

Rap Sessions Study Guide

Gender & Hip Hop

By: Daniel White Hodge

Over the last 30 years, Hip Hop culture has proven itself to be a positive force in the lives of youth relative to art, business and social activism. Despite these constructive influences, arguably the most well-known fact about the culture today is its lyrics and music videos that degrade women. In fact, for many, the term Hip Hop, in the last decade, has become synonymous with misogyny and homophobia. As Hip Hop is the defining culture in the lives of many American youth (particularly White youth), naturally the question arises: "How is Hip Hop shaping the new war of the sexes?"

The goals of this town hall style meeting conducted by leading Hip Hop intellectuals and activists are to help young people think through the range of issues associated with this dilemma; place on the table the tensions and animosities between young men and women that some Hip Hop music exacerbates; and finally, present youth with viable strategies they can implement in their personal lives and organizations.

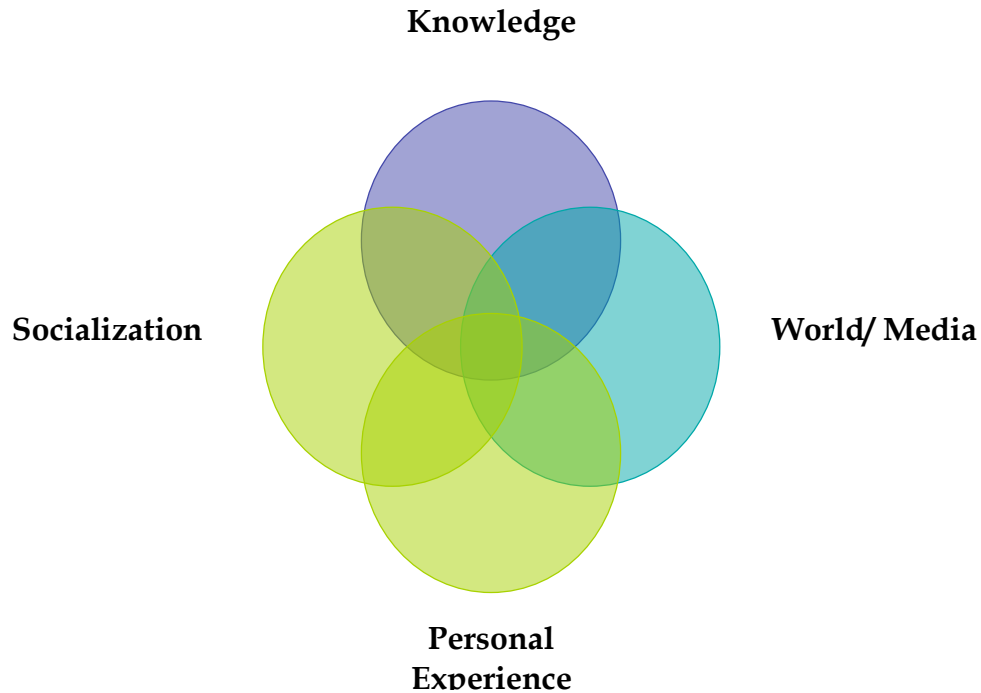
This study guide seeks to not only examine the social constructs of gender and Hip Hop, but also better understand our own views on female and male roles, norms, and pedagogies as it relates to Hip Hop. The study questions here are listed to continue the conversation that was started during the Rap Sessions forum. This study guide works best when done in a group or community setting. The community based learning format is preferred because we tend to learn more when others share, interact, and engage with our thoughts and opinions. We recommend you go deeper as a group on this particular subject. [Start here](#) and view the Rap Sessions *Digital Stories* which will also help direct you through this study guide.

For Starters...

Get into groups of three (if possible) and answer the following questions:

- When do you first remember recognizing your gender?
 - Where was it at?
- Who taught you how to "act" like a woman or a man?
 - What messages have you received from your family on being a "woman" or a "man?"
- What are some pro's and con's about being your gender?

Now, take some time to reflect on your current life status. Review the figure below:



Each of the spheres represents a different culture, context, and or social construction that each of us tend to pass through at any given time. Each sphere comes with its own set of *cultural norms & roles*. For many of us, we move effervescently through each sphere never really aware of the situations around us. In other words, there is much overlap in the different spheres. Knowledge is how we acquired and continue to acquire our education (whether formal or informal; street or book smarts). Socialization is how we have come to be the person we are today and the agents that have helped shape that (e.g. school, family, media, peers, church). World/ Media is both how the world around us influences us and how media agents such as television and news get us to re-shape our worldviews. Lastly, personal experience is just that, it is our story and it is where the other three circles intersect.

From the center, comes our level of gender awareness. Several factors influence that:

- Family
- Family dynamics
- Family communication
- School
- Our education
- Our own view and take on life

- Where we come from in the world (e.g. geographical location)
- Church/ Spirituality

Based on this model, describe within your group:

- How you received messages about male and female constructs from the knowledge, socialization, and world/ media spheres
- What is your level of gender competence? Be honest!
- Do you tend to see men and women in traditional roles?
 - Where might that come from?
- How has Hip Hop helped shape your personal experience?
- How do you feel about women being “head of the household” and men being more “domestic?” Share your thoughts within your group break down why it is you feel that way.

