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R&B Rhetoric and Victim-Blaming Discourses: Exploring the Popular Press's Revision of Rihanna's Contextual Agency

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This article offers a contextual perspective on the rhetorical mechanisms of victim blaming in public sphere discourses. By supplementing Burke's dramatistic rhetorical analysis with critical race theory, I trace the changing popular press conversation from Chris Brown's 2009 assault on Rihanna through coverage of their relationship in 2012. In doing so, I identify both the racial undertones of reductionist interpretations of R&B culture and the shift from supporting to blaming the victim. The popular press contextualized Brown's attack and the subsequent events through a racially stereotypical discussion of Brown and Rihanna's R&B performances. Though initially this press framing emphasized Brown's guilt, Rihanna's career advancements eventually recontextualized her performance as a manipulation of Brown, conjuring historical imagery of the racist Jezebel archetype. By examining this transformation, this article aims to intervene into both popular press constructions of victim as agent and racially reductionist interpretations of the R&B genre and its performers.

Keywords dramatism, popular press coverage, R&B music, Rihanna, victim blaming

On December 5, 2012, *Fox News* contributor Dana Perino quipped that women who are "victims of violence" should "make better decisions" (Christopher, 2012). *Slate* contributor Emily Yoffe (2012) similarly dismissed an intoxicated woman's rape as the result of "self-control problems." New Hampshire state representative Mark Warden even went so far as to argue that "a lot of people like being in abusive relationships. . . . People are always free to leave" (Leubsdorf, 2013). These comments illustrate a discursive style that has grown increasingly popular in American culture. By focusing on victims' agency and ignoring the role of the attacker, these remarks reframe gendered violence through victim-blaming discourses. The prevalence of victim blaming in public sphere discourses is problematic not only because such rhetoric supplements victims' physical and emotional scars with discursive attacks but also because, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2011), rhetorics of blame often prevent victims from reporting assaults. Incidents of gendered violence, including sexual assault and assault by an

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intimate partner, are consistently underreported (Truman, 2011). Given that rhetorics of victim blaming contribute to the underreporting of gendered violent crime (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011), theorists must move toward an understanding of these discourses that allows scholars to disassemble the rhetorical mechanisms of victim blaming.

The underreporting of gendered violence creates difficulties in studying the rhetorical mechanisms of victim blaming: namely, since intimate partner and sexual assaults are often sequestered to the private sphere, clear and thorough accounts detailing the rhetorical progression of victim blaming are rarely accessible for analysis. Discourse surrounding R&B artist Chris Brown's 2009 attack on fellow performer Rihanna offers one notable exception, as Internet journalists and gossip columnists began capturing and commenting on the details of Brown's intimate partner assault within hours of the February 8 attack. As the 2009 police report, published online by the *Los Angeles Times* and celebrity gossip Web site *TMZ*, makes clear, by the end of the assault Brown had hit, choked, and bitten Rihanna, leaving her abandoned in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Brown eventually confessed to the assault and was sentenced to community service, five years' probation, and domestic violence counseling.

Throughout this process, the Internet was flooded with commentary regarding the incident, and online archives were saturated with a barrage of public sphere discourses beginning shortly after the initial intimate partner assault and continuing, nearly constantly, through the time of this writing three years later. Immediately following Brown's assault, commentators supported Rihanna. Reporters interviewed the singer's father regarding her condition (Morrissey, 2009); bloggers described her injuries as "horrific" (Britney, 2009); and stars like Oprah and Dr. Phil called the assault a "teachable moment" to promote domestic violence awareness (Dimond, 2009). So it seemed that, during this early period following the attack, media commentary would refrain from the victim-blaming discourses so prevalent in contemporary culture.

However, despite Brown's violent outbursts on *Good Morning America*, popular press outlets turned to criticize Rihanna (Casablanca, 2011). Following the release of her 2009 album, *Rated R*, criticism of the singer for following Brown on Twitter quickly escalated to accusations that Rihanna was posting pictures to "make Chris [Brown] want her" (Harper, 2011; Kennedy, 2012; Poirier, 2012a, 2012b). As the popular press turned on Rihanna, a barrage of articles used her sexualized Twitter feed to attack the singer's lifestyle choices, framing her as aggressive and sexually promiscuous. One MTV Canada article, in fact, wrongly claimed that Rihanna had tweeted, "I admit it. I provoked Chris to hit me ... #ImSORRY," implying that partial blame for Brown's attack should be placed on Rihanna herself.[1] Troublingly removed from its context, Brown's 2009 attack was being reframed for a hungry audience, as the spotlight shifted from Brown's monstrous violence to Rihanna's shameful sexuality.

The media's gradual turn against Rihanna illustrates the power of the popular press not only to frame stories in their initial prominence but also to reframe a story's cultural salience through contextual shifts. This highly visible incident of intimate partner violence, the popular press's continued interest in Rihanna and Brown's relationship, and the racial stereotypes underlying much of these events' press coverage offer a case study for rhetorics of gendered violence, racial bias, and victim blaming in popular press sources, highlighting the central role of context in determining which victims should and should not receive cultural support. By

questioning the discursive mechanics of this case, this article answers Wander's (1984) charge for a contextual focus in ideological criticism:

> [I]deological criticism must be able to step outside the barriers of intent . . . not only when the discourse is being treated as a symptom of some social or political problem, but also when the discourse . . . grapples with problems which can be shown to exist in context. (p. 214)

By examining the media framing of this story, I interrogate the power of context to reverse racialized discourses about gendered violence by asking these questions: How does the cultural discourse surrounding gendered violence shift to blame victims? And how is this rhetoric influenced by race, gender, and sexuality?

This article offers a contextual perspective on the rhetorical mechanisms of victim blaming in public sphere discourses. By supplementing Burke's dramatistic rhetorical analysis with critical race theory, I trace the changing popular press conversation from Brown's 2009 assault on Rihanna through coverage of their relationship in 2012. In doing so, I identify both the racial undertones of reductionist interpretations of R&B culture and the shift from supporting to blaming the victim. The popular press contextualized Brown's attack and the subsequent events through a racially stereotypical discussion of Brown and Rihanna's R&B performances. Though initially this press framing emphasized Brown's guilt, Rihanna's career advancements eventually recontextualized her performance as a manipulation of Brown, conjuring historical imagery of the racist Jezebel archetype. By examining this transformation, this article aims to intervene into both popular press constructions of victim as agent and racially reductionist interpretations of the R&B genre and its performers.

