

SOUTH BRONX PERFORMANCES: THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIP-HOP AND BLACK GIRLS' MUSICAL PLAY

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Black girls' musical play and hip-hop exist in a reciprocal relationship. Hip-hop has influenced the performance style of battlin' cheers: improvisation, competition, confrontation, and a general 'bad' attitude, while conversely, the musical play of Black girls has influenced the lyrics, rhythms, and melodies of hip-hop songs. Thus, females have significantly shaped this genre of music generally seen as male dominated and defined.

KEYWORDS Performance; play; hip-hop; cheers; gender

Introduction

Hey! YOU think you bad!

Correction Baby! I KNOW I'm bad! ('Hollywood's swinging')

Pimped out cars and seesaws? Gold teeth and hop scotch? What connection do rappers have with little girls on urban playgrounds? This essay seeks to demonstrate that a reciprocal relationship exists between hip-hop and black girls' musical play.¹ In the first two sections of the essay I will explore the different forms of musical play among black girls and define 'battlin' cheers. I then show how hip-hop has influenced the style of performing 'badness', improvisation, confrontation and competition, all of which are prominent in battlin' cheers. Finally, I seek to contribute to hip-hop feminism by demonstrating that black girls' musical play has influenced the songs of male hip-hop artists, so that in fact females have shaped this genre of music generally seen as male dominated and defined.

Black Girls' Musical Play

The particular form of play that I shall examine is termed 'body musicking'.² I borrow this term from ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt (1997b) to describe the

rhythmic hand clapping and body slapping that is part of black musical and performance culture. This style of music making has manifested itself in many ways in black life, from patting juba during slavery in the American South to the stepping traditions of black fraternities and sororities. Moreover, body musicking takes on particular forms in the context of the play of young black girls. Although the play is not absolutely gender exclusive, the participants are almost always girls and the games are tailored specifically to females.

Gaunt (1997b) discussed four main and often overlapping types of play. The first type is ring games. The formation is usually a closed circle, with one person in the middle. The second type is hand clapping games. These can be played with two people or more, require hand dexterity and coordination and can also be done in a ring formation. The third type is double-Dutch, based on jumping rhythmically between two ropes turned by two other people while performing various tricks/stunts. The fourth type, and the focus of this essay, is cheers. Cheers can be performed in a variety of structures, including in a ring, line, semicircle formation or face to face with another player. They are based on making music and sounds with one's own body in concert with others, without touching them. Not to be confused with traditional white cheerleading at sports events, cheers also involve the most body musicking. According to Gaunt 'Cheers appear to be an urban transformation of the ring play that was common in the South USA' (1997b, 14).

Some particular cheers are performed competitively and are a simulation of adults in confrontation with one another. Girls will often battle other girls, and the winner is signalled by the approval of the rest of the group. Thus, within the cheers' grouping I posit what I call 'battlin'' cheers as a subcategory. Most of the information about battlin' cheers is based on my own personal childhood memories, as a child growing up in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the projects of the South Bronx. The battlin' cheers I discuss may exist in other parts of the country as well. However, to date I have not found these exact cheers mentioned anywhere in studies of either rural or urban performance among black children. What made these cheers different from others was the element of competition and up-in-your-face confrontation that made each of us put on our best neck roll, gyration and 'kiss this' attitude. It wasn't personal . . .

South Bronx Femininities: Performing 'Bad Ass' Women in the Context of Play

In battlin' cheers there are five key elements: call and response, verbal and physical improvisation, mock confrontation, competition and simulation. There is often a leader, with the rest of the girls acting as the chorus, and the role of leader changes with each performance. The group of girls, in concert, make one particular rhythmic pattern with their hands and feet. In a call and response pattern certain lines and words are usually repeated from cheer to cheer,

