

Internalized Misogyny in Hip Hop

From Socio-Political Voice to Profit-Driven Objectification

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ABSTRACT

Hip Hop, with its social-political properties, is a genre that often discusses oppression and social injustice. This thesis aims at exploring how the genre contradicts these values with its view of women. In this context, the thesis addresses the following question: “are women in Hip Hop aiming to become self-empowered and part of the feminist movement, or are they continuing an internalized misogyny that is embedded in the culture of Hip Hop?” To approach these questions, the thesis will seek to discover ways in which Hip Hop music and culture exhibit misogynistic and sexist features. It will argue that such women’s values have not only deteriorated but also got normalized in such music that has perpetuated into a new identity of the culture. Additionally, the thesis will discuss the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes and the profitable utilization of women’s bodies and sexual attributes. The attempt is to show how the Hip Hop culture has developed from an important social and political genre, towards a genre that has lost its authenticity in its modern discourses. To that end, the thesis will examine successful songs that have contributed to the history of Hip Hop and investigate potential changes and development of misogynistic tendencies in lyrics.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

For my parents who rarely engage with music outside the "Top Hits of the 1980s" or "Classic Feel-Good Songs"-playlists from Spotify, Hip Hop has simply become the genre that combines heavy beats with great artists who "talk really fast" and are "excellent at rhyming". At the same time, for them, the genre has also become "the one that always talks about butts and bitches" and lacks diversity because "all of the songs sound the exactly same". My response to my parents was not restricted to showing that the complexity of the Hip Hop genre does not only engage components of music and dance, but I also endeavored to exhibit how Hip Hop has developed into a *culture* that represents black communities, advocates empowerment, emphasizes beauty and aesthetics, shows the importance of brotherhood and sisterhood, and encompasses a certain attitude, fashion and so much more.

Although my parents do not have much knowledge about the complexity of the culture that is Hip Hop, I think they still do have a point nonetheless: it often discusses "butts and bitches", particularly with the songs to which they unintentionally become exposed to on the radio today. I always try to juxtapose how these songs fail to justify the true culture of Hip Hop, to which they respond: "but then why are we always exposed to these songs?", and to that, I had no cogent response. But I started to recollect why this is the case, which eventually inspired the thesis concerning misogyny and sexism in the otherwise beautiful culture of Hip Hop. Why has a culture that was initially concerned about engaging people of oppression with catchy beats and innovative wordplay developed into a culture that supports misogyny and sexism, promotes unhealthy gender roles, exploits the female body, and silences women's voices? And why have such properties become the dominant identity of modern Hip Hop discourses?

The aesthetics of the Hip Hop genre and culture has contributed to a significantly wider representation of black communities in modern pop culture. Such contributions include ways in which black so-called "ratchet" or "ghetto culture", a culture that was initially viewed by negative associations, engaging with poverty and high crime rates and racist stereotypes of the black woman as aggressive and unpredictable. Hip Hop seeks to develop towards an aesthetic that is progressively enhancing the beauty of the culture, fashion, and people of the black communities in America. For example, ways in which black women are forced to indulge in Eurocentric beauty standards are challenged by Hip Hop's perpetuation of viewing afros,

cornrows, and dreadlocks as beautiful and protected hairstyles for black women. In fact, such hairstyles inquire to become important, almost sacred for black women, meaning that such hairstyles represent black beauty. Younger generations are divided on whether it is ok for white women to indulge in such hairstyles. Not long ago, my TikTok feed included a white woman recreating a hair look from American rapper, Ice Spice, which included tight braids and recreating 3C curls to which other users commented: "During BHM???" (Black history month), "It's okay to be white" and "Bro r u mixed??? if not *crying emoji* ur cosplaying" (Marie, 2023). Indeed, black culture, beauty, and aesthetics are viewed by many as vulnerably sacred and important for black people as it is a part of their identity and history. Yet, it is still important to acknowledge that the beauty blueprint for black artists in today's Hip Hop culture is often stagnant, which still indulges certain hairstyles, body types, and persona of black women. Nonetheless, the pop-cultural significance of the art form produces a certain beauty and aesthetics for its listeners that contribute to notions of composed societies for the younger generations, a notion which, in turn, can contribute to less racism, more appetite, and overall a more composed society. These are notions that are considered important in an America that is still afflicted with racism and social injustice.

The cultural significance of the Hip Hop genre originated in African American communities during the 1970s in the Bronx, New York. Although the culture is widely accentuated and recognized by its four elements: rapping, breakdance, graffiti ad Dj-ing, the thesis will focus on its discourses of lyricism in addition to the cultural significance of the music's visual imagery and performance. The components of "Hip Hop" and "Rap" are often utilized interchangeably, yet "Hip Hop" can be recognized as the culture or genre, and "Rap" as the lyrical art form. This lyrical proportion was initially presented as a free-style form at local parties as social and communal events on the streets of New York. Hence, the genre was not recognized by specific pieces of work until the late 1970s when the release of the first track became a national phenomenon in the United States, constructing a new direction and allowing further opportunities for the art form to develop towards a respectable and acceptable genre within the music industry. Since 1980, Hip Hop artists have been able to transform the genre into new possibilities. During the time, the environment for young black Americans was challenged by high unemployment rates, poverty, racism, and social stigma, which were elements that inspire and influence the cultural art form. Today, Hip Hop continues to develop in different directions and subgenres. The 1990s are often referred to as "gangsta rap", which is often viewed as a reflection of how black people faced challenges in an America that

oppressed black culture, often referencing and challenging ways in which law enforcement treated black communities while trying to cooperate with their lives in societies affected by poverty, violence, and hopelessness. Today, we often distinguish between subgenres such as “Latin Hip Hop”, “mumble rap”, “trap” among many others, which despite its particular prominence in musical charts is by some considered making the genre shift to a poor part of the genre due to its simple style and lack of clever wordplay.

Ways in which *misogyny* and *sexism* are utilized in modern references remain various and often unclear. Oxford Dictionary defines *misogyny* as "a feeling of hate or dislike towards women, or a feeling that women are not as good as men" (Oxford, n.d.), and *sexism* as "the unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex (...)" (Oxford, n.d.). In modern discourses, such terms interrogate a vaguer spectrum and are often referred to as incidences of societal patriarchy. In *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*, Sarah Banet-Weiser produced a more nuanced definition of "popular misogyny" as a systematic devaluing and dehumanizing of women (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 2). The thesis will discuss the conspicuous notions of such oppression, by way of viewing women in Hip Hop as silenced objects that are restricted to their sexual attributes. The thesis will also discuss vaguer and ambivalent contempt for women, which frequently indulges in interpretations and references in lyricism and imagery (for example, the utilization of the female body as a profitable substance for the music industry). The identity of Hip Hop has thus developed from a socio-political genre that challenges the norms of social injustice, racism, and oppression, intertwined with a perpetuation that indulges in emphasizing black beauty and empowerment, to a genre that accentuates materialistic properties and produces women as a product of entity in ways which are profitable for the producers, but also substantial for the modern identity of the genre. Besides matters of homophobia, the integration that has developed the relationship between the cultural aesthetics of Hip Hop and nuanced popular misogyny encapsulates the most significant problem for the genre's lyricism and culture, especially for the generations that consume such discourses.

The first part of the thesis incorporates three significant works from the history of the genre, which aim to express and dismantle social injustice whilst proliferating the celebration of women in a time where misogyny and sexism were prominent in civilizations. The succeeding part indulges in modern Hip Hop culture, where three additional tracks are debunked by way of exhibiting how discourses of misogyny are embedded within the cultural art form. The works incorporated are all significant in the culture because they are represented as one of the most

popular and widespread tracks within the genre. This is because it is essential to discover tracks that people, both within and outside the community, are familiar with because that is what people *actually* listen to. Regardless of the main songs analyzed, the thesis aims to provide examples from a variety of different songs in order to show the complexity as well as the frequent occurrence of certain issues within the culture. These songs will though not be analyzed, just exemplified. It is important to acknowledge that the widespread influence of the genre is represented by numerous intellectual and important discourses, both by earlier and modern artists who seek to include social and political references, yet the thesis aims to discover the songs that dominate the genre due to the influential qualities of its modern reach. By way of doing so, the songs have been chosen due to their social significance, chart positions, and international success. From my personal experience, these are songs that are heavily represented on radio, social media, and in the music sphere as a whole. Because Hip Hop has been the most dominating musical genre in North America during the last few years (Billboard, 2021), the articulation of its internalized oppressive discourse deserves to be challenged and not normalized.

Because Hip Hop is a genre that often expresses oppression and social injustice, there is a contradiction that is occurring when the representation of women is articulated. What is it about the genre that opens up for misogynistic discourses, and what makes such content acceptable today? Is it because misogyny and sexism are so embedded within the genre that it is simply left internalized? Is it because the culture is majorly indulged by male artists, or is it because the genre is a reflection of our everyday society? The younger generation of our modern society is often referred to as “woke”, an urban term for being aware of social injustice and discrimination, constructing them to be quick to point out problematic discourses in pop-cultural media, often in homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and racism. It is eccentric then, how Hip Hop, a genre that dominates American music the greatest, allows for reinforcing its modern discourses to an audience that is exceptionally aware of the issues of misogyny and sexism, without facing controversies for its articulation. What is even stranger is the fact that the younger generations are the most dominant consumers of Hip Hop music today.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

By way of attacking the widespread and internalized misogyny in Hop Hop culture, it is necessary to engage in extensive feminist philosophy. "Feminism" is defined by Oxford

Dictionary as the "belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunity as men" (Oxford, 1995). Yet today, feminist studies often include an expansive and diverse field, encompassing many different disciplines and areas of study. Interdisciplinarity is a notable feature of feminist philosophy due to its dialogue with other fields such as race and ethnicity, economic inequity, sexuality, and class (Garry, 2017, p.1). However, there are several pivotal areas that are often considered prominent in feminist scholarship. Important areas of feminist studies often include the examination of the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which gender identities and inequalities are constructed and maintained. This often refers to studies of gender roles and expectations, expressions of women in the media and popular culture, the narrative of women's movements and activism, and the impact of patriarchy on individuals and society as an entirety. Hence, feminism seeks to inquire into, and dismantle, all sorts of societal oppression by way of creating an equitable society for everyone.

This thesis aims to discover ways in which misogyny and sexism are internalized within modern Hip Hop lyricism and culture. This includes viewing Hip Hop as a genre that has devolved from a socio-cultural artform that expresses political and societal issues, often in racial oppression and police brutality, into a capitalistic business that reinforces gender stereotypes, contains misogynistic and sexist values, and profits on women's bodies while simultaneously uses derogatory terms such as "bitch" and "whore" as normalized behavior in its discourses. As such, it is also mentionable to discuss issues concerning biased gender types and the cultural movement of the community that Hip Hop is a part of. Hence, the thesis will elaborate on theories concerning sex/gender distinction and sexuality, by way of viewing such social constructs by patriarchal and hierarchical backgrounds. The attempt is to show how such distinctions are outdated and reinforce a gender stereotype that is occurring in the specific lyricism. It is important to mention that misogyny has been present in Hip Hop from the beginning, simply because misogyny was already present in society. Yet, the expression of misogynistic and sexist content has gained a far more widespread and internalized behavior, usually for hypermasculine and heteronormative content within the modern pop-cultural part of the genre, as seen in mainstream tracks that dominate radio and the music charts.

Film-maker Byron Hurt, along with the author of black masculinity through figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Eric Dyson, discusses the relationship of masculinity and violence as circulated within Hip Hop. By questioning why there are not more extensive incidences of men facing obvious sexism in Hip Hop, Dyson argues that it is simply

not in the industry's interest to do so as it engages in a dominating masculine sphere where respect for women is less coherent. Secondly, as Dyson argues, adopting feminist stances and conceding to feminist perspective is not "erotically engaging" for men in the genre (Forman & Neal, 2017, 366). The objective of this thesis is to argue how such views are often represented in music performed by male artists, and how tribulations of such views can encapsulate. Additionally, the thesis will discuss the distinction between positive sexual liberty and predatory objectifying behavior in the songs. Radical and liberal feminists are polarized in their treatment of sexuality, both in laws and society, in spheres such as pornography (Garry, 2017, p. 707), which will be discussed in lyricism and the visual imagery of the artists later in the thesis, as they are often referred to as "soft porn" by the public due to its explicit content.