After reviewing relevant literature on Burke and the dramatistic method, I outline the tenets of R&B rhetoric used to reverse agency from Brown to Rihanna. As I discuss, I use the term *R&B rhetoric* to describe a collection of racialized assumptions about the R&B community that are often made by agents outside of that community. Following Rose's (2008) analysis of rhetorics surrounding hip-hop culture, I aim to intervene into the often-reductionist assumptions about R&B by identifying the layers of historical stereotypes present in sweeping generalizations about the genre and its meanings. Following this discussion, I map the reductive rhetorics about R&B onto the popular press discourses about Rihanna and Brown to highlight the role of shifting context during the years following the initial 2009 attack. Finally, I offer some implications for the study of rhetorical victim blaming, particularly in cases of intimate partner violence.

Method and Framework: "Question Existing"

The rhetoric of context, foregrounded in cases of victim blaming, is aptly defined in Burke's (1945) dramatistic lens. Just as narratives position characters and actions within appropriately constructed scenes, he argues, behaviors are intrinsically linked to the cultures in which they occur. Though scene can be defined by a single rhetor, the news media system may co-construct a scene through fragments of media framing. Boor Tonn, Endress, and Diamond (1993), for example, explored the way scene was constructed and reconstructed to shift blame from a Maine hunter to the woman he accidentally shot and killed. In that case, news media's simultaneous attention to

both the accident and the migration of urban dwellers into rural areas reframed the scene as Maine's hunting community. Within the hunting scene, the woman's presence in a prohibited area was framed as a violating act, transferring agency from the hunter to the woman and implicating her in her own shooting death. Similarly, Turnage (2009) described a racialized community-based scene situated within the media accounts of the Duke lacrosse players' sexual assault scandal. For Turnage (2009), like Boor Tonn and her coauthors (1993), perceptions of Duke students' rowdy infiltration into the Durham community created a hostile backlash that spoke more directly to community unrest than to the crime in question. In these cases, then, media framing resulted in a scene that indicted victims rather than perpetrators, demonstrating both the power of the scene in Burke's (1945) pentad and the power of the media to frame a situation.

In the case studies analyzed by Boor Tonn and colleagues (1993) and Turnage (2009), as well as Ott and Aoki's (2002) analysis of press coverage regarding Matthew Shepard's murder, scene is not constructed exclusively by the press. Instead, the press coverage in Boor Tonn and colleagues' (1993) case builds on historical gendered stereotypes cemented over decades, and Turnage's (2009) analysis works at the racial intersection of Duke's primarily White student body and Durham's primarily Black community. Ott and Aoki's (2002) analysis similarly reveals that press coverage relies on communal feelings of homophobic guilt to trigger a scapegoating process. Historical discourses surrounding issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality are inherent in media framing, often contributing invisibly to ongoing ideological struggles. Dingo (2012) calls this process "ideological trafficking." As Dingo (2012) explains, historically oppressive discourses can be unconsciously layered into words, so that the use of an ideologically trafficked word reinforces the historical layers of oppression embedded in that word. As Dingo (2012) argues, this process is often difficult to identify without an eye toward historical injustices. Because ideological trafficking may contribute to media framing of a pentadic scene, as in Boor Tonn and colleagues (1993), Turnage (2009), and Ott and Aoki's (2002) work, critical race theory and feminist critique provide crucial supplements to Burkean dramatistic analyses of news media.

The layered rhetorical meaning uncovered by the application of critical race theory and feminist critique to the dramatistic scene is built through the continual use of ideologically trafficked words. Burke (1966) calls the use of certain terminology to highlight particular aspects of reality while obfuscating others a "terministic screen." For Burke (1966), terministic screens work by limiting the terminology available to describe a given scene. These limited linguistic choices in turn work to channel our focus to one particular perspective over another: "whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than the other" (Burke, 1966, p. 50). Terministic screens, then, represent a potentially problematic ideological space in which stereotypes may be reiterated and normalized.

Whereas terministic screen analysis typically examines the coordination of words across a single rhetorical artifact, situations involving ideological trafficking build their terministic screens in layers through time. For example, Davis and French's (2008) analysis of Hurricane Katrina press coverage illustrates the way such seemingly "value-free terminology" as *victim* and *survivor* can be twisted to blame victims of disaster and, in this case, obfuscate government neglect. Davis and French (2008) note that the terms *victim* and *survivor* were often used in close discursive proximity with discussions of race and class, criminal activity, and a resistance to evacuation.

For Davis and French (2008), these associations worked to layer the concepts of victim and survivor with a series of racially loaded terms, such as "'poor,' 'black' 'criminals'" (p. 249). As these concepts were layered with meaning over time, Davis and French (2008) found that "value-free terminology" was transformed into victim-blaming vocabulary, making victims and survivors unsympathetic characters. When applied to media framing, such an analysis therefore involves focusing on the commonalities among the fragmented rhetoric of news coverage, then working backward historically to uncover the ideological stacking of meaning into those repeated commonalities.

By working to identify historical layers within seemingly innocuous terminology, rhetorical scholars can uncover the terministic shaping of scene and act, as well as the consequent distortion of agency. In the case studies of Boor Tonn and colleagues (1993), Turnage (2009), and Davis and French (2008), historically entrenched terminology worked to shape a particular form of agency through a scenic frame. In each of these cases, the historical layering of terminologies projected certain socially acceptable and unacceptable forms of agency onto individuals involved. As Ehrlich (2001) explains, victims and attackers often speak of incidents of assault in terms of "agentless passives," in which descriptions of the act contain no grammatical subject. This trend, French and Brown (2011) note, may reflect the problem of agency in scenes of gendered violence. As they argue, when victims claim agency, they may be understood as partially culpable for the crime committed against them. On the other hand, to reject agency is to reject control over one's body. In terms of Burke's (1945) pentad, sexual assault narratives are likely to leave agency undiscussed, because agency, like scene, can be twisted to implicate the victim rather than the attacker (French & Brown, 2011).

As the previous literature illustrates, the rhetoric of victim blaming is often complex and historically entrenched. To dissect the manipulation of Burke's (1945) pentad that results in the shifting of blame from attacker to victim, I propose a model that emphasizes the historically layered scene. My case study illustrates the propensity for scenic context to implicate particular, in this case stereotypically racist, forms of agency, which then work to frame victims as unsympathetic agents. This process works through a scene constructed from historical terminology rooted in ideological meanings. To peel back the layers of history that comprise the scenic backdrop for victim blaming, I offer a method that supplements Burke's (1945) pentadic framework with critical race theory to analyze online gossip magazine culture from the time of Brown's initial attack through 2012.

