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Racial Formation Theory and Systemic Racism in Hip-Hop Fans' Perceptions[1]

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This work contributes empirical research to racial formation theory (RFT) and systemic racism (SR), demonstrating how these theories complement each other. There are few practical applications of these theories. This research examines RFT and SR from the perspective of hip-hop fans. I qualitatively examine how 23 nonblack women articulate the relationships of race, class, and gender through discussion of hip-hop music and videos that accompany it. Findings suggest that hip-hop is a site of racial formation. Participants spoke from a color-blind perspective and white racial frame so that they perpetuated ideals of systemic racism theory.

KEY WORDS: color-blind; hip-hop; intersectionality; racial formation theory; systemic racism; white racial frame.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars analyze various aspects of hip-hop music[3] and culture individually and how they overlap in different contexts including race, race relations, gender, sexuality, authenticity, representation, performance, identity, color blindness, commodification/culture industries, space, and political statements and resistance (Azikwe 2011; Clay 2011; Collins 2006a, 2006b; Dixon, Zhang, and Conrad 2009; Dyson 2007; Fitts 2005, 2008; Gallo 2003; George 1998; Goodall 1994; Littlefield 2008; Love 2008; Morgan 1999; Myer and Kleck 2007; Persaud 2006; Pough 2004; Richardson 2007; Rose 1994, 2008; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Stephens and Few 2007; Xie, Osumare, and Ibrahim 2007). Hip-hop music serves as an entry point for discussions related to race, class, sexism, and Black culture (Morgan 1999; Rose 2008). Black and Hispanic men continue to drive the creation and production of hip-hop, and scholars are continually drawn to study how race and gender concepts operate in hip-hop music and culture. This article moves away from the traditional researcher and media analyses of lyrical content and visual representation (Azikwe

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[3] The terms *rap* and *hip-hop* originate from a culture defined by a set of practices that began with graffiti, break dancing, emceeing, and disc jockeying (George 1998; Myer and Kleck 2007; Rose 1994; Xie et al. 2007). This culture is known as hip-hop culture, and rap music evolved from emceeing and disc jockeying (Love 2008; Pough 2004). Thus, rap is the music of hip-hop culture although some refer to this as hip-hop music. Following the lead of the participants in this study and of much of the literature on hip-hop music and rap, I interchange these two terms freely.

2011; Collins 2006a, 2006b; Dyson 2007; Fitts 2005; Goodall 1994; Hunter 2011; Littlefield 2008; Persaud 2006; Rose 1994, 2008; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Xie et al. 2007) to focus on commentary by people who call themselves fans of hip-hop. Previous work involving fans and women in hip-hop focuses on the possible adverse effects of sexualized Black women's images on Black adolescent women (Dixon et al. 2009; Peterson et al. 2007; Richardson 2007; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Watkins 2005). Researchers suggest that the psychological health of Black adolescent women—in terms of self-esteem and self-image—is affected by mass media images of Black women (Dixon et al. 2009; Hurt 2006; Littlefield 2008; Richardson 2007; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Stephens and Few 2007). However, comparatively little is known about how women who do not identify as Black perceive social concepts reflected in hip-hop music and video.

It is important to examine how fans interpret hip-hop music because it is consumed across racial, gender, and socioeconomic barriers. Yet, the artists continue to be predominantly Black men. At a time where color-blind ideology is strong under a Black president (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Omi and Winant 2009), this article explores how nonblack, female fans of hip-hop articulate racial meanings and race relations when discussing hip-hop music and videos. This article contributes empirical research to racial formation theory (RFT) and systemic racism (SR) in order to demonstrate how these theories complement each other (Feagin 2006; Feagin and Elias 2013; Omi and Winant 1994, 2013). While this article focuses on race, I used gender as an entryway to discuss race with participants. Secondary to the discussion of race, this article discusses the relationship between projects of inequality and how they exist in the symbolic interaction process between fans and hip-hop media.

White Americans often have little to no interpersonal contact with people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin 2010a), yet all Americans are exposed to the "white racial frame." This is a racial framing of society that combines racial stereotypes, racial narratives and interpretations, racial images, language accents, racialized emotions, and inclinations to discriminatory action to maintain a positive orientation to whites and whiteness and a negative orientation to oppressed and exploited nonwhites (Feagin 2010b:10). The white racial frame is proliferated and normalized through the mass media and pressures people of all races to internalize this perspective (Feagin 2010b). Mass media viewers may learn about others through cultural tourism (Xie et al. 2007), looking in on a culture with which they have little unmediated personal interaction. Viewers who are uncritical of larger social forces, no matter their racial identity, may adopt a white racial frame and homogenize groups of people based on mediated interaction. It is important to explore how racial minorities in hip-hop culture are understood within the white racial frame and race theories of racial formation, SR, and color-blind ideology in the United States.[4]

[4] This article's discussion of race follows the participants' perspective of the Black–white, bipolar model of race emphasized by systemic racism by focusing on these two groups, with peripheral discussion of Hispanics and Asians as discussed in the data.

Racial Formation Theory and Systemic Racism

Hip-hop is a racialized medium because its nonwhite artists discuss racial concerns in the lyrics and critics analyze race in hip-hop (Clay 2011; Collins 2006a, 2006b; Dyson 2007; Fitts 2008; Gallo 2003; Littlefield 2008; Persaud 2006; Rose 1994, 2008; Xie et al. 2007). Hip-hop draws criticism for its representations of Blacks and Hispanics, especially concerning the implications these representations have for young people who may wish to emulate those in the media (Dixon et al. 2009; Hurt 2006; Littlefield 2008; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Stephens and Few 2007; Richardson 2007). Research has not connected fans' understanding of hip-hop's racial representations to the theories of racial formation or SR. I will explain the recent debate between RFT and SR in order to locate hip-hop within them. By connecting these theories with hip-hop, we can learn how hip-hop is a site of racial formation, and how a combination of RFT and SR can explain how viewers understand everyday race relations.

