

Winter 3-2018

Hyper-Sexualization of Black Women in the Media

Annalycia D. Matthews

University of Washington Tacoma, amatth42@uw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender_studies



Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Matthews, Annalycia D., "Hyper-Sexualization of Black Women in the Media" (2018). *Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection*. 22.

https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender_studies/22

This Undergraduate Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at UW Tacoma Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection by an authorized administrator of UW Tacoma Digital Commons.

The Hyper-sexualization of Black Women in the Media

WHEN IT COMES TO THE MALE GAZE, BLACK WOMEN HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN BEING IGNORED OR BEING FETISHIZED.

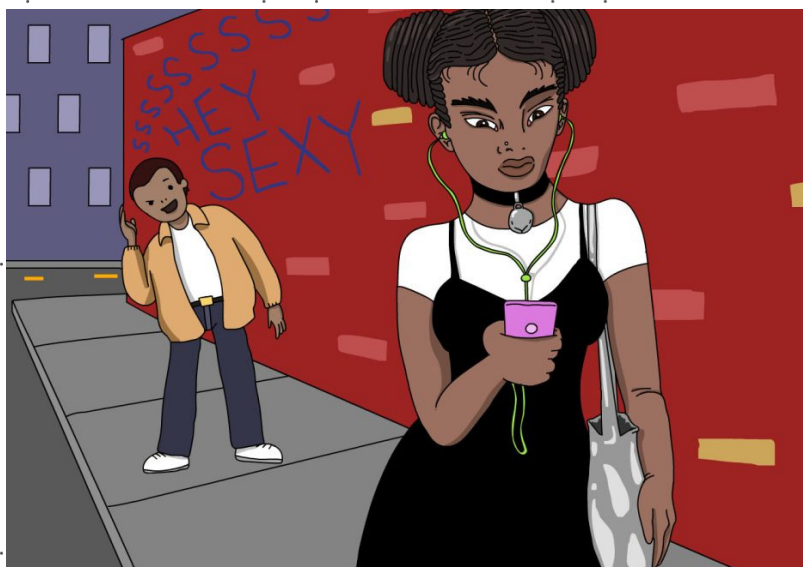


Table of Contents

02 | AUTHOR'S NOTES

The author, Annalycia Matthews, provides her readers with an opening introduction about the topic at hand and a disclaimer.

03 | THE WOMEN BEHIND THE SCENES

Black women are speaking out against the sexualization and objectification, and we need to listen to them.

04 | THE MEDIA'S ROLE

Images from the internet showing how powerful the media is in misrepresenting Black women to be sex objects.

05 | WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Please subscribe to the weekly newsletter to view anything further from this reading.

06 | SHEDDING OLD SKIN, A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Please subscribe to the weekly newsletter to view anything further from this reading.



*"The most disrespected woman in America, is the black woman. The most un-protected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America, is the black woman."
- Malcolm X*

02 Author's Notes Annalycia D. Matthews

There is no doubt that women all across the globe have been demeaned and belittled to sexual beings through objectification and sexualization, especially in the media. This is a sad reality that occurs across all cultures of people. That being said, with the emphasis of this piece being on the hypersexualization of Black women in particular, this is no way contributing to the erasure of experiences shared by many if not all women of all races regarding the oppression they face. This is not an episode of "Who Is More Oppressed?" but rather an opportunity to educate and shift the focus to a reality that is overlooked and experienced by Black women. It is to give a voice to those who may not have the courage to speak up. It is to draw attention to the excessive sexualization, manipulation and dehumanization that Black women have endured for decades through the media.

As you are reading, do try your best to take on a role of empathy when hearing about Black women's experiences on the subject matter. It is never easy to talk about our oppression, but for the sake of putting an end to it we must tackle it head on. I have taken the chance to sit down with women in the music, film, and writing industry along with neighboring fields of work and reached out to a few Black women who were able to speak on the hindering topic and act of objectifying and the hypersexualization of Black women and their bodies. As Staggars stated, "Look, we are not just Black women, we are human; we are not your Mammy, your servants, or the walking mat you wipe your feet on" (1). These are their stories.

In the media, Black women often play roles such as the "hoe," the "stripper," the baby mama, and the jezebel stereotype, which "represents the African-American woman as a promiscuous man eater" (Versluys 2013). If you were to come up with similarities between all of these roles, the underlying common factor that can be found is the proponent of sex. Black women in the media are portrayed as sexual objects and this is not on accident. Hollywood works hard at perpetuating dehumanizing stereotypes of people of color, and Black women often take the target hit for this. In this era, we know that the media is a powerful outlet to the world, not just the nation, and has a significant impact on molding the general public to think a certain way. In the media, we see black women are often shown as "sexually willing characters often inviting of sexual objectification. [These] transcend the confines of the media, and penetrate and manifest themselves in everyday society" (Ntinu '1). There doesn't seem to be much attention being paid to it. I am aware of the lack of attention being brought to Black women's voices, but I have had it with the media trying to silence us and thinking they can get away with such a harmful form of oppression for any longer.