while others are reserved for oral improvisation. Henry Louis Gates Jr (1988, 63–63) broadly defined improvisation as repetition with revision, while Margaret Thompson Drewal (1991, 43) offered a more specific definition of improvisation as 'moment-to-moment maneuvering based on acquired in-body techniques to achieve a particular effect and/or style of performance'. There are particular places in the cheer in which you insert your own creativity and style, demonstrating competence and skill as a performer in play. There are also spaces for bodily improvisation that serve to both unnerve your opponent and establish your credibility and level of personal ability. You may for instance spontaneously shake your behind in front of your opponent or mimic gestures that correlate with the rhymes that you are creating. The inclusion of improvisation in these cheers requires thinking on your feet and accumulating an arsenal of moves, words and lines that can be summoned at will in order to attack your opponent.

Battlin' cheers are also an exercise in mock confrontation. Gaunt (1997b, 169) discussed the notion of challenge and mock role playing in an antagonistic relationship as part of black social experience and expressivity. In battlin' cheers the confrontation is physically embodied: you come intentionally as close as you can to the other girl's face and body without actually touching her. If one touches an opponent in the process of battlin' it could lead to a physical altercation, especially if you don't know each other. The mock confrontation is often face-to-face and in-your-face. In addition, the words of the cheers themselves are mock attacks on not only your opponent, but also their family, boyfriend, etc. In this regard battlin' cheers may be likened to playing the dozens, also called snappin', dissin', rankin', clownin', jonin' and so forth. This direct trading of insults (a common example is 'yo mama' jokes), often improvisational, is an integral part of black oral expressive culture.

Competition is also a key element of battlin' cheers. The mock confrontation between two participants takes place in front of a responding audience of other girls who are also potential competitors. It is this audience which acts as the chorus in the call and response pattern and as unofficial judges of the battle. The battlin' continues as different girls in the group confront each other, so there is never the same pair of girls battling throughout the cheer. Thus, there are usually at least four people actively participating in battling cheers, although the number could be as large as ten or more.

Competition, confrontation and trading insults have often been overlooked in studies of black girls' musical play. As Gaunt (1997b, 147) noted, scholars have most often portrayed insulting word play as a practice within the realm of men. For example, according to Roger Abrahams 'This style of competitive word play is more characteristic of men than women and may become deeply associated with the management of a masculine identity or reputation' (Abrahams 1976, 19). Moreover, studies of girls games have often categorized them as 'non-competitive, supportive, and cooperative in nature' when compared with boys' games (Merrill-Mirsky 1986). In addition, feminist studies of the importance of play and games in the socialization of children

focus on the play of girls inculcating values such as cooperation and nurturing (Lever 1976). This in fact is not the case for all girls' games; in battlin' cheers rhymed insults and embodied aggression are prevalent. The enactment of confrontation with another person is the basis of the battle and insulting the other person, rather than nurturing them, is what is expected. The competitive nature of battlin' cheers also demonstrates that black girls' musical play is more complex and serious than previously noted.

Battlin' cheers also exhibit simulation (mimicry) in that the performers imitate grown-ups in many ways, playing at being adults. Many of the movements and gestures are acting out of 'grown' patterns of embodiment that adults might see as inappropriate for children. Some examples include neck and eye rolling, putting your hands on your hips with the accompanying attitude, touching your breasts, genitals and buttocks, imitating slapping someone, gyrating and shaking your buttocks, etc. Many of the movements seem to be very sexual. In addition, the words and improvised lines include warnings of violence, phrases of self-aggrandizement and insults (sometimes even curses) that indicate that the girls are not playing at being just any adult, but specifically 'bad ass' women who won't be taken advantage of or intimidated. This 'bad' attitude is a necessary tool for survival in an often dangerous urban environment in which females are commonly the targets of violence. Thus, being a strong, aggressive woman who is ready to defend herself is a necessity and women who are like this usually demand and receive respect.