In their seminal book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant (1994) first review three paradigms of race theory: ethnicity/assimilation, class/stratification, and nation/colonialism. Emerging from these theoretical ideas, RFT asserts that the state organizes social structures based on racial meanings and representations through a sociohistorical process. This racial formation occurs through a racial project, which links social structure to representation (Omi and Winant 1994). A racial project is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant 1994:56). The racial project is the anchor of RFT, emphasizing race as the primary stratifying concept whereas other theories have minimized its significance by focusing on ethnicity or nation (Wingfield 2013). RFT highlights the importance of racial group relations to racial formation, cautions against a Black–white, bipolar race model, and incorporates the political potential for people of color to change the definitions of race (Banton 2013; Omi and Winant 2013). Omi and Winant's work focuses on the importance of understanding how race is constructed and reconstructed before understanding racism (Golash-Boza 2013).

Scholars have examined how RFT appears in everyday interactions with television shows, media discourse, and video games (Brock 2009, 2011; Buffington and Fraley 2011), and how it relates to emotion and the workplace (Froyum 2013; Wingfield 2010), material and structural practices (Park and Pellow 2004), class formation (Jung 1999; Sallaz 2010), and racial stratification (Massey 2009). Critics claim that RFT minimizes the persistence of a racist legacy, does not emphasize whites as agents in creating the racial project, and the theory focuses too much on individual racialized interactions rather than structural processes (Dennis 2013; Feagin and Elias 2013; Wingfield 2013). Scholars claim that the discussion of the three paradigms lack theoretical evolvement (Gordon 1989) and suggests a linear progression from one paradigm to the other, with RFT as the final shift, without describing how the shift occurs (Dennis 2013). As a theory about race, RFT does not make claims about racism (Dennis 2013). Instead, RFT asserts that notions of

racial groups form in relation to each other so that focusing on race conceptualization helps us understand other social processes such as racism.

Feagin and Elias (2013) explain how SR theory addresses some of these criticisms. Feagin's (2006) theory of SR focuses on social structure, emphasizing the need to understand racism before theorizing race (Golash-Boza 2013). The theory of SR recognizes how white Americans have created racial oppression by organizing social structures, material conditions, knowledge, and everyday practices to their advantage and to the disadvantage of nonwhites (Feagin 2006). SR purports critical race theory's racial realism, which doubts the progress of racial equality and race-based advancements (Feagin and Elias 2013). The SR stance on racial progress focuses on the heavy task of dismantling the system (Dennis 2013). SR's highly structural perspective emphasizes white agency in a society of pervasive racial inequality, emphasizing race as a central organizing principle of U.S. institutions (Wingfield 2013).

Heavily focused on a bipolar model overlooking racial nuance (Banton 2013; Dennis 2013), SR claims that one way whites maintain this hierarchical organization of racial groups is through the white racial frame. This frame creates racial meanings justifying racial inequality and promotes hegemonic whiteness (Feagin 2010b). Hegemonic whiteness maintains racial cohesion and difference through meanings and practices that (1) appeal to interracial distinctions by essentializing whites as different and superior to nonwhites and (2) intraracial distinctions by marginalizing practices of "being white" that do not exemplify dominant ideals (Hughey 2010; Lewis 2004).

Whereas RFT offers hope in resistance and the possibility of changing racial definitions, critics claim that SR is bleak in its racial realism and structural emphasis, and overlooks the agency of nonwhites' resistance to racial oppression (Dennis 2013; Omi and Winant 2013). Feagin (2010b) notes that white agency implemented through the white racial frame can be opposed with counterframing from people of color. These antiracist counterframes challenge SR by inspiring civil rights organizations to fight for justice and encouraging individuals to critically question racist stereotypes (Feagin 2010b).

Racial formation theory and SR both help explain American understandings of race so that these theories are more valuable in the way that they complement each other and work together (Golash-Boza 2013). RFT emphasizes how everyday meanings, ideologies, and biased actions connect to the racial project shaped by the state. SR takes a structural perspective, emphasizing how the unequal power relations drive an uneven distribution of resources and access to opportunities. Both theories agree that structural forces influence individual thought, with RFT conceptualizing this through the racial project and SR conceptualizing this through the use of the white racial frame. Racial formation is the symbolic interaction of how people interpret representations that occur within the hierarchical structure of systemic racism which ensures that dominant white-skinned Americans are advantaged above others, with dominated darker-skinned Americans at the bottom of the hierarchy (Feagin 2006; Feagin and Elias 2013). SR and RFT both agree that whites are the agents responsible for constructing racial stratification. RFT attributes this to political conflict of racial identification while

SR assumes a more structural approach (Hughey and Byrd 2013). The hierarchical structure of SR is an institutionalized organization similar to RFT's racial project. The racial project functions at a more individual level of symbolic interaction in which intentions to reorganize and redistribute resources according to race are interpreted in everyday representations and explanations of racial differences (Omi and Winant 1994). This research interrogates how RFT and SR operate together in everyday interactions through hip-hop fans' discussions of race, class, and gender.

