.

^x *Ibid*, 421.

^{xi} Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

^{xii} *Ibid*, 8.

^{xiii} Sarita Davis and Aisha Tucker-Brown, "Effects of Black Sexual Stereotypes on Sexual Decision Making Among African American Women," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 5, no. 9 (March 2013): 113.

^{xiv} Dionne P. Stephens and Layli D. Phillips, "Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, and Dykes: The Sociohistorical Development of Adolescent African American Women's Sexual Scripts," *Sexuality and Culture* (Winter 2003).

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^{xxiii} Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92.

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^{xxv} *Ibid*, 701.

^{xxvi} *Ibid*, 706.

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Methods

This project analyzes comments left as responses to photos posted on social media by African American women who are popular within African American popular culture and hip-hop culture. I analyze the ways the jezebel image, the process of Othering, and current forms of respectability politics are publicly applied to four Black female celebrities through the lens of Instagram comments. The comments help reveal how society interacts with the images those women post, revealing underlying assumptions, stereotypes, stigmas, and social processes. This analysis focuses on how the policing of sexuality, bodily autonomy, and Black women's performance of sexuality can be seen in the virtual space of the internet and what this may tell us about stereotypes, assumptions, and predispositions towards African American women in the spotlight.

Methodologically, a discourse analysis rooted in an interdisciplinary and feminist use of grounded theory allows for an in-depth inquiry into a large sample while providing space to explicate nuance and fluidity of theory.

Methodological Approach

Kathy Charmaz lists the “fundamental tenets” of the grounded theory method as “(1) minimizing preconceived ideas about the research problem and the data, (2) using simultaneous data collection and analysis to inform each other, (3) remaining open to varied explanations and/or understandings of the data, and (4) focusing data analysis to construct middle-range theories”^{lix}. These tenets align with the goals of this project, which include an open, fluid, and informed analysis of data in order to find patterns within rather than to test preconceived hypotheses. The amplified voices in this study are

neither wholly positive nor negative. In fact, they are at times egregious and at times delightfully uplifting. This type of duality exists simultaneously in social media interactions and through analyzing how both negative and positive responses to famous Black women coincide and interact, we reveal social processes at work.

According to Charmaz, the main strength of grounded theory is its “flexible, open-ended guidelines”^{lx}. In my project, such flexibility proved to be indispensable, as it allowed for sufficient re-structuring to follow new inquiries and lines of thinking throughout the process of analysis. In this approach to analyzing data, the researcher begins with an inductive and yet systematic approach to gathering data. Instead of analyzing data to prove or disprove a hypothesis, this method opens ongoing questions and possible interpretations as the researcher moves through the data.

Theoretical sampling is one of the primary data collection techniques of grounded theory; the term references when a sample of data is assembled according to the theoretical needs of the project rather than according to the random sampling procedures of hypothesis testing analyses. Strauss and Corbin have described theoretical sampling as a means to “maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions.”^{lxi} If at any point in the analysis the researcher needs to add a subject or data point because questions have been raised that cannot be answered with the original data collection plan, they can. This is done to make sure a robust sample is created but also to ensure that any extreme differences in the data set can be explored rather than written off as unexpected. By allowing the data to be fluidly analyzed, and in many cases expanded, the researcher creates a space in which theoretical concepts can be created rather than assumed, and therefore are also amenable

to change. These benefits press against the boundaries of the scientific method and its search for traditional objectivity through testable hypotheses and detail-oriented, replicable methodology.

The goal of this project is to use an intersectional discourse analysis to analyze the ways that people interact with Black female celebrities, images of them and their bodies, and the stereotypes, stigmas, and other social processes working for or against these celebrities. By analyzing the comments left on Instagram photos of African American women whose race, gender, and the intersection of the two inspire both awe and vitriol, we are able to acknowledge and analyze how public responses to these images are indicative of the jezebel image and the controlling practice of sexualized racism and misogyny. That these women are celebrities allows for an open platform, in which the public's interactions with them are highly visible, especially on social media. While it this project privileges the voices of the commenters rather than the voices of the women who post the photos, the intention is to bring light to the societal processes working against and for these women.

Platform

Social media was pointedly chosen as the environment for this analysis. Social media is a space in which cultural norms are expected, enacted, and enforced. Instagram is an application that allows users to share photos directly from their phones with other users of the application. Publicly traded, the app was recently bought by Facebook due to its high number of users and high revenue.¹ I chose Instagram for this project because its

¹. In 2015, eMarketer estimated that Instagram could make as much as \$2.81 billion by 2017.¹ eMarketer based this projection off of the platform's high traffic rates and advertising revenue.

usage as a visual-based platform allows for a bridge between visual media and immediate audience reaction. This bridge is exemplified in how Instagram's usage of public and private profiles and quantified indicators of popularity such as likes and comments.

While most still use the term 'social media sites', 'platform' is the best way to characterize how social-media due to how these sites have integrated themselves into the daily lives of their users, and the interconnectedness they can offer. A singular website does not allow the amount of interconnected sharing with email, text, other social media platforms, and other modes of communication that is possible from social media platforms. Pew estimates that among all American adults who spend time online, 28% use Instagram.^{lxii} For the subset of users aged 18-29, that percentage jumps to 59%.^{lxiii} Also, 38% of female internet users use Instagram, compared to 26% of male internet users.^{lxiv} Pew also points out that "51% of Instagram users are on the platform daily, including 35% who visit several times a day."^{lxv} High daily usage was one of many reasons why I chose Instagram posts as the object of analysis for this study. Another was its interconnectedness to other social media sites. Instagram users have the option of posting their photos to not just Instagram, but also linking their other social media accounts and uploading to a variety of platforms with a single click, which gives each post a potentially broader audience as the posts can be accessed by those that do not follow the celebrity on Instagram but do follow them on other platforms. Other visual-based social media platforms, like Snapchat, do not share this function.

Each person who posts to Instagram is known as a "user" and each user can have "followers." For the purposes of this project, the 'subject' denotes the Instagram user who posted the photo being responded to. The 'post' is the photo posted to Instagram, its

caption, and all comments. Users and followers all have the option of posting information about themselves, called “profiles,” which can either be available publicly or designated as private. In private profiles, only a user’s profile photo, their bio, and a count of their posts, followers, and the number of people they are following are available to other users. Instagram advertises itself as a sharing platform that allows photos and videos to be posted and responded to via ‘likes’ and comments from phones rather than computers.

As a phone-based application, Instagram utilizes the camera, internet connection, and photo gallery of the phone it is installed on to share the images with ‘followers’, users who have chosen to see another user’s photos on their photo feed by clicking the ‘follow’ button on the user’s page. Instagram allows someone who posts an image to edit it, which may include altering the photo’s appearance through filters, slideshows, and cropping.² Unlike photos on its competitor Snapchat, Instagram images do not disappear in a set amount of time, but rather remain visible on Instagram until a user deletes them.³ Followers can react publicly to the posts they see by “liking” (i.e., clicking on a button that says, “like”) and by posting comments along with other followers in a designated section below each photo. These comments can be posted whether a commenter’s profile is private or public. This means that commenters with private profiles can engage with users who have public profiles, and the only information then made public about the commenter is that they commented on another user’s photo. Most celebrities have public profiles, as this has become the norm on most social media sites. By using a public

² Instagram also has affiliated apps, like Boomerang, that allow the user to edit videos or photos in ways the regular Instagram app does not allow. These apps are downloaded separately from Instagram, but are created by the same company.

³ This is unless the photo is posted to Instagram’s recently unveiled ‘Instagram stories’, which functions much like Snapchat: the photos are posted for only a 24-hour span and disappear afterwards.

profile that has millions of followers and is accessible to anyone who uses the search feature, celebrities, well-known figures, and lesser-known people create an environment where all their postings are visible and open to critique or praise from other users. The number of followers a user's profile has, as well as the number of comments and likes their posts receive, act as indicators of their popularity and relevance in popular culture. Instagram provides a count of 'likes' and comments left with each posting, to help gauge and publicize the popularity and engagement with the post. In this study, I used these details to create base criteria for the posts I analyzed, which I explain in what follows.