Such "pornographic" content has undoubtedly accumulated its place within pop-cultural music, as record labels and the artists themselves are aware that sensationalism is prosperous. Hence, additional questions come out: Is it ethical for the producers to profit off of women's bodies and sexual attributes? Does such content contribute to a healthy and liberating view of the female body, or is it reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards and objectifying women? And lastly, is such content mostly beneficial for men and their (sexual) desires, or are women's urgency taken into account when producing such artistry? It is also important to investigate who is profiting off such discourses, as it is usually not the artists themselves (whom many people may look up to and view as role models), but the record labels which may contribute to an unhealthy and inauthentic direction of the genre. Mtume Ya Salaam discusses a "business first" attitude that developed when the major labels entered the rap sphere (Salaam, 1995, p. 304), which developed the genre from a musical artform that sought to deliver good and authentic music with innovative wordplay, to a genre that needed to make money. This development, Salaam argues, forced the artists to rap about sex and violence, which makes the genre less diverse and more uniform as it limits the creativity and uniqueness of the artists. The thesis attempts to argue that possible consequences of this development are prone to conceive sexist and misogynistic properties within the Hip Hop genre.

In "The Sex/Gender Distinction and the Social Construction of Reality", Sally Haslanger states that the idea of gender being socially constructed is broadly accepted, yet the meaning of this remains somewhat controversial and often unclear (Garry, 2017, p. 157). Such concepts are often learned by our parents as we learn languages, but different cultures have overlapping ideas and concepts which seek to evolve from historical developments and scientific and technical

changes. In such a conceptual framework, Haslanger suggests that it does not take much to understand that specific cultures are responsible for our interpretive tools, one of them includes the general assumption that there are two (and only two) sexes (Garry, 2017, p. 158). However, as Haslanger notes, there is in fact a “significant percentage” of humans that share both male and female anatomical features, and, if intersexed bodies are embedded in our society, then why should we distinguish two sexes only? Sharing similar views, Claire Colebrook's “Materiality: Sex, Gender, and What Lies Beneath”, argues that it was previously standard to distinguish between sex (as the physical, biological, and material body), and gender (as the social meaning/norms which the physical bodies are lived). This distinction had been important for interrupting the presumed errors of essentialism and biologism (Garry, 2017, p. 201), errors which often occur by reinforcing sexist stereotypes and gender roles within Hip Hop lyricism and visual imagery. This is especially noticeable within the modern Hip Hop culture, as it often molds the artists into a specific character in order to encapsulate the visual aesthetics and lyrical characteristics of the community.

Because gender and sexuality are often co-related in social settings, viewing gender as a socially constructed phenomenon creates a paving way for viewing sexuality in similar matters. In “Sexuality” from *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Catharine A. MacKinnon treats sexuality also as a “social construct” by the power of men, i.e., sexuality as defined by men and forced on women (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 128). Hence, she argues that sexuality is not forced as a natural and biological habitat, but rather a social and cultural construct shaped by the hierarchy between men and women. This results in a patriarchy that seeks to perpetuate women’s subordination by treating them often as sexual objects, and by making way for male desire. For instance, MacKinnon suggests that pornography provides an answer to what men want sexually, as it permits them to view anything of their desires. Pornography, she argues, is a socially constructed domain consisting of women as “things” for sexual use, constructing them as wanting possession and dehumanization. Hence, the theory of MacKinnon and Haslanger somewhat support each other, because they both dissociates the distinction that men are far more sexual being than women are, or that men have distinctively extensive sexual needs than women, a distinction that is still prominent in the culture of Hip Hop. One study from Case Western Reserve University challenged this notion, concluding that men are indeed more sexual than women (Baumeister et al., 2001, p. 269). I shall argue that there is a notion of power within the social hierarchy, where women are often inclined to behave in sexual domains by the power of men as dominant features within the Hip Hop community and the capitalistic industry. Not

only because they are profiting from the women themselves, but also because they are feeding into their own sexual desires.

Hip Hop expresses and perpetuates what can be interpreted as a heterosexual and hyper-masculine sphere, which indulges in poor queer representation and extensive homophobia. Homophobic and degrading slurs such as "faggot" are recurrent (for example: "You that faggot ass nigga trying to pull me back, right?" from one of the artist's 50 Cent's most successful songs "In da Club"), yet there are also general negative connotations to the queer community (for example: "I cannot vibe with queers (Uh-uh)" from "Boss Life" by YFN Lucci and Offset, and "Used to fuck with Young Thug, I ain't addressing this shit, Caught him in my dressing room stealing dresses and shit" from "Barbie Dreams" by Nicki Minaj). Additionally, American rapper, DaBaby, was not hesitant to condemn the queer community during his set at Rolling Loud in 2021, where he, among other problematic statements included saying "Fellas, if you ain't sucking dick in the parking lot, put a cellphone light in the air" (Bowenbank & Rowley, 2022). The hypermasculine and heteronormative sphere in Hip Hop regenerates the notions of homophobia and leaves little room for queer individuality within the culture, reinforcing the conventional notions of "masculine" and "feminine" domains.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler intends to dispute what they refer to as "biology-is-destiny" formulation, the idea that there are biological supports of what sex and gender can represent (Butler, 1999, pp. 9-10). The sex and gender distinction conforms to the disobedient idea that gender materializes biology, hence gender is socially and culturally constructed by society. For Butler, gender is rather a performative idea that is produced and re-introduced by social practices in societies, while neglecting the conventional theories of gender and sexuality that serves to justify the dominance of women in the patriarchy (Butler, 1999). Binary ideas of the oppositions between "masculinity" and "femininity" not only indulge in a differentiation that is accomplished through the conventions of a heterosexual lens but also consolidate each term, allowing the representations of gender less fluid than what is necessary.

The lyrical articulation of how women are portrayed has developed towards a discourse that contains sexist and misogynistic tendencies which often focus on physical attributes and sexual desires. Beyond its explicit lyrical artistry, however, the visual art form of the modern Hip Hop culture often limits the female body to its physical appearance, allowing sexual attributes to be even more prominent. Such pictures often disregard their personality and intelligence to reduce

them to mere objects of male desire. From feminist stances, objectification refers to viewing the female body as an entity that is separated from the mind, allowing the female body to be seen as a product of an object that is prone to be utilized in services or as a commodity. In “Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionistin’ Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?”, Theresa Renee White employs objectification theory as understanding the consequences of being female in Hip Hop, which includes the idea that the female body is consistently sexually objectified within the culture (White, 2013, p. 609). In their music videos and live performances, Hip Hop artists often utilize female bodies as decorations, which often includes incorporating naked bodies with sensual dancing, but even bodies that are purposely dehumanized and diminished to a submissive and enslaved being as seen in the music video of "I Love It" by American rappers Kanye West and Lil Pump.

Yet, a more subtle objectification often occurs whenever women are placed alongside materialistic values, such as money, cars, jewelry, or high-fashion luxury brands, which are unarguably expected incidences in the modern Hip Hop culture. Male artists often indulge in "bragging" about such values, while simultaneously depicting ways in which they are able to acquire sexual relationships with women. Numerous instances come to mind, but some examples include "Pussy & Millions" by Drake and Travis Scott (“And my Pateks, they came with a pole”), "Niggas in Paris" By Kanye West and Jay-Z ("She said, "Ye, can we get married at the mall?" (...) show me why you deserve to have it all"), and "Taste" by Tyga and Offset "(And she got the Patek on water moccasin (...) she can get a taste"). When categorizing women in the same positions as material objects, this tendency limits them to objects of entity, as heard in Kanye West's 2004 track "Breathe In Breathe Out", "But now I'm rappin', 'bout money, hoes, and rims again". Such grandiosity has become so prominent within the culture that modern Hip Hop songs are almost expected to incorporate this type of content. In such matters, the woman becomes an object of a commodity which is ought to be categorized alongside materialistic value that seeks to engage in internalized sexism within the culture.

It is important to preface that there are artists of the 21st century who obviously and intentionally indulge in violent and predatory discourses within their lyrics. For example, the lyrics of "U.O.E.N.O" By Rocko, Rick Ross, and Future incorporated these lyrics:

"Put molly all in her champagne, she ain't even know it,

I took her home and I enjoyed that, she ain't even know it",
(Clearly enough, these lines vigorously promote rape culture and sexual predatory harassment).
In addition, there is the closing lyrics in "Shake That" by Eminem and Nate Dogg:

"I ain't leaving without you, bitch!
You're comin' home with me
and my boy
and his boy
and his boy".

Which aggressively reduces the woman's voice to please the artists and his "male friends" after extensively admiring her sexual features. And lastly, there is the lyrics of "X-Is Coming" by American rapper DMX that goes:

"Cause I ain't knockin' on the door, I'm comin' in the house
And I'm gunnin' for your spouse, tryin' to send the bitch back to her maker
And if you got a daughter older than 15, I'ma rape her".

As shown above, the lyrics include not only rape but underage girls. While such lyricism is problematic because it indulges in violent and criminal behavior, it is important to distinguish between such discourses and discourses that indulge in less obvious sexism but are nevertheless open to problematic interpretations. While most people agree that the lyrics in "U.O.E.N.O", "Shake That" and "X-Is Coming" is considered disturbing and disgusting, the challenges lay within the songs that contain more vague and subtle sexism and misogyny. This is not only because the problematic discourses can be differently interpreted, but also because the misogyny can become integrated as internalized discourses, which is what the thesis will attempt to illustrate. In other words, there is no need to illustrate how condoling in criminal behavior is considered bad because there is already a general agreement that it is. And luckily, society is often quick to hold artists of such opaque discourses accountable. Hence, such specific misogynistic and sexist discourses are not internalized or normalized within the culture. Realistically, if so, the genre would face an even greater issue. Nonetheless, the uncertainty and vagueness of lyricism in numerous parts of the modern Hip Hop culture create room for arrangement concerning internalized and normalized misogyny. These are components that can

be viewed as problematic because they may not intentionally and deliberately engage in sexism and misogyny, yet their articulation can very well be interpreted as such.

There is also an occurrent distinction between how women and men are portrayed within the genre, i.e., the male as a powerful and resourceful being and the female as a sexual object that is willing to indulge in anything for money. Terms that refer to viewing the woman as a "gold digger" and the man as a "thug" or "pimp" are prominent. Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, this is reinforced by both sexes as we see female and male rappers indulge in similar discourses within their music. By way of attempting to demonstrate a general view of such stereotypes and their consequences, the dynamic relationship between a prostitute and a pimp can be exemplified. The pimp is often considered a powerful and resourceful man that is in control, both of his workers and the combined money. Additionally, the pimp may also be fly and stylish (as seen in the way rappers like Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent portray their personas). The prostitute's place in society remains poor, while simultaneously being dependent on the pimp, economically but also safe from violence and physical abuse, not to mention that she is prone to be physically punished if her job is not done well nonetheless. Although such brutal relationships are not always present, the idea is to shamefully disregard women while praising men, although they are dependent on and fulfill each other. Similar notions are seen in the double standards of the dynamic between men's and women's sexual history, meaning viewing a woman with extensive sexual history as a "slut", "bitch", "whore", or "ho" and a man as "fly", "cool" or "powerful".

Lastly, the thesis also aims to discover ways in which Hip Hop has developed from an authentic genre that expresses black beauty and culture by black people themselves, to a genre that reproduces capitalistic values, accentuates Eurocentric beauty standards, and reinforces commodities of the female body to profit off of sex and sensationalism. Such "Eurocentric beauty standards" is defined as Eurocentrism as favorable and biased against other ethnicities, which usually perpetuate the ideal body as tall, slim, and slender, the hair as long and straight, and the skin as paled or lightly tanned (Chen, 2020, p. 2). Additional features also include a small nose, high cheekbones, and defined jawlines. Whilst the proportions of traditional black beauty and culture include authentic black hairstyles such as braids, cornrows, or locks, the thesis will aim to juxtapose how female artists are retained to reinforce such standards within the genre's visual artistry. Indeed, reinforcing generalizations, demeaning, and objectifying women, while capitalizing on the female body, advocates for sexism and misogyny in Hop Hop

culture. Eurocentric beauty standards that diminish black women and the articulation of how women are represented in the culture are also internalized issues within the community.