To examine the discursive trends present in such a large and diverse body of publication, I began with what Hall (1975) has called a "long preliminary soak" (p. 15). During this phase, I performed a series of Google News searches. Google News's organizational format, in which similar headlines are grouped together under a broader common headline, allowed me to identify both content trends and the way these trends interacted with publication dates. In other words, the Google News layout provided both a timeline of Rihanna and Brown's lives and the often racialized and gendered frames surrounding those lives. I made note of particularly prevalent articles, the dates of major events in Rihanna and Brown's relationship, and the ways these events interacted with the major themes reported en masse by the sources indexed on Google. Popular press reporting was remarkably consistent, and at each stage of Rihanna and Brown's relationship a vast majority of popular press sources reported the same information through very similar rhetorical frames.

While the frames I identify later in this article were often present in major news publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, discourses about the two artists circulated more widely and with less decorum within gossip blogs and online extensions of celebrity gossip magazines. Therefore, in my second phase of analysis, I used the themes and language I noted during the "preliminary soak" phase to gather exemplars from popular gossip blogs and online magazines indexed by Google. Though these outlets garner less respect in journalistic communities, their heavy readership and light ethical self-censorship offered a near-constant stream of commentary from before the 2009 attack until the time of writing three years later. My analysis includes source material from a variety of sources, but I have focused primarily on popular gossip sources, including *TMZ, The Hollywood Gossip, People*, and *US Magazine*, as opposed to individual or anonymously published blogs. In doing so, I have attempted to outline the common framing of Brown's attack on Rihanna and the coverage of the events that followed in widely read gossip columns.

"Nothing but the Same Old Song": Historicizing R&B Rhetoric

In the discourses surrounding Rihanna and Chris Brown, context cannot be separated from the ideological frameworks of race and gender, particularly as these identities are communicated through the discursive context of R&B, or "R&B rhetoric." As I conceptualize it here, R&B rhetoric consists of discourses about the music and the genre's cultural associations. This rhetoric offers simplistic discussions of R&B lyrics and performances as evidence for its racially problematic stereotypes, approaching the genre from a reductionist standpoint. In other words, R&B rhetoric does not concern itself with the complex and sometimes ambivalent histories and meanings R&B carries for its listeners. Collins (2004) argues that representations of R&B singers remain cemented in the history of Black sexualized performance à la Sarah Baartman and Josephine Baker, consequently projecting deviant insatiability onto Black women's sexuality while framing Black men as uncontrolled, violent, and threatening. R&B rhetoric is built on this rock, reducing music and musical imagery to essentialisms about Black men and women's sexuality as dominating and dangerous.

Contemporary cultural discourses about Black men's sexuality in R&B and hip-hop culture demonstrate the continuation of historical stereotypes about Black women and men's insatiable and animalistic sexuality. I use the term *R&B rhetoric* to encompass the narrow interpretation often brought to the genre by its critics. Just as Rose (2008) notes of "the hip hop wars," R&B's critics often use decontextualized, dehistoricized examples from R&B music and musical performances to critique and dismiss a genre that has been a meaningful space of political agency for many listeners and artists.[2] In this way, Black women's R&B and hip-hop performances are further used to evidence Black women's sexuality as unsupportive and aggressive toward Black men. The resultant framing of Black men and women in R&B and hip-hop is often used to demonstrate relationship dysfunction in the Black community. Importantly, much of R&B rhetoric, which I define as rhetoric about R&B music and culture, is driven by White producers and consumers as a justified continuation of historical racism.

Though R&B and hip-hop are distinct genres with importantly different political and historical contexts, the two genres are often conflated in external, reductionist criticisms about the music's meaning. The conflation of the two genres is both

problematic and revealing, as it demonstrates the often narrow understanding of the music by its critics. For many, the crossover collaborations between hip-hop artists and R&B performers, along with the propensity for "hot urban" radio stations to play both genres in conversation, justifies a simultaneous critique of both art forms (Rose, 2008, p. 20). At a more critical level, it is important to understand the racial stereotypes that underlie such a misunderstanding. R&B and hip-hop are both forms often understood as "Black music," and as such, critiques that merge the two genres may reveal more entrenched racial stereotypes. Indeed, that many of the critiques of hip-hop music are mirrored in criticisms of R&B may reveal broader cultural forces aiming to disarm and demonize forms that have historically and contemporarily served as essential spaces of resistance, pleasure, and social identity formation for Black women and men. Therefore, in what follows, I have incorporated literature from the well-developed field of hip-hop studies when critiques of the genres overlap.

Cultural discourses surrounding R&B rhetoric are composed of four primary tenets. First, R&B rhetoric is built on the backbone of historical racism, linking the Jim Crow South to what Collins (2004) calls "the new racism." As Collins (2004) points out, many turn-of-the-century minstrel characters remain ubiquitous in popular culture depictions of Black performance. Notably, the uncontrollable sexuality of "the buck" replays through many cultural discussions of R&B and hip-hop. Originally designed to justify slavery for White plantation owners, the buck represents Black men as innately sexual animals, happily harnessed and tamed by White slave owners (Collins, 2004). It is this wild but commodified sexuality that drives the (historically White-controlled) R&B music industry, selling records by commodifying the Black masculine body and marketing it to a largely White, suburban audience (Rose, 2008). Though hip-hop artists have constructed performances that resist the racist oppressions of the Jim Crow South, Jeffries (2009) points out that the "thug" performances at the heart of hip-hop masculinity "are largely reliant on a potent and played out formula of women's subjugation and the negation of queer male sexualities" (p. 40), demonstrating the role of wild heterosexuality for modern Black masculine performance in R&B and hip-hop arenas. While imagery of "the buck" has shifted in its racial meanings, the narrative of untamed heterosexuality represents a cornerstone of R&B rhetoric's masculine framing.

Second, the dominant narrative of women's subjugation in R&B rhetoric positions female performers as oppositional to male performers. Utley and Menzies (2009) point out that hip-hop lyrics and music videos often "depict African American men who direct their frustration with social forms of oppression towards young African American female 'bitches and hoes'" (p. 68). As a response to this overtly misogynist slang used by many early male hip-hop artists, female rappers created videos and lyrics that spoke to powerful, assertive women in Black culture (Rose, 1994). However, the development of powerful Black female artists is often disciplined in American culture and, in a musical double-bind, powerful women in the music industry are labeled as "bitches." Collins (2004) argues that the "bitch" in modern popular culture has historical roots in the suppression of Black women's voices, a theme that has become more prominent as women have gained cultural power. For Collins (2004), the term *bitch* represents

> a reworking of the image of the mule of chattel slavery. Whereas the mule was simply stubborn (passive aggressive) and needed prodding and supervision, the bitch is confrontational and actively aggressive ... [it is] designed to put women in their place. (p. 123)

The music industry's most powerful women are discursively disciplined in terms closely linked with American culture's history of controlling racism, and these practices of discipline are reflected in R&B rhetoric through reductionist discourses about the role of women in the industry.