Creation of the Data Set

The initial three subjects of the study were Amber Rose, Blac Chyna, and Cardi B. I chose them for their presence in social media and other forms of African American popular culture. A fourth subject, Nicki Minaj, was added to fulfill a theoretical sampling need. All four subjects have over one million Instagram followers, and appear regularly in news or gossip outlets such as The Shade Room and Bossip, which is another attestation to their relevance or "hotness" within the sphere of African American popular culture. These women function as a sample of Black female celebrities within popular culture and hip-hop and share both similarities and differences in their backgrounds and current endeavors, ranging from pasts as exotic dancers or art school graduates to current work as activists, rap artists, entrepreneurs, and mothers.

I chose one post from each subject, and from this post, a set of comments for each subject was derived. I created strict criteria to determine which posts I would analyze from each of these users. To ensure that I was capturing followers' comments on popular

posts, I chose only from those posts that had more than 1,000 comments. The requirement of popular posts was to receive a variety and hopefully large number of commenters and comments left on the post. The post had to be a still photograph, not a video, and the photo had to be solely of the user with no other people in the frame. The photo could not include advertisements of any kind, nor mentions/tags (@name) of any other Instagram users; this was done to limit the amount of outside influence on the comment set. Photos could be close-up, from a distance, and of any portion of the body as long as the subject was the focus and by herself. I selected from photos posted during the six-month date range of October 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017.

The number of posts for each woman that met the above criteria were: 10 for Amber Rose, 36 for Blac Chyna, 18 for Cardi B, and 54 for Nicki Minaj. For each person, I listed each eligible post on a spreadsheet, ordered from least recent to most and numbered as such. Using an online random number generator, I selected one post for each woman. Since it would have been outside the scope of this study to analyze every single comment on each post, I selected the most recent 200 eligible comments⁴ for each one and copied them into a Microsoft Word document for coding. From these 200, I eliminated those comments that were comprised entirely of emojis⁵, comments that

⁴ Before deciding on this method of collecting comments for the data set, I attempted to use a random selection of comments based on the displayed number of comments on each post. On Instagram, one can see a number associated with how many “likes” a post has received and a number corresponding to the number of comments left on the post. This original method entailed dividing the number of comments on the post by 100 and creating a “*n*”. Every *n*th eligible comment would be used to create the data set. While attempting to create the first data set, it became clear that the number displayed was not an accurate representation of the number of comments for each post and therefore 100 comments could not be gleaned from such an approach. It is my assumption that this number represents the number of comments left on the post *before* the Instagram comment filter kicks in and deletes/hides offensive comments or those that have filtered words or phrases. For this reason, the final method of the most recent 200 eligible comments was utilized.

⁵ Emojis are “any of various small images, symbols, or icons used in text fields in electronic communication (as in text messages, e-mail, and social media) to express the emotional attitude of the writer, convey information succinctly, communicate a message playfully without using words, etc.”

mentioned or replied to Instagram users other than the subject, comments that were in a language other than English, and comments that were in an unidentifiable language/dialect⁶. Comments that mentioned or replied to Instagram users other than the subject were excluded for the same reason that the photo caption could not include advertisements or mentions of other Instagram users: to limit the influence of outside affiliations on the data set. Comments that mention other users function as conversational dialogue, in which the responses may not be to the post itself, but rather to the words of another commenter. If comments between users were coded, then the coding would be thrown off by interactions between commenters rather than interactions between the commenters and the subject and post. Comments that included emojis along with words were admissible, but emojis were only included in the coding process if they helped provide context to the data point. After eliminating comments for any of these reasons, I continued sequentially to include enough comments to be able to analyze 200 for each person. The sets of 200 comments for each subject will be referred to as their “comment set.” Descriptions for each post can be found below, and links can be found to each within the citations.

Blac Chyna’s post is a full body shot of Chyna alone, in a long, flowing, open gold robe, two-piece gold-toned lingerie. She is barefoot, and turned slightly sideways,

(Merriam-Webster). Emojis are used much the same way as emoticons, or smiley faces made with a colon and a parentheses. They are small images used to add context, convey emotion, etc. but their usage may differ according to the phone’s OS (Android and iPhone emojis look quite different, even the ones that are meant to be counterparts) or the cultural surroundings of the user. They can be highly subjective and were removed from the data set for this reason.

⁶ For instance, on Amber Rose’s post, we see French Instagram users commenting with “non juste un peu mdr.” The ‘mdr’ in this comment actually stands for “mort de rire”, the French version of ‘lol’ or ‘lmao’. Cultural connotations such as this would be extremely difficult to translate correctly without knowledge of each individual language, culture, and any short-hand used on websites, social media, or within text messages.

but facing the camera. One hand rests against her face and the other is placed along her thigh. The background looks to be a photography set, and is toned beige and white, with white floors, a large white plant, and dark beige/gold walls. There is not a caption for this post.^{lxvi}

Amber Rose post is a selfie from December 16, 2016. It shows her from the chest up, in a black lace v-cut top or bodysuit. She is wearing a thick black choker and looking directly into the camera with a slight tilt to her head. As it is a selfie and a closer shot, not much can be seen in the background. The caption for the photo is the kiss lips emoji.^{lxvii}

Nicki Minaj's post is a full body shot of her sitting in a director's chair in front of a white background. Her head is tilted slightly to the side and back and her eyes seem to be closed. Her hands are clasped and placed over her crossed legs. She is wearing a ripped denim jacket over a black dress with deep cleavage and a mesh overlay, she is also wearing strap up silver sandals that come up to her knee. This post is from November 3, 2016. The caption for the photo is "When you sleepy & busy @ the same damn time."^{lxviii}

Lastly, Cardi B posted the photo we will use for this study on December 23, 2016. The photo shows Cardi in a red plaid short skirt, a low-cut white blouse, and a black fur jacket. Her leg is lifted and her foot is on a knee-height table. She is wearing black pointed-toe shoes and red argyle socks. Her hand is in her mouth and she is looking slightly down, away from the camera. The background includes a white door, but no other discernable furniture. The caption for the photo is "Teach me then (smug face emoji)"^{lxix}

As stated before, when using the word “post”, I will be referencing not just the photo, but the caption and other details as well. Below I describe the method by which I coded the data set created from the comments left on these posts.

Coding

A structured coding process characterizes the grounded theory method. Projects that use this approach are not testing hypotheses, but are building themes through a close, fluid examination of the data set and relevant knowledge of theory. This was important for this project, as I realized when I compared what I thought was important before I conducted the analysis with what emerged through coding. Prior to assembling the comment sets described above, I generated “thematic codes” that, based on my review of the literature and knowledge of the field, I suspected would be important parts of my analysis. Thematic codes follow the literary definition of a theme: “a salient abstract idea that emerges from a literary work’s treatment of its subject-matter, or a topic recurring in number...emerging indirectly.”^{lxx} The themes I began with included references to race, skin tone, sexual orientation, and sexual acts. Of these, only the code for sexual acts turned out to have salience. Further, I discovered that content-based themes like these were not the only points of interest in the data; the type of sentence and the referent of the comment emerged as distinct points of analysis as well. Thus, in using grounded theory, I generated a total of twenty-three codes, separated into three types: *thematic*, *sentence type*, and *referent codes*. I describe these three types in more detail in what follows.

My *thematic codes* of Instagram post comments include, but are not limited to, references to money, clothing, sexual acts, motherhood and children, and socioeconomic

status. In coding *sentence type*, I delineated among questions, exclamations, declarations, and imperatives. Interrogative questions were coded on the basis of a question mark and/or the presence of words such as ‘why’, ‘how’, ‘when’, and ‘where’. If a comment includes one and not the other, it was still coded as interrogative. I coded each comment with as many sentence types as it contains. For instance, exclamatory sentences such as “Damn!” are often followed with declarative sentences such as “I love you,” or sometimes imperative sentences such as, “Put on some clothes.” If a comment included all three, it was coded with all three sentence-type codes. *Referent codes* focus on whether the commenter used the words ‘she’ and ‘her’ rather than ‘you’ in order to denote their intended audience as either other commenters or the subject themselves. I explain the analytical significance of all of these codes in the data section that follows.

I coded the data sets by hand, sentence-by-sentence, using colors and shapes to denote a visible reference to each code. The process of coding was iterative, so that in conducting an entire pass through the first three subjects’ post comments, I generated codes toward the middle and end that I then went back to use in re-evaluating the beginning comments in the pass. For instance, I did not code Blac Chyna’s comments first, but when I approached her data set it became clear that references to animals were important so I searched the other subjects’ comments for such references as well. This allowed the comment sets to be coded individually while also allowing the opportunity for new codes to be created and applied to other data sets.