CHAPTER 2: CLASSIC HIP HOP

1980: “RAPPER’S DELIGHT” – THE SUGARHILL GANG

Music, the diverse art form that composes melody and sound, often cultivates messages and ideas through its lyricism, which is indeed potent in the history of the Hip Hop genre as seen in old school Hip Hop. For example, iconic songs such as “Fuck the Police” by NWA, released in 1988, discusses police brutality as targeted against black people in America, and 1993s “U.N.I.T.Y.” by Queen Latifah addresses sexual street harassment and sexual slurs as a problem in the streets of America as well as in the culture of Hip Hop. Such songs have deliberately aimed to reinforce political and societal changes by way of articulating their artistry.

By way of viewing how misogyny has developed through the lyricism of Hip Hop culture, it is plausible to have a look at the history of Hip Hop. Although influenced by synthesized funk and disco, along with components from genres like classic jazz and blues, The SugarHill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” contributed to the rise of a new musical genre that we eventually would recognize as Hip Hop. Previous artists like Chuck D from Public Enemy stated that he did not think "it was conceivable that there would be such a thing as a hip-hop record" (Jeffries, 2011, p. 1). Nonetheless, it was the first rap song to establish a place on music charts in the United States, making its first appearance on a Billboard chart nearly one month after its release (Lynch, 2014). During its time, the fourteen-minute song was considered innovative and different, generating great commercial success for the members of The SugarHill Gang, while allowing Hip Hop a platform that could capitalize on mainstream audiences. When Hip Hop and rap music first started to establish a place in the streets of New York during the 70s, the art was initially believed to be performed for live events only, and producer Sylvia Robinson struggled to find artists willing to contribute to a studio release. When Robinson managed, however, it gave the genre a whole new possibility which has inevitably sought to be institutionalized and capitalized ever since. The commercial success of The SugarHill Gang also helped to bring the genre to a more extensive audience, allowing Hip Hop to become a mainstream and respectable music genre.

“Rapper’s Delight” is not widely interpreted as a feminist track, nor is it my intention to argue so. Although the lyrics and accompanying music video allows interpretations of the song simply as a “feel-good” one, i.e., an upbeat and catchy party song, it does contain instances of trying

to persuade women. Yet, the aim of doing so is accentuated by trying to use their musical talents, and the following lines are illustrative:

“I'm gonna freak ya here I'm gonna freak you there

I'm gonna move you outta this atmosphere»

[...]

“A-come alive, y'all, a-gimme whatcha got

'Cos I'm guaranteed to make you rock”

[...]

“This young reporter, I did adore

So I rocked a vicious rhyme like I never did before”

As such, I shall argue that it is done in a far more contrasted way of elevated class in comparison to popular mainstream songs in the Hip Hop genre, as will be illustrated in later chapters. Although the lyrics are to be considered sensual, and somewhat sexual, it is still not exploiting women's bodies, emphasizing sexual desires by way of justifying rape or abuse, or articulating the presence of women in degrading matters.

As noted in the below lyrics, a level of confidence of the artists does not go unnoticed in the lyrics:

“Check it out, I'm the C-A-S-AN, the O-V-A and the rest is F-L-Y»

[...]

“I said a M-A-S, a T-E-R, a G with a double E

I said I go by the unforgettable name of the man they call the Master Gee”

[...]

“Well, my name is known all over the world

By all the foxy ladies and the pretty girls”

Such persona is often recognized in the lyrics of Hip Hop. As I shall attempt to illustrate in later chapters, the contrasts are coherent in the ways women are articulated in such matters. The SugarHill Gang attempts to raise their self-empowerment by admiring their own musical performances, which is also done without misogynistic discourses such as objectifying women, or hyper fixating the female body for profitable attempts.

The differences between this song and modern twenty-first-century Hip Hop music, however, lies in ways in which the art is being used to gain popularity and commercial success within the society. Although “Rapper’s Delight” was perhaps more concerned with presenting a certain beat and rhythmic artistry rather than a political or intellectual lyrical performance which the lyric in a way emphasizes (e.g., “All I’m here to do, ladies, is hypnotize”), it is still an important song for the Hip Hop culture and history. Interestingly though, women in the song are recognized as “women”, “ladies”, and “girls”, which I would argue is contrasted to how women are often recognized in modern pop-cultural Hip Hop.

The initial reaction concerning what is to be considered as potential misogynistic challenges embedded in Hip Hop culture and lyricism includes verbal ways in which females often are presented. Words like “bitch”, “whore”, and “hoe” have traditionally and historically been distinguished as negative and degrading terms for women, often in sexual contexts (considering "bitch" literal definition being "female dog", and "whore" being a derogatory term for prostitutes). Yet, these are terms that Hip Hop seeks to introduce as normal terms for women, (or sometimes even terms of endearment).

A contradicting example of such transcendence includes the term “bad bitch”, which, more often than not, refers to a strong and confident woman within Hip Hop. Here, countless specific songs come to mind: "Bad and Boujee" by Migos with lyrics like: "my bitches are bad and boujee", "Ali Bomaye" by The Game, 2 Chainz and Rick Ross, with lyrics like: "Bad bitches and D-boys, we bring 'em out" (with accompanied lyrics that simultaneously degrading terms used for males that is worth mentioning such as: "You a bitch nigga, no female"), "FuckWithMeYouKnowIGotIt" by Jay-z with lyrics like: "Got a bad bitch, she a masterpiece", "Highlights" by Kanye West with lyrics like: "I need every bad bitch up in Equinox", and so many others. But interestingly, the same term is frequently being used by female rappers, e.g., "Best Friend" by Saweetie and Doja Cat with lyrics: "That my best friend, she a real bad bitch", "Barbie Thingz" by Nicki Minaj with lyrics: "I'm a bad bitch, fuck the bitch", "Bad Bitch Anthem" by Trina, and the list goes on.

For the females, however, such use might contribute to claiming the word, i.e., taking control and ownership of a phrase that has had (and still has) traditionally degrading and misogynistic tendencies. Can we then suggest that Hip Hop contributes to a less sexist notion of the term?

The ways that “bitch” is utilized within the Hip Hop genre has indeed changed from its initial meaning, yet there might still be supplementary and subconscious attitudes towards such phrases which we might see in lyrics like “one good girl is worth a thousand bitches” from "Bound 2" by Kanye West, and “I’d rather be your B-I-T-C-H, cause that’s what you gon’ call me when I’m trippin anyways” from "B.I.T.C.H." by Megan Thee Stallion.

Similarly, the utilization of words like "pussy" is almost always used in degrading definitions of men. Examples include Lil Wayne's "Trigger Finger" from 2013 ("I'm a douchebag to these pussy ass niggas"), in Young Money's "Lookin Ass" from 2014 ("Pussy, you tried, pussy ass nigga you lie") and in "Die Slow" by Lil Durk and 21 Savage from 2019 ("Pussy ass nigga get robbed, if I got to, Pussy ass nigga get shot"). There is an internalized double standard in which men are viewed as inferior when "feminine" definitions are employed in Hip Hop that concurrently fails to dismiss gender equity. The double standard is especially prominent in Megan Thee Stallion's "Kitty Kat" track from 2021, where she incorporated "pussy" as empowering for herself ("Grammy nominated pussy, bitch, I got four"), while concurrently referencing a man as the devil ("Pussy ass nigga, don't hide that tail"). Hence, context is crucial to providing negative or positive meaning for words like “bitch” and “ho”. If such words contain subconscious negative attitudes, why are we utilizing these in both negative and positive events? Would it be better to have a clearer distinction of where to draw the line?

In his conversation with Hurt, Dyson argues that the greatest insult from one man to another is to call him a “bitch”, “ho” or “fag” because it implies that he is “less than a man” (Forman & Neal, 2017, p. 367). In fact, Dyson argues that such terms utilize an act of enhanced degradation because there is an initial act of injury, yet also an act of being assigned another gender or a sexual orientation that is often considered less than. Hence, such terms place the male lower than his concept of masculinity. Ironically, words like "bitch" and "ho" are still utilized within the articulation of females by male Hip Hop artists, both in positive and negative affirmations, yet never utilized as an articulation of oneself (like the females' use of "I am a bad bitch" as self-empowerment), while additionally only used as a derogatory term for other males. Why is there a double standard in how such terms are used in both degrading and empowering arrangements for women, yet only degrading for men in Hip Hop lyricism?

Some theorists have argued that Hip Hop culture and lyricism fail to engage in feminist work because it is not "erotically engaging" for the male gaze (Forman & Neal, 2017, p. 366). Yet,

although Hip Hop seeks to encapsulate much of sexism and misogyny in its modern discourses, it never really initiated such culture. The breakthrough of "Rapper's Delight" showed how the cultural art form could transform into a respectable genre within the music industry, as opposed to a sub-genre from local bars and corners in suburban New York, because The SugarHill Gang was able to create a track in which they made a commercial success. Ultimately, the capitalistic properties of the music industry will always pursue profitable features within its artistry, which is why the genre always seeks to encapsulate sexual lyrics, imagery, and performances. Although "Rapper's Delight" aims to showcase a certain persona, a confident and almost "braggy" attitude towards the artists themselves, they still juxtapose how it is not essential to be engaging in sexist and misogynistic discourses in order to make successful songs within the genre. Such persona, however, may invite the genre towards such discourses, because it suggests that such "gloating" may respond in materialistic value, and then how the artists are able to achieve attention from women, which is prominent in the modern era of the Hip Hop genre. However, Hip Hop culture seeks to develop towards a culture that is represented by criminal gangs, gangsters, drugs, and weapons. This culture also moves towards a direction that is heavily represented by internalized misogyny and sexism, with issues concerning objectification, sexual violence, and stereotypes towards women as normalized features of the musical art form.

GANGSTA RAP 1993: "KEEP YA HEAD UP" – 2PAC

The Civil Rights Movement was the beginning of what would become the goal of total liberty for black people in America. Unfortunately, though, this did not mean that racism and prejudice were eliminated from society. Since the beginning of the normalization of Rap and Hip Hop recording as opposed to traditional live performances, Hip Hop songs have progressively become more important for the music industry. With Hip Hop predominantly representing black people, its significance is represented in the genre's ability to remain critical of political aspects, especially racism and segregation issues such as police brutality and incarceration distributes. Towards the end of the 20th century, a new sub-genre of rap merged on the West Coast, what we today might acknowledge as "gangster rap". During the hype of "gansta rap", the movement in Hip Hop culture, which, as some argue, has become the dominant style of the genre (Tate, 2013), key figures like Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and The Notorious B.I.G. established their presence and dominance in the Hip Hop genre.

Unarguably, one of the most influential characters of this type of rap in American Hip Hop culture, Tupac Shakur, also known as “2Pac” or “Makaveli”, only lived to be twenty-five years old, yet his music seeks to cultivate through new generations ever since his death in 1996. While he is commonly known as a representative for the West Coast, Shakur released five studio albums that ultimately gave him the opportunity to communicate with a whole nation. In 1995, Shakur released his third studio album which included “Dear Mama”, a homage to his own mother that would eventually become a tribute to all mothers who faced struggles providing for their families in an America that was racially, economically, and culturally unfair, yet the track is also viewed as a feminist work. Two years prior to “Dear Mama”, Shakur released “Keep Ya Head Up” from his second studio album, which contradicts some of his public controversies like his alleged sexual assault case which he refused until the day he was murdered. The song itself, however, attempts to give women the courage to stand up for themselves, while celebrating the beauty of black women which is unarguably often neglected in internalized Eurocentric beauty standards. Simultaneously, the song deliberately discusses the abortion issue, possible effects and negative consequences of disrespecting women, problems concerning father figures detaching themselves from families, and general everyday catcalling of women which has always been a problem within most societies.