Interactions between "the buck" and "the bitch" result in an R&B rhetoric that ignores listeners' use of R&B and hip-hop to understand their social identities, instead reductively blaming R&B and hip-hop cultures for Black relationship dysfunction. As Rose (1994) argues, Black female artists often feature lyrics about "men taking advantage of women, cheating on them, taking their money, and then leaving them for other unsuspecting female victims" (p. 155). In conversation with rap lyrics that degrade and objectify women, these discourses may be reinterpreted by outside cultures to portray Black men and women's relationships as dysfunctional and dangerous. In what Utley and Menzies (2009) term "a love ethic of exchange" (p. 68), R&B and hip-hop rhetorics reduce the meaning of these genres to depict men and women as disposable to each other, focusing on hip-hop videos that represent men attempting to buy women through commodity culture and women finding power and control in the exchange of pleasure. R&B rhetoric thus frames relationships between men and women primarily in terms of competing power struggles, disregarding the complexities of the music's meaning for its listeners.

Finally, R&B rhetoric offers a reductive interpretation of musical genres and the cultures surrounding them. Therefore, R&B rhetoric cannot be understood as an authoritative reflection of a (Black) community it attempts to discursively construct. Instead, R&B rhetoric is a discursive tool used both in the production of this musical form and in cultural discussions and criticisms of R&B and its social influences. Because, as Rose (2008) points out, a majority of hip-hop's consumer base consists of White suburban youth eager to consume "images and stories of black ghetto life" (p. 4), much of the discursive content of R&B culture answers this demand through stereotypes. As a culture capitalized upon by White CEOs, the closely linked R&B and hip-hop industries are, in part, a project of racial formation. Omi and Winant's (1986) theory of racial formation explains the ways media is dominated and defined historically through a relatively limited locus of power. Through the "linkage of structure and representation" (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 55), racism is hegemonically shaped and reshaped as a tool of oppressive consent. Marketing techniques often work with R&B rhetoric to reduce and oversimplify messages circulated by artists in a way that perpetuates rather than complicates systems of racial oppression. In the context of White consumption, these discourses ideologically traffic reductionist stories of Black men and women's relationship dysfunction into such seemingly innocuous terms as *R&B*.

R&B rhetoric, or the reductive discourses surrounding the larger systems of production, consumption, and discursive contextualization, represents an important and somewhat invisible ideological traffic underlying the popular press conversation about Brown's assault on Rihanna. Namely, the historically racist assumptions that have been packed into discourses about Black musical forms like R&B and hip-hop hover beneath the surface of discussions of intimate partner violence and victim blaming, particularly in the case of R&B stars like Rihanna and Brown. To dissect and explore these rhetorics requires the repetition of many of the deplorable framings present in the media. As such, it bears mention that rhetorical criticism of the press accounts risks reinforcing their reductive representation of the R&B genre and its performers. Following Rose's (2008) examination of "the hip hop wars," I have

attempted to complicate and interrogate these rhetorics with an eye toward the complex and possibly ambivalent relationship between the music and its important role in the cultural lives of many Black men and women. In doing so, I aim to offer an intervention into the narrowly defined R&B rhetoric previously outlined while still leaving room for further examination and alternative interpretations of the press accounts I analyze in this article.

Having outlined my methodological and theoretical framework for analysis and the contextual elements of R&B rhetoric, I now offer a discussion of victim-blaming rhetoric in the case of Brown's assault on Rihanna and the events following the attack. Though initial coverage framed Rihanna as victim, many publications later shifted their perspective, accusing her of manipulating Brown through sexuality. I argue that this shift was prompted by Rihanna's late 2009 album release, which provided fodder for R&B rhetoric to punitively foreground Rihanna's sexuality as a Black woman. The singer's reclamation of musical and sexual agency is thus policed by the media through victim-blaming rhetoric.

"Turn Up the Music": Setting the Scene

Burke's (1945) dramatistic analysis contextualizes actions within a literal or ideological scene, and in the case of Brown's attack on Rihanna, R&B rhetoric surrounding Brown's career dictated that scene. At the time of the attack, Brown had released two albums and was recording a third. His popular press framing was defined by his music, a point demonstrated by the media's overwhelming interest in an otherwise unremarkable story. It is unsurprising then, that Brown's actions were described through the terministic screen of his R&B career, with coverage referencing "Clive Davis' pre-Grammy party" (Goldstein, 2009), headlines like "Breezy 'Bit' and Socked Up Rihanna's Forehead" (Bossip Staff, 2009), or one of Brown's songs or albums in their description of the incident. Lurking beneath this explanation is the ideological trafficking that links R&B rhetoric and violent sexuality. By setting a reductionist version of R&B culture as the scene of Brown's attack, the popular press can frame coverage of the incident through Brown's performance persona. Burke (1945) argues that "a principle of drama [is] that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (p. 3). Indeed, press coverage easily aligned scene with agent, linking Brown's presence within the incident to his ties to R&B and the music industry. When "the nature of acts" (Burke, 1945, p. 3) is integrated into this picture, though, the scene of R&B rhetoric reveals its racist underpinnings.

This brand of Black masculinity has resisted change in part because of its value as a commodity. Black artists in the hip-hop and R&B communities perform the racial formation of sexualized performance roles, often as a spectacle for White audiences (Jeffries, 2009; Rose, 2008). By manufacturing consent from the Black performance community, R&B rhetoric functions as a racial formation; as Omi and Winant (1986) note, "hegemony operates by including its subjects, incorporating its opposition" (p. 128). As a function of Collins's (2008) "new racism," then, R&B rhetoric gains much of its foothold by representing its subjects in an overt and apparently agentic manner. In other words, R&B rhetoric undercuts accusations of racism by displaying Black sexuality not as a racial formation but as evidence of Black sexuality as a nonideological, indisputable fact. Just as Rose (2008) asserts that the politics of discussing Black culture in the public sphere often use "hip hop as 'proof' of Black people's culpability for their circumstances" (p. 9), Brown's sexualization through

the overly simplistic framing of R&B rhetoric becomes the natural space in which his attack on Rihanna is situated.

