

# THOT/Thought-Leading as Disruptive Pleasure

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we, the authors, present our conceptualization of THOT/Thought-leading as disruptive pleasure enacted by Black women cultural producers, especially those engaged in hip-hop culture. Through our theory-cypher, we imitate the call-and-response nature of hip-hop cypher rounds through offering our hip-hop subjectivities as women of color; our historical and personal understandings of hip-hop culture; the ways we draw from various strains of thought from Black feminist discourse to articulate Black women's hip-hop onto-epistemology; and why we desire to articulate this concept of THOT/Thought-leading for the ways that Black women embrace self-definition and reject controlling narratives and respectability politics. By engaging in this conceptualization of THOT/Thought-leading, we center the necessity of love, care, and valuation of Black women, our experience and/as knowledge, and our abilities as cultural and knowledge producers.

KEYWORDS: Black feminism, Black studies, care, cypher, disruptive pleasure, hip hop, THOT, thought-leader

## Introduction

“Girls like me seemed to be the object of the conversations and not full participants, because we were a problem to be solved, not people in our own right.” (p. xviii)

Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot* (2020)

*Brown liquor, brown liquor*  
*Brown skin, brown face*  
*Brown leather, brown sugar*  
*Brown leaves, brown keys*  
*Brown freckles, brown face*  
*Black skin, black braids*  
*Black waves, black days*  
*Black baes, black days*

*These are black-owned things  
Black faith still can't be washed away*  
**Solange, Almeda (2019)**

We, the authors, identify as Black/women/artists/educators/researchers (Wilson & Lawton, 2019). We activate our work in the presence of our ancestors—Black women knowledge creators and curators (also see, Acuff, 2018) who have come before us, who sit at the table with us, step on stage with us, co-create with us, and for those who will be here long after we are gone. The lyrics of Solange Knowles' Almeda draw from specificities of the United States (U.S./ North American continent) Black culture; the rhythms of these lyrics point toward traditions within hip-hop culture. We think with these lyrics and Kendall's (2020) words to ask: *What theoretical interventions might be made in order to articulate a politics of pleasure in spite of the heteropatriarchal space of U.S. hip-hop culture? What does it mean to refuse being "objects of conversation?" How might we account for Black women's participation in knowledge production in excess of respectability? How might radical care be enacted to recognize the full personhood of Black women?*

In this article, we propose THOT/Thought-Leading as disruptive pleasure found in Black women's onto-epistemological engagement in and through hip-hop culture and by rejecting heteropatriarchal norms and racist/sexist stereotypes in a manner of our and their choice. We further articulate this engagement as "disruptive pleasure," and theorize it as necessary for Black women as they continue to live in the wake and continued effects of transAtlantic chattel slavery and exist waywardly and fugitively (Bey, 2019; Hartman, 2019; Sharpe, 2016). Which is to say, living in a manner that is deemed not 'normative,' but exists as a practice of refusal to be governed within the context of United States heteropatriarchy. We think with the works of Saidiya Hartman (2019) and Christina Sharpe (2016) to extend the notion of disruptive pleasure. The writings of these thought leaders help us to imagine varied and various modalities of Black life. Additionally, we think about the notion of fugitive theorizing as the unruliness and impropriety of aesthetic movements and Black refusal of hegemonic norms (Bey, 2019) to what has been deemed knowledge construction and validation of such epistemologies (Evans-Winters, 2019). We view our theorizing as an act of radical care with and through Black women's knowledge and cultural production. In this article, we question: 1) whose knowledges are validated, 2) who has access to these knowledges, and 3) how a variety of sources can aid in alternative experiences of knowledge construction. We organize this article, together, as Black women knowledge holders and creators in an aesthetic call-and-response arrangement known in hip-hop culture as a cypher.