As an initial and beautiful homage to black women, “Keep Ya Head Up” starts off with the phrase:

“Some say the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice,
I say the darker the flesh then the deeper the roots”,

The beginning of the second verse shares similarities where 2Pac emphasizes Marvin Gaye by stating “he had me feelin’ like black was the thing to be”, while furthermore discussing “ghetto” as something that “didn’t seem so tough”. “Ghetto” as we are familiar with today (i.e., areas where poverty and crimes are often prominent”) were often, and among some prejudiced people still is, used interchangeably with black areas and neighborhoods. Although poor neighborhoods are some of the many challenges of black people today, the reality is that this is a part of segregation that is yet to be detached after racial injustice prior to the civil rights movement in America.

He then moves towards acknowledging catcalling of women in society, referring to the men doing so as “clowns”. Yet, Shakur also acknowledges violence and disrespect towards women, and how such trauma can loop itself in society (e.g., “we'll have a race of babies that will hate the ladies that make the babies”). More specifically, theft, rape, and hate towards women allow children to maintain the way in which women are poorly treated.

Heavily contrasted to modern Hip Hop artists, 2Pac also encapsulate the importance of a woman's worth, encouraging them to demand respect while provoking men who fail to connect their emotional feelings within relationships:

"And when he tells you you ain't nuttin' don't believe him
And if he can't learn to love you, you should leave him
'Cause sista you don't need him"

Such lyricism is neglected by modern artists as a way of detaching emotional connections for the benefit of money, power, and sex. 2Pac also encapsulates discussions of sexual abuse and mistreatment of women in retrospect, for example:

“I wonder why we take from our women
Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?”

In a society where internalized misogyny is maintained, such lyrics are often cited as powerful statements in support of transforming the poor treatment of women, by rather supporting women’s rights and freedom. 2Pac proceeds:

“I think it's time to kill for our women (...)
Time to heal our women, be real to our women»

promoting treating women with respect and gratitude, instead of admiring them solely for their physical attributes.

Perhaps a more relevant issue than before is that the heated and polarizing discussion concerning abortion in America is also lightly suggested in his song:

“(…) and since a man can’t make one,
he has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one”,

while simultaneously criticizing the ones who may disagree: “so will the real men get up”. Supporters of abortion are often viewed as supporters of women’s rights, health care and independence, whereas supporters of banning abortions often refer to religious reasons which can, and often does, suppress women. But “Keep Ya Head Up” also acknowledges the problem of single mothers in America, i.e., problems concerning the biological father’s detachment from the relationship or the family: “leave a young mother to be a pappy”. But this is further, and perhaps more carefully discussed towards the end: “Thank the Lord for my kids, even if nobody else wants ‘em (left you all by yourself)”, while discussing potential challenges with absent fathers, for the mother, but also for the child being left behind. Economic instabilities are not only frequently coherent in single-parent households, but are also used as ethical arguments to maintain abortion legal.

By acknowledging that there are coherent problems for women despite the fact that equality and justice are important ethics for the general population, 2Pac helps to highlight errors within society that are typically normalized. Such normalizations include cat-calling (e.g., verbal street harassment), gender roles (e.g., “motherhood”), slut-shaming (i.e, judging women based on the number of sexual partners), objectifying (i.e., women as sexual property), violence against women (e.g., domestic or street-harassment) and anti-abortion (especially if the pregnancy is a result of an abandoned relationship, not to discuss violent and predatory behavior).

Additionally, Shakur seeks to refer to women in eloquent ways, e.g., “women”, “girl”, “ladies”, and “sister”. Such reference, one can argue, is less coherent in mainstream modern hip-hop music. Yet, one of the most important features of “Keep Ya Head Up” is its ability to question the ways society *actually* treats women. Questions such as “do we hate our women?” arise. Yet, the fundamental argument from 2Pac is that though women undoubtedly face issues more complex than men, encouraging them to keep going is most emphasized, while simultaneously acknowledging challenges that can be neglected and normalized. And it is exactly this that 2Pac wants society to achieve. Modern society requires modern properties, where violence and prejudice should and ought to be neglected. This is arguably prone to be normalized again by modernized Hip Hop culture. Indeed, “Keep Ya Head Up” is to be considered a feministic

anthem for single mothers and black women in a society that often marginalizes and mistreats them.

The music video of "Keep Ya Head Up" further engages in feminist stances, as it incorporated visual imagery that criticize the way women are being cat-called on the street and left abandoned whilst pregnant, while allowing the beauty of the black community to be referenced, as 2Pac is gathered with black men, woman, and children in a community that is forced together elsewhere. In addition to 2Pac's intentional acknowledgments of the misogyny of black culture, the video starts with a homage: "Dedicated to the memory of LATASHA HARLINGS... it's still on." which references an African American girl who was shot and killed aged 15. The incident led up to the 1992 Los Angeles riots, showing how black people are mistreated in American societies. Although "Keep Ya Head Up" was released thirty years ago, its lyricism and imagery have reappeared for the younger generation in modern media platforms such as TikTok, still criticizing how women are mistreated despite their contributions to society. The remarkable resurface of the song suggests how such discourses still remain of importance despite the thirty-year difference.

Definitely, there are additional mentionable works from 2Pac, as he had several political songs including "Changes", which discusses police brutality and the war on drugs that were central themes in black neighborhoods, or "Brenda's Got a Baby", a story about a twelve-year-old girl becoming pregnant after being molested. It is also worth mentioning that other dominating artists of this time were similarly different in their discourses about women. Examples include Snoop Dogg's "Beautiful" (2002) featuring Pharrell Williams, a homage that emphasizes the beauty of black women, Jay-Z's "Song Cry" (2001), which vulnerably discusses his own imperfections about a relationship breakup that he was responsible for, and "If I Ruled the World" (1996) by Nas and Lauryn Hill which encapsulates a variety of different imperfections in the American society, including how black people need to raise their daughters with poor welfare.

Hence, 2Pac, as an artist who iterates black language, black style, and black culture, helped to amplify social and political transmissions about the challenges that affect the black communities in America, which include racism, poverty, and police brutality, while simultaneously encouraging self-expression for a youth who often feels marginalized in mainstream media. The black culture was instead treated as beautiful, showcasing diversity

and richness, while simultaneously challenging and breaking down racial stereotypes. Additionally, and more unusually, 2Pac also notices the challenges of women (especially black women) specifically through his lyricism, providing a platform for black women to repress the misconduct they often face in their everyday life, which is, not always, but commonly neglected in mainstream music. The cultural significance that 2Pac had on Hip Hop history illustrates how the lyrical articulate need not be overly sexual in order to gain popularity or to make a profitable business, disregarding the theory concerning that sexual lyricism and imagery needs to be coherent throughout the artists' persona in order for them to become a respectable character within the genre.

“RESPECT IS JUST A MINIMUM”
1998: “DOO-WOP (THAT THING)” – LAURYN HILL

What about the female artist of this time? Up to the 90s, Hip Hop was mainly a male-dominating genre, yet artists like Missy Elliot, Foxy Brown, and Lil' Kim managed to climb through the hypermasculine sphere with the help of one prior artist. By some regarded as one of the greatest and most influential rappers, lyricists, and perhaps even poets of all time, Lauryn Hill, is often additionally recognized as an opportunity for other females to become a part of the Hip Hop community. Hill had already established a name in Hip Hop as a former member of Fugees, yet it is her solo album that she is most acknowledged for, and it is one of the best-selling albums of all time. The album's lead single, “Doo-Wop (That Thing)” discussed self-respect while simultaneously celebrating black women, criticizing materialistic values, and praising intellectual abilities. While breaking chart records, the song is still considered by many as one of the most influential Hip Hop songs today. The song is considered a rather feministic anthem for several reasons. Essentially, the song is concerned about avoiding sexual exploitation, i.e., "that thing", and does so by regarding flaws of both men and women.

Stereotypically, sexual exploitation has been used differently by men and women. Since men are often more inclined to be in a position of power and money, these may be tools operated by men to gain sexual relationships with women. Simultaneously, women can, and have traditionally gained power and money through giving sexual relationships in return. Prostitution, arguably the oldest profession, is of course one of the main examples of such relationships. Although there are great disagreements on whether prostitution is a respectable occupation that is to be ethically correct, there are undoubtedly instances of prostitution today

where such power dynamics are prominent. Yet “Doo-Wop (That Thing)” discusses less obvious ways in which sexual exploitation has become internalized in our everyday society, and does so by deliberately separating two different verses, one targeted towards men and one at women.

Women have historically (and still are) been judged based on physical appearance, and throughout history, women’s body shapes have been targets for trends (e.g., pale and voluminous bodies were attractive during the Renaissance, as it was believed that it represented wealth and high classes). Today, we live in a world that seeks to capitalize on women’s poor self-esteem, and while failing to celebrate imperfections, cooperation companies and the media's goal is to maintain income, breaking women down to do so (e.g., how media treats overweight women, aging women, not conventionally attractive women, etc.). I would argue that this is still a prominent concern today, and I fail to understand how it so often becomes neglected in discussions. Hill's first verse, with lyrics such as:

“Showing off your ass 'cause you're thinking it's a trend»

[...]

« It's silly when girls sell their soul because it's in

Look at where you be in hair weaves like Europeans

Fake nails done by Koreans»

aims to encourage women to be more inclined to develop an intellectual personality as opposed to maintaining beauty standards. Such standards often include Eurocentric features, which are emphasized in the verse: “hair weaves like Europeans”, a beauty standard that is poorly inclusive and strictly templated. Unfortunately, I would argue that this notion has failed to become less prominent throughout the twenty-first century, which is especially emphasized in modern Hip Hop.

Additionally, the verse encourages women to question the unfair yet normalized behaviors of men. Such behavior can include abandonment after sexual relations (e.g.: “The one you let hit it and never called you again”), neglect of general and mutual respect between partners (e.g.: “baby girl, respect is just a minimum”), and love-blindness (e.g.: “niggas fucked up and you still defending ‘em”). Hence, “Doo-Wop (That Thing)” desires a level of self-respect for women in a relationship but also disproves exploitation of their bodies (e.g.: “showing off your

ass 'cause you're thinking it's a trend (...) girl sell their souls because it's in"). Ultimately, it suggests that women should respect their values and self-worth, which is beautifully summed up in the verse: "don't be a hard rock when you really are a gem". However, some female artists might argue that this can be contradicting because they believe it should be a women's choice to expose her body or not when discussing sexual liberty. Feminist thinkers have also been divided in such matters. In "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of "Choice"", Snyder-Hall refers to third-wave feminism as a pluralistic reintroduction of feminism that strives to be inclusive and respectful (Snyder-Hall, 2012, p. 259). The patriarchal critique against prostitution was challenged by third-way feminists as personal choices and sexual liberty. Snyder-Hall argues that women should not be obtained to justify their choices to be considered a feminist, yet still consider the impact their choices have on themselves and others. Hill likely proposes a feministic approach for her critics, as an attempt to show that women do not *need* to express their bodies in sexual ways to achieve success.

The second verse, as directly stated in the song itself, is dedicated to "the men". Like 2Pac, Hill also criticizes pregnancy abandonment (e.g., "need to take care of their three and four kids then" and "quick to shoot the semen"), yet Hill also aims to mock such behaviors rather critically, such as deliberately mentioning court and child support. Moreover, the song also ridicules profane and materialistic values and behavior among men who intend to live such lifestyles for the admiration of others (e.g., "more concerned with his rims and his Tims than his woman"), while also acknowledging the general lack of respect towards women, such as "money taking, heart breaking". While some might argue that "Doo-Wop (That Thing)" is encouraging for both sexes, it is often recognized as a feministic anthem. The verse dedicated to the ladies indeed encourages them to stand up for themselves, and praises intelligence and personality, while oppressing Eurocentric beauty standards. The verse dedicated to men, however, is perhaps more so critically aimed as opposed to encouraging, which is the reason why some might consider the song rather female empowering.