Color Blindness

Contemporary American media promotes a postracial paradigm where people are encouraged to believe that race is no longer a structurally embedded obstacle to individual success (Feagin 2010a). This meritocratic belief of color blindness persists despite abundant criticism and research against it that recognizes colorblindness as a "new racism" that is more subtly institutionalized (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Collins 2006a; Feagin 2010a; Guinier and Torres 2002; Williams 1995). Those who espouse color-blind ideology perpetuate the racial hierarchy that rewards white privilege while they criticize the morality, values, and work ethic of nonwhites through their use of color-blind language (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Kandaswamy 2012). In this way, the color-blind ideology supports SR by denying that barriers exist in a stratified society. This means that when people talk about race, particularly whites, they choose words carefully, sometimes using coded language. This is what Bonilla-Silva (2010:53) would call "race talk," which includes "linguistic manners or rhetorical strategies" that allow speakers to deliver storylines or frames concerning race without directly discussing race (see also Bush 2004; Myers 2005). Color blindness allows people to claim that they do not see racial differences while using coded language to indicate the opposite. Color-blind ideology is assumed to be the more progressive stance to race issues, although it is actually regressive, undermining nonwhite experiences and perpetuating existing inequalities. For example, Picca and Feagin (2007) note that "race talk" is carefully used in front-stage encounters, juxtaposed against more explicit language in backstage ones. In this way, people exhibit a "two-faced racism" because interactions are modified based on the racial composition of the audience (Picca and Feagin 2007).

Bonilla-Silva (2010) explains four frames of color-blind ideology. "Naturalization" is a frame that explains racial phenomena by suggesting that people gravitate toward likeness (Bonilla-Silva 2010:28), so that it is natural for Blacks to befriend and date other Blacks, for example. Those who believe in naturalization focus on the free choice individuals have in selecting friends and significant others. They are distracted from SR, which socially constructs the terms under which interracial relationships are unacceptable.

Rooting his work in William Ryan's (1976) "blaming the victim" theory, Bonilla-Silva (2010) uses the term *cultural racism* to refer to culturally based arguments to explain racial minorities' circumstances. Cultural racism shifts causation from

biological deficiencies to the malignant nature of poverty, racial difficulties, and all environmental sources so that stigma is socially acquired rather than of genetic origin (Ryan 1976). Speakers espousing cultural racism simultaneously take an interest in the victim's well-being, condemn vague social and environmental conditions that created unfortunate circumstances in the past, and neglect the current stratifying social forces (Ryan 1976). The racial formation of Blacks originally constructed them as biologically inferior, but the contemporary racial formation of Blacks has been rearticulated in terms of cultural inferiority, aligning with the class-based "culture of poverty" theory. The "culture of poverty" theory asserts that the poor share subcultural values and behaviors significantly different from the dominant culture (Roach and Gursslin 1967). Thus cultural racists similarly recognize racial inequalities and assume that Blacks developed a distinct, undeserving subculture from poor social and environmental conditions without acknowledging social structures that have generated and continue to maintain such inequalities. The cultural racism of color blindness justifies the unequal distribution of resources so that SR, and by extension, racial realism persists.

All four frames of color blindness work collectively to disguise oppression and inequality created by racial formation and systemic racism by blaming individuals for disadvantaged social positions (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin and Elias 2013). The "abstract liberalism" frame is associated with political and economic liberalism, insisting that equal opportunity exists and that individual choice explains the state of racial affairs (Bonilla-Silva 2010). The fourth frame of color-blind racism is the "minimization of racism" which suggests that discrimination occurred in the past but is no longer an obstacle (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Racial equality fails to progress in part because color blindness insists that racial equality already exists so that further measures to ensure equality are unnecessary. Likewise, systemic, institutionalized practices promote color blindness so that the racial project simultaneously perpetuates racial differences while denying that they exist.

Theorizing Race Intersectionally

The racial project develops in conjunction with other forms of inequality such as gender, class, and sexuality so that an intersectional analysis reveals how concepts of inequality work together to form various identities. An intersectional interpretation of Omi and Winant's work examines how racial formation is gendered and classed to investigate how racial categories are constructed through dynamic processes (Kandaswamy 2012). Color blindness reinforces the racial project and the overlapping of other subordinating social concepts because it masks the significance of racial oppression. For example, Kandaswamy (2012) discusses how the figure of the "welfare queen" uses language of labor and family values to provide a means for the racial state to reinforce a patriarchal and capitalist state. Both RFT and SR benefit from intersectional analysis that considers how gender, sexuality, and class cause people of different racial groups to have unequal outcomes. For example, this type of analysis has particular utility in examining different social groups'

interactions with stratifying institutions such as the state's influence on interracial marriage (Wingfield 2013).

The gender project is maintenance and policing of gendered practices to advantage heterosexual men in a two-sex model of biological difference (Lorber 2010). Gender is a dichotomized male/female construction perpetuated through heteronormative gender role socialization in all major social organizations. The gender project advantages men over women (Butler 1993; Fitts 2005; Lorber 2010), but is enacted differently across class and racial/ethnic divisions (Acker 2006). Racial hegemony secures dominance by imposing a norm of heterosexuality as an extension of gender (Dyer 1997; Fitts 2005). Each social category directs analysis to particular social relations and practices. To begin with class, we enter into the complex processes where capital is accumulated and inequalities are generated (Acker 2006). Acker (2006) theorizes a gendered and racialized class through various processes, one being the construction and use of images, stereotypes, and ideologies about race and gender.

This article uses an intersectional analysis to examine how participants perceive overlapping notions of race, class, and gender in hip-hop. Hip-hop is commonly criticized for its narrow conceptualization of gender, propagating misogynist themes and objectification of women, although some researchers assert interpretations of female empowerment (Azikwe 2011; Collins 2006a; Gallo 2003; Goodall 1994; Hunter 2011; Lee 2010; Morgan 1999; Pough 2004; Richardson 2007; Rose 1994; Stephens and Few 2007). Black women in hip-hop often lack agency which reinforces historical and contemporary patterns of paternal ownership and hypersexualization exacerbated by racial stereotypes (Collins 2004, 2006a; Feagin 2010a; Fitts 2005, 2008; Gallo 2003; Hunter 2011; Richardson 2007; Rose 1994, 2008). The music industry and mass media corporations that influence the content of "commercial hip-hop" created for mainstream consumption chose to profit from perpetuating racialized and sexualized images of Black gangstas, pimps, and hoes that appeal to the white racial frame (Rose 2008). The presentation of hip-hop images in music videos may imply existing race, class, and gender stereotypes but these can only be perpetuated if viewers identify and interpret such stereotypes from these images. This study investigates how hip-hop fans associate social concepts of race, class, and gender in the representations of women in music and video.