As stated before, this project began with three subjects: Amber Rose, Blac Chyna, and Cardi B. After the first pass through of coding, known as “open coding,”^{lxxi} and the creation of the first round of memos, which are analytic documents in which the

researcher catalogues “categories, properties, hypotheses, and generative questions that evolve from the analytical process”^{lxxii}, it became clear that there was a large discrepancy between the comments on Cardi B’s post and the comments on the other two subjects’. There was little overlap at all between the codes for Cardi B’s comments, which were predominantly codes for clothing and exclamatory sentences, and the other two subjects’ comments, which included more references to body parts, sexual acts, motherhood, and commands. Using the aforementioned technique of theoretical sampling, I identified another subject—Nicki Minaj—who is closer to Cardi B in career path and current endeavors. The working theory that the sample was meant to explore was that Cardi B’s rap career, lack of children, and lack of public relationships⁷ influenced the significantly different set of responses her post received from fans and critics.

At the onset of the second round of coding, known as “axial coding,”^{lxxiii} I reviewed the comments to determine which codes tended to coincide, both within each individual comments and within each subject’s set of comments, and what this might mean in a larger picture. While many grounded theorists seek to identify one underlying “story” that can be gleaned from a data set, I found the method useful for discovering multiple “stories” and code “families” within a set of data. In this way, my third and final round of coding, known as “selective coding”^{lxxiv} attempted to glean how codes that occurred together functioned as a unit, and how the underlying assumptions of each subject’s set of comments told a story of how different women are criticized and praised according to their proximity to and distance from certain contexts and themes.

⁷ At the time of the chosen post, Cardi B was not in a public relationship. There were rumors that she was dating a member of the rap group Migos, but these were not substantiated yet.

Limitations

In choosing a grounded theory approach for this project, I acknowledge both its strengths and weaknesses in relation to other potential methods. One of its greatest strengths, which may also be a weakness, is that there are no standard rules regarding what constitutes a code or code family. There is neither a set number of times a reference must exist to be labeled a code, nor a certain number of codes required to make a code family. Due to this, the analysis and coding can be quite subjective and almost impossible to replicate, which, in scientific fields, is the mark of a well-done project. For instance, while another researcher and I may both take note that only Blac Chyna's comment set includes references to animals, we may disagree on whether it is prevalent enough to be considered a code, or how it fits into a particular code family. For this reason, grounded theory could be used to substantiate hundreds of analyses from the same data set, with each analysis being determined by the areas of focus and lived experiences of the researchers. Personally, I do not view this as a limitation as I give much credence to Harding's work criticizing the academy's dependence upon male-rooted understandings of logic and objectivity. I believe that acknowledging the subjectivity of all researchers, as we all chose our research interests for a vested reason, is a step forward in the right direction of lessening our dependence upon objective research and replicable outcomes. I believe grounded theory is a useful tool to do so. Some may agree, as grounded theory is slowly being seen in fields in which quantitative methods have previously held a foothold such as medical research.

One of the limitations of this project is the unpredictability of Instagram's comment tracking system. In the summer of 2016, Instagram unveiled a comment filter

that allowed both celebrities and regular users alike the ability to filter out comments containing specified words and phrases.^{lxxv} The filter does not actually inhibit posting of these comments, but rather hides the comment from view. In this way, the count of comments displayed under each Instagram post can be misleading due to the filtered comment's inaccessibility. Each user can manually define words they would like filtered out, as well as having the option of an automatic filter that. According to Instagram, the filter automatically hides comments that may be offensive from your posts.^{lxxvi} As Instagram does not define the set of words and phrases it filters automatically, and users can manually input any combination or list, there are any number of variations and combinations of words and phrases that may not be showing within the data sets. While I fully support the usage of these filters to minimize cyberbullying and the triggering of viewers, it creates an analytical conundrum when the most derogatory comments may also provide much insight to the coding process in a project like this. It is still unclear whether the user that created the filter can see all comments including those filtered. If so, then the ideal form of this project would be on a larger scale (all comments on a variety of posts per subject) with a completely unfiltered set of comments from which to pull a data set. These would be done as a joint undertaking with the subject, which would therefore be an example of participatory action research. Since this project is unable to extend that far, the analysis here is, by definition, conservative. Without the unfiltered comments, there is no way to determine the extent of the ways in which the commenters interact with the subjects, especially in the negative.

Another limitation of the data set stems from the design of Instagram as a platform, where comments are not date-coded and are only shown with the most recent at

the bottom of the list. Because of this, one is never sure if the ‘most recent’ comments actually came from around the time the photo was posted.⁸ A longitudinal study of the comments may have provided for a different perspective and analysis that grounded theory cannot account for.

In what follows, I discuss two of the code families that emerged from my coding and analysis: ‘Bodily Motherhood’ which includes codes for motherhood, pregnancy, weight gain and loss, and references to body parts, and ‘Othering and Affiliating’ which includes the *referent codes* and the codes for commands, clothing, and class. Within the Bodily Motherhood code family, I found that all four subjects exist as African American women that could be associated with the jezebel stereotype, but that the commenters’ responses to this association varied according to the subjects’ proximity to motherhood. Within the Othering and Affiliating code family, I found that while all four subjects attempted an undertaking Harvey and Gill call sexual entrepreneurship, not all were successful, and subjects were both Othered for this endeavor or Affiliated with as a method of creating closeness.

^{lix} Kathy Charmaz and Liska Belgrave. "Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis." *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* 2, no. 2002 (2002): 155.

^{lx} Ibid, 158.

^{lxi} Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications, 1998): 201.

^{lxii} Shannon Greenwood, Andrew Perrin, and Maeve Duggan, “Social Media Update 2016,” Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, November 11, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/>.

^{lxiii} Ibid

^{lxiv} Ibid

^{lxv} Ibid

⁸ One example of this comes from the comments to Nicki Minaj’s post. The photo was posted on November 3, 2016, but within the comments we see fans telling Nicki “Happy Birthday.” As Nicki’s birthday is on December 8, it is clear that the comments left are from a variety of time periods, and may not be indicative of the context or ordering of the original posting. I believe the comments still to be indicative of feelings towards and about Nicki as a whole, since fans had to scroll through a month’s worth of Instagram posts to show their devotion with a “Happy Birthday” comment, but it is a prime example of how without date-stamped comments, one may get a slightly skewed data set.

^{lxvi} Angela White [@blacchyna]. Instagram post. January 25, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BPsF4T-hQOV/?taken-by=blacchyna>

^{lxvii} Amber Levonchuck [@amberrose]. Instagram post. December 16, 2016.

https://www.instagram.com/p/BOGf5_nDxD/?taken-by=amberrose

^{lxviii} Onika Maraj [@nickiminaj]. Instagram post. November 3, 2016.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BMXJzRSjQxj/?taken-by=nickiminaj>

^{lxix} Belcalis Almanzar [@iamcardib]. Instagram post. December 23, 2016.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BOXU6SuBjd2/?taken-by=iamcardib>

^{lxx} Chris Baldick. *The Oxford dictionary of literary terms* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

^{lxxi} Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

^{lxxii} Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin "Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons and evaluative criteria." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 19, no. 6 (1990): 418-427.

^{lxxiii} *Ibid.*

^{lxxiv} *Ibid.*

^{lxxv} Hayley Tsukayama, "Instagram Rolls Out Its Comment Filter to Everyone," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2016, sec. The Switch, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2016/09/12/instagram-rolls-out-its-comment-filter-to-everyone/>.

^{lxxvi} Kevin Systrom, "Keeping Comments Safe On Instagram," Instagram Blog, <http://blog.instagram.com/post/150312324357/160912-news>.

Bodily Motherhood

Collins's new racism hinges upon an intersectional and systematic view of racism. Racism does not just function as a social issue, nor a purely sociopolitical pursuit; instead, racism is multifaceted with numerous goals, methods, and benchmarks of progress. One of these goals is to exploit any and all social and labor production from people of color while simultaneously granting less social and political citizenship to this group of people so that the beneficiaries of racism may enjoy the spoils of a heterogenous society without acknowledging society as such. It is my argument within this section of analysis that the relegation of Black female celebrities to the stereotype of the jezebel is a tool of Collins' capitalistic new racism in that it functions to undermine any other productive aspects of the lives of the relegated woman, be it social or labor production. In the case of the subjects within this project, their production can be quantified as music, albums, images, concerts, etc. but also non-quantifiable social production such as the invention of slang terms, the support of social movements, and their labor as mothers, girlfriends, wives, daughters, sisters, and women. In moments such as pregnancy and motherhood, when these celebrities approach the ideals of womanhood: motherhood, child-rearing, etc. their association with the jezebel stereotype supersedes the claim to (the assumed) respect associated with non-jezebel mothers. The subjects who do not yet have children were rewarded with a space of idealized motherhood in which fans look to them as motherly role models even if they are also relegated to the jezebel status.