Gaunt (1997b, 167) discussed the lessons of musical play when she wrote 'Black girls' games allow them to role play what it means to be Black and female in various performative relationships and contexts'. These battlin' cheers are teaching girls a very particular way of 'being' a black woman in their own urban environment. They in fact challenge mainstream notions of femininity because the women who are performed curse, fight, are aggressive and loud and, most importantly, are not to be messed with. Feminist studies of the role of games and play in socializing girls should take account of the many different roles into which they are being socialized.

Hip-Hop Influencing Cheers

I contend that the performance of battlin' cheers has been influenced by the prevalence of battling in hip-hop culture. This connection is further supported by the fact that the South Bronx is often recognized as hip-hop's place of origin. The competitive nature of hip-hop, especially during the late 1970s and 1980s, is exhibited in all aspects of hip-hop culture: mc'ing, dj'ing, breakdancing and graffiti. Tricia Rose, a well known scholar of hip-hop, discussed this in *Black noise*:

Break dancers often fought other break dance crews out of jealousy; writers sometimes destroyed murals and rappers and DJ battles could break

out in fights. Hip hop remains a never-ending battle for status, prestige, and group adoration, always in formation, always contested, and never fully achieved. Competitions among and cross-fertilization between breaking, graffiti writing, and rap music was fuelled by shared local experiences and social position and similarities in approaches to sound, motion, communication, and style among hip hop's Afrodiasporic communities. (Rose 1994, 36)

These battles became less frequent over time as hip-hop became more commercialized, although they still occur (e.g. mc battles). There are even some current pop culture manifestations of this aspect of hip-hop culture, such as the annual mc 'Freestyle Battle' on MTV or the weekly mc battles on BET's 106 & Park. Moreover, the importance of battlin' in a dance form has re-emerged in the media with Dance 360, a show on the UPN network based on dance competition battles between members of the audience.

The confrontational nature of these battles specifically influenced battlin' cheers. Hip-hop was omnipresent in the environment of the South Bronx and while rappers battled each other over the radio waves, young girls were having their own battles in the parks of the projects. Rappers would often battle their closest friends first for practice, before having real battles with outsiders. This is supported by Elizabeth Wheeler: 'Raps begin in the dialogue among members of a crew—friends who spend time and make music together' (Wheeler 1991, 197). The same phenomenon took place within battlin' cheers. Once you have practiced and become skilled, your 'crew' of girls would then battle another crew, from another project building, other city blocks and even other city neighborhoods.

Battlin' cheers exhibit the three often overlapping styles of rapping (mcing) noted by Nelson George *et al.* (as cited in Wheeler 1991, 197): the boast, the put-down and social commentary.³ After analyzing three battlin' cheers for boasts, put-downs, and social commentary, I will discuss the broader implications of these cheers for studies of play and socialization. In order to show the styles of performance in the cheers I adhere to the following conventions: places of improvisation are indicated using italic; places in which the entire group say the words (either answering the main performer in a call and response pattern or just saying the words together) are printed in bold; words that are forcefully emphasized are underlined.

To the front, to the back

To the front

To the back

To the front

To the Back,

 ⁴ **think she all that**

Jump up,

Jump down,

Cause ...

Girl, I will beat you down,
 Make your head go round and round (Here there is a break in the rhythm,
 with no body musicking)
 Beat you more, (Here the rhythm begins again)
 To the floor,
 Your mama too,
 Leader of the crack crew,
 Take my hand, *Slap your man*,
 Take the other, *Slap your mother*,
Take my two, and cold deck you,
 Turn my back, *You know you want that*,
 Turn my front, *This is what your man want*

