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THE WOMEN BEHIND THE MOVES:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF VIDEO ~~VIXENS~~ MODELS

by

LORON BARTLETT

Under the Direction of Layli Maparyan

ABSTRACT

This research studied three women who have performed in hip hop music videos. Previous literature concerning these women, including memoirs, men's magazine interviews, and Black feminist scholarship, has situated them as video vixens, terminology that all three participants disputed applied to them. The research was completed in two parts—a face-to-face phenomenological interview and a semi-structured telephone interview. In the phenomenological interview, the initial question—what are your experiences as a woman who dances/models in music videos?—was posed. The answers ranged from musings about professionalism and the lack thereof in the industry to the politics of skin color and nationality. The semi-structured interview allowed the participants to clarify or expound on experiences they discussed during the first interview.

INDEX WORDS: Black feminism, Video vixens, Video models, Hip hop, Music videos

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by

LORON BARTLETT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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THE WOMEN BEHIND THE MOVES:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF VIDEO ~~VIXENS~~ MODELS

by

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Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2011

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to…

My husband whose creativity is inspiring

My parents whose support is unwavering

My siblings whose laughter is comforting

Every young girl who has ever danced in front of her television,

then practiced her moves in front of her mirror.

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If I had ten thousand tongues, I could not thank You enough Jesus. Your strength is made perfect in my weakness and Your blessings are abundant.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In a Special Collector's Edition of *Essence* magazine, First Lady Michelle Obama is quoted as saying, "For me [our image] is a reminder of what is already the reality. The women in videos and the stereotypes are just not the truth of who we are as a community…. But sometimes…those stereotypes define us" (Essence 2010, 10). The stereotype of which Mrs. Obama speaks is linked to the historicized and pathologized discourse surrounding the supposed hyper-sexuality of Black women as well as to discourses of respectability that Black women have historically used to combat this stereotypical image. The image of "the women in videos" is one way in which the overly sexual and sexually available stereotype is inscribed onto the bodies of Black women. Mrs. Obama's quote implies a certain distancing from this image as a standard by which communities of Black women should be held, judged, and defined. But her statement also implies that there is a standard of femininity and respectability to which all Black women should aspire or which they inherently already uphold. The portrayal of Black women in hip hop videos, however, makes it all the more difficult for other versions of Black female personhood and sexuality to develop outside of the hyper-sexual and sexually available image that has pervaded societal politics and popular culture.

The juxtaposing narratives of the respectable Black lady and the hyper-sexualized Jezebel have been and continue to be a part of U.S. Black sexual politics and concerns for Black women. The proliferation of Black women's clubs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to undo narratives of Black female sexual and moral impropriety and replace them with narratives of Black female respectability and "proper" womanhood (Higginbotham 1993; Thompson 2009). Members of the Black women's club

movement aimed to simultaneously fight against the oversexed, immoral discourse which racist, white factions used to denigrate Black women of the day and regulate other Black women who could undermine their endeavors. The work that video vixens do is often discussed as a modern-day form of Black female sexual impropriety. Mrs. Obama's commentary about "the women in the videos" not being "the truth of who we are as a community" is reminiscent of sentiments expressed by middle and upper class Black women within the club movement in that they seek to both regulate and restore Black female personhood.

The truth is, however, that the Black women who perform in music videos are a part of the Black community and are therefore a part of our truth. The women in videos go by many different names, including, but not limited to, video vixens, video models, video hoes, eye candy, candy girls, and video girls. The most popularized term, however, comes from the title of Karrine Steffans' (more infamously known as Superhead) book *Confessions of a Video Vixen: A Cautionary Tale of Life in the Fast Lane*, published in 2005. For the purposes of this research, I intended to use the popular term "video vixen," exploring its origins and meanings within the music industry and in popular culture. However, my interviewees prompted me to rethink the usage of this term, so in the "Interview Results" chapter I often use video model instead. I also discuss the fact that not all video vixens are Black. As Dr. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting writes in *Pimps Up, Hoes Down: Hip-Hop's Hold on Young Black Women*, many video landscapes are lined with "Generation A.M.s" or Ascriptive Mulattas—women whose ethnicity is obscured or in question based on the color of their skin. My research complicates and questions the binary between the "suitable" Black femininity that First Lady Michelle Obama and other middle and upper class Black women claim to possess

versus the "unsuitable" Black femininity on display in hip hop music videos. Instead of focusing on the existing literature that describes hip hop's impact and influence on Black women's treatment in Black communities as misogynistic, degrading, empowering, and complicated, I use a phenomenological method to glean from the women who actually perform the work how they experience their lives, their impact, and their influence.

Personal Relevance

I am personally drawn to this subject matter for two main reasons. Although I do not self-define as a hip hop feminist, I live and generationally am a part of the second wave hip hop generation. I am what you would call a hip hop generation feminist.[1] I say second wave because hip hop, by all accounts, is not what it used to be. It has been outsourced to global cities across the world. It is no longer a "Black thing" or "inner city thing." It is also no longer rooted in social critique as was some hip hop during Reagan-era policies. With the globalization of hip hop comes the globalization of its images, language, culture, etc. And a large part of that image consists of the silent, moving, barely dressed bodies of Black women in videos. As a member of the generation that both produces and consumes these videos, I desire to weigh in on the conversation and shape the discourse on this pervasive subject.

As someone who secretly watched hip hop music videos as a child in order to participate in the emulation of the dances and movements of video vixens along with my friends, I no more disassociate myself from their performances as I do self-identify with them. Their performances were a part of my reality, a part of my consumption of the

[1] http://crunkfeministcollective.wordpress.com/

popular culture. What First Lady Michelle Obama's quote suggests to me is that there is but one "reality" by which Black women and Black communities should be judged, and that reality is developed at the exclusion of realities deemed stereotypical. My own trajectory suggests otherwise as my desire to perfect the movements and attain the body shape of video vixens was coupled with my desire to be an excellent student and succeed in my life's work. Thus, my own experience on the consumer side of the equation suggests that women on the production side may also be more complicated than they appear.

Research Questions

The conversations about hip hop are so often concerned with the misogynistic lyrics performed by the male rappers, the overt sexuality or lack thereof exerted and expressed by female rappers, the globalization of the culture and music, and the non-reciprocal relationship between industry executives and the artists (Morgan 1999; Pough 2004; Adams 2006; Basu 2006). Many of these conversations circulate critical discourses about the women who play an integral role in the production of verbal and visual hip hop imagery. However, other than several seminal scholarly works on female rappers' significant and complicated contributions to hip hop culture (Morgan 1999; Pough 2004; Phillips, Morgan, and Stephens 2005; Pough 2007), little has been done to highlight and complicate the contribution of video vixens. Too often the conversation is about these women, rather than by these women. My research contribution encourages video vixens to speak about their own realities, in ways that complicate how their performances are perceived and give new insights into their career motivations and aspirations. To do this I ask the following overarching questions: What meanings to video vixens attribute to their

own work? What are the "lived experiences" of women in this hip hop phenomenon? These larger research questions allow me to better glean information about the "lived experiences" of the research participants.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Black Feminism and Black Female Sexuality

Black feminists have a long history of articulating the simultaneity of gender, sexual, and racial oppressions (Combahee River Collective 1977). White supremacist ideology helped create and sustain what Patricia Hill Collins terms "controlling images" (Collins 2000). These controlling images, including the Mammy, the Matriarch, the Jezebel, the Sapphire, and the Welfare Queen are prevalent in the performances and portrayals of Black women from big screen cinema (i.e. Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* and Halle Berry in *Monster's Ball*) to small screen music videos that highlight video vixens such as Karrine Steffans. In particular, the Jezebel image "provides a rationale for the history of sexual assaults on African American women" (Adams and Fuller 2006, 945). In her work concerning "controlling images," Patricia Hill Collins examines the contemporary portrayals of the Jezebel as a continuation and reaffirmation of Black women's oppression. She says, "Because efforts to control Black women's sexuality lie at the heart of Black women's oppression, historical jezebels and contemporary 'hoochies' represent a deviant Black female sexuality" (Collins 2000, 81). The perceived deviance of Black female sexuality translates into the disturbing rationale that the Black female body, and thereby the Black woman, is in some way deviant and abnormal.

In Dionne Stephens and Layli Phillips' work examining the "sociohistorical development" of sexual scripts for Black women, they refer to Collins' "controlling images" as "ghosts" who have "influenced the creation and maintenance of today's three-dimensional sexual scripts," namely "the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama" (Stephens and Phillips 2003, 11). The ghost imagery implies that these new scripts are not merely shadows of their former selves, but they are also haunting and carry the likeness of the old scripts. Describing the Freak, they write, "Similar to the sexually insatiable Jezebel, Freaks are essentially viewed as having no sexual inhibitions or hang-ups" (20). Although the examples for the physical embodiments of this Freak script are the rappers Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown (20), this script can easily be applied to the silent moving bodies of video vixens. This sexual script of the Freak that is so closely related to the Jezebel has significant bearings on the perceived and real physical behaviors of young girls and the ways in which Black female personhood is enacted.

The most noted scholarship concerning the historical underpinnings of the Black female body is written in relation to Sarah Baartman (and other spelling variations) most (in)famously known as the "Hottentot Venus." Her presence is chronicled in 19th century Europe as a part of freak show exhibitions that displayed her body, specifically her buttocks, as a site of unusual anatomy for medical inquiry and societal spectacle (Gilman 1985; Sharpley-Whiting 1999; Holmes 2007; Crais 2009). As it relates to video vixens, it is their "butts" that are often the objects of gaze in music videos. Unlike Baartman, however, video vixens actively participate in crafting particular portrayals of Black female sexuality in popular culture (Collins 2005)[2]. The relationship between the exploitation of Sarah

[2] There is some marginal debate about to what extent Baartman participated in crafting her performance.

Baartman's body and the participatory nature of video vixens' actions is the way the buttocks is sexualized as spectacle.

The performances of women in hip hop videos are deeply affected by the historical nature of Black women's sexualized oppression. There is a false expectation and underlying fascination that the lurid sexuality on display in the visual, fantasy realm of hip hop videos is a potential reality or actual lived experience for most African American women in the United States. Scholar Cornel West names this dilemma in his seminal mid-1990s work *Race Matters* when he delves into the topic of "Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject." Concerning the myth of Black women's sexuality West says, "The dominant myth of black female sexual prowess constitutes black women as desirable sexual partners" (West 1993, 129). When the body becomes the enactor of hypersexual performance, the body is then assumed to be available sexually. Black women, inside and outside the music video industry, are socially stigmatized and controlled by these narratives of lurid sexuality and sexual availability and this stigmatization and control extends to Black girls.

Research on Women in Hip Hop

In the early to mid 1990s, many hip hop feminists explored narratives of Black female subjectivity through the lyrics and personae of female rappers. The simultaneously empowering and disengaging place of women who love hip hop and women who perform in hip hop is chronicled in several ground-breaking works (Rose, 1994; Morgan 1999; Pough 2004). The female dancer has eclipsed the female lyricist in terms of women's subjectivity in hip hop. The previous research on the lyrical content and image making of female rappers contributes to my research on video vixens in ways that emphasize Black

female subjectivity, voice, and agency within the culture. The scholarly works have also been buttressed by more popular references and interest in the early to mid 2000s, including *Essence* magazine's "Take Back the Music Campaign," launched in 2005 to address misogynistic and denigrating elements within hip hop culture. These popular sites often focus on hip hop's impact on younger consumers of the culture.

The impacts and uses of hip hop language and imagery by young Black girls and adolescents has also received significant attention in recent years (Gaunt 2006; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Brown 2009). In a study by Fatimah Muhammad, she found that the majority of her female participants in two focus groups, one consisting of alternative high school students and the other consisting of first semester college students, did not question how women were represented in the production of hip hop. They did, however, consistently refer to "half-naked women" as one of the prevailing parts of the videos they viewed (Muhammad 2007). In her book, *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*, Ruth Nicole Brown articulates her bemused feelings at witnessing the young girls in her Black girl centered empowerment group, entitled SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths), dancing provocatively to hip hop music. Of the dancing she says, "Black girls are too entrapped by histories of Black womanhood that equate Black female bodies with sexual labor and immorality. We could not imagine them any other way—premature video vixens doomed to victimhood, modern day Hottentots, on display like Sara Baartman" (Muhammad 2007, 89-90). Theoretically, we can refigure the image of the Jezebel into the Freak and practically that image can move across the screen in the form of a video vixen. But as Brown states, when we apply these narratives to the actions that girls perform, we risk ensnaring them in a pathology of sexualized victimization.