All four subjects exist as African American women who have been affiliated with the archetype of jezebel, but it is at the nexus of the codes about motherhood, bodies, and weight that we find society's acknowledgement of these women's motherhood is either

rooted in acknowledging the bodily aspect of sex, pregnancy, and their after effects or asking for the physical effects of pregnancy and childbirth to be erased. Even in demanding moral change in actions, the commenters tie the request to both the mother and child's bodies. The comment sets for Amber Rose and Blac Chyna are set apart from the other two subjects not just because of the presence of references to motherhood, children, and pregnancy, but also references to weight and body parts. These references do not always happen in the same comment, but as they are rarely present in the comments left on the posts of Nicki Minaj and Cardi B, it is important to analyze how these references interact with each other and the subjects, and what this convergence means. References to the subjects' bodies, weight gain, weight loss, pregnancy, and motherhood tie together to acknowledge that the subjects exist as mothers, but not in the way society deems appropriate or normal; and if the commenters must acknowledge their status as mothers, they will do so while calling for the physical signifiers of motherhood to be erased. The subjects' sexuality and bodies are so close to the commenters' understandings of their being that they dominate how the commenter engages with the fact of their motherhood. In the case of the subjects that are not mothers, references to their bodies are slightly more sanitized and focus on autonomy, even when the comments have a foundation of a sexual nature. In this way, Collins's reading of the jezebel image and how it moves within mass media can be expanded to encompass the moments in which the relegation to the jezebel stereotype is more forceful for fear of losing the grip of the image altogether.

Jezebel

First and foremost, I make the claim that all four subjects have been associated with the jezebel stereotype, though individual aspects of their lives and backgrounds influence how this association is characterized. In the simplest form, the jezebel stereotype pushes upon African American women characteristics such as lasciviousness, promiscuity, and paints them as always consenting, and always physically ready and available for sexual encounters. It is assumed that jezebels are purposely or by nature disregarding society's ideals of virtue, purity, and abstinence through willing and abundant sexual encounters. Within all four comment sets, people comment on sexual acts and the subjects' body parts, for example the "You make me come on myself" comment discussed in the introduction. Interspersed within and around comments concerning motherhood and pregnancy, Chyna and Rose's comment sets also show many references to individual body parts, such as toes, skin, hair, and breasts. Ranging from hair to toes, commenters voiced their opinions on the subjects' bodies in various ways, including sexual, non-sexual, pejorative, and praising. For instance, Blac Chyna and Amber Rose received comments ranging from "Ashy feet" to "Don't cover your stomach honey let it all hang out", "I love your nipple" and "I wanna titty fuck you." As can be seen, the tone of these comments varies, but the nature does not: the commenters are associating the subjects' image and existence with sex and their bodies in a way that removes individual personality, background, and agency and promotes a jezebel-like image.

Within Amber Rose's comment set, we see the extreme sexualization of her body and how commenters engage with her image. As a selfie, Amber Rose's post only shows

the upper half of her body, with focus on her face. In the photo, we see Amber wearing a black lace top with a deep V-cut neckline. Most of the comments that reference her body do so sexually, with one user even going so far as to offer a play-by-play account of how they are masturbating to Rose's image:

“I love to bust hot cum to you so much. I love u make me cum. I'm going to cum baby it feels so good. You make my stroke my dick so hard. I'm going to bust hot cum.”

Rose has not invited this commenter to share their sexual fantasies, nor did she respond to the comment. By posting this comment, the commenter worked to push onto Rose a status as a sexualized Object. In doing so, the commenter completely disregarded concepts of consent in a move reminiscent of rape fantasies, as discussed by Erin Chapman.

As stated before, the jezebel stereotype works to paint Black women as always consenting and physically ready for sexual encounters. In this way, the jezebel stereotype was cited during historical (and often in the current) rapes of Black women to remove guilt from the rapist. Ann Ducille discusses the idea of the “always-already-sexual” image of Black women within both blues music and literature from the early 1900s within her work titled “Blues Notes on Black Sexuality: Sex and the Texts of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen.”^{lxxvii} Taking Ducille's discussion into account alongside Erin Chapman's chapter Rape Fantasies and Other Assaults, within *Black Female Sexualities*, we find a pattern of downplaying of sexual assault of Black women through the usage of the always-already-sexual image.

While a play-by-play of masturbation may not be widely considered to be sexual assault or rape, the comment and the user's belief they had the right to engage with an image of a woman (pointedly not even the woman herself, meaning he feels he has rights not only to the physical but all iterations of her image) are a sexual violation. By nature, this comment is an example of a rape fantasy, similar to the theory analyzed within Chapman's work. "At their worst, rape fantasies can be precisely what the term implies – plots and images through which sexual violence is presented as erotic and desired by both the on-screen victim and, ultimately, the viewing audience."^{lxxviii} By removing the possibility of consent, engaging sexually with Rose's image, and doing so with the sole purpose of advertising and propagating their own pleasure, this commenter is engaging with a rape fantasy involving Amber Rose and advertising the fantasy publicly.

Rose's lived experience as an African American mother, ex-stripper⁹, and current activist influences the ways commenters engage with her photo; her lived experiences are also intersectional, and this example shows how the jezebel stereotype clouds the way in which people interact with her image and personhood. It is important to note here that a Black female celebrity who has openly spoken out against sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape, to have a form of consent taken away from her is doubly meaningful and disturbing.

While this comment may be the most egregious within the comment lists, it is not the only one of its nature. Out of the four subjects, three have comments that reference sexual acts that are commands. Blac Chyna is the fourth, with only one command that

⁹ It is important to note that three of our four subjects have pasts as exotic dancers, and this undoubtedly contributes to their association with the jezebel stereotype, even though none of the data sets show direct references to exotic dancing, strip clubs, or anything else associated with these pasts.

concerns sex: “Have my baby next.” Compared to “get naughty with me fuck my penis off” within Cardi B’s comments, “Spread them legs open girl” within Nicki Minaj’s comments, and “Lemme suck it bitch” within Amber Rose’s comments, Chyna’s lone semi-sexual command seems to fall short when scaled against the previously discussed comment left on Amber Rose’s post. Chyna’s regulation to jezebel can be seen in a different manner: the sexualization of her role as a mother.

Pregnancy as Point at Intersection

Through the association of race, gender, and sexual nonconformity via the jezebel stereotype, African American women are denied social citizenship while providing social labor and production. When these women show traditional ideas of womanhood: motherhood, caring for children, etc. society is faced with a conundrum in which they must award social or political citizenship or find another way to relegate them to their surplus status. One of the moments of rupture is birth, when a woman transitions to being a mother of a visible child. At this moment, society must do work to deny her the normal praise and acknowledgement that comes with motherhood and other ideals of womanhood, this is done through reinforcing her association with the jezebel stereotype. We can see this in the data sets of Blac Chyna and Amber Rose, as they are the only two subjects that have children or have had a pregnancy since their time in the spotlight. This also explains why Blac Chyna has more comments concerning both motherhood and weight than Amber Rose: Blac Chyna was only two months removed from childbirth and therefore closer to the moment of rupture in which her role as a mother had to be relegated to a role as a sexualized/jezebel mother.

Rosenthal and Lobel viewed pregnancy as a point of intersection a la intersectional theory rather than viewing pregnancy through the stereotypes that exist at intersections, as this study attempts to do. While this may seem to be a semantic difference, it is quite important. In the context of this study, I am not proposing that pregnancy functions as an aspect of identity alongside race, gender, religion, etc. as a point of intersection, but rather that the archetypes that are constructed and maintained at the intersection of race and gender affect how we view and respond to pregnancy among women, and in this particular case, African American women's interaction with the jezebel archetype and pregnancy. Pregnancy as a point of identity formation has merit, but I would argue that as it is a transitory state, between the identity aspects of non-mother and mother, it does not function the same as an intrinsic identity aspect such as race or gender. For instance, we differentiate between pregnancy and motherhood and tend to view one as the path to the other, but do not look at pregnancy as a defining component of a woman's identity alongside race or gender *unless she is pregnant at the moment of discussion*. After the pregnancy is over, a woman is viewed as a mother, not as a formerly pregnant woman. As discussed within the literature review, just as an individual may live a raced and gendered lived experience, their engagements with oppression are both raced and gendered. Pregnancy does not function as such. As a supposed symptom of womanhood, there are politics and policies surrounding the status of pregnancy but there is not an oppressive system that focuses solely on pregnancy. Rather, there are sexist systems that oppress women, who are the assumed pregnant bodies.