Now, I want to introduce some women I spoke with that may have different professions or may be stay at home moms, no matter their occupation, they are real people that have experienced first hand or have seen the act of hypersexualizing Black women's bodies. This past week, I took it upon myself to make the trip to Massachusetts for a visit with some of my girlfriends and have lunch. I was in direct conversation with one of my closest friends and when asked what she thought about the objectification of us, Black women in the media; (because these are casual conversations, believe it or not) her response was, "Certain bodies are just not as protected as others, and that's a historical thing dating back to slavery. Right now, the people that have come to the forefront of the "Me Too" movement have been cis white women in Hollywood. It kind of ignores the fact that the people who are assaulted and harassed the most are women of color, and we have no recourse. Even Tarana Burke, who started the movement, she did end up one of the people of the year for Time magazine, but they didn't even put her on the cover. They put other white women on there." (Moreno and Prois 1).

- Zahira Kelly-Cabrera, 34, Massachusetts, Artist

"Black women have always been these vixens, these animalistic erotic women. Why can't we just be the sexy American girl next door?" - Tyra Banks on being a sex symbol



Later on in the week, I had the sudden desire to speak with one of my dear friends, Amanda Seales, who is by far the most talented woman I know as she juggles being a comedian, creative artist, singer, and actress along with other things. She is usually quite busy, but she always seems to make the time for me, so I reached out to her via phone call and had inquired about how things were going with her. She had told me over the phone about an experience she had dealing with a man named Russell Simmons while visiting his office to see if she could use it to film a scene for one of her projects. Her experience goes as follows, "You know I've known Russell since I was 19...we've all been in this business forever. So, I went to [his office] and we were talking about [my show] Insecure...and he was saying big ups to me and just saying how he really liked me on the show, and [suddenly] he was like 'Oh, and Amanda, have we ever f*cked?' and I was like, this is why I left hip-hop. This is why I left hip-hop." (00:18:50-00:19:32). I couldn't believe my ears when I heard about such a precious woman experiencing this degrading harassment in her place of work. It didn't matter what she had on during her meeting, it didn't matter that the topic of discussion was business and just that, for some reason Amanda found herself being sexualized and disrespected by a man who was supposed to be about business, but instead thought it would be a good idea to ask if they have had sex or not? How disgustingly inappropriate is that? Who ever thought that would be an ok thing to do?

With this heavy on mind, I needed to let off some steam. So, I called my friend Tyra Banks, to meet for coffee on the weekend. During our meeting, I asked Tyra how she's dealt with the objectification of Black women's bodies and being depicted as sex symbols, especially in the model industry. Tyra responded by saying that, "Black women have always been these vixens, these animalistic erotic women, why can't we just be the sexy American girl next door?" (Transgiot 2006). I wholeheartedly agreed with her response and wondered the same thing.

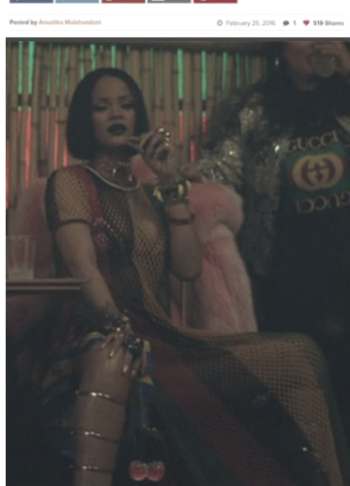
Bella Hadid Is Next-Level Edgy in Glamour Germany

Cool girl alert.



Yes, Rihanna Is Basically Naked In Her New Song, But Here's What She IS Wearing

Posted by Anonima Multination



Just another example of the Hypersexualization the Black Female body is faced with.

These two women are wearing the exact same outfit, but somehow Rihanna is "basically naked" while Bella Hadid is "Next Level Edgy".

Women will wear what we want when we want. Your opinion is not needed, nor wanted.

Here, we see the media taking part of making Rihanna, a Black woman, out to be hyper-sexualized in her dress for one of her music videos, while Bella Hadid is able to wear the same exact outfit out in the streets and no one is talking about nudity or sexualizing her body. This image was retrieved from www.reverseracism.tumblr.com.

As a black woman, I find it so hard to be in control of my sexuality. White people have this conception of black women as hypersexualized and black men expect us to be celibate, wait for them and raise their babies. I hate the fact that no matter what I do, I'll fall into a stereotype.

BLACKWOMENCONFESSIONS.TUMBLR.COM

This excerpt is from an anonymous user who submitted this to a Tumblr blog dedicated to Black women and their confessions pertaining to anything going on in their personal life. It emphasizes the struggle of never being comfortable in her own body because of the preexisting pressures to be what society has designated for her.

This image was retrieved from www.blackwomensconfessions.tumblr.com.



Life as we know it is greatly impacted by the media. So, when all we see is Black women playing that same old role of the hoochie mama, and we walk down the street and hear a man catcalling a Black woman with some sexualized slur, we know this to be learned behavior. We know that because of the media misrepresenting Black women in every way possible, there are people that are going to live their day to day lives believing the media as if it were true. There are people that will see what's on television, whether that be their favorite show, movie, music video to their favorite song, and believe every last bit of it. Black women are constantly being shown as sexual beings. Their bodies and their innocence has been stripped away from them since adolescence in this society and not much is being done to savor them. I say all of this to say that representation matters: The intersections of race and gender are things that a Black woman cannot escape. Those two things follow her wherever she goes and still her voice is something of the unheard. I chose this topic for this project to raise awareness around the subject matter and hopefully educate others so the hyper-sexualization of Black women can come to an end. Esomonu said it best, "Black women should not be generalized as hypersexual because it is neither true nor moral to create such a general perspective. Black women are neither your sexual experiments to conquer nor the sex-driven humans that such a stereotype portrays us to be" (1).

Representation really does matter.