Probing Deeper...

The gender crisis facing the Hip Hop generation is a major hot button issue for those both outside and within the Hip Hop community. In small groups answer:

- How is Hip Hop contributing to the misogyny and homophobia in our national culture?
 - How do the lyrics of such artists like Ludacris, 50 Cent, and Lil Kim attribute to these phenomena?
- How do degrading images of women affect women, girls, men and boys?
 - In other words, how do you think gender formation and gender role formation is affected in the developmental process of children by degrading images of women?
 - How do films add to stereotypes of women?
- What are Hip Hop artists and activists presenting as alternatives to the dominant representations?
 - Does Hip Hop as a whole try to make things better or just add more fuel to the fire in your opinion?

Take a look at this video ([Click here](#))

- What are the messages about manhood being sent out by this video?
- How is masculinity defined by Ludacris?
- How does the club atmosphere can be pro-male at times? If you disagree with this statement, then talk about that.

Take a look at this video ([Click here](#))

- How are women portrayed in this video?
- What are the overall theme/ themes being sent out by this video?

- How are relationships defined?
 - How are women seen by men?
 - What do women have to do in order to vie for men's attention?
 - Does Ashanti contribute to negative images of women or does she balance the video out?
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Examining Hip Hop's Gender Constructs...

[Click here](#) to examine Byron Hurt's documentary a little closer and to see up close some of the more destructive forces of misogyny within the Hip Hop matrix. Victoria DeFrancisco and Catherine Palczewski state, "The way in which language names a person as a sex and gender determines how that person is perceived as a sex and a gender" (2007: 107). Moreover, they state, "Language provides one way to trace the ideology of a culture, and language is also a way culture maintains itself" (p.107). So, if that is the case:

- How does the constant use to the word "Bitch" affect women's overall self image?
- Tupac once stated that there were differences between a bitch, a ho/ slut, and woman. Do you think that is true? Go deeper than just yes or no.
- Does Byron have a point about the use of the word bitch in contrast to the word "nigga?"
- How might the words bitch, ho, and slut affect the developmental process of a woman?
 - How might it affect the developmental process of a man
 - Young woman?
 - Young Man?
- In Byron's DVD it states, "*Every black man that goes in the studio has always got two people in his head: him, in terms of who he really is, and the thug that he feels he has to project.*" How does the corporate commercialized hyper male image get placed on Hip Hop icons such as Kanye, 50 Cent, and or Jay-Z?
 - How does hyper-masculinity rear its head in the development of "image" within Hip Hop?
 - How does America's image of male dominance play out in Hip Hop?
 - How does America's understanding of gender roles get attributed as Hip Hop's problems? In other words, why is Hip Hop the one to blame when America has had a problem with women for a lot longer than Hip Hop has been around?
 - How do television shows like *Deal or No Deal*, *The Pussy Cat Dolls*, and *Gossip Girl* compound the gender issue even further? If you do not agree with that, then explain how they promote gender diversity.

Gender is a complex issue. Subtle messages that get into our psyche regarding gender roles are therein “Hard-wired” into our personal experience resulting in the altering of our worldview; hence, resulting in our level of gender communication and gender views. Chuck Kraft states, “For we follow the dictates of our society almost entirely by reflex, not by rationally thinking out each move. Such cultural reflexes appear to be at least as deeply ingrained in us as the reflexes by means of which an athlete performs” (Kraft p. 104). We all have to take a closer look into how we view and see the opposite sex and to critically examine culture, while not looking at Hip Hop as the “smoking gun” which began the gender debate. These long standing issues were here long before Hip Hop even dropped its first block party. We must begin to deconstruct what gender means both for society, and for ourselves.

For Further Reading

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Dan White Hodge is a dynamic speaker, scholar, Hip Hop theologian, Tupac Shakur scholar, & racial bridge builder that connects Urban Popular culture (Including but not limited to Hip Hop, Race/ Ethnicity, class, socio-cultural concerns, The Black Church, & The Emergent Urban Church) with daily life events. Having received his PhD from Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, his dissertation focused on the life, theology, and spiritual message of Tupac Amaru Shakur (TITLE: Baptized in Dirty Water: The Missiological Gospel of Tupac Amaru Shakur). Dan has been an active member of the Hip Hop Community since he was in first grade, and continues to not only study the culture, but live it as well. His unique perspective on Hip Hop and Theology challenges his audiences to look beyond the "outer surface" and go into the deeper parts of the culture. Dr. White Hodge is currently working on a book entitled "*Tha Hostile Gospel: Missionally Engaging The Theology of Hip Hop.*" This book is being published by Inner Varsity Press and deals with the theology and spirituality of Hip Hop culture.