Performativity and Media

Dancing and other forms of bodily display are not new phenomena for Black women in the music and entertainment industries. In their essay "Theorizing the Body in African-American Music," scholars Susan McClary and Robert Walser trace the connection between the body, movement, and music in African American culture. According to McClary and Walser, the historical understanding is that there is a disconnect between the mind and the body in Black music because "the mind and culture still remain the exclusive property of Eurocentric discourse, while the dancing body is romanticized as what is left over when the burdens of reason and civilization have been flung away" (McClary and Walser 1994, 76). In other words, dancing and other movements to music have historically not been considered activities that require a huge amount of thought. The notion that using the body for dance was considered mindless coincides with the projection of White fantasies and fears onto the Black body (Gottschild, 2003) and mimics many other tired binaries: primitive and natural versus civilized and cultured; body versus mind.

In the fight for racial equality and uplift, many counterpoints to the primitive, Eurocentric view want to erase dialogue of the Black body from the entire scholarship and practice of Black cultural aesthetics. McClary and Walser say that "given the ongoing struggle to have black music perceived as music, black culture recognized as culture, Black people respected as people, it is tempting to pursue projects of legitimation that treat the body as a stumbling block in the way of full appreciation of black artistic achievement" (McClary and Walser 1994, 78). But in treating the body as a secondary, oppositional force, Black people could quite possibly deny a rich history of telling stories and fighting back with their bodies, not to mention a long (African) history of dance as art and sacred

activity. In order to reclaim the Black body, its legitimation, presence, power and worth must be recognized. As Cornel West argues, Black bodily sexuality is no longer a taboo based solely on White fear and White supremacist ideology, but rather "Black sexuality is a taboo subject in America principally because it is a form of black power over which whites have little control" (West 1993, 124-125).

The Black body has increasingly become a site for advertising everything from sporting gear to cosmetic products (Bailey 2008). The performative nature of hip hop compels its participants to display and advertise hyper-feminized or hyper-masculinized behaviors in front of the camera. According to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, constructed identities constantly need to be reconstructed by the acts of repetition that serve to shore up the status quo of stagnant gender identities (Butler 1990). When the example of women in hip hop videos is taken into account, we see the repetition of gendered performances. But instead of subverting the systems of misogyny, sexual misrepresentations, and patriarchal domination, the performances of video vixens entertain and perpetuate these systems of oppression. Butler maintains her argument that we cannot avoid doing gender, but we can choose how those performances take shape. But what if a person's choice to perform gender is shaped by historical misrepresentations and stereotypes related to their race, gender, and sexuality, as is the case with video vixens?

Video Vixen Sightings, Video Vixens Speaking

Discourses concerning performativity and Black female sexuality are gaining more traction in feminist and womanist circles for a number of reasons, but particularly because these two discourses converge in the realm of hip hop production and consumption. There

are several scholarly essays, chapters, and books devoted to theorizing about the performance, impact, and phenomenon that is the video vixen, namely three essays from *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology*, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Pimps Up, Hoes, Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women,* and Shayne Lee's chapter, "Confessions of a Video Vixen" in *Erotic Revolutionaries: Black Women, Sexuality, and Popular Culture*.

Indeed, the historical relationships between Sarah Baartman, Josephine Baker, and the countless, nameless Black women who perform in music videos are a point of study (Story, 2007). Also, the calling out of rap artists, record executives, magazine editors and the like, is also a part of broadening the scholarship (Leon, 2007; Wilson, 2007). Conversations, deliberations, and ethnographic studies with female viewership of rap and hip hop are necessary to understanding how young women's identities are (mis)informed by their consumption (Muhammad, 2007). Also, the proliferation of the "ethnically ambiguous" video vixen is worth researching in relation to colorism within the Black community as well as a Western desire for the "exotic" (Sharpley-Whiting, 2008). And there are works that situate fame inducing video vixens, namely Karrine Steffans, as mantle bearers for a revolutionary Black feminist agenda that embraces sexual agency and rejects the politics of respectability (Lee, 2010).

There are less scholarly renderings of the work of video vixens as well. In men's magazines such as *King, Smooth,* and *Black Men*, famous and up and coming video vixens in the hip hop industry engage in interviews that center on their acceptance of and other people's infatuation with their "ASSets," their "working" relationships with different rappers in the industry, their sexual fantasies and prowess, and get-to-know you questions

that are more suited for a first date. All three of the magazines listed above have online versions where you can subscribe to receive online or mailed content and read interviews and view revealing photographs of women who work in the urban modeling industry. The television show, *Candy Girls*, which premiered on E! Television in March of 2009, chronicles Danielle Crawley's premiere music video and urban modeling talent agency and her ability to market the most in demand "eye candy" for the most famous artists in hip hop. And most recently, actress Meagan Good produced and starred in an indie film entitled, *Video Girl*, which was scheduled to premiere in select cities on April 29, but according to The Internet Movie Database, the release was pushed back to May. As of July 31, 2011 there has been no searchable information on show times for the film. These different cultural production mediums are central in the creation of the narratives circulated about the women who perform in music videos as models and dancers.

One of the most discussed and disputed forms of writing concerning video vixens, has been the publication of memoirs by current and former video vixens. Although the memoirs *Confessions of a Video Vixen* by Karrine Stephens, and *Vixen Icon: Buffie the Body* by Buffie Carruth, are shaped by commercial and consumerist needs and could thereby be placed in the same category as the men's magazine genre, they still give a glimpse into the subjectivity and agency of women who dance in music videos. However, what proceeds in the next chapter is a conversation with women who have performed in music videos but without the same fanfare and notoriety associated with Steffans and Carruth. And perhaps more importantly, the women I interviewed have lacked the opportunities that women like Steffans and Carruth have had to express themselves and discuss their experiences in the hip hop and urban modeling industry.

Hip hop is a global phenomenon and one of the most salient reasons for its rise in popularity is the medium of the music video. Although video vixens play a large role in this medium, very little is known about the women who perform. By using phenomenological interviews and semi-structured interviews, I illuminate some of their voices in ways that have yet to be explored in scholarship. With this multi-method study, I expand the discussion about their performances from merely a dichotomous relationship between Black female sexual subjugation and Black female sexual liberation, to one that takes into consideration the breadth of their experiences, motivations, limitations, and liberations.

III. METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

Method and Research Protocol

At the heart of my method is the use of phenomenological interviews that encourage the video vixens to talk about their own lives on their own terms. These interviews began with the question, what is it like to perform in hip hop music videos? One to two follow-up questions were asked based on the insights they provided into the first question. During the latter part of the interview, we viewed a music video that the woman has performed in and then continue with the open-endedness of the interview. In addition to phenomenological interviews I conducted semi-structured interviews to gather information on their work as video vixens and the construction of black women's sexuality and self in hip hop. These questions can be found in Appendix A. In order to contextualize the discussion further, I also analyzed two memoirs by video vixens, Karrine Steffans and Buffie "the Body" Carruth, looking for insight into these same questions. However, their texts function as a peripheral analysis in the larger schema of the research.

In terms of the logistics of the interviews, we meet in a mutually agreed upon space with video capabilities. I interviewed 3 women who have performed and/or continue to perform in hip hop music videos. I video recorded the interviews and keep them confidential by securing them in a lockbox. A week to 2 weeks after the initial phenomenological interview, I conducted a semi-structured interview with my participants. The phenomenological portion of the research allowed me to gather personal accounts of the women's experiences as music video models in ways that have yet to be examined in scholarly research. This information primarily answers the research question, what are the "lived experiences" of women in this hip hop phenomenon? The semi-structured portion allowed me to obtain more nuanced information pertaining to their work and any other information that was not elaborated on in the phenomenological interview. This research method will primarily answer the question, what meanings to video vixens attribute to their own work? For specific questions asked of the participants during the semi-structured interview, please reference Appendix A.

Methodological Justification

In this thesis, I am engaging in feminist phenomenological research. Before discussing feminist phenomenology, it is important to establish the meaning of phenomenology and its relevance as a qualitative research method. Phenomenology is not only a method, but it is also a philosophical perspective. The term itself literally means the "science of phenomena" (Groenewald 2004, 4). By all accounts, German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 — 1938) is the originator of this philosophical perspective. According to Groenewald, Husserl argued the following:

> He [Husserl] argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness. To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure 'phenomena' and the only absolute data from where to begin (Groenewald 2004, 4).

To ignore any and every thing on the outside of "immediate experience" is the impetus for the "bracketing" tool that phenomenological researchers are supposed to use when conducting their research. There has to be some acknowledgment of these outside forces in order to ultimately ignore them. But what many scholars have argued, especially in feminist scholarship, is that "bracketing" can lead to ignoring biases and the social and cultural experiences of the researcher that may or may not have some sort of influence over the research and the research subjects.

John Creswell, a leading scholar on research approaches, writes, "As a method the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (Creswell 1994, 12). Although this engagement of researcher and research participants is "extensive and prolonged," the researcher's participation is minimized while the research participants freely discuss their thoughts pertaining to short prompts provided by the researcher. The previous statement is also evidence that phenomenological research is different from the interview in that there are less direct questions posed and generally there are no follow-up questions. The reason for this again goes back to "bracketing" because theoretically speaking, there are to be "no preconceived notions, expectations, or frameworks" when the

researcher asks questions and later analyzes data (Creswell 1994, 94). Phenomenology is born out of essentialism and "bracketing" or "epoche" are at the center of this philosophical perspective. Husserl's theory places much of its emphasis on "bracketing our preconceptions and developing universal structures based on what people experience and how" (Creswell 1998, 54). The development of "universal structures" to analyze experience is a slippery slope to universalizing experience and frankly ignoring some experiences altogether. It is because of this complicated language of universality that many feminist scholars have been reluctant to use phenomenology as a qualitative research method. But it is also the language of "lived experience" being explained and described by the people who actually live it that is also intriguing and provocative for feminists who want to attend to the voices and lend credence to women's lives that have long been abandoned, ignored, and erased.

In much of the literature, phenomenology manifests itself as both an enactment of a method and a philosophical way of thinking. Either way, phenomenology is one approach that many feminist researchers have shied away from and grappled with in their research. In the introduction to the anthology *Feminist Phenomenology,* editor Linda Fisher repeatedly writes that phenomenology and feminism lack compatibility for a whole host of reasons. She notes that phenomenology, like many other theoretical orientations adopted by feminists, fails to address "specificities of sex and gendered experience" (Fisher 2000, 4). There is also a perception that phenomenology and feminism have competing world-views, with the former working as an "essentialist doctrine" and the latter targeting essentialism in its criticism (3). Fisher points to the work of theorist Merleau-Ponty by way of Luce Irigaray as a pathway by which feminists have embraced the phenomenological

approach. Although he does not specifically reference gendered variations in his phenomenological research, it is Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on "lived experience, embodiment, and sexuality" that Fisher says has drawn some feminist scholars to the method. Fisher's main explanation for why the two schools of thought have been so incongruent is the idea that phenomenologists and not the orientation itself have "overlooked feminism" as a viable theoretical partner. As to the reasons why they have rarely been in conversation with each other, it is on the "part of individuals who have evidenced little interest in accepting or even listening to, a feminist perspective" (6).

In 1977, some thirty years before Fisher's volume of essays focusing on feminist phenomenology, Iris Marion Young wrote an essay entitled "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality." According to Dianne Chisholm's essay of the similarly titled "Climbing like a Girl: An Exemplary Adventure in Feminist Phenomenology," Young's essay is "feminism's first case study that uses phenomenology to investigate contemporary women's experiences" (Chisholm 2008, 10). Young's main thesis, or hypothesis to be exact, is stated as follows: "If there are indeed typically 'feminine' styles of body comportment and movement, this should generate for the existential phenomenologist a concern to specify such a differentiation of the modalities of the lived body" (Young 2005, 28). Instead of a "feminist denial" of difference between the "essences" of masculinity and femininity as prescribed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, Young believes that their needs to be an acknowledgement of the difference in order to account for the "real differences in the behavior and experiences of men and women" (29). Although Young does not define feminist

phenomenology outright, her work does make a valiant attempt when she writes about the importance of studying women's experiences of their corporality:

> The situation of women within a given sociohistorical set of circumstances, despite the individual variation in each woman's experience, opportunities, and possibilities, has a unity that can be described and made intelligible. It should be emphasized, however that this unity is specific to a particular social formation during a particular epoch (29).

Although Young's rendering of phenomenology in reference to women's lives and experiences takes into account the specificity of epochs and phenomenon, there is still the language of universalism and essentialism that pervades throughout her essay. This is not unexpected because she situates herself as a phenomenologist, and as previously stated, phenomenology is grounded in existentialist and essentialist views of the realities of the world.