Indeed, the cultural significance of Hill has become an important part of the female representation of 1990s Hip Hop. In fact, in Kanye West's 2016 track "No More Parties In LA", from his *Life Of Pablo* album, he raps "I was uninspired since Lauryn Hill retired". This might resonate with how the music industry has shifted towards a genre that often neglects the purpose to repress the social and cultural challenges of both racism and misogyny. Yet, although *The*

Miseducation of Lauryn Hill is viewed as one of the most influential female albums of her time, Hill announced to The RollingStone's podcast that the reason the album remained her only solo work is because she felt that the authenticity behind her artistry would potentially be at risk with a label that limited her creativity (Betancourt, 2021). Because "Doo-Wop (That Thing)" is considered a socially powerful song that addresses female empowerment and encourages women to assert their worth, the repercussion of the articulation of Hip Hop developed as the genre shifted towards a profitable opportunity of the industry. In other words, the authenticity that was composed of freestyling during the live performances in New York become neglected for the sake of profit. Ultimately, such notions are accentuated by the industry of the 21st century, which is juxtaposed in a deep dive into modern rap.

In terms of visual performance, the music video accompanied by "Doo-Wop (That Thing)" incorporates a split screening, both of which were shot in the streets of New York City. One half is depicting a street party from the 1960s, where Hill is dressed in retro attire, while the other one is from the late 1990s, showing homage to both the R&B and doo-wop and the Hip Hop community, respectively. The split screens usually occur when Hill herself is performing, while people from the community of both time periods are watching, allowing a visual representation of two historical periods and their significance in society. According to Maisie Hulbert, such interrelation of two different periods references a continuous battle against oppressive forces (Hulbert, 2018, p. 11) because Hill illustrates how the gendered issues faced prior still remain persistent despite thirty years of difference. Such persistence is particularly apparent when both versions of Hill perform side by side at congregated block parties. The "1998" side incorporates a sign saying: "33rd annual Block party", referencing that the need for solidarity remains. Hill's attire in the left screening represents 60s beauty standards, as she is performing in her zebra-printed suit and hair in an updo-sleeked style, contrastingly to the right part where she is dressed in relaxed clothing with her dreadlocks. Yet, Hill is not participating in the specific beauty standards of the 90s which is still Eurocentric, but she is indulging in what she wants society to allow women to do, which compliments the lyrics "now Lauryn is only human".

The music video also incorporates a split scene where the 60s version shows black women and children joyfully dancing, while the late 80s version show how the community leans over a mured fence spectating the city. This can suggest that society is more concerned with the presence of other people instead of themselves, referencing the lyrics that discourse how people

are more concerned with their own and other peoples' appearance rather than their intellectual abilities and individual personality. Still, another powerful statement exists in the representation of a strong female community within the music video. The backup dancers and singers show the movement from all male dancers with a specific choreography, towards greater liberty consisting of both males and females, while simultaneously referencing imperfections within society that are still occurring. Nonetheless, an honorable mention in Hill's music video is concerned with its incorporation of an all-black cast, celebrating black women and the black community within Hip Hop America.

Although *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* remains Hill's only solo album, there are considerable examples of her engaging in an identity that is concerned with feminist stances, self-reflection, and social-political references. From a Fugees live show in 1996, Hill rapped "if you're misogynist then you probably cannot get with this", and in another track from *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, "Superstar", she raps "Music is supposed to inspire (Music is supposed to inspire) How come we ain't gettin' no higher?". In "Forgive Them Father" from the same album, she raps "Why for you to increase, I must decrease? If I treat you kindly, does it mean that I'm weak?" in addition to "wolves in sheep coats who pretend to be lovers, men who lack conscience will even lie to themselves". Lastly, in "Final Hour", she raps: "I'm about to change the focus from the richest to the brokest". Hill was always concerned with unraveling unfair misconceptions while encouraging female self-empowerment. The entirety of her album is recognized as one of the most considerable albums, and the messages and cultivation of self-love, self-respect, and self-acceptance have a cultural impact on the Hip Hop identity, which resonated with its listeners, particularly black women. Hill marked herself as a respectable artist alongside her male colleagues, paving way for additional female representation within the genre.

CHAPTER 3: MODERN RAP

“OMG, LOOK AT HER BUTT!» 2014: “ANACONDA” – NICKI MINAJ

Towards modern Rap, female Hip Hop artists retain a rigidly extensive place within the culture, allowing the genre to become far more gender inclusive than it has ever been before. Female artists like Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion remain some of the most successful Hip Hop artists of modern Hip Hop, yet male artists such as Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, and Drake are also established as respectable names within the 21st century. Because modern rap leaves more opportunities for female artists, it is reasonable to argue that the genre is moving towards less misogyny and sexism, nevertheless, the following chapter will argue otherwise.

Onika Tanya Miraj-Petty, more famously recognized as Nicki Minaj, is one of the most influential female rappers of the twenty-first century. Being the highest-selling female rapper of all time (according to herself in “Truffle Butter”), or at least one of the biggest female rappers of all time (Grigoriadis, 2015), her ability to communicate makes her one of the most powerful female and commercially successful artists of today. With records like “Anaconda” and “Superbass”, Minaj has established her name in Hip Hop and Rap culture, yet with her “Starships” and “Pound the Alarm” songs, Minaj has also managed to claim a respectable place within pop/dance music. In 2022, Minaj received MTV’s Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award, which is presented to highly influential artists who have a “profound impact on music video and popular culture” (Serrano, 2022).

Along with the record label Young Money Entertainment, Minaj released "Anaconda" on August 4th 2014, from the studio album *The Pinkprint*. The album's name is a reference to Jay-Z's 2001 album *The Blueprint*, where Minaj references herself as a blueprint for female artists (Dharmic, 2014). "Anaconda" samples Sir Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back" from 1992, with the infamous chorus of "My anaconda don't want none unless you've got bun, hun!". Peaking at number two on Billboard Hot 100 chart in addition to being nominated for Best Rap Song at the 2015 annual Grammy Awards, the lyricism and its accompanying visuals managed to become a great public and commercial success for Minaj. With close to 20 million views within its first 24 hours, Vevo (an American music video-providing service owned by Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group) claims that Minaj managed to break records for the most viewed music video in its first release day on August 19th (Schillaci,

2014). Vevo certified the music video again after reaching 100 million views just eleven days later, and today, the accompanying music video of “Anaconda” has over one billion views on YouTube. These numbers provide proof of how influential Minaj has come to be within the genre, which is important to consider when looking at the identity of the culture. With its modern Hip Hop rap aesthetics, and its samples from “Baby Got Back”, Minaj managed to create a modern and innovative yet nostalgic (for some) track that would reach out to different generations. The sample, along with Minaj’s upbeat rap and playful instrumental has permitted the song to become as popular as it still is today.

As Minaj, along with her crew, probably expected, the song did cause controversy among its audience. While some appreciate the liberation of the female body, other people were concerned with the way it is articulated both in the lyrics and in the visuals. With its sample from “Baby Got Back” (with an anaconda as a metaphor for male genitalia), “Anaconda” starts by disregarding women with smaller butts, while Minaj immediately starts her verse by romanticizing successful drug dealers that can buy her high-luxury designer items (i.e., Alexander McQueen and Balmain). While doing so, she herself is high of pills being “on some dumb shit”. I would argue that such lyricism allows Minaj to be interpreted as someone who can normalize and internalize drugs and intoxication, while simultaneously ridiculing it. Minaj is referring to the possibilities of drug dealers and the potential dangers of drugs as something that is glorified, and almost, romanticized (for example “Was in shootouts with the law, but he live in a palace»). In another way, the obscurity of the lyricism might likewise be interpreted as so ludicrous that it cannot be taken seriously. The drug dealer, whom Minaj refers to as “Boy Toy”, may initiate that she is in control of the relationship, allowing her to have the power of her circumstances. It may also indicate that Minaj has sexual powers over her sexual relations, a position which females are often declined from.

The continuation of a certain desired body image reoccurs in the pre-chorus: “He can tell I ain’t missing no meal” (emphasizing her curves again), and “Say he don’t like em bony, he wants something he can grab” (referring to the non-curvy as “bony”, might be considered degrading for many with such body types). But the song may also endorse prostitution and drugs in lyrics like: “I let him hit it ‘cause he slang cocaine (...) and when we done, I make him buy me Balmain”. This “gold-digger” notion is often recognized in modern Hip Hop, and expresses exploitation of women’s bodies that encourages “prostitution”, usually with the dynamic of the sexual power of women and the economic power of men. This is considerably a misogynistic

feature within the song, yet, Minaj aims to emphasize that she is the one in control of this power dynamic, making her able to redeem the traditional notions of “gold-diggers” and “prostitution”.

Yet, towards the end of the pre-chorus, she goes: “So I pulled up in the Jag, and I hit him with the jab”, emphasizing the power of her own money (being able to purchase her own car), while also claiming the power of her sexuality (being able to dismiss sexual harassment). Later in the song, Minaj alters the line slightly: “So I pulled up in the Jag, Mayweather with the jab”, referring to Floyd Mayweather, one of the most successful boxers in the world. Yet both the chorus and the post-chorus consist of repeated lines of “My anaconda don’t want none unless you got buns, hun” and “Oh my gosh, look at her butt”. Towards the end, the post-chorus goes: “little in the middle, but she got much back”, emphasizing the female curves again. The outro contributes to the last thoughts about this exact idea; disregarding “skinny bitches” while praising her “fat ass”.

It is worth mentioning that there is a difference in voicing in Nicki Minaj's “Anaconda” and Sir Mix-a-lot's “Baby's Got Back” that can be interpreted as a female owning and expressing her own sexuality versus alternatively sexually objectifying it. Despite the heavily sampled chorus from “Baby Got Back”, the tone in Minaj’s “Anaconda” resembles a different voice to sexualized women, a voice that emphasized the power of own sexuality. Minaj aims to be understood as a woman who embraces and flaunts her curves, a body that has recently been disregarded by Eurocentric body standards during the beginning of the 21st century. Yet, the incorporation of lyrics that deliberately wants women to look a certain way is contradicting in “Anaconda”, making it an empowering song for Nicki, herself, but definitely not for all women. Nonetheless, the contrast between a man's voice in the chorus and Minaj herself creates an interesting dynamic towards female and male sexuality and power.

On the contrary, however, the extravagant and over-the-top features of “Anaconda”, both lyrically and visually, allow the song to be viewed as a satirical response to women’s bodies and sexuality. In such a case, the contribution of “Baby’s Got Back” is the perfect way of emphasizing the irony within such a message. Minaj then allows ridiculing modern beauty standards by emphasizing an extreme and exaggerated version of female bodies and how it is portrayed in the media. An example of such satire is seen in her music video where she has incorporated two micro hot pink dumbbells for her arm workout while simultaneously swinging

her hips back and forth. The rest of the visual performance presented by Minaj consists of a variety of diverse scenery. The music video initiates Minaj herself alongside female dancers in a jungle-like set. Halfway through, Minaj mimics a gym or a "yoga class" where she is performed twerking and dancing. Towards the end, we see Minaj crawling toward rapper Drake, proceeding to give him a lap dance. A study that performed an analysis of violent and sexual content in Hip Hop music videos from Alabama State University found that there were 376 instances of violent or sexual content in "Anaconda". 163 instances were displays of buttocks. In total, the study found that the video displayed some kind of violent or sexual content eighty-nine percent of the time (Clark, et al., 2016, p. 17). Thus, the imagery is heavily represented around Minaj and her physical and sexual desires, attitudes, and power.

Although the 90s "gangsta rap" was often dominated by male contribution, female rappers like Missy Elliot, Foxy Brown, Lauren Hill, and Lil Kim were still well-established names within the culture. Yet today, Hip Hop seeks to appreciate female rap in different ways. The genre, which has usually been represented by a rather "masculine" energy, both for male and female rappers, moves towards a more glamorous and dazzling persona, especially for modern female rappers. To exhibit an example, a "blueprint" of gangsta rap during the 1990s included wearing baggy clothes while maintaining a certain attitude that fails to show signs of weakness, or in any other ways not having control. Such persona can be recognized in female rappers such as Missy Elliot, which is not traditionally known for her body or her looks (other than the fact that she is a woman doing a male-dominated genre during her peak time), both more so for her musical articulation, talent and overall representation in the Hip Hop culture.