Brown's Black masculine dominance is communicated most clearly through a frame of exaggerated heterosexuality. Collins (2004) notes that the reduction of Black men to their penises historically represented "the potential use of the penis as a weapon of violence against White women" (p. 64). The image of the Black penis has now become "yet another piece to the commodification of Black male bodies" (p. 161), as it has transitioned into a focal point of media in formats like R&B music videos, adult animation and cartoons, and pornography. Indeed, the exaggeration of Brown's sexuality is clearest through music videos' emphasis on his genitals. Not only does choreography often feature gestures that indicate or directly contact his penis, many of the singer's lyrics reference the organ. In his best-known single "Look at Me Now," for example, Brown raps:

> Better cuff your chick if you with her. I can get her, and she accidentally slip, fall on my dick. Oops, I said on my dick. I ain't really mean to say on my dick, but since we talking about my dick, all of you haters say, "Hi" to it. (Brown, Pentz, et al., 2011)

This lyric demonstrates not only the commodification of Brown's penis in the record but also the representation of exaggerated heterosexuality, which traffics historical representations of Black sexuality as animalistic and uncontrollable. Such representations are decontextualized and foregrounded in R&B rhetoric.

While messages about Brown's sexual anatomy are both lyrically and visually omnipresent in his performances, his sexuality is more importantly framed in terms of his power over sexual partners. In his 2011 single "No Bullshit," for example, Brown proposes a late-night sexual encounter with the woman addressed in the number. And while the song is not violent or overly aggressive, lyrics such as "Hurry up, so we can get this party started" and "We ain't going to stop till 9 a.m." (Brown, McCall, Whitacre, & Henderson, 2011) nod to the assumed power and insatiability of the singer's sexuality. These references to the popularly termed *booty call* have implications for Black masculine sexuality, as the term *booty* carries associations not only with militarized masculinity, as in the spoils of war, but also with Black women's bodies. As a marker of sexual prowess, Collins (2004) argues that the booty call becomes an important factor in defining Black masculinity, functioning as one of the few areas of power for working-class Black men. The dominance of Brown's sexuality in his music is thus conflicted, but ever present, casting the singer within traditional representations of dangerous Black masculine sexuality.

The unbridled sexuality represented in the R&B rhetoric surrounding Brown provides a groundwork upon which press coverage of his 2009 attack is constructed. From this public knowledge of Brown's star persona, journalists discursively frame the incident as an appeal to readers. The problematic aspect of this process is the reductionist way R&B rhetoric represents the commodified Black body. Such representations are marketable due to historical ideological trafficking of Black masculine sexuality combined with essentialist public critiques of hip-hop (Rose, 2008). The language used to frame Brown's attack is therefore pulled from a certain discursive framework, or, to borrow Burke's (1966) phrase, a terministic screen. As Burke (1966) notes, terministic screens influence our perspectives on reality by limiting available vocabulary. By referring to Brown as "Breezy," his R&B moniker, and

referencing several of his popular songs—even within the highly inappropriate context of a serious and potentially deadly criminal action—press coverage contextualizes the attack as an extension of Brown's music, using terminology to shape the attack's ideological scene. By drawing from such a framework, the popular press directs cultural readings of Brown's attack through the reductionist lens of R&B rhetoric, highlighting otherwise irrelevant aspects of Brown's performance persona.

"My Body on Your Body": Fusing Scene, Agent, and Act

By framing Brown's 2009 attack within the ideologically trafficked dramatistic scene of R&B rhetoric, the popular press frames the violent act not only as an extension of Brown's music but as a symptom of Black masculinity in general. As Burke (1945) notes, the emphasis of scene in a rhetorical setting implies that action is motivated and explained by the setting of that action. In this case, the setting itself, R&B rhetoric, frames Brown in terms of his hypersexualized performance persona. The historical construction of the sexualized Black body thus guides press coverage of Brown's actions through the racial stereotypes of R&B rhetoric. By reifying stereotypes of violent Black sexuality in Brown, R&B rhetoric becomes a strong influence on how Black culture and Black masculinity are interpreted in future press coverage; as Collins (2004) articulates, "images and representations . . . provide an important part of the interpretive context for explaining [behaviors]" (p. 18). The use of R&B rhetoric's oversimplified representations as a terministic screen thereby links Brown's race and gender to his violent actions, with coverage of the attack framing the violent act as a direct outgrowth of Brown's Black body.

Representations of physically dominating Black masculinity have historically functioned as a racial formation, discursively constructing violent Black men as culturally unassimilable. As Rose (2008) argues, much of the cultural rhetoric critiquing hip-hop is based on ideologically trafficked characterizations of Black men as naturally violent and animalistic. Such characterizations occur through the coverage of Brown. In Rihanna's interview with Diane Sawyer, for example, the singer recalled, "[Brown] had no soul in his eyes, just blank. . . . There was no person when I looked at him" (qtd. in Kreps, 2009), and much of the press coverage emphasized Brown's body as weapon, noting that he "struck her *with his fists* " (*TMZ* Staff, 2009c, emphasis added). The singer's objectification is further evidenced in his sentencing, in which Judge Patricia Schnegg specified that Brown's sentence involve "actual physical labor, as opposed to some type of community service" (Duke, 2009). Such rhetoric demonstrates the propensity for cultural adoption of stereotypical discourses, which, in this case, reduce a human being to a physically brutal body, solidifying the cultural salience of stereotypes linking Black men to physical violence. Though press coverage is justified in blaming Brown for his brutal assault, stripping Black masculinity of its humanity racially frames Black men as physically violent animals while reductionist interpretations of Brown's music are represented as his consent to these discourses.

When examined through the terministic screen of R&B and the commodified Black body, the media frame surrounding Brown's attack focuses almost entirely on Brown's agency, specifically pointing to the incident as an illustration of Black male stereotypes. Even as the literal scene of the attack, emphasized in media headlines as "Brown's silver Lamborghini" (Baker, 2009), "Brown's rented Lamborghini" (*TMZ* Staff, 2009a), and "Brown's Lamborghini" (Tate, 2009), the luxury sports car carries a larger discursive weight than Burke's (1945) scenic element explains. Burke

(1945) notes that as a container for the act, the scene may include metaphysical elements intended to drive purpose and agency. In this case, the high-end vehicle functions to establish Brown's agency, as evidenced by descriptions that link the car with references to the couple leaving "Clive Davis' pre-Grammy party" (e.g., Baker, 2009; Thomson, 2009; *TMZ* Staff, 2009b). Implied in this coverage as both an echo and continuation of the racial formation of violent Black masculinity is the idea that Brown's body is equipped for the violent outburst by virtue of his race and gender. The Lamborghini shrinks away as a physical scene to contain the violence; the car's function is to rhetorically commodify the altercation, linking it to sports cars, R&B singers, and the perceived excesses of music industry culture. The cultural link between luxury sports cars and phallic symbolism is evident here, as both scene and agent fit together to illustrate pure images of physical sexuality.