Because of the term's problematic nature, many feminist theorists and phenomenologists have developed their own interpretations of "bracketing." In a 1989 anthologized essay, Jenny Nelson writes, "Feminist scholars stress the need to 'bracket' the presuppositions of patriarchal structures in order to fully describe and define women's experience as it is lived and communicated by women, rather than in terms prescribed by the dominant (masculine) structures of discourse (Nelson 1989, 225). In this sense, bracketing is used as a tool to eliminate any patriarchal biases by which matriarchal experiences could be filtered, compared, and/or devalued.

One of the essays in the *Feminist Phenomenology* anthology, written by Louise Levesque-Lopman and titled "Listen and You Will Hear: Reflections on Interviewing from a

Feminist Phenomenological Perspective" believes in the viability of feminism and phenomenology together, but critically examines the researchers' role in the creation of knowledge and how we know what we know about a given phenomenon. Concerning how feminist epistemological concerns can somehow be translated into a phenomenological research approach, Levesque-Lopman writes that feminists have to identify the importance of "*conscious subjectivity* (the validating of each woman's subjective experience) and *intersubjectivity* (the researcher's comparing of her work with her own experiences as a woman and a scientist…)" (Levesque-Lopman 2000, 106). It is the recognition of "intersubjectivity" in feminist research that would seemingly disqualify it from engaging with phenomenology as the act of "bracketing" discourages the researcher from integrating her or his personal biases and preconceptions into the research. For this reason, some feminist phenomenologists have adapted phenomenology in ways that limit the "bracketing" language, but focus instead on Merleau-Ponty's language of "lived experience, embodiment, and sexuality."

Feminist phenomenologist Kristin Langellier believes that phenomenology and feminism have the ability to bring out the theoretical best in one another:

> Feminism encourages the situation of phenomenological analysis of women's lived experiences within the social differences unavoidable in a society built upon inequalities. Phenomenology cautions against merely imposing feminist interpretations on women's lived experience. Tacking, bracketing, correcting, critiquing, situating - sometimes the "piecing and quilting" of phenomenology and feminism is uneasy, awkward, unaligned (Langellier 1994, 72).

Langellier's characterization of the benefits and hindrances of each research approach

speaks to her larger project of locating herself as "a white, middle class quilter" in the context of researching the quilt making narratives and practices of women from various cultural backgrounds. She cautions that as a feminist phenomenological researcher it was important for her to acknowledge her positionality and biases, and yet not allow those preconceptions to privilege a certain type of knowledge production. For example, her findings saw a general pattern in that women embraced the "phenomenological descriptions of 'the personal' while simultaneously resisting feminist reductions of 'the political'" (74). Langellier says that she grappled with understanding the women's claims within "the personal is political" theoretical paradigm that situates their quilting activities as a response to societal oppressions or understanding the women as "creative agents in their own lives," relegating their activities to personal experiences (74). She settles, however, on something of a middle ground, imploring those who identify as feminists and phenomenologists to remember that "research takes place in the world rather than the ivory tower" and because of this, researchers invested in both strands of theoretical research should allow their research participants to "talk back" and openly "record and discuss our disagreements rather than downplay our differences in the research process" (75). Langellier's effort to appreciate both phenomenology and feminism in her research of female quilt makers joins both "a philosophy of experience with a politics of women's experiences" that mirrors the connections between phenomenology and feminism respectively and substantively (77).

It is the connection of the philosophical and political experiences that I explore in my research. My goal is to explore the subjectivity and lived experiences of 3 Black women who participate in the production of music videos as "video vixens" using

phenomenological interviewing. I asked question prompts that I hoped would deduce meaningful insights into a range of topics including but not limited to the following: the objectification and/or empowerment they feel as a result of their performances, ideal body type for the industry, and how they view/are they aware of the historical representations (i.e. Jezebels and sometimes Sapphires) to which their performances are often compared. Their answers and insights to these questions are central to giving greater credence to the fact that they play a pivotal role in the formation of hip hop culture, yet little research has been done that focuses on their contributions from their perspectives.

IV. INTERVIEW RESULTS

All three phenomenological interviews started with the same question: What are your experiences as a woman who dances/models in hip hop music videos? Two out of the three women were able to muse on this question for at least 15 minutes without the next prompting question. One of the women had to be prompted several times in order for the interview to continue. In this instance, the interviewing protocol changed slightly as I was asking more questions than I first intended. The interviews took place in three separate locations chosen by the interviewee and agreed upon by all parties involved. During each interview, the participant and I viewed a music video of their choosing and discussed their experiences on that particular video. I interviewed three women by the names of Kitta, Celene, and Mya.* Kitta is a 24 year old, African American woman, who is married with three children. She has attended between 75 and 100 casting calls and performed in four music videos. Celene is a 20 year old, African American woman, who is single and attends

* *Some names have been changed to protect the identities of the women.*

college full-time. She has attended over 15 casting calls and performed in three music videos. Mya is a 20 year old, African American woman, who is also single and attends college full-time. She has attended approximately 15-20 casting calls and performed in 5 music videos.

The second phase of the interview process was the semi-structured interviews. In these recorded phone conversations, I asked the women more specific questions related to their demographics, as well as points of interest that they brought up during the phenomenological interviews, but which needed more context and/or elaboration. The questions from the semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix A. Below, I have grouped the responses from both the phenomenological and semi-structured interviews together in order to better inform their experiences, as the three of them elaborated on points that they made or remembered specific things about incidents that were relayed in the earlier interviews.

After listening to hours of recorded interview conversations, I have grouped the women's revelations into six separate categories. These categories are "Video Vixens Versus Video Models," "Professionalism in the Industry," "Professional Goals," "Casting Calls and Video Shoots," "The Politics of Race, Beauty, and Sexuality," and "Fame, Notoriety, and Impact." These groupings will allow me to bring some cohesiveness to the parallel experiences that these three women have had within the hip hop music video producing industry. These categories will also allow me to draw out the nuances of their individual experiences as they each bring a different set of knowledges and varying levels of participation and commitment to the work that they have done and continue to do.

Video Vixens Versus Video Models

All three women made ardent attempts to separate their work from that of video vixens. The term video vixen was popularized and made infamous by the book, *Confessions of a Video Vixen,* written by author and former video vixen, Karrine Steffans. Although Steffans' book is less about her experiences as a woman who danced and modeled in hip hop music videos and more about the sexual experiences and relationships she had with various men in the hip hop music industry, her tell-all book has become a standard by which many women who choose to participate in this profession are judged. When presented with the title of the study, "The Women Behind the Moves: A Phenomenological Study of Video Vixens," Celene said:

> "I don't consider myself a video vixen. That's not my goal at all. Being that you might be a curvier female, rather than just a stick figure, not saying you're like fat or anything like that, you might be typecast as that. And if somebody finds you attractive, and you know you're African American that's an automatic, like we want her in our video. And that's kind of how I got into them. It wasn't like, 'You know, I want to be a video girl.' It's nothing like that" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene acknowledged that although she possessed a similar body type, she did not ascribe to the stereotype associated with video vixen behavior and she did not perform in videos in which video vixens choose to or are expected to perform. Concerning how video vixens are typecast, Celene said:

> "That's why I really don't call myself a video vixen just for that simple fact my butt is not 50 inches either. And besides physically, they are really fly-by-night type of

> females, and I'm just not like that. I have a lot more quality than that (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene's use of "fly-by-night" refers to her feelings about the untrustworthiness of women in the industry. Consistently, the three women portrayed video vixens as unprofessional, unreliable, and lacking in moral character and respect for themselves and the others around them. Kitta also echoed Celene's emphasis on a video vixen's body type and attractiveness. When describing why the term video vixen is used, Kitta pointed to the modern definition of a vixen, which, plainly stated, is a woman who uses her sex appeal and cunningness to get what she desires from her relationships and the world around her. Concerning why vixens are considered necessary in the production of hip hop videos, Kitta states:

> "You've got the video. You need somebody who is sexy and to show off your video; that's where the vixen part comes in" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Although Kitta did not explicitly negate or confirm whether or not she views herself as a video vixen in this initial interview, she did associate being sexy and revealing parts of one's body as "vixenish" behavior. Kitta did, however, separate herself from the behavior that, in her opinion, uses the attractiveness of one's body and physically sexual acts to advance in the industry:

> "There are females out here who are sleeping with people just to get their name out there and to get big, and to get exposure, which is the wrong way to go about doing it. So they pretty much mess it up for a lot of girls in the industry who's not doing all of that. Because if they [the artist] know that this person right here is going to sleep with me [the artist] just to get this spot and I don't have to pay her or do anything

> else but put her in a video…it's kind of hard to explain…the people who are doing it just basically make it 10 times harder for the girls who are not doing it to really get out there and get paid for videos because we're not doing anything versus somebody who will do it for free. It's a bad label to have but people just gotta know that all females ain't like that. I would say that 95 percent of girls in videos are doing it and the other 5 percent—it's super hard for us to get out there and get into the industry, because of that rep" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

The fact that Kitta used the pronoun "us" to describe the 5 percent of women who she felt were going about their work in a professional manner shows that she separated herself from the video vixens that were willing to be unprofessional for roles in music videos. Kitta confirmed this viewpoint in the semi-structured interview when she said:

> "I just model. I don't really like the video vixen term, just model. A lot of bad negativity comes with that word, with what it stands for, what girls are called in the industry. For example, they'll have sex with everybody, so I just don't like the term. I use like model or video model, something that seems more professional than video vixen" (Kitta, July 13, 2011)

Mya associated the term video vixen with an urban profession that can limit one's exposure to other parts of the entertainment industry. She said:

> "When I describe my profession, I just say that I model because I try not to limit myself to urban markets so I say modeling in general" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Kitta, as well as Celene and Mya reiterated several times that they did not want to limit themselves, and they did not want other people to limit them, to "just" being in music videos. Their insistence on progressing beyond performing in music videos and crossing

over into other, more reputable, entertainment ventures is in large part due to the reputations that come with performing in music videos, including the labels "video vixen," "video hoe," and "video chick." These terms come with connotations that, in their eyes, are seen as less than professional. Commercial print in magazines and newspapers, commercials that air on television, working behind the scenes in model management—all of these professions seemed more appealing to the three women I interviewed.

All three of the women interviewed preferred the term video model rather than video vixen to describe the work they had done in music videos. For them, the term video vixen had become synonymous with unprofessionalism, having sexual relations with men in the industry—artists, producers, directors, entourage—to advance one's career, and/or limiting one's career goals to the urban/hip hop entertainment market. The women also acknowledged that because there were women in the industry who had chosen to engage in what they deemed unprofessional behavior, it proved difficult at times for them to get certain gigs because they would be expected to engage in some of these acts. Rather than positioning themselves as video vixens, the women situated themselves as models, who take their jobs seriously and expect to be compensated for the work that they perform.

Professionalism in the Industry

Professionalism, and the lack thereof, was a major topic of interest for all three women. Not only did they discuss professionalism as it relates to the women who perform, but also the professionalism of the (generally) men who hire them to perform and the compensation, or lack thereof, they receive for their work. Mya, Kitta, and Celene positioned themselves as women who are professional at all times. Their discussions of

professionalism were often linked with having respect for themselves, possessing a high moral integrity, and taking control over the direction of their career and project choices.

Mya relayed an experience from the first video shoot she was cast in which a casting director asked her what she was willing to do in order to obtain a role in the video. The following is the exchange as she remembered it, and the conscious choice that she decided to make about her career:

> "And I remember after I worked with my first booking agency to book me for the first video I ever did, he [a casting agent] came up to me and was like, 'I mean be honest, I need to ask you this question, what are you willing to do to get into a video?' I was looking like, "what do you mean what am I going to do?" I thought it was based on the look, the talent, what they wanted, what they needed. Some people don't care whether you fit the role or not; if you go to the back and you know do something, you'll get the role. The terminology he used was "If you go to the back and give such and such a little head then you'll get this role. And he was like, there's two ways you can work it to the top—you can work it to the top that way or by continuously going to casting after casting after casting after casting and getting rejected and he was like he knows people who have had done it both ways. So at that point he was asking me to decide which way I wanted to come up in the industry. I decided to, of course, take the right way because at the end of the day, when you do stuff, you have skeletons in your closet. When you get big or even if you decide to chill out and go have a family, eventually that stuff is going to come out and it's going to be an embarrassment to you and your family. You're not going

> to feel good about it. There are heavy moral issues when you're in this industry (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Although she was propositioned to go to "the back" at the video shoot and perform oral sex on a man in order to secure a role in the video, Mya took it as a test of her willpower and what she would be willing to do in an industry where, as the casting director said, there are one of two ways you can "work it to the top." The thought of progressing in her career by way of using sex caused Mya to examine the consequences of such actions, and she chose not to do so. But her repetition of going to "casting after casting" and getting rejected suggested that achieving success without using sex for leverage was made that much more difficult.