METHODS

Between January and May 2011, I interviewed 23 women between 18–24 years old, who self-identified as nonblack. I was open to those who did not identify as Black because a considerable amount of studies have already examined Black women's perceptions of hip-hop music and video (Dixon et al. 2009; Hurt 2006; Littlefield 2008; Peterson et al. 2007; Richardson 2007; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Stephens and Few 2007; Watkins 2005). I did not quota sample (Bernard 2000) based on race or ethnicity, but did categorize participants by race after the interviews. Twelve identified as white, six as Hispanic, four as Asian American,

and one as multiracial.[5] All of the interviewees were in college or recently graduated. I recruited participants using two methods. First, I announced my study in introductory sociology and criminology courses to recruit interested students. Second, I purposively sampled (Babbie 2007) known fans of hip-hop and then utilized a snowball sampling technique (Babbie 2007) to identify additional female hip-hop fans through existing social networks. In this study "fans" are conceptualized as people who are knowledgeable about and prefer hip-hop music to other genres, distinct from fans of "fandom" found in cultural studies (see Lewis 2001). Potential participants were contacted via e-mail or Facebook with a brief summary of the project and an informed consent document.

Semistructured interviews offered the participants flexibility in their responses, allowing diverse, personal interpretations to emerge (Bernard 2000). I followed an interview guide for a systematic approach that increases data reliability (Bernard 2000; Patton 2002). In the interviews I asked probing questions, first encouraging participants to describe their understanding of hip-hop music and culture. Every interview began with the question: "How would you define hip-hop music?" I then asked about their listening preferences. There was variation in the hip-hop subgenres participants listened to. Some of the interviewees primarily listened to "Top-40" or mainstream hip-hop that was popular on the radio. Others listened primarily to "underground" or "old school" (rap from the 1980s or 1990s) or K-pop (Korean pop music). This article focuses on mainstream hip-hop which was a common point of discussion across the interviews. Thus, artists frequently discussed in the interviews included Chris Brown, Drake, Jay-Z, Kanye West, Lil Wayne, Nicki Minaj, Pharrell, and Waka Flocka Flame with discussion focused on the male artists as they comprise the overwhelming majority of hip-hop artists.

After a brief description of why they listen, their likes and dislikes, and if/how they relate to the music, I asked interviewees to select hip-hop music videos that feature women or have women in them. Some had more difficulty with this than others. If a participant was not familiar with this type of video, I suggested starting with an artist the participant had already mentioned, and looking for a video that was likely to feature women. I asked what the interviewee noticed about the women in the video in terms of their role, appearance, behavior, and purpose. If the participant had not mentioned race by the end of the interview, I asked what was noticed about the race of the women in the videos. In addition to answering these questions, participants often launched into a discussion of broader social issues, artists, or music in general in order to explain their response. Therefore, comments were not always in direct response to, but inspired from, a conversation about a particular artist, song, or video.

Interviews were audiotaped and lasted between 40–85 minutes, averaging about 55 minutes. Afterward, I transcribed and coded the data. I used an iterative, inductive coding process. I conducted open coding and selective coding around the

[5] The racial categories used throughout (Black, white, Hispanic, Asian) are not meant to imply a monolithic characterization of groups of people. Recognizing the heterogeneity of these groups, these terms are consistent with the language of the participants, who collectively form a group of nonblack women. Although some "Hispanic" peoples identify as Black, this was not the case for these participants and their reference to Hispanics implied nonblack, nonwhite Hispanics.

key themes of race and gender (Bernard 2000; Strauss 1987). I manually assigned and organized qualitative codes in order to detect themes of the data (Saldaña 2013). During the coding process, I wrote memos (Charmaz 2006) that recorded my thoughts about the data and then verified that my ideas accurately reflected the data. This iterative process of verification minimized the likelihood that my own biases entered into the interpretation process.

RACIAL FORMATION AND SYSTEMIC RACISM IN EVERYDAY PRACTICE

The interviews yielded rich data indicating how participants perceive the racial project in hip-hop, and related gender and class concepts. On the surface it seems like participants are critical of social and political issues—class inequality by race, social disapproval of interracial dating, and objectification of women—yet they still understood these issues within the themes of SR and RFT. Participants spoke about a perceived connection between hip-hop and the Black community, often discussing hip-hop culture as a representation of Black culture. They discussed their perceptions of Blacks with color blindness, referring to class characteristics, relationships between Blacks and nonblacks, and how hip-hop may influence cultural tourists' impressions of Blacks, particularly concerned with hypersexualization in the music and video. The findings of this research revealed four major themes: cultural racism, cultural tourism, race relations, and hypersexualization, which were consistent across participants' discussion of hip-hop music and videos. I argue that these themes indicate that fans understand hip-hop music and videos as sites of racial formation and, by using color-blind language, they perpetuate SR.

Cultural Racism

One of the most prominent themes was the cultural racism frame of color blindness. This theme includes instances where interviewees made explicit class-related remarks about Black communities such as deplorable conditions of low-income neighborhoods without acknowledging how SR constructed these conditions. In these instances, participants described assumptions about a uniform Black experience, gathered from their interactions with hip-hop, demonstrating that their views of Black culture and hip-hop culture overlap. Some interviewees claimed that Blacks are uneducated, commonly relating this to the discussion of ignorance in hip-hop music. For example, when responding to the opening interview question, one interviewee stated:

> The lyrics are a lot about drugs, and women, and sex and stuff and the people singing it are not as educated as say someone singing country music. There's not as much meaning to the song as something in country or pop. It's just a bunch of random sentences put together but it produces a good beat and that's why I like it.