This cheer focuses mostly on boasts and put-downs. For the sake of a more clear analysis, let us assume I am the person performing this cheer towards another girl. In the first five lines I boast about the violence that I would do to my opponent. When I say 'make your head go round and round', I jump in front of her and roll my head around on my shoulders, imitating the motion that would take place if I punched her in the face. In the sixth line I put down my opponent's mother by insinuating that she is a major user of crack-cocaine, an indirect form of social commentary. With the next three lines I continue to boast about the violence that I would do to my opponent's boyfriend, mother and the opponent herself. While saying these lines I may mimic slapping her face with one hand, then another, and take a belligerent stance with fists closed to simulate 'decking' (punching) my opponent in her face, knocking her out 'cold'. On 'turn my back' I literally turn around and place my hands, palms up, on the top of my backside while moving my butt up and down, to place the emphasis on my behind being the body part that my opponent envies, assumingly because she doesn't have enough of it. On 'turn my front' I turn back around to face my opponent and may touch my breasts and genitals or maybe sweep down the front of my body with my hands to indicate that my opponent's boyfriend is appreciative of my body. The next battlin' cheer also provides many more opportunities for improvisation and simulation.

Ookie cookie

Oo-kie, cookie, ook-ookie cookie

Oo-kie, cookie, ook-ookie cookie

They call me _____ (**ookie cookie**)

Got your man (**on my tookie**)

Did your man like this

(La di da di) *Wash that body*

(Tutti frutti) *And that booty*

Rumble! All in your face, In your face, I got taste (Here there is a break in the rhythm, with no body musicking)

(One) Don't get me started (Here the rhythm begins again)

(Two) Looking retarded

(Three) Your man with me, 'cause you too ugly

(Four) Yes I'm sure

(Five) Kickin' live

(Six) Scope this

(Seven) Rock your heaven

(Eight) Kick you straight

(Nine) Up your behind

(Ten) Do it again

(Eleven, Eleven, Eleven) You can't touch this

(Twelve, Twelve, Twelve) 'Cause you lookin busted

I told you once, I told you twice; I got the ginu-ice

The next person would come in on the beat and the rhythm wouldn't stop, while the words start all over from the beginning.

The first two lines are sung together as a group. In the third line I introduce myself. In the fourth I begin to boast about having taken my opponents boyfriend. When I say that I 'did your man like this' I might walk up to my opponent, lift one leg to the side and thrust my pelvis towards her, imitating having sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. Another common improvisation for that line was 'You know I know I'm bad', although girls could insert whatever fits in with the beat. In the next two lines I insult my opponent by insinuating that she is not clean. 'La di da di' seems to be taken from the popular hip-hop classic 'The show/La di da di', recorded in 1985 by Doug E. Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew, including Slick Rick, who later gained prominence as a solo artist. 'Tutti frutti' likely refers to the rock and roll hit by Little Richard in 1955. On the eighth line I 'rumble', by actually getting in her face, doing my best neck roll to intimidate her. Many different types of rhymes may be inserted here. For example, 'Rumble! Like number three, you know you can't see me', meaning you can't even be compared with me. The next three lines continue the insults. 'Yes I'm sure' was often substituted with 'Al B. Sure', the name of a popular R&B singer in the late 1980s and early 1990s. 'Scope this' could just as easily be 'Peep this' (look at this) or 'Eat this'. At that place in the cheer I turn my back to my opponent and make gestures or movements to focus her attention on my behind. For the next several lines I turn back around to face her and continue to boast about what I would do to her, including kicking her in the behind repeatedly. The climax of the cheer are the last three lines, and to emphasize my point I boast about what I have over my opponent. Among other moves I may shake my finger in her face or point to my body. 'You can't touch this' (which refers to M.C. Hammer's popular song released on his album in 1990) means that she cannot be compared with me no matter how hard she tries. When I say she's looking 'busted' I mean that her clothing and

general demeanor is unattractive. Other words commonly inserted here include **'Eleven, Eleven, Eleven, Stop sweatin' me; Twelve, Twelve, Twelve,'**Cause you lookin' corny', and other improvisations. The last line's reference to 'ginu-ice',⁵ punctuated by a break in the beat, indicated that my turn was done and it was time for my opponent to take her turn in the battle.

