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## **Pimps and Hoes Parties**

"Pimps and Hoes" parties refer to collective, celebratory, rituals generally involving white middle-to-upper class, college-aged males and females, who dress up in outlandish costumes (and occasionally in 'black face') to spend the better part of an evening drinking, dancing, and more or less caricaturing stereotypical icons associated with the African-American community. Although their exact date of origin is unknown, Pimps and Hoes parties were well established in US popular culture by the late 1990s. They involve male participants dressing up as stereotypical "pimps" (i.e. ringleaders or bosses behind the sex trade) and female participants playing the part as "hoes" (i.e. prostitutes or sex workers). More often than not, both the males and female partygoers identify as racially white, but during the celebration dress in attire and affect mannerisms which are considered to be stereotypically black or African-American. Huge hats, sunglasses, heavy gold chains, leopard skin vests, colorful zoot-suits and platform shoes are common costumes for the "pimps," while "hoes" typically adorn in garish makeup, quite revealing skirts or shorts, fishnet stockings, and high-heeled shoes. The parties are common across in cities and towns across the United States and have even been recently found in the United Kingdom. They are often hosted by radio stations, night clubs, and other corporate entities.

From a sociological perspective, the question arises whether or not such parties are just harmless get-togethers or if they are racist and/or misogynistic in orientation. The icon or figure or the pimp has been a staple in the African-American community since at least the early 1970s,

and may even be dated to the Harlem Renaissance. The pimp or the hustler represented an alternative to the civil rights oriented or black power radicals of the mid-to late 1960s, as well as working class blacks who were thought to have sold out to the “Man.” The pimp or the hustler is too busy making money to worry about such mundane things as a job and sees political action as beside the point. He is a significant role model for African-Americans since he signifies an individual who has attained success without playing by the rules of the game. The pimp or hustler is a variant of the trickster figure in American folklore and is respected because he has money and status but does not engage in normal forms of wage labor to attain them.

Of course, the money that the pimp does earn comes at the expense of his stable of prostitutes who are more or less viciously exploited. Yet the realities of the prostitute’s world of violence, abuse, disease, poverty, and so on are ignored and prostitutes are assumed to be simply sex-starved seductresses who like to party and who enjoy nothing better than to spend their time having sex with strangers. These images are reinforced through a consumer culture that sexualizes and commodifies the (black) female body and are reinforced and glamorized through hip-hop and rap music.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, such has been popular among white as well as black consumers and in part explains the appeal of pimps and hoes parties among white twentysomethings. Pimps and hoes parties represent an instance of liminality where typical social roles and situations are suspended and individuals have an opportunity to act out subversive personalities. Normally well behaved, middle to upper class young men, who would otherwise be considered rather conformist are allowed to try on a persona characterized by violence, power and bravado. If only for a short period of time, they get to experience what it

feels like to act “black,” to use slang, and to speak in derogative terms to the women in their company.

For their part, young white women partygoers, socialized to repress their sexuality, are given an opportunity to identify with the eroticism of the black female, which is normally held at bay due to its threatening nature. As “hoes,” these women are afforded an opportunity to dress and act as provocatively as possible and experience a moment of unbridled sexuality.

Both male and female attendees at pimps and hoes parties take part in a collective, time-bounded, fantasy about race, sex and class. Whether or not these events present genuine instances of racism and are founded on an ideology of hate towards the Other is largely a matter of speculation. Certainly the parties have their supporters, especially night-clubs and radio stations who make considerable profits off expensive cover charges and overpriced shots of Courvoisier. Pimps and Hoes parties do appear to reinforce certain patriarchal gender attitudes and practices. Some feminist observers find the parties highly objectionable (though more on sex than on racial grounds) for reasons discussed above and seek to have the events banned. Others find the parties about as offensive as Halloween or other fancy dress events and don't see what the fuss is all about.

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**Further Reading:**

The Huffington Post, “Carnage Cardiff’s Pimps and Hoes,”

[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/08/carnage-cardiffs-pimps-and-hoes-theme-angry-feminist-petition\\_n\\_1947599.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/08/carnage-cardiffs-pimps-and-hoes-theme-angry-feminist-petition_n_1947599.html) (cited December 28, 2012).

McCall, Nathan. *Makes Me Wanna Holler*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Quinn, Eithne. “‘Who’s the Mack?’ The Performativity and Politics of the Pimp Figure in Gangsta Rap.” *Journal of American Studies* 34 (2000): 115-136.