To interviewees, the superficial content of hip-hop music, especially in comparison to other genres (with more white artists), implied a lack of education which reflected the artist's background. Participants also referenced the use of slang

and nonstandard English in hip-hop music as signals of less education among Blacks.

Participants claimed that Blacks are poorly educated because they are afforded less educational opportunities. Interviewees expressed this belief through cultural racism by blaming conditions which then influence a cultural deficiency of the Black community. This belief was illustrated by one participant when she said:

> The most weak individuals are the most poor. It's not because they're weak in the sense that they don't have the ability to grow strong and they're stupid or anything like that; it's just they weren't given the right tools and the right opportunities. And they're stuck. Some people were born in poverty and they stay in poverty. . . . People from the ghetto, people who don't have class, or people who don't—the thing is like they don't have class, they're not as educated, they're not as wise, they're trashy, which I don't agree with; I just think it's just different.

Here, the participant described the cycle of poverty with color-blind language. She recognized structural forces of systemic racism without identifying how whites have purposefully denied tools and opportunities to nonwhites, and particularly Blacks. Consistent with cultural racism, this participant describes social structures as unfortunate, dismal circumstances without acknowledging how the hierarchy was created, continues to be maintained, and/or who this system advantages.

Participants assumed that a low-income class status explained why they think there are more Black and Hispanic women than white women in hip-hop videos. Some participants explained that Black and Hispanic women have less opportunity and they live in environments where drugs and domestic violence are commonplace. As a result, Black and Hispanic women would be more willing than whites to do things that are objectifying or degrading in a music video in order to improve their own circumstances. For example, when discussing a scene in a music video ("Bottoms Up" by Trey Songz) that featured bondage and shadow dancing (a woman dancing seductively behind a screen so that only her shadow is visible), one participant interpreted the bondage as a form of violence. She stated:

> I'm not saying white girls are above that. I'm really not, because there's white girls that do this. But I feel like it's so one-sided a lot. Like that's their reality, that's their—a lot of Black people, like Hispanics, other ethnic groups, I feel like that's—they can relate to that. They've lived where there's drugs and there's violence and they've unfortunately been subject to that and domestic violence to them happens every day in a lot of homes. But I mean like, if that's their way out and they make money doing that and they don't buy into—like, it's real, you know? I think that's why. I think producers know that. I think they know that people can relate more.

This participant reasoned that Black and Hispanic women can relate to the violence and sexual objectification of music videos so that producers are more likely to recruit these women over whites. Assumptions about class supported this rationalization of Black and Hispanic women's promiscuous behavior in the videos, consistent with other participant claims. Some interviewees assumed that Blacks and Hispanics experience difficult social circumstances and are afforded limited life opportunities so that participation in sexually exploitative videos is an appealing opportunity even though other types of women also experience the conditions participants describe. Participants who shared this opinion did not believe that the women in the videos necessarily internalized promiscuous behavior but that they comply with such a role because of their personal background.

The participants talked about Blacks and Hispanics with coded language, describing circumstances of class without addressing race, so that speakers could indirectly talk about race by hiding behind color-blind language. Some participants implied a lower-class status when they used the terms *ghetto* or *urban*. Some also used the terms *ghetto*, *urban*, or *ethnic* as code words for Black or Hispanic. One participant explained:

> Well, I guess when you think of someone as ghetto you think of loud, obnoxious, cussing, obviously have some ethnicity or try to be ethnic. I'm not saying ethnic is bad or ethnicity is bad, but usually when you have some type of culture, you have an accent or you dress different, a little different.

When using code words, the interviewees made stereotypical statements about Blacks or Hispanics by assuming that social conditions of poverty create individual behavior and character traits—obnoxiousness, loudness, using profanity, violence, or delinquency—that all Blacks and Hispanics possess. Being ethnic or nonwhite was also associated with living in the "ghetto," described as having little opportunity, little wealth or income, and routine exposure to domestic violence and drugs. Participants spoke with a white racial frame when using the term *ethnic* to refer to people who are different, as they were conceptualized negatively compared to hegemonic whiteness (Hughey 2010). The practice of espousing white normativity indicated the racial hierarchy of SR because interviewees marked and "othered" nonwhites as culturally flawed against the hegemonic ideals of whiteness. Despite intraracial distinction among whites, participants shared a collective understanding of hegemonic whiteness by implying that Blacks and Hispanics are essentially different from and inferior to whites (Hughey 2010) who are educated, classy, and do not struggle with finances, violence, or drugs. By calling upon hegemonic whiteness when making comparisons, participants recognized a shared collectivity of whiteness that supports the stratification of SR.

Cultural Tourism

Participants made it clear that they were able to enjoy hip-hop music, watch the videos, and identify themselves as fans without feeling a sense of belonging to hip-hop culture themselves. In this way, they were cultural tourists. They primarily viewed hip-hop as a representation of Black culture to which they did not belong because of their nonblack status. Even though some of the participants recognized racial heterogeneity in hip-hop culture, specifically when referencing dance/b-boying or cypher battles, they still spoke about their place from an outsider's position. In these instances racial heterogeneity did not make them feel included more so because they were women attempting to participate in masculine spaces.

When nonblacks have little or no personal contact with Blacks, various media sources may contribute to individual perceptions about Blacks as a group (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin 2010a). For example, when I asked where an interviewee's belief about certain racial dynamics originated, she said that it was not from personal experience, explaining, "I dunno. Maybe it's just 'cause I only see it in music videos or something." Some participants referenced other media to demonstrate racial

tension between Black and white women. One explanation for this racial tension was the belief that Black women do not want white women to date Black men because they "belong" to the Black community. When participants referenced music or movies rather than personal experience or observation, they demonstrated cultural tourism by assuming that media represent reality. Such statements indicated that cultural tourists acquire explanations for racial tensions between Black and nonblack women through media.