As a married woman, Kitta was mindful, but not overly cautious with the relational and sexual advances she had experienced from men in the industry. She said:

> I have gotten advances from producers, directors, artists…. It doesn't make me feel too bad because I know I am not doing anything. I know someone is always going to be attracted to someone. At least it lets me know that I might look pretty good, pretty decent, so I don't feel bad about it. But at the same time it is supposed to be a professional environment, you're supposed to make your music, you're here to produce, you're here to direct, so why are you trying to talk to somebody. It's strictly business, so I am not going to mix my pleasure with my business at all so it's like why are you trying to do it" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

In Kitta's opinion, being professional did not coincide with making personal connections with artists, producers and directors. Rather, the connections she desired to make were

business relationships. Concerning how she went about cultivating these business associations, Kitta said:

> "I think it's better to network with the producer or director because most of the time when you have like say Blood Raw for instance, he's not the one actually out there casting for the video and looking for the girls; it's his director, his producer…it's always good to talk to that director and network with them versus the artist. The artist—the only thing they are really going to want to do, is pretty much have sex with you. That's the only thing they are really there for [to do]. The directors and stuff that's pretty much the big people that make the final decisions and stuff with their video. Deal with the people behind the scenes rather the ones in front of the camera" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Celene also saw music video shoots as one of many ways to network, although she did not see many opportunities for career expansion by only working with Black artists, producers and directors. Concerning why she has performed in music videos for Black rappers, Celene said:

> I do it for networking purposes. You never know who you might meet on somebody's set. They might put you in a Covergirl commercial. A lot of them do have connections to the, I say, the white collar modeling. You never know who you might meet. But being that they're men and they're in the music game, they don't use those connections, but sometimes they do. Because it's all the same show business industry. They just put lines between certain things. I do know a lot of good agencies that cast my videos. But a lot of agencies—they don't even do music videos. A lot of girls will be like, 'Well I want to go to an agency so they can cast me

> in music videos.' There's just so many agencies that don't even have music videos on their roster because they know what image comes with it—the weed, the sex, the money, the drama, the unprofessionalism. I mean Black people take all day to do a video. I went to a video, that was a Black video, and it took from 11 in the morning to 10 at night—that's too long. I am not even getting minimum wage for this, and it's not worth it" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Although Celene characterized a whole subset of people as taking "all day" to complete a video shoot, this is her experience, as she knows it. Celene makes it clear that although Black artists may have "white collar" connections in the entertainment industry outside of the "music game," they often do not use these connections to further their own careers let alone the careers of other people. In her assessment, the reason why many modeling agencies dissuade their clients from participating in music videos is because of the unprofessionalism displayed on set. And finally, Celene made a point that the other interviewees brought up on several occasions which was that the compensation can, at times, be insufficient for the time and effort they put into their work.

Concerning her own compensation, Kitta described being paid at a less than stellar level considering what she is asked to do in music videos and what other women are willing to do to be in a video. Kitta said:

> "The compensation—it really all depends on if you are the leading lady or if you are just an extra. The one that really only gets paid is the leading lady and then they might have a principle role. But the extras—they're just pretty much there to get your face seen, be around the celebrities, to get that experience, to gain that exposure. The stuff that they have to go through—it's kinda like a wolf pack out

> there. When a girl walks on the scene, all these dudes all these big name people (and girls walk out there), they basically just jump all over them by just calling them over there. I have experienced one where we were doing a pool scene and dudes were just feeling all over the leading lady. It's just hard. I know I couldn't do it. They couldn't pay me enough to do it. But we don't get compensated enough at all for what we have to go through" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

As discussed in the introduction to the results chapter, during each phenomenological interview, the participant and I viewed a music video of their choice and then they discussed their experience on that video. In the section entitled, "Video Shoot Experiences," I delve deeper into those findings. But for now, what Kitta said about the pay scale and its correlation to rank among video models and vixens is key to understanding whose work is valued. As an extra in the video we viewed, Kitta was not paid as much as a woman who gets a principle role or lead role. Although she preferred not to give the specifics of how much she was or was not paid for her role as extra in the video, Celene was more forthcoming about the treatment women, who were cast as extras in videos, received in the form of payment and working conditions. Celene said:

> "Now Bruno Mars and a couple of others are classier and you can be in a music videos like that; but you still have the Wacka Flocka's and Gucci Mane's and the rest of his crew who are still doing those types of videos that they just want 100 girls to show up, and get paid 100 a piece. You're going to be in one room, you all are going to be changing in front of each other, women are going to steal your stuff and you're going to have problems" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene did not confirm or deny that she had experienced this treatment herself or if she was relaying the experiences of someone else that she knew, but it was clear that she was close enough to the situation to know that the more women that were involved as extras, the less likely they were to get compensated fairly. Celene mused:

> When girls start getting bigger paychecks, the average rate would be—for someone who's smart—they would be trying to sell themselves as $250 a day or an hour. That's a kinda a good playing field for most girls and it goes up from there. I wouldn't advise anybody to do any naked or implied music videos that are less than that. $250, to me is a club scene, something that is public. The more public, the more people are there, the less you are gonna want to do, if you're that type of female—some females will do anything for that amount (Celene, June 28, 2011).

In the video that we viewed, Celene held a principle role in the video, as the casting director told her that there would only be about four women in the video. Although she did not specifically say how much she made for doing the video, it would be fair to say that she made two hundred and fifty or more dollars as she said that anything less would be selling herself short. While Celene and Kitta expressed some frustration and dissatisfaction with the pay offered women to perform in music videos, Mya had a more satisfying experience with the level of compensation she received.

Mya, who not only had the lead role in the video that we watched, but was also the only woman featured in the video, expressed that her experience with compensation was fair and positive. Mya stated:

> "I guess I can talk about some positive stuff too. The money is pretty good. For a couple of hours, you can make $500-1000 so that's a very big plus. Because if you

> do it consistently and you consistently get roles and you're serious about your career, you can make a good amount of money. And it helps pay for college tuition, bills, rent so it helps out that way" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Although Mya found that the payments she received were enough to take care of college expenses, she, as well as the other women saw the lack of professionalism as it related to compensation as a reason to further their careers in other arenas, whether within the entertainment industry or outside of it.

Professional Goals

All three of the women expressed a desire to not limit themselves to performing in hip hop music videos. They had varying levels of employment within the entertainment industry as well as outside of it. Kitta, a wife and mother, was the least experienced of the three women interviewed when it came to professional success in the entertainment industry as a model. Her goals, however, extended beyond the castings she was involved in for music videos. Kitta stated:

> My long-term goals, well I don't want to stay in the video industry. I'm just really doing this right now to get my name out there and get where I need to be. But my main goal is to get into commercial print, like just commercials, movies, even sitcoms—that's eventually where I want to get to. I don't want to limit myself just to music videos being down here in Georgia (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Kitta felt that performing in hip hop music videos was the best way for her to get into other parts of the entertainment industry because in her mind, the network among producers, directors, and photographers is wide enough for her to have access to various

opportunities outside of being a video model and performing in videos produced in the Atlanta area. Concerning how she hopes her current choice of being a music video model will eventually open up other opportunities in the entertainment industry, Kitta said:

> "Where I am now can get me where I want to be simply because I am going out there and networking with a lot of photographers, directors, producers. So the key thing is to network as much as you can because it's pretty much "who you know" and hopefully I can meet a producer or director who knows somebody out in California who can say I recommend this person because she's professional and she does what she's supposed to do. So hopefully that happens" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Celene and Mya also discussed using video modeling as a stepping-stone to do more respected and more commercialized work within the entertainment industry. Concerning her career goals, Celene said:

> I call myself the jack-of-all-trades. I can do that video thing, but that's not…I'd rather be in a T-mobile commercial. That's what I'm aiming for. I see the girl on TV and think, "I could be doing that!" Any commercialized things—prints, ads, magazines, editorials. Of course I won't be doing runway because I'm under 5 feet…and my hips are just a little too big for what they prefer but I am going to keep it honest. But *Maybelline*, that's neck bone up so you know I could get away with stuff like that being a little shorter than the average, skinny stick model that they want. No *106 and Park*, that's not where I want to land. I mean it's cool, it's fine but that's just so taboo to me. I really feel it's very, 'That's it. That's all, that's all you want to do'" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene admitted that she was not above doing "that video thing," but she, as well as Kitta, desired to do more in the entertainment industry. Celene made a distinction between what she referred to as "white collar" commercialism and more "urban" forms of commercialization, which was referenced in her desire not to land on a music video shown on *106 and Park* (which is a music video countdown show on Black Entertainment Television). Concerning her professional goals within the industry, Celene sometimes spoke of music video modeling as an inhibitor to more commercialized forms of modeling and acting. She said:

> "I just casted for *Hype Hair Magazine*, I just auditioned for *Wet Seal*, a clothes line. My number one goal is to be in an ad campaign—you are the face for their product for the season. When you get into the other side of things with the Black [people], and the video vixens, you'll never to get to be in the front of the sink brushing your teeth with *Colgate* or *Crest*; you're not going to get there. So acting and modeling gigs—I'm working on getting my acting thing together just for commercial reasons. Because if you're picked to be on paper for *Maybelline* of *CoverGirl* you have to transfer that over when they do their commercial. That same girl that's going to be on paper is going to be in that commercial as well so you have to have your acting in there (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Not only did Celene see video modeling as a simultaneous stepping-stone and roadblock, but Mya also experienced the same dichotomous relationship in her work. In the section entitled "Video Models Versus Video Vixens," Mya was quoted as saying, "I try not to limit myself to urban markets so I say modeling in general." This sentiment echoes what Celene

made clear which is that to be a respected model, music video modeling should be done on a limited basis. Mya stated her professional goals in this way:

> "My goals within this profession…I just want to make a name for myself. I eventually want to get behind the scenes, maybe producing or starting my own agency, something dealing directly with the girls so I can kind of mentor and guide girls through the industry because so many girls don't have guidance. That's one of my goals, and like I said to make a name for myself. This is not something—even though I love it and I'm on it full time, it's my passion, it's what I do—I don't see myself 30 years from now focusing on it so much. But I love it for right now, so wherever it takes me is wherever I'm going to go. I don't have a set thing that I'm trying to accomplish with it. I'm just kinda riding the wave and seeing where it takes me" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

It is important to note that, when speaking about making a name for herself, Mya was referring to doing so in the entertainment industry as a model, and not in the subcategory of video modeling. At any rate, Mya's sentiments about making a name for herself were also echoed by Kitta and Celene. Each of these women expressed a desire to make a name for themselves professionally, but not necessarily through video modeling. Each woman also articulated a need to be successful outside of the entertainment industry all together.

While Mya and Celene made it a point to actively pursue a college education while simultaneously "doing the model thing," at the time of this study, Kitta chose to pursue modeling full-time. Kitta did, however, express a desire to go back to school to enhance her people skills:

> "As far as outside of this industry, I eventually want to go back to school for mass communications, since I do want to deal with a lot of people. And then just something with the motion picture industry, I don't know exactly what yet though" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Mya was very clear about her long-term educational and career goals, which not only included helping young girls within the modeling industry, as stated above, but pursuing a law degree:

> "And my goals in life, I want to practice operational law for the Judge Advocate General Courts, working with JAG; and after I retire from JAG I would like to become a U.S. diplomat with the U.S. State Department. I've taken steps to procure that role. I've interned in DC, I'm currently a junior working on my bachelors' in business management and Pre Law, and I plan on attending law school at Vanderbilt University in a couple of years. So wish me luck on my LSATs!" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Like Mya, Celene had a wealth of current experiences as well as hopes for her future, which included finishing school, furthering her education in the medical field, and starting a non-profit. Celene mused:

> "I've always been an undercover nerd, but I've always been a nerd and I love science. But biology is my major and hopefully, if it hasn't become too hard by my senior year, biology is what I want to do. I want to get some money back from me investing into [my college] so I'm going to go into nursing first, and then while I'm in nursing, I would say a nurse can make a good 50,000 a year. Then go to med school for dermatology, that's my number one goal to get teen's and young adults' skin looking right because if you're not looking right on the outside a lot of girls' self-

> esteem is lowered. That's why I got into Mary Kaye, because skin care is very big, and now I work at Macy's doing women's makeup in the cosmetics and fragrances department. So skin is very important to me. But dermatology, I really have a passion for it. At this point, nursing and dermatology will be my ultimate goals along with my non-profit with women empowerment and men's life coaching. I want it to be like a turn-around program for the men and an up-and-coming program for the ladies, just to upgrade them to the next level and turn the Black men around. I really want to give back; I've done plenty of non-profit things… I really want to open up a boutique that has a non-profit thing to it. We're always going to be selling something that is given back, such as AIDS and breast cancer awareness" Celene, June 28, 2011).