## Welcome to the Cypher

In what follows, we guide the reader through our engagement with what we refer to as a *cypher*, a method of call-and-response in which those gathered share information creatively and publicly. Love (2016) and Evans-Winters (2019) have discussed how the cypher can embody spaces of multiple consciousnesses, co-constructed learning, and cultural memory. This method has often been used by hip-hop artists<sup>1</sup> and Black women as they create spaces for themselves to articulate their thoughts and experiences, offering opportunities for their voices to be heard (Coleman, personal communication, December 11, 2019<sup>2</sup>; Coleman, 2020; Pough, 2015). As Pough (2015) states:

The cypher is in constant motion, created throughout U.S. history whenever Black women—whether expressing themselves through writing, public oratory, music, or club activities—come together to discuss issues of importance to themselves and the Black community. The cypher is both a space that Black women create for themselves and a space in which they question themselves about what it means to be both Black and woman in the larger U.S. public sphere. (p. 41-42)

In this spirit, our theorizing conjures the vernacular of hip-hop culture by inhabiting this call-and-response nature of the cypher. By engaging with theory and experience in and through hip hop, in a cypher-like manner, we bob and weave these multifaceted details of Black women's entanglement with cultural production through the concept of THOT/Thought-Leading. Each of the following sections reveal a series of rounds in our cypher, our understanding and conceptualization of how these elements interact as a form of aesthetic, non-linear call-and-response to inform THOT/Thought-Leading.

We begin by introducing the first section of the article as we introduce ourselves and present to the reader our connections to and subjectivities through hip-hop culture. What follows is our theorization of THOT/Thought-Leading, which is grounded in a

theoretical framework of Black feminist discourses, engaging with varied strains of Black feminist thought created and curated by Black women. We end our article by offering conclusions and implications from what we learned through our engagement with this *theory-cypher* (theorizing as a cypher and the cypher as theorizing), reflecting on the importance of each of these elements in this theorization and the cultural production by/for/about Black women. We envision the future of continued engagement with this theorization in hopes of advancing and centering disruptive pleasure. This article is a decolonial gesture (Dipti Desai, personal communication, October

9, 2020, Art Education Research Institute symposium) toward Black women and girls, who may read themselves within and into this text; its specificity addresses issues and experiences relevant to those who are not always considered in art education curriculum and pedagogical practice. This is our practice of care for and about Black women, in the wake of quotidian forms of exclusion (Collins, 1990/2009; Sharpe, 2016).

### **Cypher**

*Some think that we can't flow*

*Can't flow*

*Stereotypes, they got to go*

*Got to go*

*I'm a mess around and flip the scene into reverse*

*With what?*

*With a little touch of "Ladies First"*

**Queen Latifah & Monie Love, Ladies First (1989)**

## **Round 1: Women of Color Hip-Hop Subjectivities**

With the aim of honoring the sentiments of Queen Latifah and Monie Love, we begin this first round of the cypher with an introduction to our subjectivities as women of color through hip hop.

**Gloria's Interlude<sup>3</sup>:** My relationship with hip hop began in 1987 and continues today. It started in middle school. My regular morning routine was animated by the beats and lyrics blasting through my boombox, complete with a double cassette player and detachable speakers. The morning crew of WBLX radio set the tone by introducing the debut single, Push It, by emcees Salt 'N' Pepa (Cheryl James and Sandra Denton) and DJ Spinderella (Deidra Roper)—the powerhouse trifecta of Black women (two lyricists and a DJ) from Queens, NY. This song would set ablaze a fire in my body to answer their call to get out there and dance. There was something powerful about this mantra. Grossly misunderstood as a song about sex, the trio would protest this until they gained their well-deserved respect for this chart-topping hit.

My girlhood was situated within the burgeoning era of hip-hop culture of the late 1970's and early 1980's, was inspired by the first wave of Black women emcee's and DJ's such as Salt 'N' Pepa, Queen Latifah, Monie Love, MC Lyte, Roxanne Shante, Bahamadia, and the Real Roxanne. By the time I reached high school, I donned an asymmetrical haircut, bamboo earrings, and, on some days, an Afrocentric leather medallion. Like the early women-progenitors

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3 The author has written extensively about her racialized identity (see also Wilson et al., 2016; Guyotte et al., 2016; Wilson, 2018).

of hip hop who demanded space to be seen and heard, I too was unafraid to take up space. With their 1989 hit single, *Ladies First*, Queen Latifah and Monie Love proclaimed a liberatory manifesta and call to arms, much like the Aretha Franklin song, R-e-s-p-e-c-t. This song delivered a specific message to White America that Black women were (and had been) undervalued—(see also #CiteBlackWomen and #CiteASista), giving Black women further permission to take up space/own the room.

The range of Black women in hip hop in decades to follow would move the needle (and me) in ways that would build a foundation of expressive form and knowledge of self (Tefagiorgis, 1987) in relation to my understanding of interlocking matrices of heteropatriarchal oppression (Collins 1990/2009; Crenshaw, 1989). I began to notice a spectrum of Black women's representation unfold, as my love for hip-hop culture grew. The 1990's would usher in Lauryn Hill, a quadruple threat (lyricist, singer, rapper and producer), who would complicate the culture by spittin' lyrics, which would highlight and critique cultural and social conditions of blackness, Black womanhood, motherhood, and the music industry.