The cultural tourist phenomenon was clearer to some than others. One participant frequented the studio where her aspiring rapper friends recorded. She recognized her positionality:

> Do I personally, as a 23-year-old white, upper-middle-class female relate directly to the music? Maybe not me personally. . . . But honestly, I think it wasn't made for me but I can enjoy it as well as anybody else can as long as I have that—and I do think it's very important—as long as I have that level of respect and understanding, that I know my limits and my barriers and that I know when I'm listening to it as an observer as opposed to a participant.

This statement displays the interviewee's understanding of her place as an outsider who appreciates the music but does not personally relate to it. However, this particular interviewee had exceptional insight compared to the norm of the others.

For many participants, hip-hop culture was synonymous with Black culture so that to know hip-hop music, dance, and culture, you also know Black culture. For example, one white interviewee stated that her knowledge of hip-hop helped foster a relationship between herself and her Black roommates:

> I think a lot of times they kind of respect you because you know a little bit about their culture. I lived with Black girls for like three years and even though I was an upper-class white girl, it was, "Oh, she can do the one-two step." They thought it was like the best thing in the world. . . . So I think certain girls will let it get to them, but a lot of them will reach out to you more because they're like, "She's giving our culture and our type of dance a chance, so why shouldn't we give her a chance?"

This participant's experience of relating to Black women through hip-hop confirmed her assumption that hip-hop and blackness are linked. This perspective reasons that nonblacks can learn about Blacks from hip-hop. In another instance, a student of social work said that she was fortunate enough to not have been raised in poverty, but that she uses hip-hop to familiarize herself with real-life situations of poverty. It may be true that hip-hop followers can learn about particular artists' perspectives, but many participants did not acknowledge the heterogeneity of Blacks and other racial groups. Instead, hip-hop images and representations were equated to Black experience and reality, serving as a foundation for ideas about race.

Race Relations

Participants discussed the relationship between different racial groups—Black, white, Asian, and Hispanic—when interviewees compared racial groups or discussed them in relation to each other. When speaking directly about relationships between Blacks and nonblacks, some interviewees interpreted tension between

groups but had difficulty elaborating further. For example, a participant commented that artist Kanye West has white girls in his videos and in his song "Gold Digger" he says "then he leaves you for a white girl," which she said made her "feel like there is a lot of tension in that aspect." Consistent with others, this participant could not articulate a theory for the tension she sensed.

When discussing racial dynamics, participants offered descriptions of "ghetto" women in relation to people of other races. Descriptions were based on their personal interactions, their observations of others, or their perceptions from media such as movies and hip-hop music. When discussing Nicki Minaj, a Black female rapper, one Asian American interviewee explained that she was scared of "ghetto" Black girls because they are intentionally intimidating to discourage others from interacting with them:

> Like honestly, I'm like very scared of Black girls. Or, some of them. I mean, I used to have, like in middle school like my best friend was like Black. She was really nice, though. But I feel like a lot of the more, like ghetto Black girls set this, they create this, like purposely, they create this like facade you know, where it's like not approachable. You know, they don't want people coming up to them and like talking to them and stuff like that and it works 'cause I'm scared of them. . . . I know they don't want like, especially Asians like coming up to them. I dunno if that's the same or something they feel for like their own race but . . . I dunno sometimes I'll see like them getting along. But they have to be like ghetto Asians. You know, they can't be like, like normal Asian like or Asian-Asian like [fresh-off-the-boat] Asian.

Here, the participant illustrates her perception of Black–Asian interactions, where "ghetto" women are unfriendly to women of other races, especially Asians. This was reflective of other participants' elaborations: "ghetto" women were conceptualized within the white racial frame as Black, unapproachable, unfriendly, confrontational, and abnormal. Black women, particularly low-income Black women, were perceived to be racially exclusive and unwilling to socialize with women who do not share their racial membership. To participants, Black women's identity was linked to their perceptions of representations in the media and framed negatively to support SR.

Some used interracial relationships to explain their understanding of race relations. Participants who discussed interracial relationships stated that they support them, acknowledging that it is more common now but still widely unaccepted. In conflating hip-hop with "ghetto" blackness, one interviewee stated, "I could never see like a [fresh-off-the-boat] Asian with like a ghetto Black guy. Yeah, they have to be like at least, you know, wear like fitted caps and, you know, wear like high-top sneakers, too, for them to get along with each other." For an Asian woman to date a "ghetto" Black man, they would have to at least conform to hip-hop culture, implied here in the style of dress. Again, the assumption is that hip-hop is associated with a "ghetto" Black culture and is therefore a medium to which Blacks can relate, as Blacks are conceptualized as a monolith.

From a white racial frame, and with a culturally racist perspective, Blacks are portrayed negatively and understood as culturally deficient so that participants speaking from this viewpoint suggested that nonblack women dating Black men would have to be deficient in some manner to form a compatible couple. One interviewee said that the pairing of white women and Black men is uncommon, but in

order to do so, the woman would have to be delinquent, rebelling from her role of a traditional white woman. In explaining this, she stated, "And they kind of pull off the whole ghetto talk thing. I think that turns them on. They kind of have a bad girl, they're like bad white girls, [they] have a bad side to them." This speaker expressed a white racial frame that portrays whiteness positively and blackness negatively so that to be intimately involved with blackness, the white woman would have to be "bad." This good–bad dichotomy relates to the racial hierarchy maintained with systemic racism with whites placed at the top. In addition, the participant asserts hegemonic whiteness because she distinguishes that only a "bad" white woman could date a Black man, implying that such a person does not exemplify dominant ideals. Another participant stated, "But I know that like white women have always been seen as like a source of like status for Black males. Like 'if I could date a white girl that's like high status.'" This participant clearly recognized the racial hierarchy that prizes whites above other racial groups, contributing to interracial tension that many could not fully articulate.