I use the motherhood code to denote any references to children, motherhood, and pregnancy within Chyna and Rose's set of comments. For instance, in Rose's comments, we see a comment that states, "U have a son by the time he is 9 he will be showing dick pics so delete this for ur sons future." This comment connects Rose's current (supposed) deviant actions to her son's future, further enforcing the idea that a jezebel cannot be an appropriate and good mother. In Chyna's set, we see a similar comment: "It's good to be a mom and a ***** right? Embarrassed for you." While we may never know what word was meant to replace the asterisks above, it is important to note their presence and acknowledge that the word the commenter wanted to use was deemed so inappropriate (by their standards) that it was too vile to type, but just vile enough to be used to describe Chyna. As can be seen, a striking aspect of this code within these comment sets is its pejorative nature. This type of moral condemnation is not rare within the data set, as perceived superiority is the foundation of insults, which these comment sets are full of. This comment also shows us that the commenter views being a mom and the negative word they called Chyna as being intrinsically opposite of each other, or at the very least not belonging together. In this way, this comment exhibits societal thought that a supposed jezebel's sexual nature is the antithesis to proper motherhood and its ideals.

In addition to the above comments referencing motherhood, Chyna's comment set was home to many commenters inquiring whether, and sometimes stating that, she was pregnant with another child. Comments such as "Another baby bump!???" and "She look pregnant" tie the commenters' understanding of pregnancy to the visible signs of change in a mother's body, which is not abnormal. What makes it relevant to this project is how the same acknowledgement of Chyna's body and possible body changes comes through

in commands for her to lose weight. Comments concerning Chyna's weight mostly concern her need to lose weight or call pejorative attention to her current weight: "Overweight!!! Try to loose some weight before taking pictures!!!" and "I gonna eat like a pig (pig emoji) to be like her!!!" It is clear these comments call for the alteration of Chyna's body; but as stated before, it is also Chyna's body which points to her status as a mother and recent bearer of a child. In this way, the commands and statements which call for Chyna to lose her "baby weight" are also calling for her to lose the bodily signifier that she is a mother. Such erasure would allow commenters to engage with Chyna's body as it was pre-baby, when she was not such a visible mother.¹⁰

It is important to note that even comments that are more supportive of Chyna and her body still follow the pattern listed above, in which Chyna's motherhood is tied to her body, and the general understanding is that her body should revert into what it looked like before the child and before the public had to acknowledge the pregnancy. "Beautiful but revenge body needed" and "Lovely new mommy" both approach Chyna's body in slightly different but linked ways. "Beautiful but revenge body needed" points to "hollywood's obsession with a snap back" as another commenter calls it. In recent years, 'snap back' has been used to denote how recent celebrity mothers work out, diet, exercise, and some say go under the knife to get their bodies back to their before-pregnancy image. It has become somewhat of a cultural requirement that celebrity women 'snap back' in a short amount of time. Shannon Trice-Black's study *Perceptions of Women's Sexuality Within the Context of Motherhood* touches on this cultural phenomenon. Her research subjects mention the pressure of the snap-back body but do

¹⁰ I make a point here to not say "when she was not a mother" because this was not Chyna's first child.

not name it in that way. “Media images of stars such as Nicole Kidman and Halle Berry, looking young, thin, and shapely only weeks after giving birth are unrealistic images that are presented in tabloid magazines. ...The inability to achieve unrealistic expectations of motherhood can lead to negative feelings such as disappointment, frustration, and sadness.”^{lxxix} In the case of Chyna, her commenters’ urgings for her previous body function both as a symptom of this trend and as an indicator of how they view weight, her body, and motherhood.

When a woman is told to lose her ‘baby weight’, the speaker is assuming sole reason for weight gain is due to the pregnancy and therefore now that the baby has been born, the weight should leave her body as well. I have endeavored to show that in the case of Blac Chyna, this is done to regulate her body and weight with the goal of the jezebel physical standard: slim, youthful, and bearing no sign of motherhood or anything other than carnal instigation. This does not provide room for these women to appreciate their new bodies and how they signify their status as mothers, instead forcing them to push their bodies back into an easily consumable image: that of a model or actor ready to entertain the world, or even more solemn, the image of a sexualized woman ready to entertain with her body and image. The comment “lovely new mommy” follows a similar path. While a compliment and seemingly supportive of Chyna’s look in the photo, the comment still ties her image and body to her status as a mother. There is an understanding that this is neither the pre-pregnancy Chyna nor post-snap back Chyna, she is a ‘new mommy’ and therefore somewhere in between, in a state of transition and flux. As in the comment that inspired the title of this work, “ Can’t teach an old hoe new

tricks”, the commenters are committed to relegating Chyna and Rose to jezebel status and have convinced themselves that these women will never be anything beyond jezebels.

Ideals of Motherhood

While Amber Rose and Blac Chyna are the only two subjects that have children, their comment sets are not the only ones to have references to motherhood. As Minaj does not have any children, these references have a significantly different context than how they appear within the other two data sets. These comments functioned differently and coincided with trends different from the ones within Rose or Chyna’s comment sets, which created an interesting image. The comments followed a pattern: “mom follow me back,” “mom are u coming to berlin some day?”, and “werk mom.” Minaj is always explicitly called ‘mom’, and there are no other discernable references to motherhood, children, or pregnancy throughout the comments left on her post. The commenters place themselves as Minaj’s children and make requests or give compliments. The word ‘mom’ is the only designation of motherhood used; meaning that the commenters never call Minaj ‘mommy’, ‘ma’, or ‘mother’. I believe this to be an indication of a social trend rather than a pejorative or praising acknowledgement of Minaj a la jezebel motherhood, as Minaj does not have any children, nor has she had a public pregnancy in her time in the entertainment industry.

This association of Minaj with the term ‘mom’ is less an association of Minaj with motherhood or children, but rather an association of Minaj with a position of respect. Another commenter called Minaj their “role model” a designation not found in

any of the other comment sets just as ‘mom’ is also absent in them. These two aspects coincide to paint a picture of a different kind of motherhood: the idealized version. By not being a Black mother, Nicki Minaj has not pushed her fans and commenters to the same moment of rupture that Chyna’s pregnancy caused her. Minaj is a Black female celebrity who has not required society to reconcile her body, supposed sexual nature, and motherhood; therefore, her fans and commenters can associate her with the ideal image of a mother, ignoring the inevitable rupture when Minaj’s sexual lyrics, enhanced body, and any other jezebel-like characteristic conflict with a more traditionally respected state of being or aspect. I say inevitable only because if it is not pregnancy, it could be marriage or another social construction that does not align with the jezebel stereotype, not because pregnancy is inevitable or the final accomplishment for women. The lack of this respectful mom reference in Cardi B’s comments can be attributed to how new her presence is within the music industry. I believe that due to Cardi’s past as a stripper, if she is ever met with a rupture such as pregnancy, the responses will be quite similar to the ones analyzed earlier from Chyna and Rose’s comment sets.

In conclusion, the raced and gendered experiences of Black women are intersectional both in their creation and in the forms of oppression they reflect. One of the ways this oppression functions is through stereotypes that influence how society engages with the bodies of Black women. The jezebel stereotype reduces Black women to sexual beings with little to no regard for the aspects of their personality, history, and present endeavors that do not revolve around sex or their bodies. When these “jezebels” become mothers, society refuses to allow them full social citizenship through their role as mothers, which are normally idealized as respectable women who are married and not

normally hypersexualized. The closer the subject is chronologically to the moment of childbirth, which can be seen as the initial moment of motherhood, the more society works against the mother's image and body, to push her to erase the physical representations of motherhood such as weight gain and therefore revert her body to the sexualized/jezebel image they associate with the now mother. How these commenters view pregnancy and motherhood is clouded and directly influenced by their understanding of the pregnant woman/mother as a jezebel. For the subjects who are not mothers, references to motherhood are rooted in respect and non-sexual themes, almost as if the carrot of respectability is being dangled in the subject's face. This carrot will be sure to disappear if the ideals of motherhood come too close to their reality

^{lxxvii} Ann Ducille, "Blues Notes on Black Sexuality: Sex and the Texts of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 3 (1993): 418-44

^{lxxviii} Erin Chapman, "Rape Fantasies and Other Assaults: Black Women's Sexuality and Racial Redemption on Film," in *Black Female Sexualities*, ed. Trimiko Melancon and Joanne M. Braxton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 143.