Although all three women have varying experiences on video shoots and as video models, they collectively envision other opportunities for their lives and careers that extend well beyond performing in hip hop music videos. Their commitment to professionalism within the industry, along with their familial and educational responsibilities, made it evident that music video model, not video vixen, was their job title in the meantime and/or on an occasional basis.

Casting Calls and Video Shoots

Not only did the women converse about the differences between video vixens and video models, professionalism (or lack thereof) in the industry, and their own personal goals within and outside of the entertainment industry, they also discussed the day-to-day and inner workings of music video shoots. During the phenomenological portion of the

interviews, we viewed a music video in which the women had performed. While watching the video, the women talked about different aspects of the music video making process. They discussed everything from clothing choices to the roles that they were asked to play. In an effort to protect their anonymity, the titles of the videos that we viewed will not be listed. However, what the women had to say about their experiences in videos and other video shoot experiences is detailed in the paragraphs that follow.

While Mya watched her video, in which she was the only woman featured alongside the artist, she mused about the experience of getting her first leading lady role. She said:

> When it came to casting, his manager choose a couple of girls, and then he [the artist] took us out because he really wanted somebody that he felt comfortable with so…. It's definitely acting. It's fun and I like doing it because I like acting like somebody I'm not, or putting on an image, or seeing if I can actually convince people that I am whatever I'm trying portray. It's really cool. I'm my own biggest critic. I'm sitting up here like, "that could have been done better" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

As the video progressed, Mya realized how awkward she felt to be on a set and in a video alone compared to other videos where there were several other women with whom she could interact.

> "It was kind of funny being on camera by myself because I'm used to interacting with you, talking, partying. So then he's like, the director's like, 'hey stand over here and play in this scene.' It was a little awkward for me because I was like 'well how do I play by myself?' [*laughter*] I have nobody to interact with. So I kind of had to learn how to, by myself, interact with the camera and have the camera as my audience and put on a show just for the camera. That was kind of awkward at first

> but I worked through that. It was really cool though; I like being lead. It's a lot more work because you have a lot more people in your face, but it was a cool experience" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Although described as awkward, Mya's experience in the lead role of a video was quite fulfilling for her. She expressed learning a lot about herself throughout the process because she was able to be expressive, not only on this particular video where she was the only woman of interest, but in all of her endeavors as a model. Concerning how modeling created a sense of self-positivity and self-gratification, Mya said:

> "You get to explore yourself because when you're doing work via modeling or you know in video, or taking pictures…you know it's art basically in my opinion. You get to make different expressions, explore different concepts. You get to act things out that in everyday life you probably wouldn't participate in. It's a really nice form of artwork and expression. If I'm feeling bad a day and I go to like a shoot, I'll portray that in my shoot so it's like artistically my emotions came out and you know that's my release that I get (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Mya's experiences in music videos, as well as other forums within the entertainment industry, formed within her an ability to explore herself in more meaningful ways. For Mya, performing in music videos also allowed her to play characters or roles and express herself artistically. In the semi-structured interview portion, Celene and Kitta also commented on the acting and role-playing that goes on in music videos. Celene said that she did not identify with the roles she played in music videos at all because she tapped into her "alter ego." Kitta said that her experiences have been "pretty much like acting."

Acting and playing the role also involved choosing attire that showed off one's body. On how she was asked to coordinate her wardrobe with particular video shoot scenes, Kitta said:

> "As far as the dress, it depends on the theme. As far as what you're going to be doing, with the video that we are going to view, it was something sexy, but not a nightclub scene. So just shorts, or jeans, with a nice top, heels. It just depends on the video and what you're going to wear. If it's a high budget video then they'll have the clothes and all that stuff for you so you don't have to bring your own stuff. But most of the videos I did were kind of low budget I would say so I had to bring my own material. I wear whatever catches my eye; something that's going to be really sexy, that shows off my body, that shows exactly the eye candy that I am trying to do. So it all depends on their concept and what I choose from my closet (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Kitta admitted that her intent behind her clothing choices was centered around showing off her body and presenting herself as "eye candy" or as an attractive woman to the male gaze. Later, in the semi-structured interview Kitta reiterated that she felt comfortable with the attire she was asked to wear because it was clothing that she bought. In all the videos, the women interviewed were asked to bring the own wardrobe. Mya described what the video director instructed her to bring:

> "They kind of told me what they were looking for, like they'll tell you grown and sexy and stay away from these colors, bring these colors, then they kind of…after that you have any freedom you want" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

The experience of being expressive with one's clothing and actions was one of the main reasons why the women interviewed enjoyed being a part of the production of music videos. While they considered some of the working conditions below average, such as having to provide one's own clothing, they all seemed to enjoy the parts of their job that included being able to act out roles in the front of the camera.

While the women had a generally pleasant experience on the sets of the music videos that we viewed together, there were some points of contention for Celene and Kitta. While viewing the video in which she performed, Celene discussed how she came to be a part of the project, saying:

> "Somebody viewed my website [name of website] and they were like, 'we're doing a video and we like the way you look. We're only going to have about four girls in it, and I think that, I would like you to be in it'" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

After accepting the offer to do the video, on the set Celene realized several things. Although there ended up being five women instead of four, she still maintained her principle role in the video as one of four girls who surrounded the two artists in the club scene. Celene also noticed that casting was looking for a particular type of video model. She said:

> "This video took twelve hours to do. It was at Club Inferno, shot in Atlanta. I was the only Black girl there. They're all Latina… It lasted so long, the production took forever, I didn't like the way a lot of things were going on—what they wanted females to do. They were basically looking for exotic females or females that had a different look. They were looking for those types of girls for this video. The other African American girl that was in the video—she didn't last very long. She only did one scene although she was seen multiple times in the video; I guess because they

> didn't want it to look like there was only one Black girl in the video, but she was there for only 20 minutes. But things like that don't matter. You always have to say what matters, what am I doing to get out of this" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

More will be said about beauty expectations in the next section, *Racial and Beauty Politics*, but for Celene, the emphasis on the casting director wanting "females that had a different look" was a prevalent issue, as well as what the women were asked to do. Continuing to muse while viewing the video, Celene said:

> "They told me to turn around too, but I had on a dress where you couldn't see my butt. I turned around for a little while. I don't like the whole touching thing. His hand was around my back, I didn't really like that" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

The hand Celene was speaking of was that of one of the artists in the club scene. Celene linked this unwanted touching back to the unprofessionalism that, in her opinion, is often displayed by the artists' and their entourages on the sets of music videos. The perception of unprofessionalism is also what Kitta suspected kept her out of the role she was asked to and intended to play in the music video that we viewed together.

In Kitta's video, she is seen twice briefly. In fact, we had to pause the video clip to get a longer glimpse of her. At any rate, Kitta describes the experience of being pushed out of a principle role for a role as an extra, saying:

> "When I first went, I wasn't supposed to be the leading lady, but I was supposed to be like, you know how they have the principle roles, where you're actually seen a lot more versus just being a regular extra—that's what I thought I was going to be doing, but the actual girl that came in there, her and another girl they were the actual principle roles. They was doing all that stuff, so I was just pushed as an extra.

> So that's why you didn't see me a whole lot, but you saw me, my little 10 seconds of show, of fame. But that's what I thought I was going to be doing but I wasn't. From what I saw at the actual pool party, they are why the video vixen label is there, from what I actually saw. And I am pretty sure that that had something to do with it because I didn't even see them at the casting and I was at the casting. The casting was like maybe two hours long; it wasn't a long casting, and I didn't see them there and I was there pretty much the whole time. Even my husband—he does the whole video thing—he was talking to the directors and producers and all that and I was there the whole time and I never did see them so I was like 'how did you end up in here?' So I'm pretty sure that's how" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Although there was no way to definitively decipher how the two women were chosen for the principle roles over her, in Kitta's estimation, they were chosen because they were willing to do things that she deemed unprofessional. Because Kitta did not see them at the casting for the video, she assumed that they must have been hired on the basis of other criteria besides headshots and portfolios, on which she was hired. All of the women described having to, not necessarily compete with, but work with women who in their estimation were not always on the set for the same reasons they were, or were being hired because of a skin color preference, their commitment to professionalism, or their willingness to do anything to be hired.

Mya described the jealousy that is sometimes displayed not only in the casting rooms and on the video shoots, but on social media sites as well. She observed:

> "Another thing I've seen happen is jealousy between girls—the whole light skin versus dark skin thing. Right now, this is the most that I have seen this argument

> happen. Like I see girls arguing on Twitter, 'you always get this role because you're light, or you always get this role because you have a big butt.' And the girls will go complain to casting directors that the same girls get the same roles. You know, honestly it might seem that way, but a lot of times the girls that say that, they only go to certain castings, like big ones—like this one was on Twitter so I'm going to go to this one—and the same girls go to everything, everything, so they might get rejected ten times and you would never know that and it just so happens that they get this role right here. So it may seem that they're getting that role every time, or a favorite to the talent or casting director but it's obviously not like that. Now there are some instances where a girl is a favorite, but nine times out ten it's because she has worked her way into that favorite position doing one thing or another, either sexually, or she's showed time after time that she can be professional—either one of the two ways" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

More will be said about the light skin and dark skin dichotomy in the section entitled *Racial and Beauty Politics*. However, Mya's commentary on how some women feel slighted by the casting process because it seemed the same women or the same type of women get hired to be in videos led to feelings of jealousy. Although Atlanta has an emerging market for music entertainment, according to all three women they have witnessed the same women attending the same castings which can also lead to feelings of jealousy and angst if your career goals include obtaining principle or lead roles in music videos. In Celene's experience, she witnessed this angst in an up-close and personal way.

In describing a video shoot experience in which a woman did not get the on-screen time that she felt she was promised and deserved, Celene observed the woman taking it out on the other women and their belongings on set. Celene stated:

> "I know one girl when I was on set, this one girl didn't get her camera time that she was promised by someone. When they saw her shot it was like a group of girls around [the artist] and the director cut her out, so when they played it back she was like, 'I'm cut out! This is the only scene I'm being put in and I'm being cut out, what's going on?' And she got upset. The girl kinda got rude and irate that she was cut out of the video shoot and she went behind the set and stole a lot of the girls' stuff and when they came back their purses were empty. I think that is just totally inappropriate behavior. And a lot of things like that go on behind the scenes. A lot of the girls feel like they are going home with a Ludacris that night or a Trey Songz—they feel like they are going to go home with these men tonight and you are not going to get in the way of them doing it. They are really gunning for that man that's the star of the evening. She was just being really disrespectful to the other girls. After the video shoot, I guess [the artist] realized that she was stealing stuff because she got thrown off the video. And he gave some of the girls their money back, I guess compensated them, but that's not really important…I mean, that kind of stuff just screams no class, like you will kill one of us for this. This is not worth it" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

In Celene's estimation, this woman's behavior, although extreme in that she was stealing money and other belongings from the other women on set, stemmed from a desire that some women have to make it within the industry at any cost. According to all three women

interviewed, this desire manifested itself in various ways—everything from sleeping with popular artists to being voyeuristic and attention seeking in music videos to igniting a healthy dose of competition amongst women. Within these discussions about specific experiences during casting calls and on video shoots, Celene and Mya had some strong opinions about the politics of skin color and beauty, which is not to say that Kitta did not have opinions about these subjects; rather, during the course of their musings about their experience in the phenomenological interview, this subject matter was prevalent enough to their experiences that it saturated a lot of their understandings about the inner workings of the industry.