**Amber's Interlude:** I came to love hip hop through my parents, who grew up during hip hop's "coming of age" (1970s/1980s). They loved hip hop and we would listen to it in the house, in the car....it was all around me. I grew up listening to all kinds of music, but hip hop has stayed with me in a way that's different from other genres. I remember my mother playing music by MC Lyte, JJ Fad, and Salt-N-Pepa. My father played Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, and Jay-Z. There is just something about the vibrations of the beats....the rawness of the sounds....the realness of the lyrics that has always drawn me in. The first Black woman hip-hop artist that I remember inspiring me is Missy Elliot. Her ability to sing and rap, dance, and create her creative visual/sonic video productions amazed me. The first song I remember of hers was *I Can't Stand the Rain*. I grew up in the 90s listening to other artists like Lauryn Hill, Eve, TLC, Lil' Kim, Da Brat, and Mary J. Blige on the radio and on CDs.

With the evolution of technology and music distribution, I remember diving into my own explorations of different hip-hop artists in my teen years, spending hours on the computer looking up *YouTube* videos and downloading different songs. I would try to stay up-to-date on new song releases and hip-hop culture. I must also admit that being from Georgia, my musical disposition is tied to Southern hip-hop/rap and trap music, although I do enjoy the music of rappers from other regions. There's a beauty to the music and voices that connect to a feeling of home, centered in the Black experience in the Southern United States. As I see the sounds and movements of hip hop evolve, I continue to be excited to see what will come next. I have

enjoyed the recent evolution of Black women rappers and hip-hop artists such as Nicki Minaj, Jhené Aiko, Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, Lizzo, City Girls, Noname, Beyoncé, Tierra Whack, and more. Seeing and feeling their various representations of Black womanhood help me to reflect on my own understanding of what it means to be a Black woman in this particular space and time, and the kind of Black woman I want to be. Music was and continues to be a major part of my life. Hip-hop music has been a backdrop in my life, keeping me afloat sonically, visually, and culturally. I often think with music, often randomly singing lyrics, and believing there's a song for every moment.

**Collective Interlude:** Together, our embeddedness in (and indebtedness to) Black women in hip-hop culture captivates our ongoing dialogue with one another. It also reflects the critical dialogic exchanges we have with others (see also duo-/trio-ethnography methodologies, Acuff, López & Wilson, 2019; Sions & Coleman, 2019; Wilson & Shields, 2019). The necessity of such dialogues provoke questions such as: *What is "so-and-so" saying or doing in her latest music video? Did you see so-and-so's outfit? How is this different or similar to other artists? How might this add to the previous discourses for Black woman-/girl-hood liberation and joy? How does this new song add to our visual and sonic cultural understanding? Did you catch that sample?* As a part of the post-Civil Rights generation, we align ourselves with Black feminists like Cooper, Morris, & Boylorn (2017). These scholars inform our conversations about Black women producers of hip-hop culture, as they move the needle forward with Black feminist discourse by introducing the notion of "disrespectability" and "anti-respectability" politics (Cooper, Morris, & Boylorn, 2017) as a way to understand the varied registers of Black women's knowledge. We (the authors) are invested in expanding and advancing a nuanced understanding of Black (and women-of-color<sup>4</sup>) feminisms and insist that the role of respectability politics and controlling narratives within hip-hop culture be directly addressed.

Being in conversation within and outside of this article, we, the authors, find connection as Black girls/women, creatives, pedagogues, scholars, and hip-hop enthusiasts. We see this space as a reflection of our communal means of offering care to one another (Collins, 1990/2009; Sharpe, 2016), imagining/reimagining what it means to be in community despite the many roles we have and partaking in care and healing practices for not just our survival, but

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4 "Women of color" (WoC) aligns with Loretta Ross's 2011 articulation of WoC, in which she explains that although melanated women are not necessarily connected through biological designation, they are connected through the alignment of social, economic and political struggles experienced through a minoritized status (Western States Center 2011).

our thrival (Love, 2019). Conceptualizing THOT /Thought-Leading within the context of and exceeding the limits of art education, we extend the spaces, places, and moments where we can gather and share our most authentic selves as disruptive pleasure and activism on our own behalf.