Some interviewees discussed the taboo surrounding interracial dating as a reason why the women in videos are least frequently white. They described intraracial relationships as natural so that interracial relationships are unnatural, espousing the "naturalization" frame of color blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Therefore, including Black and Hispanic women in Black and Hispanic male artists' videos maintain the status quo. One participant exemplified this attitude when she stated:

> Yeah, you'd have your Black and Hispanic girls saying that you sold out. That the dude sold out. Like why are you with only the white bitches? Yeah, it would be weird, just–'cause I mean, the people you're gonna have in your videos are the people you hang out with and like people tend to hang out with their race even though we'd like to say that it's the twenty-first century or whatever and that things have changed, it's–it really like hasn't in that spectrum. You could go around campus, you'll see some people intermingling, but the main thing is, you stick with who you are. The women would be pissed, that's for sure.

This participant summarized what many of the participants expressed: Hispanic (and especially) Black women would be upset because they would feel like rappers have betrayed their community by featuring white women in their videos. Some interviewees indicated that if Black male rappers had a significant amount of white women in their videos, it would be, as participants stated, "controversial" or "a distraction from the artist." Participants also believed that Black and Hispanic women in the videos reflected a social reality that people self-segregate according to racial membership, reflecting the naturalization frame of color blindness. According to SR theory, whites racially segregate people with the intention of maintaining racial hierarchy so that focusing on naturalization neglects the broader problem of social stratification.

Hypersexualization

Several participants associated hip-hop with Blacks and Hispanics, but also with sex, noting that the themes in music and video are sexual. These interpretations altogether offer the dangerous impression that Blacks and Hispanics are hypersexual, as viewed from the white racial frame. The hypersexualization theme appeared

in interviews when participants mentioned that the general nature of hip-hop music is sexual, or more specifically that rappers emphasize having sex with women. Interviewees also indicated hypersexualization when they explained how women in videos insinuated sex through a combination of their clothing, dancing, and/or behavior, or the way the camera captured women's body parts. Even when speaking about videos generally, interviewees articulated that videos are sexual, indicating that to them, hip-hop has a sexual connotation. For example, one woman said about mainstream hip-hop, "I see that pretty often where the guy is just like rapping and the only interaction between the man and any female is just like sex." When comparing current hip-hop to old school, an interviewee said, "I feel like in most of hip-hop it's all about sex. You can rarely find music that actually talks about life and everything." Another participant noted the visual framing of women in videos: "I feel like in a lot of the videos they won't even show the woman's face; they'll just show their backside." Interviewees noted that hip-hop music stresses sex and women serve a sexual purpose for the male gaze in videos.

Because hip-hop and Black culture are already conceptually linked for participants, hip-hop's focus on sex and women as sexual objects reflected sexuality in Black culture. This is where the gender and racial projects intersect: Black women and men are hypersexual where women are sexual objects for men's desires. This intersection was clear when some of the participants stated that they think hip-hop communicates negative stereotypes about Blacks, citing representations of sexuality as problematic. Participants thought that white hip-hop viewers who have little contact with Blacks (cultural tourists) would develop a negative perception of rappers. For example, one participant argued that white people who viewed hip-hop videos would think Black rappers are "really scary and tough and just bad I guess 'cause they just like rape and have sex with girls." Participants claimed that even though there are probably a lot of white people who admire rappers, the overall message may reinforce stereotypes of violent hypersexual Black men. This stereotype contributes to the racial project because it perpetuates themes of white, heterosexual dominance that fans perceive when gazing upon hip-hop music and culture.

Women were described as sexual objects to complement the male rappers' masculinity. When watching the video for "Buzzin'" by Mann, one interviewee explained, "I think it's supposed to signify his status as a male like I can attract these kinds of beautiful women. So guys should respect him for that and then girls should be attracted to him because of that." Participants noted that the sexual availability of numerous women legitimated the rapper's manhood and desirability. For example, one participant stated: "Sex is a common theme in hip-hop. A lot of videos show a lot of women's skin to get the message across that it's sexual or to make people be like, 'Oh, OK, this is what they're doing, this is the life of a hip-hop artist, have all these women half naked around.'" When watching the video "Lollipop" by Lil Wayne, one commented, "They're all biting their lips like they're jaguars, like they're ready to pounce on him—LOOK SHE'S EVEN WEARING LEOPARD PRINT! They're like animals! Animals that want him. Sex-driven animals... It's just a certain lifestyle that's being portrayed." A high female-to-male ratio is perceived to be part of a rapper's lifestyle, as women fulfill a sexual purpose for the men. While the visual focus of videos fixated on the ways women communicated

their sexual willingness, this also implied a high sexual desire on behalf of the men whom they surround.

DISCUSSION

This article contributes empirical research to both RFT and SR and also highlights the ways in which these theories complement each other. The symbolic interaction between hip-hop music and video and participants demonstrated how hip-hop is a site of racial formation. Participants demonstrated that they interpreted a representation of a monolithic Black culture, identity, and an explanation for racial dynamics in hip-hop music and video. In this manner, hip-hop contributes to the understanding and construction of race, thereby contributing to racial formation. Participants indirectly, unknowingly referred to SR when they alluded to the hierarchical organization of individuals according to racial group membership, often when comparing groups or discussing how they relate to one another. By using the white racial frame and color blindness, speakers discussed consequences of SR without recognizing the intentional structural organization of social groups. Data revealed four significant themes of participant interpretations: cultural racism, cultural tourism, race relations, and hypersexualization. Examined together, these themes bridge RFT and SR, as indicated in Fig. I. If systemic racism is the institutional foundation of racial order, RFT via symbolic interaction maintains the stratification with whites privileged above nonwhites. Figure I illustrates how the themes of this study are like the pillars that support racial stratification.