Female artists of modern Hip Hop often indulge in other ways. I would argue that women express their sexuality in a far more physical way, i.e., in their music videos, public performances, and on their social platforms. Here, the physical blueprint has developed from clothing style to body type. Yet, the attitude remains the same. Additionally, there seems to be a prevailing way in which modern female rappers use these types of physical properties to articulate their music. This is all very prominent in their visuals, of course, yet the lyricism is also influenced by expressing this further. A study from Beijing Forestry University suggested that the result of Kim Kardashian's Instagram posts contributed to other celebrities exporting similar images for increased attention (Yang, 2022, p. 5). Although the infamous "BBL-movement" (a form of plastic surgery often referred to as "Brazilian butt lift") may stem from the Kardashians due to Kim Kardashian's sexualized performances on social media, I would

argue that this has become an important physical feature of the culture of female rappers. In fact, during a podcast interview with Joe Budden, Minaj admitted that she felt pressured to undergo surgery on her behind due to Lil Wayne's remarks about her body (Henry, 2022). If we take a few of the most influential female rappers of today, women like Nicki, Cardi B, Saweetie, Doja Cat, and Megan Thee Stallion are all women with such body types. But the body itself is not a problem, it is the way that they portray such body type within their musical articulation. (For example: “Anaconda” by Nicki Minaj, “Body” by Megan Thee Stallion, and “Up” by Cardi B). It cannot be considered “female empowering” if they are degrading thin women. On the other hand: can we consider this feministic if they are celebrating their curves (which have historically been poorly treated)? But why do they have to dismiss other body types in order to celebrate their own? Does the entity of physical and sexual empowerment require the domain of what females have to offer?

It is also important to remember that such body types have recently (especially during the beginning of the 2000s) been disregarded in the media and pop culture. High-end luxury runways, in addition to so-called “it-girls” such as Paris Hilton and Britney Spears being role models for young teenagers, were heavily represented with diet culture and social stigma towards “curvy” women, that were often considered “fat” and “unhealthy”. Hence, such expressions of female body image that modern rap indulges in can be recognized as a feministic movement, aiming to celebrate a bigger variety of the female body. With today's “it-girl” being Kim Kardashian or Beyoncé, however, one can argue if this exact conversation is necessary anymore. If media and pop culture keep treating female bodies as “trends” like it does today, the need for “body-positivity” is important, however, all bodies need to be included and represented in such movements. Indeed, inclusion is important, but avoiding discrediting other types of bodies is arguably even more important.

Minaj is not the first female in Hip Hop to express sexuality and perform explicitly, as there were artists such as Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown who were present before her. But was it necessary for women like Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown to be explicitly more sexual than their male colleagues to make it in Hip Hop? Although male rappers often discourse about sexual matters within their tracks, modern female rappers are far more sexualizing themselves in both their lyrics and visual artistry than male rappers are, and they often communicate sex in different ways. Countless examples come to mind, including some of the biggest female Hip Hop artists as of today like Nicki Minaj, Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, Latto, City Girls, Doja Cat, Saweetie,

etc. These are all women who have explicit lyrics about sex, but also minimal to no clothing within their music videos and public performances. All these females have at one point included sensual dances such as twerking, yet pole dancing is also common. Simultaneously, I fail to think of one male Hip Hop artist that has done the same. In fact, male rappers are prone to wear big, baggy clothing (partly because of male fashion, but also likely to make them appear bigger and more muscular), and I have yet to see them dance in similar ways as the ladies do. Ironically, one exception is rapper Lil Nas X, the homosexual male rapper from Georgia who felt he was disclaimed from the Hip Hop community because of his performances as he is performing in similar ways as the females, showing how the genre engages in gender bias and homophobia.

Another mentionable aspect is how such sexuality is received by the public. Female rappers who deliberately and shamelessly outs their own sexual liberty, both visually and lyrically, are often considered controversial, and often referred to as “vulgar” and “slutty”. Yet, male rappers who use similar techniques and discourses are usually not considered as controversial. In fact, it is not uncommon that male rappers utilize women in their visual performances, both in music videos and during stage performances, in the same or similar ways female rappers behave. For example, Snoop Dogg’s live performances are often accompanied by female strippers who are celebrated by their physical bodies as well as their technical abilities, while Snoop Dogg is shooting a money gun at them. When “Anaconda” was just released, people were left flabbergasted. While some believed that she was out of her mind talking the way she did, others believed that the song was made just for giggles, almost too extreme to be considered a serious and respectable Hip Hop track. And while Anaconda may, in many ways, use ridicule and exaggeration in its discourse, it still showed how she was not taken seriously by public opinion. It was not until a few years later that Minaj received most of the positive feedback on her social media. Some people would even consider Minaj and Anaconda “ahead of its time” and an “iconic” song and music video that forever changed the way female rappers discuss their liberal sexuality.

Minaj was discovered and signed by American Rapper, Lil Wayne who founded the record label Young Money Entertainment. The same label has released several commercially successful songs and albums, including Lil Wayne's *Tha Carter IV*, and Drake's *Views*. The name of the record label itself, "Young Money", might illustrate how they are aiming to sign young and new artists for a profitable business. With its distributor being Republic Records, owned by Universal Music Group, which Rolling Stones states a total revenue of three billion

dollars in 2018 (Wang, 2019), it is clear that today's record labels and music industry goals are grossing high numbers. In her TEDx Talk, Ellen Chamberlain argues that the lyrical content immediately changed when Hip Hop became a commodity (Chamberlain, 2019, 5:45).

Prior to modern music, it was most common for the artists themselves to own their own music, allowing them to have more power towards what they wanted to articulate and therefore own balance of their releases. It was also the artists themselves, usually black people who have inherently been victims of marginalized racism and stereotypes, who were a part of the same culture that seeks to reach similar people with similar backgrounds and struggles. Modern Hip Hop, however, has according to Billboard grown into the biggest genre in contemporary American music (Billboard, 2021), allowing capitalistic properties to withdraw the authenticity of what the genre initially represented. In other words, record labels have taken over the control of the genre, and because record companies often fail to have direct ties to the existent community, they often do not aim to reach the community either. Instead, they ought to release songs for mass production in order to make the art as profitable as possible. The companies are aware that sensationalism sells, and therefore reinforces explicit content within the lyricism and visual imagery.

Unfortunate events for contemporary female Hip Hop artists have occurred whenever other prosperous artists assert their chart positions, and the culture arranges them on a pedestal, which often never occurs for the male artists within the culture. For example, Cardi B made her breakthrough with the single "Bodak Yellow" in 2017 which came to be Billboard's top female song that year. The following year, Cardi B released her anticipated album *Invasion of Privacy*, which incorporated singles that contributed to several chart positions and streaming records. In fact, surpassing *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill's* 92 weeks, *Invasion of Privacy* came to be the longest-charting debut album by a female Hip Hop artist (C. H., 2021). During the time when Cardi B asserted her position, many considered Minaj the dominating female artist of the modern Hip Hop community. The rise of another female artist became affiliated with a rivalry that is often referred to as "Nicki Minaj versus Cardi B". This was massively referred to by fans on social media, but also by media platforms such as Billboard (Saponara, 2018), NBC News (Barczyk, 2018), and even Norwegian pop-culture platform 730 (Halvorsen, 2022). The masculine domain occurring in the Hip Hop community never paved way for several successful female artists in positions of dominance, making fans reluctant to choose sides for either artist, which is demonstrated by the artists themselves.

Minaj is notorious for referencing how she made a pathway for other female rappers by degradingly referring to them as "bitches" and "her sons", examples include lyrics from "Did it on 'Em": "All these bitches is my sons (...) If I had a dick, I would pull it out and piss on 'em", from "I'm Legit": "All them bitches is my sons but who's the daddy?", from "Stupid Hoe": "These bitches is my sons and I don't want custody", from "Senile": "All these rappers is my sons, and I'm always nine months". These are just a few examples, yet Minaj has an extensive amount of this representation throughout her whole discography. Minaj is also not reluctant to argue that there will never be another female Hip Hop artist that will seek to reach her level of transcendence and sovereignty within the culture.

In 2012, Minaj released a track entitled "Roman Reloaded", which included the infamous lyrics: "If I had a label I would never sign you hoes, Take bitches to school, then I Columbine these hoes". While referencing the 1999 High School massacre in Colorado, Minaj is demonstrating that no one will ever survive the attempt at claiming her place within the culture, even though she is "teaching" them how to do so. In her first single of 2023, "Red Ruby Da Sleeze", Minaj incorporated the lyrics: "Who the fuck told bitches they was me now? I knew these bitches was slow, I ain't know these bitches senile". Minaj has also been vocal about other female rappers copying her style and artistry as heard in lyrics from "Seeing Green" featuring Lil Wayne: "I am the star in any room that I stand in (...) These bitches copy my homework, that's what they hand in" and from "Motorsport" featuring Offset and Cardi B: "I don't work in no office, but they copyin' and that's facts though". The prevailing confidence and dominance of Minaj may represent her influential and powerful position within the Hip Hop sphere, while still engaging with potential threats, or even jealousy of other female rappers.

Although such lyricism can create an interpretation for a satirical framework of her perception of her female colleagues within the Hip Hop sphere, there is a sub-conscious attitude of a domain and superiority that is occurring throughout her discography. Though this persona can be interpreted as self-empowering and personal domain, such an attitude of sovereignty can simultaneously indulge in a perpetuation of putting women up against one another, disregarding Lauryn Hill's aim of creating female solidarity and communion. Yet, the continuation of such lyrics in Minaj's discography may also represent a reflection of how women are often patriarchally portrayed against each other by malicious jealousy. It still, I shall argue, represents an untrue portrait of how women act toward other women in society.

In August 2022, Minaj and Young Money Entertainment released a single entitled "Super Freaky Girl". The song is significant to lightly examine, because it became the first single of a solo female rapper to debut on Billboard Hot 100 since Lauryn Hill's "Doo-Wop (That Thing)". To illustrate how Hip Hop has changed since 1998, the thesis has previously shown how Hill deliberately discusses and condemns problematic beauty standards expected of females, criticizing materialistic values and endorsing women to regain their self-respect. The following lines have been retracted from the first verse of "Super Freaky Girl":

"Uh, okay
One thing about me, I'm the baddest alive
He know the prettiest bitch didn't come until I arrive
I don't let bitches get to me, I fuck they man if they try
I got a princess face, a killer body, samurai mind
They can't be Nicki, they so stupid, I just laugh when they try
A thong bikini up my ass, I think I'll go for a dive
His ex bitch went up against me, but she didn't survive
On applications I write, "Pressure" 'cause that's what I apply (brr)"

Indeed, the main constitutions of Minaj's music stem from her physical body, sexual attributes, and her "bad bitch" persona (usually regarded as a confident and strong woman). With the chorus possessing lyrics such as: "He want a F-R-E-A-K (freaky girl)", Minaj also engages in what is desirable for the male gaze, e.g., "princess face", "elegant bitch with a ho glow" and "You can smack it, you can grip it", perpetuating the inadvertence of viewing women as merely "pretty objects for male desires". While there is no initial harm in expressing oneself as a sexual being with sexual desires, as well as engaging in self-empowered confidence and attitude, the articulation of such references utilized by female rappers can be problematic because there is a fine line between sexual liberty and freedom, and sexual exploitation and objectification. Correspondingly, there is also a fine line between confidence, a self-empowered persona (which can be important and liberating for females in a pop-cultural media era that continuously aims to criticize celebrities, predominantly on their physical appearance), and someone who aims to deliver what is considered favorable for the male gaze. Has the internalized misogyny become disguised by sexual liberty?

Lauryn Hill's "Doo-Wop (That Thing)" emphasizes the importance of women sticking up for each other, coming together, and showing solidarities (e.g., the annual block parties presented in the visuals and encouraging lyrics), while lyrically attempting to show how personality and intellect are of more importance than physical beauty. Minaj's "Super Freaky Girl" on the contrary, introduces a notion of "competition" among women because the "bad bitch" persona suggests that there is no woman that will reach her level of dominance. Lyrics such as: "he know the prettiest bitch didn't come until I arrive" and "they can't be Nicki, they so stupid, I just laugh when they try" discourage the importance of women standing together and showing solidarity as aimed for by Hill.