*(Love of my life)*

*You are my friend*

*(Love of my life)*

*I can depend*

*(Love of my life)*

*Without you, baby,*

*It feels like a sampled true love*

**Erykah Badu** (feat. Common), *Love of My Life (An Ode to Hip Hop)*  
(2002)

## Round 2: Allow Us to Introduce the Culture

In the previous section, we contextualized our deep connection to hip hop. We continue, in this second round of the cypher, with an introduction to the aesthetico-cultural phenomenon of hip hop and how, like the love of/for a close friend, has contributed to our practices of joy, personally and professionally. Hip hop, as a culture, is an aesthetic/movement, which has its origins in New York and was primarily created by Black, Latina/-o, and Caribbean Americans in the South Bronx and New York City. As with any culture, vocabularies were created (Spillers, 1987), which help to further define what hip-hop culture has come to be. For example, Afrika Bambaataa of the hip-hop collective Zulu Nation coined terms and concepts such as rapping, DJing, b-boying/b-girling, and breakdancing, also known as the four elements of hip hop. Other elements of hip-hop aesthetic movements include nuances of historical knowledge (intellectual/philosophical), beatboxing (a percussive vocal style), and hip-hop fashion and style. Although its origins have centered on the voices of Black men, these cultural productions have also served as a means for Black women to locate themselves within a capitalist society that has consistently refused to acknowledge our/their worth and value. In our case, hip-hop culture is in our veins. It has impacted how we think about ourselves as Black people. Moreover, as Black women, we find connection with other Black women who are also engaged in the hip-hop world. Across music genres, the creative products from Black female culture in the form of audio/visual productions, have served as tributes, anthems, and roll calls, invoking the nature of call-and-response. It is because of and through the creative production of women emcees/rappers we were inspired to center the joy that hip hop has given us as Black women who have grown up surrounded by its power. For us, it is the space where we allow(ed) ourselves to feel

and experience our bodies (our blackness and our girl- / womanhood) fully, expressing most freely in our homes and other sacred spaces (with friends, in the shower, in the car); we dance, twerk, clap, snap, bop, sing full-throated, spit lyrics, yell at top of our lungs. Unapologetically. Much like the early calls-to-arms by Black women foremothers in the music industry (i.e., Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Ma Rainey, Aretha Franklin, Etta James, Bessie Smith, Ella Fitzgerald, Mahalia Jackson, Diana Ross, Lena Horne, Marian Anderson, Tina Turner, and more), we have been thinking deeply about what these women offer us: artistically, epistemologically, ontologically, and pedagogically (Wilson, 2020). Their creative expression has laid the groundwork for generations of artists and thought-leaders who would follow. As contemporary Black women artists and thought-leaders, our creation of this theorization is an extension of the joy and liberation that we have found in engaging with Black women’s hip-hop productions. Understanding that Black feminist thought emphasizes knowledge validation of those who are and are not considered intellectuals (Acuff, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Collins, 1990/2009), our aim is to signal toward a recognition, affirmation, and democratization of intellectualism within and outside of the academy.

*Sometimes I go off (I go off), I go hard (I go hard)  
Get what’s mine (Take what’s mine), I’m a star (I’m a star)  
‘Cause I slay (Slay), I slay (Hey), I slay (Okay), I slay (Okay)  
All day (Okay), I slay (Okay), I slay (Okay), I slay (Okay)*  
**Beyoncé, Formation (2016)**

### **Round 3: Get (IN)Formation: A Black Women’s Hip-Hop Onto-Epistemology**

Black women are producers of social, political, and cultural thought that speaks to their experiences, while also refusing their oppression (Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013; Nash, 2014). We agree with hooks (1989) that, “Black women need to construct a model of feminist theorizing and scholarship that is inclusive, that widens our options, that enhances our understanding of black experience and gender” (p. 182). She explains the importance of educating people about the experiences of sexism and racism that Black women face while also engaging in self-empowerment. As Black women also empower themselves, they come to embrace the specific cultural contexts they were impacted by. In this case, the context of hip-hop culture.