In accordance with the cultural racism theme, interviewees described a deficient Black culture, which to them was synonymous with hip-hop. Participants depicted

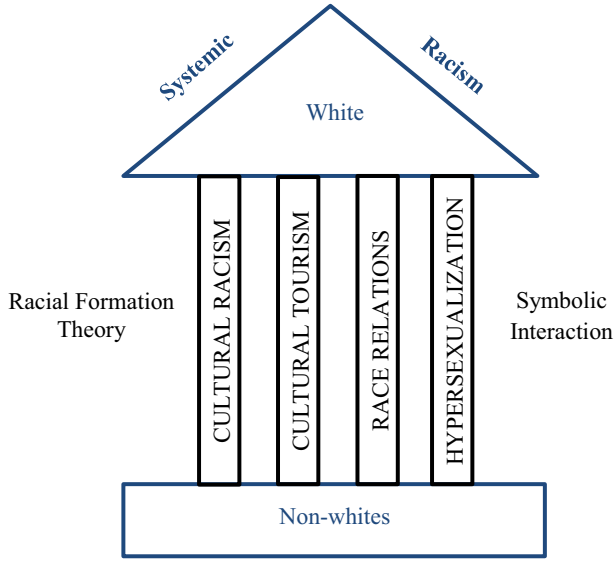

Figure 1. Illustration of how the themes maintain systemic racism and racial formation theory via symbolic interaction.

Blacks as uneducated, obnoxious, hypersexual, having little opportunity, and particularly Black women as unfriendly to nonblacks. In purporting cultural racism, interviewees recognized unfortunate conditions but not the social structures that created them. In this way, the data illustrated how systemic racism operates: people are aware of disadvantages that challenge Black communities, but they appear unaware of the underlying system that whites constructed to maintain this order. In recognizing race as an explanation for the unequal distribution of resources (Blacks are afforded less opportunity), participants also indirectly referred to the racial project, linking RFT and SR together.

Racial formation theory stresses that racial group relations are important to understandings of race. The participants identified as fans so that they were insiders of the music, but still felt like outsiders because they were not Black, suggesting a strong association of hip-hop and Blacks. As cultural tourists themselves, participants felt like they learned about Black culture from hip-hop so that it served as a site of racial formation, a way to understand Black folks. Drawing upon hegemonic whiteness, participants felt like other nonblack (particularly white) cultural tourists would interpret negative perceptions about Blacks, perpetuating the white racial frame. In these statements, interviewees suggested that they have had few personal experiences with Blacks and assumed that other nonblacks (particularly whites) might also, which speaks to successful racial stratification and segregation of SR. Racial segregation makes it easier to preserve a white racial frame and assert a hegemonic whiteness. When people of all racial identifications assume a white racial frame and share an understanding of hegemonic whiteness, SR succeeds in pervading mind-sets with various racial perspectives. Both white and nonwhite participants asserted the white racial frame and drew from a hegemonic whiteness when discussing race relations, indicating that racial formation complements SR.

Participants sensed racial tension between Blacks and others in instances of interracial relationships, and expressed naturalization in observations of self-segregation practices. Interviewees described a pejorative Black identity constructed through cultural racism that was unsuitable for "typical" white mates, reifying hegemonic whiteness. These racial constructions suggest an idealization and normalization of intraracial relationships that maintain segregation of systemic racism. Participants used color-blind language of cultural racism and naturalization to explain microlevel social processes. This approach supported the broader social hierarchy and perpetuated SR in their explanations of classed and gendered racial identities.

This research also illustrates how race, class, and gender projects overlap, importantly highlighting how social categories do not operate in isolation. Participants used code words referring to class to signify race. The description of "ghetto" was a color-blind strategy of race talk that referred not only to poor neighborhood conditions but also to undesirable behavior and personal characteristics. Such a pejorative description enacted the white racial frame and clearly placed Blacks and the Black community lower on the racial hierarchy than whites, as purported in SR theory. However, participants suggested that the racial formation of a subordinate Black identity was constructed in conjunction with perceptions of class and gender. Interviewees discussed class concerns to explain why Black women participating in

hip-hop videos behave sexually and submissively for male artists. The prominence of these themes in mainstream hip-hop emphasizes that influential corporate powers promote a particular sexualized, racialized, and classed representation of Blacks that, in viewers' minds, contributes to a wider racial formation of Blacks. These data indicate that nonblack hip-hop fans assume the white racial frame in part because the mainstream images and messages support social stratification of SR.

A combination of the cultural racism, cultural tourism, and hypersexualization themes revealed perceptions that Black women are promiscuous and Black men are aggressive and hypersexual. Participants also noted Black male artists' use of women to beget status so that the objectification of women for the male gaze signified heterosexual dominance that reinforced their masculinity. Although male rappers display many women to reinforce their male dominance, they inadvertently support white supremacist ideals because the stereotype of the hypersexual Black man (rapper) and woman (as a sexualized person in the video) is reinforced in the viewer's mind. In asserting male dominance, rappers are then unintentionally perpetuating the racial hierarchy.

This research indicates how race, class, and gender projects overlap to create racially constructed identities from a white racial frame. These data illustrate how racial formation occurs as an interaction between individuals and media within the larger social structure of systemic racism. This research suggests that race is a prominent organizing concept that affects how people understand each other. Although this is a small sample of participants, these preliminary data suggest ways that hip-hop music and video can inform perceptions of race among fans. Further research is necessary to make generalizations about particular racial or ethnic groups' perceptions of hip-hop music and video and to substantiate the links discussed in this article.

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