Yet, parts of Minaj's discography can be recognized as "feel-good" songs, meaning that it does not initiate serious meaning or social messages. However, such songs still contribute to misogynistic and sexist discourses, which ultimately extract the socio-political properties of the genre. Although obvious, it is still worth mentioning that it is not the artists themselves who allow their songs to debut at number one. Hence, there is a possibility that the Hip Hop community wishes for less political articulation integrated within the genre, as it is the listeners who reflect the chart activity. It is still vital to consider the power of production, specifically the impact of promotion, record labels, venues, and media, as these often perform as necessary contributors to a song's successful outcome.

It is critical to recognize that Hip Hop aesthetics develop complementary to society, and to state that pop culture has always been preoccupied with sexual content and exploitation of the female body is not a vulgar statement. Sexual content has not only become widely represented in the media, but it has also become more acceptable due to the liberal view of women's sexuality. The widespread use of the media and its representation among the younger generation is prominent. Thus, it is not shocking that artists like Minaj engage in such discourses. The unfortunate events occur whenever artists communicate such discourses concurrently with what can be understood or interpreted as endorsing rape, the "importance" of physical appearance, the engagement of sexual attributes for males' erotic engagement, or perpetuating the female body as a sexual object that narrows the woman down to a "piece of flesh" rather than an individual human being. It is also discouraging how such songs seek to represent the music charts of the American Hip Hop culture, which has previously been concerned with articulating the imperfection of racial inequality and racism, which is what the genre initially conveyed.

ANACONDA WALKED, SO WAP COULD RUN 2020: “WAP” – CARDI B & MEGAN THEE STALLION

In honor of International woman’s Day in 2022, Rolling Stones India published a “10 Iconic Feminist Anthems”, ranking “WAP” as number nine (Majumder, 2022) along with anthems such as “Run The World (Girls)” by Beyonce and “Build a B*itch” by Bella Porch. It was in August of 2020 that the New York rapper, Cardi B and Houston rapper, Megan Thee Stallion released the Hip Hop collab entitled “WAP”, an acronym for “wet ass pussy”. The track, along with its music video, immediately received massive widespread media popularity, making its debut at the top of the US Billboard chart. Over two years later, it still remains one of the most famous songs from both Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, and as of February 2023, the music video has 493 million views on Youtube. Although “WAP” can be considered a sexually liberating song for women in a culture that often criticizes and bash women for behaving in similar ways, this thesis argues that such tracks in modern pop culture can contribute to reinforcing misogynistic and sexist properties.

With samples from Frank Ski’s “Whores in this house” from 1992, the song starts with a repeated line of “there’s some whores in this house”, suggesting that this is indeed an “NSFW” song from the very first line. In such an issue, it suggests that females who are sexual beings or even have sexual desires are considered prostitutes. Yet, it is imaginable that Cardi and Megan are trying to reclaim the word (in similar ways as the word “bitch”) in a “yes, I am a whore, what are you going to do about it” attitude. In another matter, the line is coming from a male voice, suggesting that Cardi and Megan are unbothered by men’s perception of women who are sexually liberated and “in charge” within a society usually prone to slut-shame and disregard women. By such matter, it makes acuity of how Cardi B’s own voice is much more potent and more evident as her first line goes:

“I said certified freak, seven days a week
Wet ass pussy, make that pullout game weak, woo!”

Cardi goes “I said certified freak”, an interesting contrast that appears immediately after Ski’s male starting voice, allowing her to define herself in her own terms. Ski’s voice persists through, yet Cardi B’s voice is much more potent and prevalent, allowing her to be the main attention

throughout her verse. In other ways, Cardi B is incorporating Ski's voice in similar ways that "bad bitch" is utilized within the Hip Hop genre, i.e., reestablishing a phrase that is usually seen as a derogatory term for women.

The re-occurring sexual expression for money in Hip Hop music is also extremely coherent in "WAP". Lyrics in such concerns include:

"Put this pussy right in yo' face
Swipe your nose like a credit card»
[...]
"I don't cook, I don't clean
But let me tell you, I got this ring (ayy, ayy)»
[...]
"Ask for a car while you ride that dick"
[...]
"Pay my tuition just to kiss me on this wet ass pussy
Now make it rain if you wanna see some wet ass pussy»
[...]
«He got some money, then that's where I'm headed
Pussy A-1, just like his credit»

Hence comes the question: are these women promoting prostitution by way of sexualizing themselves, or are they articulating to raise their standards of what their potential partners should be like, simply because they have the power to do so? If aspiring to raise expectations of men is an important verdict of women like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, why is it most commonly articulated in money and sex, rather than, for instance, politically motivated debates concerning the inequality of the sexes, e.g., unequal pay, abortion laws, how black females are underrepresented in higher work positions, etc, or in other ways which permit men to be emotionally invested in relationships as a consequence of toxic masculinity? Secondly, it is highly unlikely that Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion are unaware of the fact that such lyrics can be interpreted as promoting prostitution, literally or subconsciously. Hence, can "WAP" be considered a feministic anthem for sexual liberty by way of articulation, or should we pressure the artists and the industry to accommodate other types of discourses? Is the song doing more harm than good?

In such concern, I do believe that the listeners are also somewhat responsible for what type of music is being released, simply because the listeners make the songs evolve into popular tracks. As seen in “cancel culture”, a term used to show how a bigger group of people stop supporting a person or a group because they have done actions that are considered offensive, people are in greater power over the direction artists shifts. Artists who, deliberately or not, release songs that are openly racist, homophobic, hateful, or in other ways considered offensive are prone to face a great backlash from the artists’ reached audience and beyond. Yet, a great amount of modern Hip Hop has sexist and misogynistic discourses which are left unbothered. Hence, is misogyny and sexism so normalized in the industry of the genre that the listeners fail to ask them to take accountability? Or have such discourses become so integrated within the culture that there is almost a necessity to incorporate them?

“WAP” also introduces lyrics that accommodate for the woman to be in charge of sexual relationships, indicating that it is indeed her that is in power despite its contradicting lyrics about trading money and sex. Below are some examples:

“Hop on top, I want a ride
I do a kegel while it's inside”

[...]

“I tell him where to put it, never tell him where I'm 'bout to be
I run down on him 'fore I have a nigga running me”

[...]

«Put him on his knees, give him some' to believe in”

[...]

«Big D stand for big demeanor
I could make ya bust before I ever meet ya”

Critic Margaret Pereira argues that Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion engage in new materialism, where they harness their bodies as sites of agential transfer to unseat materialist and anthropocentric hierarchies, a subversion wherein they locate themselves the notions of exchange value by branding or commodifying themselves (Pereira, 2022, p. 12). Pereira also illustrates the connection of the Black body as repeatedly constructed as an entity with no agency as constructed by white supremacy. This is especially seen during slavery, where black

bodies were owned as a resource by white slave owners. Blackness has, as Pereira states, been forced to share characteristics with nonliving objects because it has been constructed as something one can “own” and be in control over (Pereira, 2022, p. 14). A degrading characteristic that somehow seeks to evolve during our modern times is seen in Black bodies being murdered by police officers for minor crimes. Nonetheless, black women specifically, with their history of being negatively defined as aggressive and overly sexual beings, had additionally been victims of rape, sexual abuse, and misogynoir.

On the contrary, voluntary prostitution is sometimes referred to by feminists as ethical and reasonable. For instance, in his essay “Charges against Prostitution”, Lars O. Ericsson attempts a defense for prostitution, by suggesting that prostitution should be “reformed” rather than abolished (Ericsson, 1980). Changing the way we view such professions, Ericsson argues, includes disregarding the moral and ethical (and often religious) reasoning of why we distinguish harlotry as a non-respectable profession in society. In such view, viewing lyrics promoting selling sexual services should also be reformed. Yet, prostitution is still a complex matter, and needs far more theory and elaboration in order to be discussed but unarguably still infamous for its sexism and misogyny.

The lyrics also include references to BDSM (an acronym for bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism), an erotic interaction that often includes fetishes and interpretation of sexual bondage, role-playing, and dynamic power-play (submissive and dominant), often with physical pain. Although BDSM is initially voluntary play, it does represent an unequal power play that can resemble rape or non-consensual abuse. Examples of such lyrics include:

“Tie me up like I'm surprised
Let's role-play, I wear a disguise»

[...]

“I don't wanna spit, I wanna gulp
I wanna gag, I wanna choke»

[...]

“Your honor, I'm a freak bitch, handcuffs, leashes”

[...]

“Never lost a fight, but I'm looking for a beating”

[...]

“You can't hurt my feelings, but I like pain”

A combination of such lyrics (in addition to “endorsing prostitution”) can reinforce dangerous incidents in our modern society because it allows us to interpret the body as an object which ought to be sold, dominated, and in other ways harassed. In similarities with aspects from pornography, the lyrics also invite the notion of women finding sexual pleasure in physical pain, which is not representable for most women, I would argue. What is interesting, however, is the power-dynamic shift from the artists to the listeners, allowing the sense that there is equal power-play within the song, which unusually occurs during a single session of BDSM and pornography. Although it is clear that the female artists of “WAP” aim to deliberately incorporate lyrics that show signs of dominance and control within a physical relationship, there are undoubtedly changes they could make to allow the dominance to seem even more potent through the lyrics.

Although female Hip Hop artists like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion argue that such music is to be considered a part of a feminist movement within the Hip Hop community, there can be a provocative way in which modern Hip Hop artists aim to liberate themselves. Sexual liberty without sexual suppression is, of course, a major part of an important feministic movement, and artists like Cardi and Megan are influential enough to make such change occur. Yet, being a character that aims to turn its full focus on liberating themselves as a sexual being may have opposing effects because they can both be viewed as women with nothing but sexual attributes, which again, can make them even more sexualized by others within the community.

In 2020, Cardi B collaborated with American Democratic politician, Bernie Sanders, and they did several press communications on YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. One of the topics brought up was concerning racial injustice, specifically police brutality in the heat of the George Floyd incident earlier that year, which is a concern that is often discussed in earlier Hip Hop culture. Hence, Cardi B is indeed involved politically, yet why is it not articulated in her music? Is it because it does not sell? Is it because there is such a specific blueprint for how female Hip Hop artists should look and behave, that political and societal debates are not a part of? Or is it because female Hip Hop artists lack the political influence to begin with, so why bother? In such cases, the music industry itself is stagnant and misogynistic, because it molds female artists into a specific character. Such character includes viewing the woman reduced to her sexual abilities and not intelligently. Nevertheless, artists like Cardi B, Nicki Minaj, and Megan Thee Stallion are extremely influential in the Hip Hop community as seen in their ability to generate

millions of streams in days or even hours. Is it then reasonable to demand more from such artists?

Because visual imagery seeks to develop as more important through music as a result of technology, it is worth mentioning parts of the music video that allows for misogynistic discourses. The music video starts with entering a gate entitled “WAP” towards a mansion with a fountain sculptured by two ladies (most likely the ladies themselves by the resemblance of the official art cover of the song), in a squat position with water running down through their nipples and their tongues out. Inside the house, we view Cardi and Megan going through a hallway in which there are sculptures on the wall resembling both breasts and butts. Indeed, the first twenty seconds of their music video initiates that this is a rather adult song and video, which not even *Kidz Bop* can manage to clean. Yet, for Cardi and Megan, this is exactly what they aim to do with their artistry; to obtain a vulgar image in order to generate more popularity and publicity, because they are aware that controversy is an extremely powerful and profitable currency. Yet, the music video also includes a variety of different female celebrities, including singer Normani, rapper Mulatto, and reality star Kylie Jenner. To some, their cameo is an important statement in an industry that continuously put powerful females in competition with one another (Attwood et al., 2021, p. 20). To others, the appearance of Kylie Jenner showed how the cameos were mainly for clout, as Cardi B allegedly paid a million dollars for the video (Hurst, 2021).