The importance of improvisation and creativity in battlin' cheers cannot be underestimated. To come up with something new and innovative in the context of a battle was key to victory. During one hot summer in the Bronx I recall one battle in which my friends and I walked all the way from 170th Street where we lived to the park area of a project complex near 161st Street.⁶ We encountered a group of adolescent girls from that neighborhood and battled in 'Ookie cookie'. In their crew was a girl who looked no more than 9 years old. Although her crew knew what she was going to do, my crew was taken by surprise when she improvised a line and stopped the beat (inserting a break) at a place where it wasn't usually stopped, but which flowed rhythmically. Her improvisation went something like this: **'(Eight)** Kick you straight, **(Nine)** Up your behind (stomp), Make your py⁷ shine. **(Ten)**, Do it again . . .'. The spectators (including many boys) and other participants went wild, as it was obvious we had lost. This was the first time that we had battled girls that we did not know. When we battled each other within our own circle of friends it was more like a continuous practice for 'real' battles in the future, much like upcoming rappers free styling with their friends to try out new techniques and hone their skills for real battles with unknown adversaries.

In the last battlin' cheer that I discuss verbal rather than physical improvisation is the key element. It is less physical as there are fewer opportunities to really get up in your opponents face. The cheer begins and ends with everyone chanting in chorus, while the individual performing has the middle of the cheer to herself. I consider this cheer a battlin' cheer because it can be performed to an 'imaginary' opponent as well as a real one, within a semicircle of girls. It is also interesting that the rhythm of the cheer is based on a 'step' that is associated with Delta Sigma Theta, a black sorority, although the order of movements is slightly different. I didn't realize the origins of the body musicking of this cheer until I went to college and saw the sorority performing it. I assumed then that a member of the sorority must have taught the step to some girls in the Bronx, perhaps in an after-school program, and the girls then taught it to others, and through ingenuity and creativity a new cheer emerged. The elements of boast, put-downs and social commentary are all present in this cheer as well.

Reebok my posse rock

Reebok my posse rock

Ho, it don't stop

My posse rock

It don't stop

Me⁸ name is _____
 What, don't you remember,
I dissed your man in the middle of September
After that, the color was red,
I dissed your man cause he peed in the bed,
After that, the color was green,
I dissed your man cause he needed Listerine,
After that, the color was blue,
I dissed your man cause he looked like you
With the Ree, the Ree, the Ree-Ree-Ree-Ree
Reebok my posse rock
Ho,⁹ it don't stop
My posse rock
It don't stop

The title of the cheer is social commentary. Reeboks were the sneaker (trainer) of choice for many in the Bronx in the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially the soft leather freestyle sneakers for women. They came in a variety of colors (red, green, blue, yellow, pink, etc.). If it was me cheering 'Reebok my posse rock' would refer to the fact that all of the girls in my posse, or group of friends, all rocked (wore) Reeboks. The cheer refers to the different colors; as I insult my opponent, I am simultaneously boasting about my 'wealth' of sneakers that I possess in a variety of colors.¹⁰ For each color I choose, I come up with a rhyme about why I dissed (or rejected) my opponent's man, an indirect insult to her. Gaunt has pointed out that this cheer may in fact be a variation of a game based on Afrika Bambaataa's 1982 hit song, 'Planet rock' (personal communication) (where the phrase 'it don't stop' is used repeatedly) demonstrating again the direct influence of hip-hop on black girls' play. In the last part of the cheer the group of girls stops the rhythm and chants together acappella in chorus. Simultaneously, the main performer gets an opportunity to exhibit herself with dance movements in front of her opponent or to the group of girls in general. When this chorus is finished the rhythm returns and the next girl begins.

Battlin' cheers force us to re-examine scholars' homogenization of male and female behavior in the context of play and also to reassess the different forms of socialization that play can be used to achieve. The types of 'South Bronx femininities' that are emphasized in the context of musical play broaden the scope of the different roles female children have access to in the context of play as socialization.