If, as Collins (2004) argues, essentializing Black men *as* their penises "created space for the myth of the Black rapist in postemancipation Jim Crow South, and the myth of Black men's need for booty calls within contemporary Black popular culture" (p. 207), then the Lamborghini functions less as a scene for Brown's violent act and more as an extension of Brown's hypersexualized, hyperconsumptive agency within that attack. Hip-hop and R&B performances are often caricatured as emphasizing conspicuous consumption, which, as Baldwin (1999) points out, is both remarkably similar to and despised by White, middle-class, consumer culture. Popular press emphasis on Brown's Lamborghini emphasizes both his hypersexuality and his materialistic culture, reinforcing reductive stereotypes packed into R&B rhetoric. By performing an act consistent with historically cemented representations of Black masculine sexuality, in this case a violent attack on a sexual partner, Brown's performance solidifies his place as deviant agent. The literal scene functions here only to cement what is already culturally prevalent: the commodification of deviant Black male sexuality. In this case, the scenic element of the Lamborghini sexualizes Brown in a way that allows the media to frame his actions as extravagant while ignoring the contextual scene of masculine R&B rhetoric as a terministic screen.

By reporting Chris Brown's attack on Rihanna through the lens of R&B rhetoric, the popular press framed his violence as the natural convergence of scene and agent. Burke (1945) argues that a rhetorical emphasis on the scene-agent ratio is often used to illustrate the influence of context on the actor, thereby absolving the individual of at least partial responsibility. The heavy-handed contextualization of Brown's attack within R&B rhetoric represents this ratio, justifying Brown's actions through an ideologically trafficked lens of covert racism. Through the scene-agent ratio, the popular press projects a racist image onto the attack coverage, quietly insinuating that the artist's violent behavior naturally aligned with the racialized identity necessary for commercial success within the racial formation of the music industry. This highly problematic situation is further complicated by the scene-agent ratio's ability to absolve the guilty of their wrongdoing. As the media shift blame away from Brown and onto the R&B scene, the dramatistic agent is destabilized. Thus, by linking scene and agent through Brown's simultaneous coverage as artist and batterer, the popular press opens a space for a violently unstable dramatistic act.

"Bitch Is Breaking Codes": Shifting the Scenic Screen

From the early articles about Brown's attack, popular press media were consistent in framing Brown as agent and Rihanna as victim; however, the release of Rihanna's

2009 album, *Rated R*, dramatically reframed the crisis situation, refocusing media coverage onto Rihanna's sexuality. Throughout this shift, the R&B rhetoric remained consistent, providing a hook for the popular press media that allowed them to continue discussions of Brown's attack even three and a half years after the initial incident. Unique to this situation is the apparent stability of the dramatistic "container." In Burke's (1945) terms, the scene remains stable while agent and act crumble within it. However, the imagined stability of the dramatistic scene is undercut by a change in R&B rhetoric's discursive focus. In short, Rihanna's reemergence on the R&B scene repositions the terministic screen through which R&B rhetoric is constructed. As *Rated R* gains footing in the popular press, so too do R&B rhetoric's stereotypes about Black women. *Rated R* thus reframes Rihanna through R&B rhetoric, and the album consequently allows the popular press coverage to blame her dominating sexuality for Brown's initial attack.

Rihanna's public performance as a celebrity is constructed from a cultural understanding of powerful Black femininity. Within the ideologically trafficked rhetorics of hip-hop and R&B, the term *bitch* can be understood as a way of disciplining women's cultural power. As Dyson (2006) argues, the term "bitch . . . is especially damaging because it is rooted in unjust social conditions" (p. 177). Though hip-hop and R&B are spaces of complex political negotiations, for Dyson, the proliferation of the term *bitch* in hip-hop rhetoric represents a backlash against advancements in feminism and women's cultural power, providing a shorthand for women who challenge masculine cultural authority. In short, Dyson (2006) writes, "'bitch' is a one-word thesaurus for male supremacy" (p. 178). Media framing of Rihanna's actions represents the singer as aggressive and confrontational even from its initial coverage of Brown's attack; many stories discuss the altercation beginning with Rihanna's anger about Brown texting another woman (e.g., Rush & Dillon, 2009). Rihanna's framing as a "bitch" escalates for the next several years, with articles discussing her protests to their court-ordered separation, the impact of her candid interviews on his career, and her attack on fans for criticizing their relationship (Harper, 2011; Rodriguez, 2009a, 2009b). Rihanna's daily performances are filtered through a media lens of racialized performance framed to implicate the singer as a "bitch."

Rihanna's acts and agency are also framed by her performance persona, which neatly aligns with traditional racial projects representing Black female performance. For example, "Birthday Cake," released as a remix featuring Brown in 2012, could be interpreted through stereotypes of dominating Black women, as Rihanna sings, "I'm [going to] make you my bitch" (The-Dream, Rihanna, Palacios, & Clark, 2012). For Collins (2004), this type of powerful woman follows the trend of representing Black femininity not only in terms of aggression but also as "[feeding] into a broader community norm that sees independent Black women as somehow failing to support Black men" (p. 144). Rihanna reverses gender roles, positioning herself as more powerful than the man she is addressing; Brown's collaboration indicates that he will be made Rihanna's "bitch," destabilizing his role as agent and hers as victim. This gender reversal is common in Rihanna's work: in her 2010 single "What's My Name," she sings that she is "looking for a guy to put in work" (Eriksen, Hermansen, Dean, Hale, & Graham, 2010); in "Raining Men," the singer is joined by Nicki Minaj to mock men for "aiming too high" in their pursuit of the women (Hough, Wouter, Thomas, Thomas, & Maraj, 2010); and in "Man Down," Rihanna fantasizes about killing her rapist (Joseph, Thomas, Thomas, & Layne, 2011). Though this type of imagery can be read as empowering for women using R&B to understand their social

identities, the reductionist narrative of R&B rhetoric employs it to destabilize her role as Brown's victim, endowing her with qualities more often associated with agent.