^{lxxix} Shannon Trice-Black, "Perceptions of Women's Sexuality within the Context of Motherhood," *The Family Journal* 18, no. 2 (April 2010): 160.

Othering and Affiliating

It is impossible to analyze the data set and be ignorant of the obvious usage of Othering alongside the jezebel stereotype. At its root, the jezebel stereotype is its own version of Othering, one in which the physical and assumed moral characteristics of a group are maligned to show fealty to society's standards of virtue, purity, chastity, etc. What I was not expecting within this project was such Othering rooted in grammar, and without any references to race. Another surprise was how many commenters were doing the *opposite* of Othering. It became imperative to figure out why and how this trend within the data came to be.

Using the concept of Othering, I will analyze a second code family which consists of the referent code and the codes for commands, clothing and class. While creating the code families, it became clear one needed to be created to analyze, with an analytical emphasis on Othering, the trend of a stark division of comments' contexts and occurrence. The previous analysis focuses on how an intersectional trope functions in the lives of the subjects, i.e. how Black female celebrities' recent pregnancies can affect how commenters interact with the jezebel stereotype. This analysis will analyze the comments through a look to theories of Othering, sexual entrepreneurship, and hip-hop's historical and present ties to class and sexualization of Black women.

The Othering and Affiliation code family was created due to forms of address in the comments occurring in stark, patterned ways. For instance, the referent code references whether the commenter used 'she' or 'you' to denote how the comment was being directed, either towards viewers or towards the subject of the post themselves. The

comment sets of Nicki Minaj and Cardi B had an overwhelmingly large amount of commenters that spoke to the subjects directly, while Amber Rose and Blac Chyna's set had higher instances of commenters speaking *about* them. For example, Cardi B and Nicki Minaj had many comments directly referencing them such as "I love *you*" or "*You* need to come get you a REAL one." In contrast, Blac Chyna and Amber Rose's comments included many phrases along the lines of "*She* must have..." or usage of their name such as "*Amber* still scared to sit on my face tho" (emphasis added).

This trend can also be seen in the contextual use of certain references/codes. For instance, within Cardi B and Nicki Minaj's data sets, being ghetto or a 'hoodrat' was considered a positive characteristic or a sign of someone from a low-income setting making it to the top, such as in comments like "Loving the WAY you are a real HOODRAT WOMAN." Whereas within Blac Chyna's comment set similar words were used as insults and attempts to malign her character: "Ghetto filth" and "Ghetto pig" being just a couple examples.

This analysis section's focus on class will be informed mostly by Collins's work with classed images and dynamics within *Black Sexual Politics*. According to Collins, the moral codes adopted at the rise of respectability politics were intrinsically impossible for poor and working class Black women to abide by. Due to this, there became a classed understanding of morality, with middle class Black people holding the moral barometer as well as the money and time to ensure they fell within its measure. Our subjects' perceived income and class status (monetary and moral) directly influence what others expect of them, think of them, and act towards them. This can be seen in the data set. What will be analyzed later is how hip-hop is a space in which the rags to riches storyline

holds weight and preference, and therefore the hip-hop artists in this study can benefit from such a narrative. The subjects that are not directly involved with hip-hop are associated with the immorality of the poor and working class, no matter their current income.

This code family was created from the codes that follow a pattern of stark difference in application or appearance within two sets of comment sets; set one is Nicki Minaj and Cardi B and set two is Amber Rose and Blac Chyna. It is my argument that while many Black women attempt to utilize sexual entrepreneurship as a method of achieving monetary and social wealth and influence, hip-hop is an industry within which this becomes a real possibility; unfortunately, the jezebel stereotype and class stigmas work alongside this entrepreneurship and influence the success or failure of the women engaging in this endeavor.

I believe that the subjects of our study are sexual entrepreneurs in a manner entirely different from the form seen in Harvey and Gill's analysis of *The Sex Inspectors*. Instead, these women are attempting to turn the tides of the forced sexualization society pushes upon them via a labor-based use of their sexualized images to create notoriety and recognition. Most notably, though their sexualized images are influenced by society, their decision to use them for personal gain is revolutionary, dangerous, and thought-provoking.

I would like to push Harvey and Gill's characterization further and use the terms sex entrepreneur and sex entrepreneurship to discuss how the women within this project utilize their sexuality as a commodity to bolster their fame within their respective industries. In this way, the term 'sexual entrepreneur' provides more agency than within

Harvey and Gill's analysis, as the women are neither being forced nor coerced, but are rather choosing this form of entrepreneurship to bolster their standing in our racially and sexually capitalistic society. While it is true that society has conditioned women to trade images and examples of their sexuality for acceptance, there is a large difference between the context and audience of *The Sex Inspectors'* couples and the more public exchange that occurs with celebrities. While assuming society has input ideas of sex as commodity into the minds of most of its inhabitants, it is still important to point out how only some of those inhabitants decide to engage with the trade of sexual image. In fact, Harvey states "Western societies [have become] saturated by sexual representations and discourses."^{lxxx} This further proves the point that we must view society and the actions taken therein through a lens of over-sexualization in all spheres and forms and view decisions taken on a different scale of agency and entrepreneurship. It is just as much an exercise of agency to utilize a sexualized image as it is to not use one.

Hooks' take on this historical and modern trend of self-commodification or the willing commodification of sex still erases some of the agency represented in Jackson's theory of scripting; agency that I hope to represent here. 'Sex sells' is a widely used phrase, but we should expand our understanding to encompass what is being sold, who is doing the selling, and who is buying. In the case of the four subjects of this study, the *idea* or *allure* of having sex with them is what is being publicly traded, a far cry from the case in Harvey and Gill's analysis in which the act and the assumed skill level and compatibility with a partner are being commodified. This self-commodification is also markedly different than the "Bad Bitch" image that Collins analyzes within *Black Sexual Politics*. The Bad Bitch "puts her looks, sexuality, intellect, and/or aggression in service

to African American communities.”^{lxxxii} While one can make the claim that the social and labor production of these four artists, mothers, and women are a form of service to the African American community, the effort would be better put towards analyzing what it means to the images described above if these women are capitalizing on their image, sexuality, and intellect *purely for their own pleasure*. Instead of requiring Black women to be in service to a man or community to validate their sexual entrepreneurship and the agency of using their own image, we can instead analyze what it means for these women to acknowledge their own power and ability and to use it for their own gains.

Fans of the four subjects are not buying the opportunity to sexually engage with the stars or test out their willingness and sexual expertise when they click ‘like’ on an Instagram photo or buy an album or mixtape. Instead, they are buying into an image intended to create revenue, social power, and agency. What is missing from hooks’s, Harvey and Gill’s, and Collins’s analyses is the acknowledgement that while the hypersexualization of African American women is historical and pernicious, those same women sometime can use such a trope to their advantage and are fully cognizant of doing so. To assume that Black female celebrities are not aware of their sexy images or do not purposefully create their image within the public sphere is to do a disservice to their intellect and agency. These women have effectively taken a cultural practice meant to degrade them and instead made money. While their financial gain does not erase the negative experiences that surely come with being a sexualized woman of color (as we can see in previously discussed comments), their monetary gain does show that sexual entrepreneurship can be a boon for women of color in certain industries and should be recognized as an exercise of agency and societal pressure equally.

I would argue that through acknowledgement and support of their pasts as exotic dancers (Cardi B, Amber Rose, and Blac Chyna), participation in activism such as Amber Rose's Slut Walk (which Blac Chyna has been supportive of since its inception), and their usage of generally sexy images online and in print, all four of the subjects of this project engage in sexual entrepreneurship even though only two of them are rappers and/or associated directly with hip-hop. Through an analysis of the comments left on their posts, we can see how their audiences reacted to this usage and what this may say about the limits of sexual entrepreneurship as a project of self-actualization, labor, etc.