The Influence of Girls' Musical Play on Hip-Hop

The relationship between cheers and hip-hop is not unidirectional. The boasts, put-downs and social commentary of hip-hop mc'ing are all present

in battlin' cheers and the influence of hip-hop is seen in the use of certain phrases or words in the girls' games. But the influence of hip-hop on black girls' musical play is just that; an influence. The games themselves were the creation of the girls; the improvised words and gestures, the rhythms, the general arrangement of the cheers, along with other elements, were produced on the playgrounds. The reciprocal influence of black girls' games and body musicking on hip-hop culture has generally not been acknowledged. Black girls' musical play has been cited as one of many predecessors influencing on hip-hop. 'Raps forebears stretch back through disco, street funk, radio DJs . . . acapella and doo-wop groups, ring games, skip-rope rhymes . . . toasts, signifying and the dozens' (Toop 1984, 19). Gaunt (1997a, 162) pointed out that hip-hop reminds black women of the musical play of their childhood and attracts them to it, in spite of the misogynistic lyrics and the fact that women are mainly relegated to hip-hop's margins.

Taking her observation a step further, I've noted that the attraction of black women and girls to certain hip-hop songs is also based more specifically on explicit and obvious references to childhood games and play in the lyrics and rhythms of the songs. The adult nostalgia for this musical play includes males who had watched the girls' games as boys. Several rappers have used the memories of black girls' musical play in order to garner hit singles.

There exists an ongoing dialogue between girls' games and male songs; as black girls incorporate certain elements of hip-hop performance in their musical play, male rappers create songs based on the words, rhythms and popularity of girls' games. However, there is discord between the original contexts and imaginary world of black girls' play where females asserted themselves and performed for one another. In the space of play black girls are the agents of their own performances, but in the hip-hop songs where girls' musical play has been incorporated they are replaced by male performers. They are sidelined in rap videos, presented as barely dressed sexual objects, dancing women who prance around for male connoisseurs.¹¹

Three rap songs in particular demonstrate the influence of black girls' musical play on hip-hop.¹² The first example is 'Country grammar' by rapper Nelly, released on his first album of the same name in 2000, and the first on the album to gain popular radio and television play. It rocketed Nelly into the spotlight as a new artist. In this song Nelly utilized lyrical and musical references to a popular handclapping game 'Shimmy shimmy coco pop'. The words to the game compare to the lyrics of the song in the following manner.

Shimmy shimmy coco pop

Down, down baby
Down, down the roller coaster
Sweet, sweet baby
I'll never let you go,

Shimmy, shimmy coco pop,
 Shimmy, shimmy pow!
 Shimmy shimmy coco pop,
 Shimmy, shimmy pow!

Country grammar (opening lines and chorus)

I'm goin down, down baby,
 Yo' street in a Range Rover
 Street sweeper baby,
 Cocked ready to let it go
 Shimmy shimmy coco what?
 Listen to it pound
 Light it up and take a puff,
 Pass it to me now

Nelly calls up memories of this handclapping game; the lilt and rhythm of his voice imitates the girls' singing and he retains key words. The handclapping game itself can be played with two or more people and often includes moving one's hands in a rippling motion imitating a roller coaster, crossing arms over chests in an imitation of love. This stands in stark juxtaposition to Nelly's version in his song, where we hear references to big flashy cars with loud, 'pounding' music systems and marijuana is passed around among those in the cars. The video, which showcases scenes in St Louis as well as Nelly rapping in front of a crowd of onlookers, places women in the background in revealing clothing. Although women are marginalized in the performance and presentation of 'Country grammar', it was the popular familiarity with the handclapping game that helped to take Nelly to the top of the charts. This is supported by the following musical review in *Rolling Stone*:

[Nelly's Country Grammar (Hot...)] is one of the year's biggest and best hits, a St. Louis hip-hop block party with a bounce that represents the playground. Nelly takes his singsong hook from the classic clapping song 'Down Down Baby,' currently in heavy rotation on a jungle gym near you...Nelly changes the roller coaster to a Range Rover and throws in some bass, blunts and booty for a celebration of his native St. Louis street slang, shimmy-shimmy shaking his Cocoa Puffs to the top of the charts. And he stole the MTV Video Music Awards.... You can hear 'Down Down Baby' in Kid Rock ('Shimmy shimmy go go mother...pop'), Digital Underground ('I'm cocoa, and I might go pop') and, of course, Ol' dirty bastard's 'Shimmy Shimmy Ya,' but Nelly's the first rapper to make it bounce.... (Sheffield 2000)

A more recent example of the same phenomenon is the song 'Señorita,' released by the rapper Jin on his album *The rest is history* (2004). The chorus and

words of the song are almost exactly the same as the ring-play 'We're going to Kentucky':

We're going to Kentucky

We're going to Kentucky
 We're going to Kentucky
 We're going to the fair,
 To see the señorita,¹³
 With flowers in her hair,
 Oh, shake it seniorita
 Shake it if you can,
 So all the boys around the block,
 Can see your underwear

Seniorita (chorus)

I'm going to Miami,
 I'm going to the fair,
 To see the señorita,
 With flowers in her hair,
 Ah, shake it seniorita
 Shake it if you can,
 Show all the boys around your block,
 You're doing your damn thing

Here, the words and rhythm are taken directly from the girls' musical play, even more so than in the Nelly example. In the context of this popular ring play young girls holding hands skip or walk around in a circle, while one girl is the 'senorita' in the middle. On the 'shake it' seniorita part she shakes her hips from side to side while everyone else claps providing the beat. The rap song, rather, focuses on Jin going to Miami rather than Kentucky, to pursue a Latina señorita.¹⁴ Jin replicates the vocal rhythm of the ring play. In his video there is the requisite club scene in which women in tight clothing dance by his side. Again, women are sidelined and dark skinned women in particular are almost completely absent. These images again stand in juxtaposition to the reality of the ring play upon which the song is based, in which young girls of all complexions participate and play with each other.

The final example is the song 'Oochie wally wally' by Nas and Bravehearts on the *QB finest* album (2001).¹⁵ This song references popular childhood cheers in both the title and the chorus, but the lyrics are so explicitly sexual and misogynistic that they seem to erase the origins of the cheers and the female empowered space of black girl's musical play upon which the song is thematically based. The chorus of the song would be considered two separate cheers in my community. The first, Oochie wally wally was a cheer performed in a ring format. One girl would enter the circle and improvise two lines about where she lived.

During the chorus she would dance in front of the other girls. Here is one example.

Oochie wally wally

*My name is _____
 And I live in a hut,
 And if you don't believe me,
 Then watch me shake my butt
 She said a, oochie wally wally,
 Oochie bang bang,
 Oochie wally wally,
 Oochie bang bang.*

The second cheer that the Nas and Bravehearts song seems to be based on was 'The devil made me do it'; more sexually suggestive in nature and always performed with secrecy amongst adolescent girls. Some of the lines included the following.

The devil made me do it

*The devil made me do it,
 He really, really, really busted my booty,
 He really, really, really, turned me out,
 He really, really, really broke it on down.*

The choruses of the Nas and Bravehearts song are as follows:

Oochie wally

[1st chorus]
 Oo-chie wally wally, oo-chie bang bang (4 times)

[2nd Chorus]
 He really really really f***ed my coochie¹⁶
 He really really really turned me out
 He really really really got to gut me
 He really really made me scream and shout

[3rd Chorus]
 He really taught me how to work my body
 He really taught me how to do it with my mouth
 He really really tried to hurt me hurt me
 I really love his thug and gangsta style

Although these choruses are performed by a woman, her name is not even listed as one of the principal performers. The suggestions of sexual violence in the choruses, along with the words of some of the lyrics performed by the male rappers, are disturbing. In the first verse alone there are references to violent anal

and vaginal sex with a woman who is then passed around to four other men. Women are referred to as bitches and hos and talked about as sexual objects to be poked, prodded, used and then tossed aside. In the video made for the song the rappers sit nestled in a harem of women, who caress their bodies, breasts and behinds hanging out of skimpy clothing. Once again, the musical play of black girls' has been repackaged in a form that denigrates women.