As the popular press balanced on the unstable gendered ground, they shifted focus from attack to reunion, reframing Rihanna as agent and shifting the nature of the act away from domestic violence. Like Dyson (2006), Collins (2004) interprets the term *bitch* as a shorthand for women who "control men, or at least try to, using their bodies as weapons" (p. 126). Following the singers' appearances on each other's remixed singles, one of which features Rihanna promising to "do whatever it takes to make it right" (Mason & Thomas, 2012), the couple was involved in a slew of explicit Twitter posts framed as Rihanna's ploy to tempt Brown. When Rihanna tweeted a picture of herself having just landed in Hawaii with the caption "Just got 'laid,'" for example, headlines framed the pun as "Rihanna's ultimate taunt to Chris Brown" (Poirier, 2012b). An image of Rihanna sitting on the shoulders of her bodyguard was similarly attributed to Rihanna's desire to lure Brown away from his current girlfriend (International Business Times Staff, 2012). Of interest in this situation is the way that dominating sexuality, the same trait that provided the terministic screen for Brown's agency, is reapplied to Rihanna to negate her victimization. This shift, then, demonstrates the impossibility of female victimization within ideologically trafficked, reductionist, racist, R&B rhetorical scenes. Indeed, the framing of these tweets nods to a shift in the pentad that emphasizes Rihanna's agency in the relationship, using Rihanna's online persona to justify Brown's rage.

Just as R&B rhetoric was used as the scene to frame Brown's attack within his raced, gendered performance persona, Rihanna's lifestyle becomes a target through which the popular press can reframe the singer as agent. With the release of three consecutive albums in late 2009, 2010, and 2011, Rihanna's sexualized R&B performance moved to the foreground of press coverage, bringing gossip along with it. Early 2012 saw a barrage of press coverage about Rihanna's lifestyle, generally attributing the singer's sexualized behavior to a hidden desire to reunite with Brown. Just as coverage of Brown's 2009 assault references his R&B career, Rihanna's lifestyle coverage often referred to her as "the 'S&M' singer" (Johnson, 2012) and "bad girl" (Brown & Stephen, 2012), referencing a former hit single and new album, respectively, and inscribing these attributes onto her character. These descriptions point to the R&B rhetorical scene's propensity to project onto the agent, reifying and reinforcing reductionist stereotypes about Black sexualized performance. Articles like these are often illustrated with sexually suggestive images of the singer, many of which literally erase Rihanna's human agency in favor of objectifying close-ups of the singer's face, torso, and hips, solidifying the shift between a sympathetic press and a victim-blaming machine (e.g., Gayles, 2012; Johnson, 2012).

"Looking for the Rest of Me": Erasing Race

By shifting focus onto Rihanna, press coverage reified historical constructions of Black sexuality, pairing constructions of hypersexualized Brown with Rihanna's partying persona. In the larger popular culture, Rihanna represents more than just a wild child. As a quickly rising popular star, Rihanna personifies a shifting media culture in which women gain increasing control over their own representations; in the words of one popular press reporter, "Rihanna has emerged as a tough-talking dominator, one of the most striking and powerful figures in music, male or female" (Caramanica, 2012). When contextualized in this way, Rihanna's Black sexualized performance

represents what Collins (2004) notes is a threat to the cultural hegemony of representational racial formations:

> Aggressive African American women create problems in the imperfectly desegregated post-civil rights era, because they are less likely to accept the terms of their subordination. In this context, Black "bitches" of all kinds must be censured. (p. 138)

By turning the focus onto Rihanna's character, rather than the historical context of Black sexualized performance, the media turns the singer's aggressive reputation against her. The result of the media's act-agent ratio is, in this case, an increased interrogation of Rihanna's lifestyle.

By emphasizing the dramatistic scene of R&B rhetoric, the popular press coverage of Rihanna's lifestyle rhetorically foregrounds the singer as agent, creating a hostile new frame in continuing coverage of Brown's assault. For Burke (1945), the scene-act ratio has a deterministic effect on rhetorical framing, indicating that an agent "does not *act*, she is automatically *moved*" (p. 10, emphasis in original), whereas the act-agent ratio has the opposite rhetorical effect. Brown's 2009 attack is strongly framed through the R&B rhetorical scene, implying that Brown was moved to assault Rihanna by R&B culture. However, as the terministic screen shifts from masculine R&B persona to Rihanna's Black female sexuality, the R&B frame moves from Brown's commodifiable buck to Rihanna's uncontrollable Jezebel. As such, Rihanna's gender prompts the popular press to police and restrict her performance with shaming headlines, such as, "Rihanna: Partying With Strippers Makes You Look Desperate to Get Chris Brown Back" (Fuller, 2012). In attributing Rihanna's increasingly sexualized Twitter feed to her relationship with Brown, the media shifts focus from Black male sexuality to Black female sexuality, rhetorically framing this action as dominating uncontrollable sexuality. Within this shift, Brown effectively loses agency to Rihanna, while Rihanna's lifestyle consumes discussions of their relationship.

Rihanna's agency problematizes scene in a more prominent way than even Brown's initial role as agent within the R&B scene. Discussing only Rihanna's desperate sexuality, as in the 2012 coverage, denies not only the racial formation of Black women's sexuality as dominating and aggressive, it also negates the clear patterns of domestic violence present in the situation. Many criticized Rihanna's collaboration and rumored reunion with Brown as setting a negative example for her teen fans and encouraging victims of domestic violence to return to their abusers (see Carroll, 2013; Long, 2012; Maxwell, 2013). The most tasteless cultural commentators even claimed that Rihanna's lifestyle justified Brown's attack, as critics made T-shirts and started online polls to garner support for their dangerous perspective (kittygurl05, 2010; Stewart, 2009). Escalating criticisms of Rihanna fueled a final shift in the dramatistic act in which scene was no longer present. Instead, Rihanna's agency becomes the focal point for cultural criticism. With the scene of cultural context excluded, the incident and events following are swallowed into the singers' performance personae. Rihanna's agency becomes the focus of blame, shifting the nature of the act to the singer's performance of "bitch" and "Jezebel" and away from Brown's attack.