By embracing these various contexts, Black women have also theorized their experiences in many ways, and have engaged in practices of refusal against subjugation of their experiences by claiming and reclaiming their ways of being and knowing. Beyoncé’s lyrics are reflective of this practice. We refer to these political acts as an extension of Black feminist discourse, which attends to the

intimacies between related analytics in articulating what Black feminism can offer (Nash, 2019). For example, Hip-Hop Feminism is related to Black feminism as it still articulates the experiences of Black women, but does so from the context of those who are a part of hip-hop culture. Joan Morgan (1999) first coined the term “Hip-Hop Feminist” and used it to describe being a feminist “brave enough to fuck with the grays” (p. 59). In this statement, Morgan references a politics rooted in the work of a multigenerational and multi-diasporic consciousness—one that is laced with tensions. The grays evoke those middle spaces that Black women live within, the complex intersectional matrices of identities, cultures, and experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). This does not mean taking up polarizing sides, but recognizing the importance of the intersections of identities, thoughts, and actions that exemplify who we are and what we think. In taking on hip-hop culture, Black women/feminists look for their truth among the intersection of voices to create something new. In this space, Black women reject respectability politics, which refers to the embracing of more “normative behaviors,” or the policing of “non-normative” behaviors with Black people, in favor of “disrespectability politics” (Cooper, Morris, & Boylorn, 2017, p. 326).

Collins (1990/2009) states, “When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so” (p. 125). For us (the authors), this includes a disruption of colonizing orientations (Bhattacharya, personal communication, February 25, 2020), which questions the need to justify Black women’s epistemologies (Collins, 1990/2009). In order to articulate THOT/Thought-Leading, we utilize the lens of Black feminist discourse. This discourse is a combination of the many theorizations of Black women, including Black feminist thought (Collins 1990/2009), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Hip-Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), and Crunk Feminism (Boylorn, Morris & Cooper, 2017a). The use of multiple theorizations of/about/by Black women adds to our understanding of the many ways that Black women exist, share their experiences, and respond by creating cultural productions/texts (Davis, 1998). These Black feminist theorizations in conjunction with THOT/Thought-Leading inspires us to think with Black women as cultural and knowledge producers, creating from their disruptive pleasure, radical and liberating thoughts. Additionally, these theorizations expose generational shifts in thinking with Black feminist discourse and an expansion beyond neatly packaged narratives of survival toward thrival (Love, 2019).

*Fuck bein’ good, I’m a bad bitch (Ah)*  
*I’m sick of motherfuckers tryna tell me how to live (Fuck y’all)*  
**Megan Thee Stallion, Girls in the Hood (2020)**  
*I’d rather be your B-I-T-C-H (I’d rather keep it real with ya)*  
*‘Cause that’s what you gon’ call me when I’m trippin’ anyway*

*You know you can't control me, baby, you need a real one in your life*  
**Megan Thee Stallion, B.I.T.C.H. (2020)**

#### **Round 4: Why THOT/Thought-Leading?**

As in Megan Thee Stallion's lyrics above, Black women in hip hop have often rejected controlling narratives through their lyrical and visual pronouncements. As Collins (1990/2009) has noted, Black women have been subject to controlling narratives and imagery that attempt to dictate perceptions of who they are and what they do. These long-held perceptions have often led to the negative beliefs and stereotypes of Black women, which remove any forms of agency that Black women have in defining themselves and asserting their lived experiences. Collins (1990/2009) reminds us that Black women have been delineated as Mammies, Matriarchs, Welfare Mothers/Queens, Black Ladies, Jezebels, and Hoochies; in spite of these controlling narratives, Black women have a unique standpoint where we define ourselves.

In defining ourselves, Black women have often had to come to terms with or reclaim cultural products that have placed them in supportive or subservient roles. Within hip-hop culture, Black women have ultimately been viewed through the lens of patriarchy and capitalism, being objects of the male gaze and objects to be consumed. For instance, the term, THOT, an acronym for That Ho Over There, has been weaponized in hip-hop culture as a form of linguistic control over women's bodies, deeming their movements as sexual beings as wayward or in service to others' desires (Hartman, 2019; hooks, 1992; Nash, 2019; Wilson, 2020). THOT is a slang word and sexual stereotype that began appearing in hip-hop culture in 2014. It is a misogynistic term, which has been examined and understood to have gained relative power via social media platforms such as Twitter and via song lyrics and music videos, created by Black and Brown men in the hip-hop industry (Collins, 2000; Tyree & Kirby 2017).