The Politics of Race, Beauty, and Sexuality

Although Kitta could have very well experienced the politics and particulars of colorism on the sets of music videos, it was not a topic of discussion that she provided in our interviews, both phenomenological and semi-structured. However, Celene and Mya were forthcoming about their experience with colorism, beauty ideals, and racial and ethnic expectations during the phenomenological portion of our interviews. While viewing the video of her choice, Celene described how she felt being the only Black woman in a scene with three other women of color, saying:

> "The video we're going to view, you could tell that some of the girls, that's what they wanted to do—be vixens, after the shoot. I was the only black girl there. That wasn't intimidating—but they might have thought I had another race in me, but I am predominately black, and I do live a black life style—and everybody else was from Venezuela, Honduras, Puerto Rico; all my Latina sisters were there. We were all

> colored women, but all the Latina girls were there and I was the only Black girl, so it was kinda intimidating, and that type of stuff can intimidate you, but I'm not gonna go out and just be booty nasty because I am the only black girl there and I don't need to show, 'Hey look at me, look at me.' I mean some of the other females did that, but it screams that you are thirsty and I'm just not. I want to be around those people for the right reasons. I don't want them to be like 'Yeah, she's just another video vixen.' I just feel that I have more to offer. That's just personal, other people might not feel that way, other people might not agree with me" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene's multilayered experience on this video shoot speaks to several things that all three women observed on their respective sets. In order to get more prominent roles or be the center of attention in videos, the interview participants witnessed women who were willing to flirt, date and/or perform sexual acts with the artists, directors, producers, and/or entourage. Celene described not wanting to be "booty nasty" which, by inference meant that she refused to use tastelessness and sexual vulgarity to be liked among the artists and other people on the set. Her unwillingness to be "booty nasty" was also tied to the fact that she was the only Black girl in the scene of three other women who were all of Hispanic descent. In Celene's mind, the other women's perceived "thirstiness" or desperateness set them a part from her own self not only because she was actively shying away from the attention, but because the Latina women commanded so much attention from the two male artists and their entourages on the set. Concerning why the Latina women were so dynamic in her experience, Celene stated:

> "They [men] know which ones to try. Dudes in general, they know which ones to try. I don't know if I give off that look, but a lot of them don't try me, as they would

> try other girls, maybe because the girls weren't of Black descent. Maybe being Latino they thought that maybe she doesn't even speak English, I don't know. But they were aiming for them. They spoke to me and we had conversations, but they were just going for them. We were all equally attractive and pretty, so I wouldn't say it was anything like that, but they know who to try" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene would not attribute the other women's skin color to the fact that the men were aggressively approaching them on the video set. Rather, she hypothesized that the men were most likely approaching the Latina women because of a language barrier. Celene linked the women's perceived lack of effective communication in English to the ability of the artists to "try" the Latina women in ways that they would not "try" a woman whose first language was English. Celene did, however, admit that once she arrived on set and saw the other women, she realized that the casting directors and artist "were basically looking for exotic females or females that had a different look."

Mya admitted grappling with the notion that casting directors, artists, and other people who make the decisions about the visual direction of music videos, are often looking for women with an "exotic" look or an "ethnic" look, which is usually code for Hispanic or biracial or multiethnic. Mya reflected on this concept of beauty and how it has directly affected her, saying:

> "Girls who are Hispanic or ethnic looking—they are ones who get the most roles. And even if you are Black-looking, you have to have something in you that, well not in you, but something about you that is, you know, mysterious—like racially ambiguous about you. And I really, really hate that because a lot of times people will come up to me and go, 'Oh you're really pretty, what are you mixed with?' And I

> look at people, like 'oh so I have to be mixed with something to be pretty? How come I can't just be a beautiful Black woman? Why is that you feel like I have to have some White, or Indian or something in me to make me gorgeous? Why isn't it that Black women by themselves aren't considered pretty?'" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

The many interrogatives that she posed reflect how Mya has experienced these notions of beauty on a very personal level. In her experience, casting directors for video shoots have tended to choose women with lighter skin colors or women who are ethnically ambiguous as the featured models and/or dancers in music videos. Even concerning her own physical appearance, Mya has been asked to define her ethnic origins as proof that her beauty comes from a more diverse racial and ethnic background than African American. She also admitted to altering her physical presentation to appear more Eurocentric. Mya stated:

> So starting out in this industry, I did have to kinda change my look up and make myself look less ethnic and honestly, I've gotten more roles that way. I'll just be honest—with making myself look more ethnic [gesture to her hair], and you know long black curly hair. I couldn't do colors anymore because then you look black still and I…so I mean it's a little crazy, but at the end of the day that's the way the cookies crumble. You know it takes one person to stand up about it but honestly nobody wants to speak on it. People want to act like the issue does not happen, but at the end of the day non-Black women are preferred. And it really, really, really sucks…'" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Mya's claim about making herself look "less ethnic" was cleared up later in her semi-structured interview where she said that she meant "less Black." Having "more ethnic" features or being considered ethnically or racially ambiguous, was what Mya felt would get

her more roles. Mya's gesture to and mentioning of her changing hair style and the restriction of the colors used to dye her hair, speaks to the larger issue of what and whom is deemed attractive and desirable not just in music videos, but within the modeling industry, and more generally, the entertainment industry. Both in her vehement questioning of those who would inquire about her racial heritage and her disdain for having to compromise her appearance, Mya expressed a desire to see the Eurocentric and racially ambiguous standards of beauty changed so that "non-Black women" are no longer the preferred standard.

Mya also said that she could see the issue of racial diversity shifting, but it was happening very slowly. One of the reasons for the slower pace,

> "In the industry, in life, in general, I feel like there has to be somebody to break the double standard and if everybody just sits up here and pretends like they don't want the light skinned, or the Hispanic or the Middle Eastern woman or whatever, to always be the face of Black women rather Black women themselves, it would be a lie. And it's gonna keep on going and that's just going to keep on being the face of Black women and I don't appreciate that at all, at all. I feel like darker skin women should get an equal amount of roles as light skin women. And I just have to say that it has been getting a little better because I've seen a lot of dark skin women get roles. But at the same time those dark skin women that get roles have made themselves look more ethnic—they've got the long weave or colored contacts or they do something to make themselves look more Eurocentric versus Afrocentric. You know, I can't argue with that because the Eurocentric look is in right now. As long a

> Black woman is getting a role that is going to be seen in the Black and urban community then I'm ok with that" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Mya was very troubled by the notion that other women of color—women of Middle Eastern, European, or Hispanic decent—seemed to be replacing and (mis)representing Black women in sites like Black men's magazines and hip hop music videos. And even as she begins to see Black women in more prominent roles, Mya said that they [and she] still feel compelled to alter their appearance with the addition of longer hair and/or colorful contacts—attributes that they were not born with. According to Mya, part of the appeal of looking more Eurocentric stemmed from the perceived relational and sexual desires of Black men.

> "If you open black men's magazines now, it seems like they prefer women not of color, well I won't say women not of color, because they prefer ethnic women, but they don't like ethnic looking women if that makes sense" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Again when asked in the semi-structured interview to explain how she was using "ethnic women" and "ethnic looking women,'' Mya confirmed that "ethnic" meant to be ambiguous as to one's ethnicity, while to be "ethnic looking" meant that your ethnicity was not in question because of your skin color and other attributes that could identify you racially. At any rate, Mya went on to discuss how these Black men's magazines, such as *King, Smooth,* and *Black Men* often featured pictorials of women who were not of African descent and/or were ambiguous as to their race and ethnicity. She said:

> "As long a Black woman is getting a role that is going to be seen in the Black and urban community then I'm ok with that. Because honestly, if you go outside of the urban community and you go into like a Latino magazine, you're not going to see a

> bunch of Black people in a Latino magazine. But if you go in the Black magazine you see a bunch of Latinos in there, you see a bunch of White women there, you see a bunch of Middle Eastern women in there. At the same time, I guess it is kinda like diversity… There's nothing wrong with diversity, don't get me wrong, I love people of all races, but they also have that strong culture… I want it to be like, if you're looking at a Black magazine, yeah you might have one White woman in there, you might see one woman of another ethnicity, but you know that it's a Black magazine, you know that it's Black owned, created, and thought of. It's something that came from us. So with the light-skin versus dark skin, or I don't even want to say light skin versus dark skin, because honestly they'll choose a Hispanic over a light skin Black woman, so it's almost like a race thing at the end of the day, it's a race thing" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

According to Mya and Celene, the "race thing" could be an inhibitor to success in the modeling industry, and more generally the entertainment industry. And as Celene pointed out, it can be intimidating knowing that the casting directors and artists are interested in hiring women that appear "exotic" or "ethnically ambiguous" because the attributes associated these women—long and/or curly hair, lighter skin, colorful eyes—are deemed desirable by a particular demographic of men who consume Black men's magazines and hip hop music videos. But even in the midst of what would seem like a hostile, or non-supportive environment for African American women, the three women interviewed had an understanding that their bodies and body types were sexually desirable to men.

When asked to describe whether or not they experienced their own sensuality and sexuality through their performances, the participants had differing reflections. Kitta said:

> "I do bring it, and how I bring it? Pretty much I just think about the things that men want to…not just men, but people in general want to see a female that's sexy. So they always say make love to the camera, so that's exactly what you have to do. They'll say if you have a certain image or a certain sexual look, that's what I try to do. I just try to phase everybody out, like I'm at home in the mirror. And I try to dance in the mirror and look sexy and try to do different things. And that's exactly what I do—just phase everybody out so I won't be as nervous or as shy" (Kitta, July 13, 2011).

Having just devoted herself to modeling full-time, Kitta expressed the nervousness that she felt performing in front of cameras and in front of celebrities. But she articulated that role-playing in the mirror at home and trying out different facial expressions and body movements that exuded sexuality helped her to transmit that on a music video or on photo shoots. Celene articulated that she did not intentionally infuse her performances with sexuality, saying:

> "My main goal with modeling is not to be sexual or to have sex appeal. Naturally, if you are an attractive girl who has curves or are appealing to a man's eye, you're going to naturally be sensual or sexual to a man because they're going to find interest in you. That's what I believe and whatever comes off naturally is what comes off naturally. But I'm not going to try to be overly sexual just for a music video. Whatever is there naturally is there. And I just really kind of play the role. I'm not in to overdoing it—I don't have any interest in that" (Celene, July 13, 2011).

Unlike Kitta, Celene said that she did not try to be sexy; rather, she expressed that sexuality comes naturally because of others' attraction to her body. Celene detached her own

sexuality and how she experiences it, from the ways in which other people might interpret her sex appeal. Mya also had a similar experience of disassociating herself from how she experiences her sexuality and what she portrays on a shoot. Reiterating what she said during the phenomenological interview about modeling being similar to acting in that she used an alter ego to play a role, Mya said:

> "My sensuality and sexuality are all, like I said, my alter ego, so when I do portray that on camera or at a shoot, it's my alter ego. I, myself, am not a very sexual person, but my alter ego is like very sexual" (Mya, July 15, 2011).

Whether or not these women felt that the sexuality in their performance was intentional or unintentional, they all agreed that it was the use of their bodies, and the ways in which other video models and vixens have used their bodies, that sells the music, the artist(s), and the product(s). However, all three research participants had a desire to use their bodies and talents within the urban modeling industry for a limited amount of time. In doing so, the women hoped to avoid the pitfalls of other music video vixens and models, who have remained beholden to performing in music videos or who have ventured into pornography, and broaden their appeal to other forms of entertainment.

Fame, Notoriety, and Impact

When it came to success and making a name for themselves in the modeling world, the three women had varying degrees of success that they had already obtained and that they were attempting to reach. Not only did the women discuss their own dealings with the perils and promises of fame or their desire for fame, but they also conversed about how

being a part of this industry allowed them to be around famous people with connections and what other women were willing to do or had done to obtain it.

At the time of our interview, Kitta was modeling full-time with aspirations to be more successful in the industry. However, according to her, her shyness was a hindrance to becoming more successful. Concerning a video shoot she was on of which several local Atlanta artists and celebrities were a part, Kitta said:

> "I was real nervous. I talked to people but at the same time I really didn't network and that would have been the best time because Greg Street was there, DJ Drama, Webbie was there, Young Buck, Blood Raw, Diamond from Crown Mob, she was in the video also. It would have been the best time for me to network and give my business card to them and just talk to them. But I didn't. I was too shy and too nervous. The only thing I can really tell people to do is get out there and network no matter if you are shy or don't talk or whatever because this person could have the capabilities of getting you paid or in a movie or whatever it may be" (Kitta, June 19, 2011).

Kitta felt that by overcoming her shyness and networking with established artists and celebrities, she could open up more opportunities for herself. Her sentiments about networking were echoed by Celene and Mya, both of whom had experienced larger amounts of success in the industry. While Kitta hoped to achieve more fame in the future, Mya spoke of experiencing the benefits and risks of obtaining more fame.