The racial formation of the aggressive Black bitch is also foregrounded by R&B rhetoric's use of Rihanna's social media accounts as evidence of her aggressive,

blameworthy behaviors. Because social media outlets can appear to be the sole responsibility of artists themselves, venues such as Twitter can be framed as representational consent by reductionist discourses like R&B rhetoric.[3] For Omi and Winant (1986), racial domination occurs simultaneously through representation and structural organization, where one feeds the other continuously. For the often White-supremacist, misogynistic music industry, the ability to showcase musical performers through social media, blending their private lives with their public performance personas, represents a new form of representational politics. Rihanna's Twitter feed, for example, represents the singer's own thoughts, but the extent to which these are structured by input from her agents, managers, and public relations representatives is hidden. It is therefore problematic to assert that Rihanna's social media newsfeed should be taken as her complicity in Brown's abuse. Indeed, this can only be understood as "consent," when consent is read as an integral building block in the hegemonic structure of racial formations.

Examined in light of their sexual representations, Rihanna and Brown's scenic locations become a violent negotiation; both agents are represented as sexually powerful, but only within the ideologically trafficked scene of R&B musical performance. For Collins (2004), the relationship between Black feminine sexuality and Black masculine sexuality creates a tension that "works to erase the workings of racial discrimination by keeping Black men and Black women focused on blaming one another for problems" (p. 180). By shifting agency from Brown to Rihanna, the popular press focuses cultural attention on the Black individual and the hip-hop community, obfuscating the systematic structural racism that commodifies their bodies and makes the story palatable in the first place. Indeed, the cultural function of Black sexual politics, according to Collins (2004), is to obfuscate hegemonic privilege. Chris Brown's attack on Rihanna allows the media to pin the blame for cultural stereotypes of Black individuals squarely on the shoulders of those individuals themselves, demonstrating what Omi and Winant (1986) describe as hegemonic representational consent. Burke's (1945) concept of pentadic framing helps to illuminate this process. Just as dramatism predicts, it is rhetorical framing that ultimately shifts to accommodate the privileging of some aspects of racial tensions and the erasure of others.

Conclusion: "Don't Get No Better as Each Day Goes By"

The commodification of Brown's assault on Rihanna and the events following his initial attack point to a larger rhetorical issue in American culture; namely, this case illustrates the power of context in cases of victim blaming. This process begins when press coverage describes individuals through specific cultural identity markers, such as that of R&B artist. This cultural marker then works to project the scenic context for an assault, altering the nature of the scene to match the generalized identity of the individuals involved. In this case, R&B rhetoric is the scene, but this process of victim-blaming rhetoric could emerge from any scene that centralizes a historically stereotyped cultural identity. The historical layering is important here, because it works as shorthand to describe agents and scene. At this point, media framing seems both stable, through the historically solidified stereotyping of identity roles, and innocuous, through the seemingly harmless association of individuals with their performance identities. As in the case of Brown and Rihanna, this process is likely under way from the beginning of press coverage, even in cases that involve sympathetic

framing in initial reports. The important first stage of this process is a continuation of ideological trafficking projected as the dramatistic scene.

Once the agent-scene ratio has solidified emphasis on the agents' fit within the historically layered ideological scene, the shifting context that facilitates victim blaming can begin. Importantly, the scenic context must include different consequences for masculine and feminine agents, a condition that is common to most historically constructed stereotypes. Given this condition, press can refocus the ideologically trafficked scene from the masculine to the feminine. Once terminology focuses on the feminine victim, her agency is placed under the microscope, and any action within the scene is understood as agency. Since the scenic framework remains stable, simply shifting from one agent to another, the victim is now framed as having control of the original attack situation, opening a space for victim-blaming rhetoric. As a final, damning step in this process, the scene fades from view, leaving only the victim's agency.

The mechanics of this case study represent a particular manipulation of press coverage that works to shift agency from attacker to victim. Theoretically, this process need not be restricted to situations of gendered violence or sexual attack, though the ideologically trafficked nature of the scene is clearer in cases involving victims from historically oppressed classes. Future research can apply this formulation to understand the nuanced differences in press coverage of varying situations and victims. Furthermore, this process may work to expand other uses of pentadic analysis that stretch beyond press coverage framing examples. For example, though Rihanna's Twitter feed played an important role in this particular case study, a comprehensive analysis of the role of social media in the process was beyond the scope of this article. However, given the shifts in context and framing, such an analysis might illuminate the role of Twitter followers in circulating and recirculating particular frames of sympathy along with implicit references to "Jezebel," "bitch," and "buck" in cases like these. Further examination of the victim-blaming process described in both popular press and social media should work to understand the rhetorical process of victim blaming in domestic violence and sexual assault situations and beyond.

By examining the rhetorical construction of victim blaming in the popular press media, communication research can find ways to identify and reverse these patterns of shame and dismissal, but this can only happen when raced, gendered patterns of negative press coverage are identified within their contexts. As Burke (1968) argued, "[D]rama is employed, not as a metaphor but as a fixed form that helps us discover what the implications of the terms 'act' and 'person' *really are*" (p. 448, emphasis in original). As a tremendously powerful rhetorical medium, the popular press could represent a site of struggle against historically cemented, racist, sexist rhetorics. Unfortunately, this study highlights not only the problems with victim blaming in situations of gendered violence but also the way discussions of gendered violence can work to ideologically traffic racist rhetorics of Black masculinity and femininity. An understanding of this process, particularly as it relates to rhetorics of victim blaming, illustrates the importance of dramatistic analysis in uncovering problematic discourses about gendered violence while highlighting Burkean method's need to be supplemented by critical race theory and feminist critique. By carefully examining the processes of ideological trafficking in popular press news coverage, communication scholars may open a space for intervention into reductionist, stereotypical interpretations of genres like R&B and, consequently, the political impacts of such narrow interpretations.

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Notes

1. The MTV Canada article was later removed from the site (Varghese, 2011).
2. Rose's (2008) work is also significant because of her text's careful consideration of those who defend hip-hop. Rose (2008) notes that "the primary use of the 'keeping it real' defense of hip hop is to prove hip hop's role as a truth teller, especially the truths about poor black urban life that many people want to shove under the rug" (p. 134). Similarly, many discourses about R&B are positioned in defense of the musical form, and it is important to note that these discourses may offer a radically different interpretation of the events detailed here. Though discussions of this perspective are beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to acknowledge the progressive politics of R&B and hip hop, particularly for marginalized communities.
3. Rihanna's Twitter feed, in particular, appears to have been understood by many popular press outlets as the artist's personal expressions. For example, headlines like "Singer Mocks 'Role Model' Label With Shocking New Images" (Gayles, 2012) and "Rihanna Receives Backlash Following Chris Brown" (Harper, 2011) demonstrate the way Rihanna was assigned and accepted full responsibility for her Twitter feed rather than placing responsibility on social media managers.

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