About vs. To

If we first analyze the referent code, the usage of 'she' or 'her' as opposed to 'you' places the subject of the post in an objective focus. It is Othering reminiscent to Fanon's "Look a Negro!"; in both cases the commenter separates themselves from someone else by speaking *about* them and their status as Other rather than *to* them. In pointing out perceived physical flaws and class differences via speaking about a subject, the commenter attempts to make them into an object of the discourse. Usage of 'she' and 'her', which I will call indirect references, appear within the comment sets of Amber Rose and Blac Chyna in much higher numbers than the comment sets of Nicki Minaj and Cardi B. "I would do anything to have sex with her" and "She still look pregnant and her face complexion don't match her legs" are examples of indirect reference in Rose's and Chyna's comment sets respectively. In contrast, "Nicki you poppin'," "I love you", and "Love the way you looking" are typical of the forms of address in Nicki Minaj and Cardi B's comments. While Rose and Chyna's sets did have instances of the code for being

spoken to, or direct reference, I focus here on the more prevalent pattern of being spoken about.

As discussed in the introduction, instances of Othering are intended to serve primarily one purpose: to distinguish the speaker or actor from the Othered object as an act of self-separation and distancing. In discussing having sex with Amber Rose without speaking to Amber Rose, the commenter is pushing upon Rose the status of sexual object rather than sexual entrepreneur or engaged participant. In Harvey and Gill's theory of sexual entrepreneurship, the woman who commodifies her sexuality does so to impress her current partner or gain a new partner. To engage with the commodified sexuality but ignore the humanity of the entrepreneur is to Other the person and consume the sexualized image. The comment stated above, "I would do anything to have sex with her" is not intended to be read or seen by Rose, but rather to be seen by other commenters that would also like to have sex with Rose. The commenter is aligning themselves with a group that would like to tap into Rose's assumed sexual prowess without engaging with her humanity and subjectivity. In Chyna's case, we see a statement about her image and body: "She still look pregnant and her face complexion don't match her legs." This comment is distinctly non-sexual, unlike the comment left on Rose's post. As discussed in the previous chapter, Chyna's status as a mother makes for varied responses to her body, mostly negative, within her comment set. In this case, the commenter is disparaging her makeup or the retouching of the photo by stating that Chyna's face doesn't match her legs (the fact that this is normal doesn't seem to occur to the commenter). While this may not be as stereotypical an act of Othering, nor as blatant as the comment left on Rose's post, the combination of disparaging remark and usage of

‘she’ is allowing the commenter to negatively appraise Chyna’s appearance knowing that it is unlikely that Chyna will speak back on her own behalf. Just as in the previously discussed comment, the comment is not meant to be read by the subject, but rather by other commenters that are assumed to hold an opinion. This type of comment helps turn the comment section into a space to objectify the subject of the post, while depending upon the unlikelihood of the subject responding. While the discussion is *about* these four women, it does not include them.

This is a side effect of the intersection of the jezebel stereotype and motherhood discussed in the previous section. For Blac Chyna and Amber Rose, their status as mothers forces society to more harshly relegate them to the jezebel stereotype than others. This same dynamic affects their form of and involvement with sexual entrepreneurship. Both women were exotic dancers in their youth, as was Cardi B. All three women have made comments that they are not ashamed of their pasts as exotic dancers and work to embrace it. Why then is there such a difference in how society engages with these pasts? The answer could reside in motherhood or also within the harsh relegation mentioned before. As commenters work to relegate Rose and Chyna to a jezebel status in response to their motherhood, they cannot acknowledge that they have reclaimed their sexualized images in any way, especially one that positively influences their lives. To do so would be to topple the jezebel trope and acknowledge sexual imagination as a labor force commodity capable of creating positive social and monetary gain for those who participate in it. This would undermine the commenters’ efforts to push upon the two subjects the trope of the jezebel as a method to reinforce their status as existentially surplus.

It is important also to note here the efforts of Rose and Chyna, but Amber Rose specifically, outside of the hip-hop industry to change the dynamic of society's sexualization and engagement with women. Amber Rose's campaign of yearly 'slut walks' across the United States have the expressed purpose of "...raising awareness about sexual injustice and gender inequality. The Amber Rose SlutWalk aims to impact and uplift, while shifting the paradigm of rape culture."^{lxxxii} Since its inception, Rose's Slut Walk campaign has garnered huge support. As one of Rose's best friends, Chyna has attended most of the rallies and even wore matching outfits, emblazoned with sexual insults such as ho and slut to an awards show in 2015 with Amber Rose by her side.^{lxxxiii} This campaign is an obvious slap in the face to the foundation of the jezebel and is most assuredly also a reason for the commenters' forceful reinforcement of the jezebel trope and the barring of Rose and Chyna from a space of successful sexual entrepreneur.

How do we denote what successful sexual entrepreneurship is? Cardi B and Nicki Minaj may be the examples we are looking for, and their involvement within hip-hop is what made this possible. Within the comment sets of Nicki Minaj and Cardi B, most comments that include a reference code are speaking directly to the subject. By using 'you' the commenters' contribute to an open dynamic rooted in subjectivity of the subject of the post. "I love everything about you Nicki" & "I love you. Keep doing what you're doing. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year" are great examples of how Minaj and Cardi are heralded by commenters as worthy of praise and direct acknowledgement. There are, of course, comments that use the direct reference that are still disparaging or highly sexualized, such as "I wanna stretch u out with this dick" or "fuck you bitch" within Cardi and Nicki's comment sets, respectively. While these statements at face value

may seem little more than misogynistic sexual predation, they still afford Cardi and Nicki the opportunity to respond and interject if they choose. Also, one could say that they are written directly to the subject for the sole purpose of receiving a response, either negative or positive. This need for response validates their entry into sexual entrepreneurship in a way. It makes it obvious in comparison to the other subjects that the space created within the comment sections of Nicki and Cardi's posts are not entirely dependent upon the objectification of either woman.

An interesting linkage occurs between the comment sets that have majority direct references and a high number of commands. Within Minaj and Cardi's comment sets, the number of imperative sentence types is higher than the other two comment sets. In conjunction with the direct reference code, this points toward a high level of assumed familiarity on the part of the commenters. The commenters are acknowledging Cardi and Nicki as subjects and at the same time are pushing the boundaries of what that means regarding their familiarity with these subjects as well as their status as subjects. "nicki my love send me greeting" seems an innocuous phrase, except the commenter has demanded a response through a command. As stated before, sexual entrepreneurship must be discussed in terms of what is being traded, who is doing the selling, and who is buying. In the context of commands and direct responses, the commenters are trading acknowledgement of Nicki and Cardi as subjects for Affiliation.

Wealth & Affiliation

For the purposes of this project, the act of direct reference combined with the code for commands will be discussed as Affiliating, which functions as the direct opposite of

Othering. Affiliation is a way of associating oneself with those it is prudent or advantageous to do so through the acknowledgement of a Subject. Due to Nicki and Cardi's status as successful sexual entrepreneurs, meaning their sexuality is accepted and their business ventures are flourishing, many of their commenters speak to them not only as Subjects rather than objects, but as Subjects they would like to get close to, physically, emotionally, or through social media. A great example of this within the data sets are the numerous requests made to Nicki and Cardi: "mom follow me back", "Cardi I'm one of your biggest fans. Can you plzzz follow?", and "...Please come to my strip club ONCE." To have a celebrity following your profile would be a great boon to your popularity and social status and the same could be said for a celebrity's appearance at your club. To take this analysis a step further, to feel you can ask or demand a celebrity to follow you or physically be near you is a complicated venture. At once, it speaks to a status as Subject that is rooted still in sexual Objectivity. These commenters are trading acknowledgement (which they presume to be to the subject's advantage) with Affiliation (which is assumed to be to their advantage), but what happens when the subject does not 'hold up their end of the deal'? These commenters must know that requests or commands for sex such as "get naughty with me fuck my penis off" within Cardi's data set or "Spread them legs open girl" within Nicki's data set will not be heeded and will not increase their chances of sexual encounters with these celebrities. So why do they do it? The answer is unclear, but I believe it could be rooted in a reminder to these celebrities that they are still sexual objects, even when they are being acknowledged as Subjects. These commenters are at face value acknowledging the subject's humanity and status as non-Object or Subject, but they are still willing to rescind that status if the Subject deviates from certain behaviors or

understandings. Either way, these are not simple examples of sexually objectifying women, as there is a difference between doing so with an indirect reference to the subject and a direct reference. This difference must be acknowledged and analyzed.