As the only women interviewed who had a leading lady role in a music video, Mya had experienced a bit more fame, recognition, and compensation than Kitta and Celene. Some of the perks of fame that Mya discussed were the compensation, as noted in the

previous section *Professionalism in the Industry*, and also traveling outside of the Atlanta area where she is from. Mya stated:

> "I like traveling so that's a big plus in the industry. You get to travel to different places—Los Angeles, Miami, you know just different places. Even in the city of Atlanta, with doing modeling, I've gone places that—I've lived here for 12 years—that I've never been before. So that's really nice" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Although Mya had experienced several positive aspects of becoming better known, she had also seen how this recognition could backfire. Mya relayed an experience wherein a family member told her grandmother that Mya had been in a position of sexual vulgarity in a video on the Internet. She retold the story in this way:

> "I had an incident with a family member calling my grandmother telling her that I was basically busting it wide open on the Internet, when I was actually in a bathing suit, something that you would wear to a water park. I was kind of hurt by that because I was like 'why would you call and tell my grandmother this, because my grandmother is my heart.' And I guess they call themselves trying to embarrass me, or dishonor me, or disgrace me because they feel like I was getting a little too big. Like people get that feeling if you're getting a little too big then you have to calm it down because you can't be better than me, you can't be more successful than me" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

While she felt that her swimwear was appropriate for the work she was doing, Mya's family member either did not find her behavior appropriate or desired to make it seem as if she was "busting it wide open" or in other words, flaunting her body distastefully and sexually online. Being mischaracterized was something that affected Mya deeply which was evident

on her face during the interview. Not only did Mya feel that she had to be leery of family members and close friends, but strangers as well who may want to discredit her in some way or take their obsession further by stalking her. Mya said:

> "It's really scary when you recognize that people are recognizing you especially for something [I have done]. When I first heard that guy mention that he had seen me in the video, I was like 'that's so trivial, I did that three years ago so how do you still remember that because I barely remember that.' So when I started doing even bigger projects, for a safety issue, it was important that I don't put my real name on anything, that I be careful of the pictures and things that I put up—that I even be careful of the things that I put myself into. If I'm at a party and someone has a camera up, I can't let people film me, I can't let people take pictures of me, I can't send pictures to people. It's just liability issues because I might get into something and somebody sends this picture to TMZ. I just never know down the line what's going to happen. There's a big safety thing there" (Mya, July 6, 2011).

Mya's experience of being recognized and potentially misrepresented was less flattering than it was frightening and frustrating. She expressed a need to protect her identity and privacy, which Celene and Kitta attested to as well, as their modeling names were not the names given to them at birth. Like Mya, Celene also had to navigate how to deal with people recognizing her publically. Speaking on how she has been angered by recognition that leads to stereotypical renderings of her work, Celene said:

> "I have been in the grocery store and people say, 'You look so familiar and I say 'Yeah, I do do things that are out there. You might have seen me on a club flyer, in a video, at an event, you might have seen me in a picture, a photographer's pictures. I

> do have those moments where people say 'I have seen you before, what do you do?' or something like that. And then other times, where people will be like, 'Yeah I've seen you somewhere before—you a stripper?' Those things make me kind of angry because they typecast you just because you have that look as those video vixens and they typecast you and that really angers me. Because if you knew what I do and all that I do, you would be like, 'Oh no, I'm sorry.' So it really angers me to be thrown into that same category as one of those types of people" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

Celene's sentiments during this portion of our interview reflect what all of the women said about disassociating themselves from the video vixen moniker because it was often associated with unprofessionalism and even sex work. Celene preferred to be recognized for work that she had actually done—photo shoots, modeling, and videos—rather than work—stripping or other forms of sex work—in which she had never partaken. Celene attributed this typecasting to the fact that many women who perform in hip hop music videos tend to be curvier, with larger breasts, hips and buttocks and smaller waists, and sometimes these women also participate in stripping and pornography. Concerning how some women's choices can lead to the sex work industry, Celene said:

> 'Make sure you know the production team, make sure it's all legit because you'll wind up doing some other things that are in the adult film industry—you can go to that side very quick doing the video vixen things. There are a lot of video vixens—Pinky [for example]—they've gone to the adult film industry because of the video vixen thing of big booty, big hips. You can go that way pretty quick" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

For the three women interviewed, they were not seeking the type of fame, or infamy that comes from engaging in the adult film industry or sex work more generally. Rather, the women desired to use music videos as one aspect of their multi-layered approach to finding success in the entertainment industry. Although the three women were invested in the fame, celebrity and connections of the artists, directors, and producers, they all claimed that they were not invested to the point that they sought to exchange sexual or relational favors for a leg up in the industry.

Another aspect of fame and notoriety that came up was the participants' knowledge and opinions about women who have gained fame and notoriety using their sexuality to make a name for themselves. In the semi-structured interview, Kitta spoke about how Karrine Steffans' book, *Confessions of a Video Vixen*, has been a double-edged sword for video models and video vixens that have come along after its publication. Kitta stated:

> "You'll never know by just looking at a music video, what actually goes on. People really didn't know what went on with video vixens and video models until Karrine Steffans actually had that book come out. Until that came out, people really didn't know what females go through. So she opened up a lot of light on that… Sometimes if you have a name out like Karrine Steffans, I'm pretty sure there are a lot of people who wouldn't want to work with Karrine Steffans because she did a tell-all. People don't want to know everybody's business like that" (Kitta, July 13, 2011).

Celene also found Karrine Steffans' fame to be misleading, and almost laughable as to what video models were about. She mused:

> "I don't want to downplay anybody who is a vixen. It's just—I read Karrine Steffans book from beginning to end, and she is the ultimate video vixen, as they would say,

> of the century and it was pathetic to me. I wasn't raised to be so thirsty over men. I don't need a man for anything so therefore I am not looking for a man's approval to tell me 'oh, you're pretty you have a nice body'" (Celene, June 28, 2011).

In her statements about not needing a man for anything versus Steffans' seeming need for these things, Celene was referring to the tell-all portion of Steffans' first book *Confessions*, in which she "confesses" to having sexual relationships with various men in the hip hop and rap entertainment industry. All three made direct correlations between the perceptions of sexual promiscuity that get thrust upon women who model in hip hop music videos and the first book Steffans wrote about her autobiographical experiences as a video vixen.

Celene and Mya also discussed their knowledge of Josephine Baker. As a sexual icon of the 1920s and 1930s, U.S. born Josephine Baker took her act to France and several current pop/R & B stars, including Beyoncé, count her as a musical and performance inspiration. When the research participants were asked whether or not they or video vixens and models more generally had a historical connection to Baker, Kitta said that she was vaguely aware of Baker's life, while Celene discussed how Baker's act was too risqué for the time period, and Mya discussed Baker as a role model. Celene contemplated Baker's impact in her time period, as well as Black female entertainers in the present, saying:

> "Josephine Baker did what she did—I believe that Josephine Baker worked in Europe and I think that's why she went to Europe was to get acceptance by that culture. Back then, here in America, I really think she would have been looked at as a floozy, loose; I don't think that was really widely accepted. But she definitely succeeded in Europe. It was very risky, I don't know if I would be dancing topless with cheetahs and banana skirts. It's kind of risky. Nowadays that would be very

> misogynist and very just out there. It was an art form in a way, but I think that she was just trying to set herself away from the rest of the women that were out there at that time. Josephine Baker was culturally accepted in Europe because she was pretty, she was different, and they looked at her as being exotic, they looked at her as being different, kind of like a 'ooh, ah' factor…they kind of idolized her. What Josephine did was kind of groundbreaking. To be honest, what Josephine Baker did, it's a little bit more in the adult film industry now. I don't want to really say that because she's Josephine Baker. She's kind of a legend and she's someone who has set the tone for Black women entertainers. When I say entertainers, I think Beyoncé—there's plenty more vocally talented people than Beyoncé, but Beyoncé is who she is because she's an entertainer. And that's how I feel about Josephine Baker. Her voice was not all of that, in my opinion. I think she was more of an entertainer and that's kind of what makes a superstar, per say. So I think that what she did was kind of on the racy side, but I think that it was worse than what the girls do nowadays. I mean they do have on clothes, and it's not nearly as explicit. It's kind of on the same level [though], it's kind of giving off the same vibe" (Celene, July 13, 2011).

Going back and forth between whether or not she felt Josephine Baker's performances were on par with the performance of video models and video vixens today, Celene felt that there were some similarities between the sexuality and sensuality of the performances, but continued to confirm that Baker's performances would be considered more explicit than those of women in hip hop music videos. It is also noteworthy that Celene believes that Baker's popularity was based on her perceived exoticism, an idea that is often mapped onto

the bodies of women of color to create and reinforce racial biases and discourses of difference. Mya had a different knowledge of Josephine Baker than did Celene. In fact, Mya looked to Baker as an inspiration and mused about other performers and performances that inspire her. She stated:

> "I am basically a big fan of Josephine Baker. Her and Marilyn Monroe are the two people I channel because it's sexy, but at the same time it's not raunchy, busting it wide open. It's a certain level of class and air that regards them. Like with the burlesque dancers—it's not just throwing stuff off or whatever. There is meaning to it. It's a story being told or an image being portrayed. It's something behind it" (Mya, July 15, 2011).

Mya's intrigue with burlesque storytelling works seamlessly with the aforementioned enjoyment she found in expressing her moods and acting out storylines for the camera on video and photo shoots. Just as Mya said that performers such as Josephine Baker and Marilyn Monroe influenced her, she, along with Celene and Kitta acknowledged that viewers, especially those that are younger in age, of hip hop music videos were impacted by their performances as well as the performances of other video models. Kitta chose to answer the question, "What, if any, impacts do you feel your performance has on younger viewers of hip hop videos?," by exploring the positive and negative impacts on the viewership. She said:

> "It's somewhat of a positive impact, and it's also negative at the same time. You have the young females who like to dance in talent shows, dance in different places, and just love to dance so they look at us in a positive way even though they don't know everything that goes on. Because you'll never know just sitting here looking at

> a music video what actually goes on… As far as the dudes viewing it, it's kind of like a negative impact because the only thing you really see in rap videos now is how dudes are really degrading women as far as talking about them and calling them all kinds of name and stuff so the younger people who want to get into the music industry are feeding of that. 'So this rapper may be doing it so it's ok for me to do it" (Kitta, July 13, 2011).

Remembering how music video dancers influenced her as a little girl, Celene spoke about the impact of her own performance. She reflected:

> "When I was younger, I wanted to be a video girl just because you got to be in music videos with the cool guys, and things like that. Girls email me all the time and ask me about modeling, so I know that they're watching because they always contact me. Whether it's about education or modeling, I get about three or four emails a month about either opportunity. You have to watch that as well, because I don't want anybody to, even with my own children—when I decide to have them—I don't want them to think, 'Oh, why are you doing this and why are you telling me I can't because you did it?' So, you have to be careful of those kinds of things because you do have a future, not only business wise, but family wise as well. Everybody's watching you and they're going to follow you" (Celene, July 13, 2011).

Mya stressed that women who model and dance in videos, but also have other careers and/or interests need to let people—whether admirers or detractors—know that they do more than just perform in music videos. She stated:

> "It definitely affects our community and girls and females' self-images. A lot of times, I honestly think that it hurts more than it helps because if you're the standard

> for little girls then sometimes they're not able to meet them. Because a lot of times you're portrayed as being the perfect sex object so then they in turn want to be the perfect sex object and that's honestly not anything to aspire to be. You should aspire to have a career, and not be a sex object for any man, or to be perfect for any man. So a lot of times I feel like it hurts our community with the way that we are portrayed. There are some of us who do go and speak to young girls on image and do community service with them. When you get one on one and you show girls that, yes this is a career but you have to have a backup, or you have to do things differently and give them the one-on-one talk, to actually inspire them. Because they'll look at her and say, 'Yeah I remember her and she's actually in school going to get her medical degree' or something like that, and then they'll look up to you in that sense. But if they don't know you and they've never heard you speak, then you're just an object basically in the video, being shown off and it's just not positive. You have to have something to back it up" (Mya, July 15, 2011).