For us, the term THOT acts as a neologism (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), a word or phrase that has entered into common use or mainstream language (and may perhaps be falling out of popular discourse), yet operates as a signifier of controlling language used specifically in reference to women (Tyree & Kirby, 2017). Meanwhile, Black women creatives in hip hop such as Cardi B have reclaimed this term like in the *Thotiana Remix*, as Black women have previously done with other controlling terms, to assert their agency, reject respectability politics, embrace their sexuality/erotic power, and define themselves as they see fit (Collins, 1990/2009; Lorde, 1984/2007; Morgan, 1999; Williams, 2017).

By participating in disrespectability/anti-respectability politics, Black women, through a variety of media, show that they have the ability

and agency to act on their behalf and in their own interests. Through historical and contemporary forms of Black visual and media culture, we (the authors) were exposed to and participated in forms of cultural production for and by Black women who invited us into liberatory forms of agency. For example, we grew up watching music video programs and channels such as *Soul Train*, *Video Soul* and *106 and Park on BET*, *VH1 Soul*, *Yo! MTV Raps*, *The BET Awards*, and *Black Girls Rock!*. This agency is important when considering representations for Black girls as consumers of Black popular culture (Love, 2012). Hip-Hop feminism can be a tool for Black women and girls to “examine rap music and culture through a Black feminist lens that questions the misogyny and sexism within the art form but recognizes the sexual agency of women who utilize the culture to express themselves and their sexual desires” (Love, 2012, p. 23). As Black girls and women read hip-hop cultural texts through the lens of Black feminist discourse, we/they can come to more nuanced understandings of ourselves/themselves, the art form, and cultural entity that they are engaging with.

*Yeah, I know my worth, these colonizers got to pay me  
Yeah, I had to go first 'cause the rest would never last  
I had to show the positives for those that couldn't add*  
**Rapsody** (feat. J. Cole), *Sojourner* (2019)

### **Outro: Thoughts on THOTs**

In this final section, as Rapsody notes, we recognize our worth and the worth of Black women hip-hop cultural producers. We return to our original questions—the provocations which inspired our theorizations and suggest that THOT/Thought-Leading as a call-to-arms, an extension of Black feminist discourses, and a way to affirm Black women as cultural/knowledge producers, whose voices have been marginalized within the larger whitestream canon of art(s) education (Wilson, 2020). Our theorizations extend a contemporary Black feminist orientation and sharpen an understanding of the ways Black women participate in cultural and knowledge-production, which necessarily complicates an understanding of Black women’s onto-epistemologies.

*What theoretical interventions might be made in order to articulate a politics of pleasure in spite of the heteropatriarchal space of hip-hop culture?*

Theorizing with and through popular and media culture, with which many people engage, can offer opportunities for articulating a politics of pleasure. This theorizing by Black women becomes particularly important when recognizing and understanding their status as thought leaders. When Black women engage with visual and media

culture on their own terms and in the name of activism on their own behalf, we/they engage in “black female interiority” and move beyond mere representation politics (Morgan, 2019). Here, Morgan refers to “the quiet composite of mental, spiritual and psychological expression,” (p. 83) and necessitates that Black female interiority is in excess of this; this includes exceeding the limits of a politics of silencing of a broad range of feelings and desires.

We (the authors) offer our intergenerational and interior articulations as a way of performing radical care. Our theorization offers ways to think about and with Black women’s hip-hop onto-epistemologies and what they may offer aesthetically and pedagogically. In doing so, we refuse a marginalized status by framing this work as disruptive pleasure, joy, activism, fugitivity, healing justice, and radical care (Hartman, 2019; Sharpe, 2016). For those engaging this article, we extend an invitation to become part of understanding, affirming and validating the knowledge created and curated by Black women. To place Black women as “objects of conversation” (Kendall, 2020, p. xviii) rather than centralize their agency to speak for themselves risks mere superficial treatment (as in a citation in an article or mention on social media), perpetuates an historic silencing, and invalidates our conceptualization of radical care and love (Sharpe, 2016; Nash, 2019).