To move away from the referent codes but to stay within the realm of Affiliation as a theory and practice within the data set, we will now discuss how references to clothing were used as a sign of wealth and Affiliation. Within all four separate comment sets, there are comments concerning the clothing worn by the subjects, but the content of those comments varies widely. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, this family code was created to examine the disparate differences in code occurrence and context among the data sets. This reference is no different.

Rose and Chyna do receive compliments on their clothing or makeup such as “What color and brand of lipstick is this? I love that shade!” and “That’s beautiful what u got on,” but only Cardi and Nicki received comments in which the clothing was related back to the commenter personally. For example, “I use to wear this for high school uniform” or “Wow I got that jacket from hubby we have mad of the same shit.” These are easily identifiable examples of Affiliation, as clothing has always been associated with socioeconomic status, especially within hip-hop and Black popular culture. According to Sharpley-Whiting, hip-hop “naturally expanded beyond its DJing, MCing, break dancing, and tagging origins. The hip-hop universe soon included fashion...”^{lxxxiv} The more expensive the clothing, the wealthier its wearer was assumed to be. One can still see this within today’s rap lyrics that discuss clothing, shoes, and makeup in an exclusive manner, such as Cardi B’s huge hit Bodak Yellow. “These is red bottoms, these is bloody shoes”^{lxxxv} references the wildly expensive brand Christian Louboutin, which most of

Cardi's fans probably cannot afford.¹¹ Cardi is also known for loving Balenciaga shoes, of which she has numerous pictures on her Instagram. Minaj's track Four Door Aventador describes her having adventurous sex in her Lamborghini.^{lxxxvi}

Within hip-hop, associations of monetary success with materialistic symbols are not limited to its female rappers, and this understanding of class comes into direct contact with the intersection of race and gender within the data sets. It seems clear references to clothing and the action of Affiliation within them are a sign of successful sexual entrepreneurship, as the commenters are not only acknowledging signs of wealth, but are also acknowledging that the clothing on a sexualized body, often clothing that makes them seem even sexier, as in Cardi B's post, is a boon to their image rather than a sign of jezebel status to be degraded. In complimenting the clothing of a sexualized body, and going so far as to wish you had such clothing or to acknowledge that you *share* the same clothing as a sexualized body, one is erasing some of the stigma placed on these women's bodies and declaring that they would like to share their status; something not done towards traditional jezebels. Some of this success can be contributed to Nicki and Cardi's placement within the hip-hop industry, as they are directly associated as rappers rather than peripherally associated (such as Amber and Chyna). According to Collins, "Black women's self-representation in rap results in complex, often contradictory and multifaceted depictions of Black womanhood."^{lxxxvii} Collins speaks to how rap can be an "important forum" for women, but I would like to push this even further to encompass a discussion about class differences in image. Collins's discussion of the Black Lady as the Black middle class woman's image does not take into consideration the Black female

¹¹ This song was not released at the time of the post being analyzed, but was #1 on the Billboard 100 chart at the time this analysis was written.

rappers she discusses here.^{lxxxviii} How then, can we determine how these Black female rappers have created their own sexualized and yet agency-filled image and career? The answer lies within something hip-hop holds dear: a rags to riches story.

Hip-hop depends on an artist or figures origins to deem them a success story. As mentioned above, the more expensive the clothing items the wealthier their wearer is assumed to be. For those that began life with humble beginnings, the response to their rise to wealth can be markedly different. For instance, both Blac Chyna and Cardi B have similar backgrounds (not wealthy, past employment as a stripper). Within Blac Chyna's comment set we find disparaging remarks calling her things like "Ghetto filth", "Ghetto pig!" and stating she has "no class." On the other side of the spectrum, Cardi B's references to class include "Loving the WAY you are a real HOODRAT WOMAN love that." Such marked difference for two women with similar pasts is indicative of aforementioned biases against and for these women and their class status and current endeavors. Cardi B is allowed to function within an almost purely hip-hop state; she is primarily a rap artist with a few other endorsements. This helps her venture into sexual entrepreneurship thrive and contributes to the associations of wealth and attire mentioned earlier: her fans want to wear the things she wears and point out similarities to Affiliate with her and any associations with a lower socioeconomic status are considered a boon to her personality and story. Unfortunately for Blac Chyna, her existence as a mother-jezebel is working against her as well as her non-direct affiliation with hip-hop. While she has dated (and been engaged to) rappers and other hip-hop figures, she is neither an artist, nor producer, nor in any other way directly affiliated with the hip-hop industry. Therefore, she is markedly exempt from the rags-to-riches storyline that hip-hop holds

dear. Hip-hop requires some association with ‘the hood’, motherhood does not. As mentioned before, this can be seen in how associations with lower class are considered a boon to those within hip-hop, but a character flaw to those that are not. Poor or working class Black women have historically and currently been shut out from the possibility of achieving a positive image for themselves. The biases working against Blac Chyna and for Cardi B are symptoms of this.

This analysis would be remiss if I did not point out that the way these women are responded to is inherently flawed and based on stereotypes and not their nuanced lived experiences. For instance, within sexual entrepreneurship wouldn’t the three subjects with pasts as exotic dancers all be considered successful in using ideas and understandings of their sexualities for acknowledgement and financial gain? That would be the logical progression of a society in which women’s reclamation of their sexuality as commodity was truly viewed as a positive and productive endeavor. Instead, certain women are barred from this form of production and are disparaged for engaging with their sexual natures at all. In the case of this study, it can be seen how mothers are barred from acknowledging their sexuality or bodies as sexual grounds without receiving backlash that is personalized to stereotypes the public works to push upon them. The association of motherhood with chastity and purity is ages old and this study shows that even within hip-hop, a space historically and currently intended to inspire discourse, we have not moved far from this benchmark of society.

^{lxxx} Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill, “Spicing It Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and *The Sex Inspectors*,” in *New Femininities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 63.

^{lxxxi} Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 124.

^{lxxxii} “The Mission,” The Amber Rose SlutWalk, <http://amberroseslutwalk.com/our-story/>.

^{lxxxiii} Emily Yahr, “The Story Behind Amber Rose and Blac Chyna’s ‘slut’ Dresses at the VMAs,” *Washington Post*, August 30, 2015, sec. Arts and Entertainment,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/08/30/the-story-behind-amber-rose-and-blac-chynas-slut-dresses-at-the-vmcas/>.

^{lxxxiv} T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women* (New York: NYU Press): 6.

^{lxxxv} Cardi B, *Bodak Yellow* (New York: Atlantic Records, 2017)

^{lxxxvi} Nicki Minaj, *Four Door Aventador* (New Orleans: Young Money, 2014)

^{lxxxvii} Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 133.

^{lxxxviii} Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 138.

Conclusion

The jezebel stereotype functions as a foundational brick of Collins' new racism: it is a racist tool at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and as can be seen from this analysis, class. The methods by which the jezebel stereotype was used against the four Black female celebrities in this study varied in both usage and outcome. For Blac Chyna and Amber Rose, a forceful relegation to jezebel and voiding of their sexual entrepreneurship was necessary, as they were getting too close to characteristics that were antonymous to the promiscuous, immoral, irresponsible nature of the jezebel. In this forced relegation, we saw how pregnancy and sexualized racism engage in a song and dance of pushing away from physical signs of motherhood and pushing towards body images reminiscent of a jezebel. For Nicki Minaj and Cardi B, we saw how being a hip-hop artist allowed for the self-commodification of sexualized images in a manner that kept forced relegation at bay and affirmed their labor. It is important to note Nicki Minaj and Cardi B did not experience the same forceful relegation to jezebel due to motherhood, but their association with hip-hop and successful sexual entrepreneurship have not excluded them from relegation to the jezebel stereotype. Instead, they are given an opportunity to capitalize monetarily off this relegation.

Scholars must continue to analyze how aspects of intersectional oppression and Collins's new racism's function within society in the present day. To do so is to open a world of possibilities, not just of scholarly thought but also of actionable change. By acknowledging the methods through which women are successfully fighting or owning their relegation to jezebel, we acknowledge that Black women are neither passive

participants in their lives nor passive victims of a racism that attacks their body and attempts to steal their agency.

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