In Mya's estimation, it was the image of the woman and not the woman herself who had the greatest impact on how young girls and women viewed themselves in relation to the standards of beauty and sexuality that they encountered on television or in magazines. According to Mya, these impacts could be countered when the viewers got a glimpse of who the video model or video vixen was personally, in a setting such as a mentorship program, an endeavor that both Mya and Celene discussed pursuing individually.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

As the results chapter demonstrates, the three women interviewed—Celene, Kitta, and Mya—view their experiences in the urban/hip hop video and modeling industry in ways that are sometimes more dynamic, and other times more personal and critical, than the academic literature that has been published about the liberating and subjugating aspects of their work. While many scholars compare the performances of video models and video vixens to historical narratives concerning Sarah Baartman, or Hottenetot Venus, none of the women interviewed demonstrate knowledge of Baartman or her legacy—which is not to say that the comparison is unworthy or invalid as a point of analysis. There are of course similarities between the commodification and exploitation of Sarah Baartman's body and the use of the video models and vixens to sell artists' image and songs. But I cannot say with certitude that the old philosophical adage, "If you do not know your history, you are doomed to repeat it" applies to the women I interviewed, or any woman who performs in music videos for that matter. There is a semblance of agency that these women feel they have because they are able to turn down gigs that do not suit their taste and/or needs, whereas by most accounts, Baartman was in a position of servitude with her manager, Hendrick Cezar.

While their connections to Baartman are unexplored and their relationships to Josephine Baker vary, the three women interviewed are very clear that women such as Karrine Steffans have given video models a black eye of sorts. While their discussions had traces of the politics of respectability, i.e. their insistence on professionalism while doing their job, the women also express a semblance of agency that they experience in being able to control their career choices and wear outfits in which they feel most comfortable. Their

contentions with Steffans are real, but Shayne Lee argues that Steffans' detractors are engaging in "lazy branding" when they reduce her sexual experiences to that of a "harlot" instead of engaging in a discourse that re-imagines Steffans as "an assertive self-aware feminist who sparks women to confront their sexual longings rather than sweep them under the politics-of-respectability rug" (Lee 2010, 40). Sex, especially sex that a man or woman chooses to brag about, is about power. Instead of interrogating the patriarchal power structure that allows some men to use sex as a weapon, or pawn, or for boost, Lee contends that Steffans is all right to play within the same power dynamics and use them as she sees fit.

There is a contentious space between or among "politics of respectability" and "politics of sexual agency." While "politics of respectability" seemingly keep men's sexual dalliances from repudiation and women's sexual longings in check, "politics of sexual agency" attempt to make right the gendered double standard afforded under the politics of respectability by essentially saying, women can do it to. The women interviewed for this study inhabit this in-between space in that they articulate a desire to keep all forms of sex out of the equation and position themselves as professionals who can be agentive in other ways that do not require reversing the power dynamic concerning sexual exploits. But keeping notions of sex out of their work only function to an extent, insofar as they are willing to commodify their bodies to manufacture sexual desire. Even within this space, however, there are other powerful interests at play, which include record companies and the buying public, entities that Lee explores in relationship to Steffans but only insomuch as to further his point that women like Steffans need to adhere to the same system of subjugation, as opposed to finding ways to subvert and dismantle the system.

As for how the research participants' experiences map onto other pop culture references, while some of their experiences correspond with those of video vixen authors Karrine Steffans and Buffie "the Body" Carruth, such as role-playing on video shoots and grappling with their body image, other experiences do not map so seamlessly onto the more famous performers, such as sexual and relational fraternizing with famous men or the level of success experienced in the industry. And that last sentiment about the differing levels of success is precisely the reason why I began posing my research questions such as, what are the experiences of women who dance/model in hip hop music videos and how do they construct their realities in the context of hip hop and within their communities?

Steffans and Carruth are afforded the opportunity to publish books about their experiences and as readers we can only hope that the women whose names and faces grace the front covers penned them. The women chosen for "Smooth Girl of the Month" in *Smooth Magazine* or "Web Girl of the Week" in *King Magazine*, are only a fraction of the women who attend castings calls around the country (and sometimes world) looking for a principal role or lead role in a music video. Although their interviews are posted online (alongside their titillating photographs) for admirers and detractors to read and comment on, the questions they are asked tend to focus on the enormity of their body parts or their favorite sexual exploits. They are also asked substantive questions concerning their career choices and standards of beauty in the entertainment industry. For instance on the *Black Men Magazine* website, the women are asked formulaic interview questions such as, "Do you or would you work a 9 to 5 until your career took off?" and "How do you feel about magazines like *Elle* and *Vogue*, do you think they should feature more curvaceous

women?"[3] to which the women give short, nondescript answers that they are never asked to expound upon. But the reality is that the women in these interviews have to play to commercial and consumer interests, hence questions like, "Preferred type of underwear?" and "How old were you when you had your first kiss and paint us the picture?"[4]

The more pressing reality is that most women who perform in music videos will not publish books and many women who aspire to get their career starts in the urban modeling industry are relegated to answering questions about the size of their buttocks. With this study, I intended to open up the possibilities for discourse that can be had about and by women who perform in music videos as video vixens and video models. My own discourse changed in the midst of interviewing, as all three of the research participants had a strong aversion to the term "video vixen." This research has the potential to grow and expand the discourse on Black female sexuality, performance, and agency in hip hop with the addition of women who have experience in the music video industry performing in more high-budget videos or women who intend to make video modeling a more long-term career goal.

I began thinking about this research more critically when I read a quote by First Lady Michelle Obama in a special addition of *Essence* magazine. She said, "For me [our image] is a reminder of what is already the reality. The women in videos and the stereotypes are just not the truth of who we are as a community…. But sometimes…those stereotypes define us" (Essence 2009, 10). Not just the First Lady, but many feminist scholars, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and some men too have expressed similar sentiments. The truth is, however, that while the women in the videos do not represent us all, they are a part of our community. The truth is that while they know their work is a

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[3] http://www.blackmendigital.com/t2/interviews.php?nats=TypeInAcct.type.blackmen.blackmen2.1.0.0.0.0
[4] http://www.king-mag.com/online/?cat=23

contributing factor to the stereotypes concerning Black women, many of them uphold standards that most Black women tend to hold dear—obtaining a college education, mothering our children, providing for our families, etc. Their sentiments, it seems, should welcome more nuanced discourses about their work, and more broadly, their lives. We could open up the possibilities for such discourses, if we would only but hear them speak. "I feel like I've kind of been given a voice" (Mya, July 15, 2011). These are voices that speak their own truth in the midst of power.

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Appendix A. Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How old are you?

2. Approximately, how many casting calls have you attended?

3. How many music videos have you performed in?

4. What terms (i.e. video vixen, video model, etc.) do you use to describe what you do? What do you think about these terms?

5. How would you describe your first experience on a music video shoot?

6. What are your motives for performing in music videos?

7. What do you do with the money you make from performing in music videos?

8. How do you, or do you, self-identify with the characters (love interest, groupie, etc.) you portray in music videos?

9. What are your thoughts on the wardrobe options on set? How is your outfit chosen?

10. What is your role in hip hop? Do you see any similarities between your role and the role of female rappers or R&B artists?

11. Do you experience any backlash because of your job/career choice?

12. How do you experience your sexuality/sensuality? Is your performance a part of how you experience your sexuality/sensuality?

13. How do you, do you, reconcile the sexually provocative nature of your performance with historical narratives about Black women's sexuality? What is your knowledge of the following women?
    - Sarah Bartmann/Hottentot Venus
    - Josephine Baker

14. What, if any, impacts do you feel your performance has on younger viewers of hip hop videos?

15. Generally, what are your feelings about participating in this research study? How do you feel it has benefited you, if at all?

Appendix B. Signed Informed Consent for Face-to-Face Interviews

Georgia State University
Department of Women's Studies
Informed Consent

Title: The Women Behind the Moves: A Phenomenological Study of Video Vixens

Principal Investigator: Dr. Layli Maparyan
Loron Bartlett

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the personal experiences of women who dance in hip hop videos. You are invited to participate because you know first hand about the experiences that female dancers and models have faced in a male dominated industry such as hip hop. Rarely are the voices of the women who star in the videos heard. With this study, I hope to expand the discussion about "video vixens" to one that takes into consideration your experiences and motivations as performers and the limitations and liberations that you feel. A total of 4 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require about 4 to 5 hours of your time. 3 to 4 hours are needed for the first face-to-face interview and about 1 hour is needed for a second face-to-face or phone interview.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will first be interviewed face-to-face in a location that we both agree on. This location needs to be in a place where you feel comfortable discussing your experiences openly and with few or no interruptions. The chosen location needs to have access to a DVD/VCR or Internet to view a music video. This first interview will take 3-4 hours to complete and you will be answering the following question: what are your experiences as a woman who dances in hip hop music videos? I will not ask many, if any, follow-up questions. The purpose of this type of interview is to reflect an unbiased account of your experiences. For this first interview, you will also choose a music video to watch, in which you have performed. If you are uncomfortable with this option, you can choose another video in which you are not a participant. After viewing the music video, you will answer the following question: what are your feelings about your/their experiences in the making of this music video? This first interview will be video recorded.

If you decide to continue with the study, you will also be asked to participate in a follow-up face-to-face interview or a telephone interview. This interview will take place 1 to 2 weeks after completing the first interview. This second interview will be much shorter (up to 1 hour). If face-to-face, it will take place in a location of your choice. You will be asked to

answer more detailed questions such as how many videos you have performed in, how many casting calls you have attended, and how much financial compensation you receive. This second interview will be tape-recorded.

This research will take place in the month of June. I will be the only researcher with whom you will interact. The time commitment is as follows: We will either interact face-to-face twice or face-to-face once and by phone once. Again, the first interview will require a minimum commitment of 3 hours and will include the viewing of a music video. The second portion of the interview will require a maximum commitment of 1 hour. 1 to 2 weeks will pass between the two interviews.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. Possible benefits include learning more about yourself and your work through the act of reflecting on your experiences. Overall, we hope to gain information about the lived experiences of women who dance in hip hop music videos.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any personal benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The principal investigator, Layli Phillips Maparyan, and the primary researcher, myself (Loron Bartlett) will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked, password-protected safe, as well as a locked file cabinet. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact the student principal investigator, Loron Bartlett, at 770-364-8039 or loron.bartlett@gmail.com if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be video recorded, please sign below.

_____ _____
Participant Date

_____ _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix C. Informed Consent for Phone Interviews

Georgia State University
Department of Women's Studies
Informed Consent

Title: The Women Behind the Moves: A Phenomenological Study of Video Vixens

Principal Investigator: Dr. Layli Maparyan
Loron Bartlett

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the personal experiences of women who dance in hip hop videos. You are invited to participate because you know first hand about the experiences that female dancers and models have faced in a male dominated industry such as hip hop. Rarely are the voices of the women who star in the videos heard. With this study, I hope to expand the discussion about "video vixens" to one that takes into consideration your experiences and motivations as performers and the limitations and liberations that you feel. A total of 4 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require about 4 to 5 hours of your time. 3 to 4 hours are needed for the first face-to-face interview and about 1 hour is needed for a second face-to-face or phone interview.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will first be interviewed face-to-face in a location that we both agree on. This location needs to be in a place where you feel comfortable discussing your experiences openly and with few or no interruptions. The chosen location needs to have access to a DVD/VCR or Internet to view a music video. This first interview will take 3-4 hours to complete and you will be answering the following question: what are your experiences as a woman who dances in hip hop music videos? I will not ask many, if any, follow-up questions. The purpose of this type of interview is to reflect an unbiased account of your experiences. For this first interview, you will also choose a music video to watch, in which you have performed. If you are uncomfortable with this option, you can choose another video in which you are not a participant. After viewing the music video, you will answer the following question: what are your feelings about your/their experiences in the making of this music video? This first interview will be video recorded.

If you decide to continue with the study, you will also be asked to participate in a follow-up face-to-face interview or a telephone interview. This interview will take place 1 to 2 weeks after completing the first interview. This second interview will be much shorter (up to 1 hour). If face-to-face, it will take place in a location of your choice. You will be asked to

answer more detailed questions such as how many videos you have performed in, how many casting calls you have attended, and how much financial compensation you receive. This second interview will be tape-recorded.

This research will take place in the month of April. I will be the only researcher with whom you will interact. The time commitment is as follows: We will either interact face-to-face twice or face-to-face once and by phone once. Again, the first interview will require a minimum commitment of 3 hours and will include the viewing of a music video. The second portion of the interview will require a maximum commitment of 1 hour. 1 to 2 weeks will pass between the two interviews.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. Possible benefits include learning more about yourself and your work through the act of reflecting on your experiences. Overall, we hope to gain information about the lived experiences of women who dance in hip hop music videos.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any personal benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The principal investigator, Layli Phillips Maparyan, and the primary researcher, myself (Loron Bartlett) will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked, password-protected safe, as well as a locked file cabinet. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact the student principal investigator, Loron Bartlett, at 770-364-8039 or loron.bartlett@gmail.com if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form upon request, as it contains the same information as the initial informed letter that you signed.

If you agree to continue with this study, please continue with the interview process.