Sexual references do exist in many examples of musical play amongst urban black girls. However, to the girls they weren't necessarily about sex. Gaunt (1997b, 158) used the concept of autosexuality to explain sexuality in black girls' musical play, noting that they 'make use of the idiom of sexuality rather than being about sexuality'. Therefore, through the explicit lyrics and accompanying images of the song 'Oochie wally wally' rappers Bravehearts and Nas do actual violence to the musical play of black girls' that is the origin of the chorus in their song.

Conclusion

Black girls' musical play is very complex: cooperative and competitive, nurturing and insulting, sweet and violent, reflecting the multifaceted nature of black expressive culture as a whole. Black girls' musical play and hip-hop exist in a reciprocal relationship. Hip-hop has had a large influence on the aggressive nature of the mock confrontation, competition, boasting, ritual insults and simulation which define battlin' cheers in the Bronx. Equally, the words and rhythms of black girls' body musicking have been incorporated in the lyrics and beats of popular hip-hop songs by male rappers. However, the verses and videos of many hip-hop songs based on black girls' musical play are often misogynist, belying their origins. Notwithstanding, it is in fact the rhythm and words of the hooks of these hip-hop songs that appeal to women who played these games in their childhood, as well as the girls still playing them. It also appeals to the men who as boys witnessed the girls playing as they ran around the playground. Although hip-hop is generally seen as male dominated and defined, this article seeks to recover the childhood performances of black women as the basis of several hip-hop songs and as strongly influencing their popularity with consumers.

NOTES

1. Throughout the essay I will use the term 'black' to refer to people of African descent in general.
2. For well-known definitions of play refer to Johan Huizinga (1949) and Roger Callois (1961).
3. We must keep in mind, however, that these three elements are also present in many other forms of black expressive culture, such as the dozens, the blues, etc., and form a part of oral traditions going back even to Africa.

4. At this point you insert the tag name of the girl performing the cheer; my own was Londa, a shortened version of Yolanda.
5. Initially, the meaning of ginu-ice was unclear to me. However, Kyra Gaunt has suggested that it may be a special linguistic code in which the word genuine was altered to rhyme with the preceding phrase.
6. This little adventure was of course without the knowledge of our parents or families. Had I asked for permission I would have definitely been told 'no'.
7. She is referring to the vulgar term for female genitalia.
8. The use of the word 'me' instead of 'my' most likely indicates a West Indian/ Caribbean influence.
9. The 'Ho' that is included in the cheer refers to a common word sound used at hip-hop parties and concerts, e.g. 'All the fellas in the house say Ho!' (it is not referring to the vernacular term for the word whore).
10. I thank my husband Lincoln Ward for helping me to see this connection between the various colors and the sneakers.
11. My intention is not to overlook female performers that have asserted themselves in the realm of hip-hop, such as Missy Elliot, MC Lyte, Da Brat, etc. However, the focus of this paper is the reciprocal relationship between female games and male songs.
12. For this section I use the words of games as I remember having played them as a child.
13. The use of *señorita* shows the influence of the Spanish and Latino populations, which is substantial in the Bronx.
14. Both 'Shimmy Shimmy Coco pop' and 'We're going to Kentucky' are musical play forms that seem to be popular not only in the African-American community, but in other communities as well.
15. 'Oochie wally wally' was also performed as a cheer with the words slightly modified by female rapper Trina in the video 'Take it to da house' with Trick Daddy (2001).
16. This is another term for female genitalia.

Discography

- Bravehearts and Nas. 2001. Oochie wally wally. *QB finest*. Sony Records.
 Jin. 2004. *Señorita*. *The rest is history*. Virgin Records.
 Nelly. 2000. Country grammar. *Country grammar*. Universal Records.

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