### *What does it mean to refuse being “objects of conversation?”*

In crafting this article, we spent many hours, weeks, and months listening to self-curated playlists, carefully attending to lyrics, while theorizing alongside an intergenerational wealth of Black women cultural producers, hip-hop creatives, and scholars (such as Missy Elliott, Bettina Love, Joan Morgan, and more). Exceeding our writing, we also allowed the music to guide our natural inclinations to get up and dance. This excess illuminates our range of Black women onto-epistemologies, and in doing so, we refuse being restricted, contained or “held in,” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 68), as in the lives of ancestors contained as objects/cargo in the hold of ships during transatlantic disasters and as in the misogynistic portrayal of Black women in hip hop. As Carruthers (2018) notes, “We deserve more than partial freedoms cloaked as pathways to liberation. Freedom is not real if everyone can’t exercise it” (p. 102). In engaging with this work, we centered and liberated our girl-/womanhoods, our pleasures and our joy. We agree with Garner, Hill, Robinson, & Callier (2019) who define pleasure as something that is produced when “we dismantle systems of power that seek to infringe on our ability to be our whole selves” (p. 191). In sum, we wanted to write an article that we, as Black women, would find joy in *producing* and *reading* (Evans-Winters, 2019).

Using the cypher as a means to hold dialogic space with one another

and also as a means to *be held* (in the wake of on-going aftereffects of transatlantic enslavement), we extend a radical care and love for Black women as knowledge-holders/producers. Black feminists across time have promoted the importance of being in conversation, valuing dialogue over monologue (Lorde (1984/2007). Continuing to think with Lorde (1984/2007), we honor this dialogic space as allowing for our thoughts and words as Black women to have deeper meaning, finding affirmation and validation in each other and our intergenerational knowledges.

*How might we account for Black girls' and women's participation in knowledge production in excess of respectability? How might radical care be enacted to recognize the full personhood of Black women?*

By curating a space to lay bare our connections to hip hop culture, we reveal an interiority of Black girl-/womanhood in excess of respectability. As what some might call “bad feminists” (Gay, 2014), there is no denying the complexity of loving hip-hop culture and its associated misogyny. Here, we think with Joan Morgan (1999) and her challenge for us to sit with the messiness and “gray” areas, and also Garner et. al (2019) to enact a politics of anti-respectability. The lyrics of the Black women highlighted in this article serve as punctuated aesthetic pronouncements of the lived realities of Blackness and womanness within and through the diasporas.

To these ends, these realizations cannot be ignored in the contexts of teaching and learning, as hip-hop culture has become ubiquitous in U.S. culture. What this means is that there is danger in deficit perspectives about hip-hop culture and Black girls (Garner et. al, 2019), which result in state- and school-sanctioned restrictions of “presentation” (e.g. restricting braided hairstyles and afros worn by Black students and clothing choices), and in removal through suspension (reinforcing trends toward the school-to-prison pipeline; see also, Morris, 2016). In order to counter these deficit perspectives, those who are involved in the culture of teaching and learning must divest from patriarchal and myopic narratives of blackness and womanhood. This is no task for the faint of heart.

In closing, we want to give thanks and express our gratitude to the Black women cultural- and knowledge-producers whose work we identify as disruptive pleasure. We have been inspired by the sonic and visual productions of these women through our love and appreciation of hip-hop culture, imagining and theorizing futures that center joy for Black women and girls. In doing this, we think with the words of Alice Walker:

“For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints,  
but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the

springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane....What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? In our great-grandmothers' day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood" (Walker, 1983, p. 233)

We say the names of the Black women who inspired and influenced this theorization: Aisha Durham, Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Angie Martinez, Audre Lorde, Bahamadia, bell hooks, Bettina Love, Beyoncé, Brittney Cooper, Cardi B, Carrie Mae Weems, Charlene Carruthers, Christina Sharpe, City Girls, Da Brat, Dominique Hill, Erykah Badu, Eve, Foxy Brown, Freida Tesfagiorgis, Gwendolyn Pough, Grace Jones, Hortense Spillers, Iona Rozeal Brown, Jamea Richmond Edwards, Janelle Monáe, Janet Jackson, Jennifer Nash, Jessica Robinson, Jhené Aiko, JJFad, Joan Morgan, Joni Boyd Acuff, Juliana Huxtable, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Left Eye, Lauryn Hill, Lil' Kim, Lizzo, Mary J. Blige, MC Lyte, Megan Thee Stallion, Mickalene Thomas, Mikki Kendall, Missy Elliot, Monie Love, Monique Morris, Morgan Kirby, Nicki Minaj, Noname, Pamela Lawton, Patricia Hill Collins, Porshé Garner, Queen Latifah, Rapsody, Rihanna, Robin Boylorn, Roxane Gay, Roxanne Shanté, Saidiya Hartman, Salt-n-Pepa, Sherri Williams, Sister Souljah, Solange, Susana Morris, Tierra Whack, TLC, Trina, Wangechi Mutu, Venus Evans-Winters.

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