The polarization between sexual liberty and sexist objectification became significant. The sculptures of the female body, both the fountain by the gate and the body parts on the walls, were by some seen as a literal depiction of viewing females as sexual objects (McKay, 2021), while others suggest viewing the sculptures as a “larger-than-life object of visual consumptions”, by celebrating them as sexual beings (Edelman, n.d.). I suggest aiming to view the sculptures as literal artwork, as they are portrayed as eloquently sculptured pieces of art, with a resemblance to classical antiquity usually seen in historical and modern museums. The pieces are also of materials of marble and gold, supposedly, allowing them to be expressed visually in luxury and elegance.

Nonetheless, the emphasis on sex and the female body is the most significant, which is bound to allow discourses concerning misogyny and sexism. In fact, male Hip Hop artists have been using the female body in similar ways, without receiving the same numbers as Cardi B and

Megan Thee Stallion. While I do suggest that there is something unnecessary and provocative for women like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion to perform in such ways for expressing their sexuality, I do also propose that there is a concurrent sub-conscious “slut-shaming” view in such attitude, allowing dangerous polarization to occur. This is also articulated within Megan's track "Anxiety" from 2022 where she opens up about her mental health struggles. She raps: "Sayin' I'm a ho 'cause I'm in love with my body".

Indeed, "WAP" can be viewed as a feminist stance towards females being sexually liberated for their sexual desires and freedom. Yet, feminism is so much more than being sexually liberated. For example, pop artists such as Ariana Grande and RnB artist like Beyoncé create feminist anthems (“God is a Woman” and “***Flawless”, respectively) where Ariana attempts to show how her sexual powers are so strong that it becomes God-like, allowing her to be in complete power of her relationships. Although the lyrics are interpreted in a sexual manner, Grande is not diminishing her own body as a product ought to be harassed, sold, or in other ways taken control over. Instead, she converts the sexual parts of her body, which have historically been diminished and abused by men, which she deliberately employs as her own power. Beyoncé samples Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TEDx Talk entitled “We Should All Be Feminists” from 2013, discussing how feminism is a construct of social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. These are examples of songs that lack objectifying themselves within the lyrics, while rather emphasizing their essence as strong and powerful beings. Beyoncé even takes it to a new level “(...) don’t think I’m just his little wife” while demonstrating her own power despite being married to successful and respectable rapper Jay-Z. Hence, these are two examples of 21st-century female rappers who use their feminist ideas without over-sexualizing themselves. Yet, it is important to note that these are artists who also have other songs which can be seen as overly sexist within their discography for example: "Partition", by Beyoncé with lyrics such as “driver roll up the partition please, I don’t need you seeing Yonce on her knees” and "34+35" by Ariana Grande who references a sex position. Both contain lyricism that limits the artists to their sexual attributes, which additionally shows how the music industry and the artists themselves may use them as profitable tools within their music.

Rolling Stones India suggested that the very reason people became flabbergasted by “WAP” is not the song itself but the fact that two women articulated it (Majumbder, 2022). Rolling Stone exemplifies songs like “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke which was later criticized for endorsing victim blaming and promoting intoxicated rape culture with lyrics containing “I know

you want it". Nonetheless, Thicke's song became popular for its catching beat and playful music video. If so, then a part of the problems concerning misogyny in the music industry occurs with the internalized misogyny of the listeners, i.e. the everyday public. Why are people upset about two women expressing their sexual desires within their artistic performances, but not when the men (who have done it for decades) do it? "WAP" is not the first Hip Hop track that embraces "hornyness" and sex in the genre, yet it is one of the few Hip Hop songs that have engaged politicians, for instance, a Republican congressional candidate from California, James P. Bradley, wrote on Twitter: "Cardi B & Megan Thee Stallion is what happens when children are raised without God and without a strong father figure (...) made me want to pour holy water in my ears and I feel sorry for future girls if this is their role model!" (Holmes, 2020). The same day, Californian Republican politician, DeAnna Lorraine called the song "trash and depravity" (Holmes, 2020).

Certain Republicans are not necessarily offended by sexual content in mainstream media as shown by how the response to former president Donald Trump's sexist and controversial outings. However, if a woman acts in similar ways, they show contempt as expressed on social media platforms. In these territories, where women are disregarded for further levels of feminine sexuality and explicitness, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion contend their agency as powerful black female Hip Hop artists within a domain that is originally masculine and often portrays women as sexual objects. Possible challenges resurface when the artists are reinforcing such stereotypes in their lyrical artistry. The conversation of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP" began to disseminate immediately after its release, causing polarization within the whole music community. This dissemination ultimately allowed the artists and the record label to reach the level of recognition and profit they seek.

“YOUR SUCH A FUCKING HO, I LOVE IT” 2019: “I LOVE IT” – KANYE WEST & LIL PUMP

In terms of popular mainstream modern rap, the thesis has incorporated two songs from three different female artists. Hence, the present track is by two commercially successful rappers of the 21st century, Kanye West and Lil Pump. Kanye West, also known as Ye or Yeezy, gained his breakthrough by dropping out of Chicago State University to pursue his musical interests. His debut album *The Collage Dropout* from 2004 was immediately successful, and West was

able to make a career of his music. Today, he is considered one of the most mentionable names within modern Hip Hop, with songs like "Stronger", "Heartless" and "Homecoming". Gazzy Garcia, better known under his artist name, Lil Pump, started off as a "SoundCloud rapper", a smaller streaming platform for artists to release music without record labels, but gained his first commercial success with the track "Gucci Gang" in 2017, which includes lyrics like "I fucked a bitch, I forgot her name". Today, he is often recognized for his abnormal persona and attitude in his music videos and live performances. "I Love It" was released on September 8th, 2018, and premiered at the 2018th Pornhub Awards where West himself co-directed (Snapes, 2018), which immediately illustrates how the intentions of the direction the song is aimed to be headed. In the US, "I Love It" peaked at number six on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, yet reached number one in Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden.

"I Love It" starts off with vocals from Adele Givens, an American comedian with samples from her performance in an episode of Def Comedy Jam:

“Cause you know in the old days they couldn't say the shit they wanted to say
They had to fake orgasms and shit
We can tell niggas today, "Hey, I wanna cum, mothafucka"

The starting lyrics might initially suggest a feministic approach to women being vocally oppressed, and not sexually liberated, as they ought to regain their voice in sexual relations. Yet, this is quickly disregarded as Lil Pump starts his first lyrics immediately after, e.g.: "You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (I love it)", repeated three times. Once again, we hear women expressed as "ho", and once again, such expressions are used as rather a positive term within the song, yet it fails to acknowledge women as human beings while repressing them to commodities like we are familiar to within the genre.

Furthermore, the Lil Pumps incorporates several lines about sexual relations with women, for example:

“(Love it, love it) (I'ma fuck a bitch, tell her cousin)”
Your boyfriend is a dork, McLovin (dork, McLovin, ooh, ooh, ooh)”
[...]
“Fucked that bitch up out in London (up out in)

Then I fucked up on her cousin
Or her sister, I don't know nothin' (uh-uh, woo)"

In addition to expressing explicit sexual relations with no emotional connection with women, the song also incorporates flashy and materialistic values, for example:

"I just pulled up in a Ghost (Ghost)" (Rolls-Royce automobile)

[...]

"So much diamonds on my bust down"

[...]

"I like my dick sucked, I'll buy you a sick truck"

These are both components that reinforce the image of the male persona within the modern character of the Hip Hop genre. Such attitudes towards women and sex highly respond to the notion of "toxic masculinity", a term that according to the gender-study professor, Carol Harrington, emerged in the 1980s within the mythopoetic men's movement coined by Shepherd Bliss (Harrington, 2020, p. 347). Yet, it is not until newly that the term regained a new familiarity among younger generations due to its appearance on social media, especially Tik Tok where many content creators discuss incidences and problems connected to such masculinity. According to Harrington, a notable number of media indoctrinated the term in discussions of former President Trump and the #MeToo movement since 2016 (Harrington, 2020, p. 349). Today, it is often recognized as social and stereotypical guidelines associated with what is considered masculine that often indulge in negative consequences for men, such as restraining emotional feelings or maintaining a strong character to maintain its image.

Andrea Clay's "I Used to Be Scared of the Dick" notes that Hip Hop culture has been responsible for the branding of black hypermasculinity in mainstream American culture (Forman & Neal, 2012, p. 348). In Hip Hop culture, the common persona of masculinity is often referred to as "thug" or "pimp". 90's Hip Hop introduced the "Thug" image among male rappers, typically defined as a criminal, often in relation to stealing or taking drugs. Today,

however, a “thug” has unarguably become less of such sort, and more of a nickname for male rappers who aims to be recognized as a person with a certain attitude, image, and persona that is all prominent in Hip Hop culture. Such identity often includes being a strong and confident (and sometimes also even cocky and presumptuous) man in control, often referred to as an “alpha male”. An example of this is the commonly mistaken phrase “thug life”, which is often mistaken for a criminal lifestyle. In contrast, however, it is often referred to as a resilient way of living in a difficult society, a society that often faces problems with racial injustice, poverty, and high crime rates, problems which are familiar in the initial culture of the genre. In such cases, Hip Hop culture and its identity create a motivating attitude towards hard times, and here again, success and money are important attributes of such an image.

This is where it can become problematic: although flaunting money and materialistic goods persuades the listener to view them as successful and resourceful, it might also illustrate that it is needed in order to be successful, or even happy. In a way, Hip Hop almost represents a wealthy lifestyle, although it initially started by portraying a challenging one. Luckily though, there are a few exceptions, J. Cole’s “Love Yours” challenges the aim for commercial and materialistic success, while rather emphasizing love, gratitude, and respect, romanticizing the struggles of poverty and hard times, while trying to demonstrate how money cannot buy happiness and that success is not equalized to money. Another example is “PRIDE” by Kendrick Lamar which humbly discusses his intimate imperfections of himself, while striving to make better life decisions, not only for himself but also for the people in his life. Yet, there is a general attitude towards materialistic values that reinforces a problem within the community, and this is also emphasized by the culture's view on women.

The meaning of phrases like “thug” and “pimp” has changed, and the way it is utilized in rap discourses is becoming different, which is often utilized in money and power. Such an image induces misogynistic tendencies in females because it contributes to certain attitudes towards them: it contributes to romanticizing viewing females as sexual beings, which is not necessarily a negative matter, yet limiting women to such is. In this regard, there is also a level of entitlement that is disturbing. E.g., lyrics like “I’m getting so much money I can buy ya bitch”, as heard in “Ali Bomaye” by Game, and “Takin’ hella long, bitch, give it to me now” as heard in “Fuckin’ Problems” by A\$AP Rocky, Drake and Kendrick Lamar. Such lyricism is reinforcing ownership of women, completely disregarding them as their own independent beings. Simultaneously, such lyrics also show that money is the main power that men can use

to control who they want, yet women themselves ought not to voice their opinion. Does this also contribute to rape culture or just general control men ought to have over women?

Another issue that appears is that such a persona reinforces the male as a “money figure” and the female as a “sexual being” within a relationship, which is also connected to toxic traditional views of heteronormative relationships. The man makes the money (and therefore also has the economic power), and for this reason, the women ought to give the man what he wants. This presents a hierarchy that has been around since the beginning of human nature, but especially strengthened within Victorian values. The only difference, however, is that the female is supposed to be as sexual as the man (if not even more), almost in a way that allows the male to be in complete control of him wanting sexual relations or not. A further problem is that women as “gold-digger” and men as “only after sex” stereotypes allow even newer attitudes towards them. Women should aim to be physically attractive, which today often refers to a pretty face with a curvy yet skinny body, and men should have materialistic goods such as money, expensive cars, and luxury brands. The problem arrives when such attitudes become the “norm” within the Hip Hop culture and identity, and hence everyday society. This is especially a problem when a vast majority of the people listening to such music are young people, who are often easier to influence.

Hence, the Hip Hop community indeed has a blueprint of how men and women should behave in the music genre. Larsen discusses the record industry as a business that traditionally “molds” the artists to current trends (Larsen, 2006, p. 47). Such trends might have evolved during the 1990s as a result of the often called “gangsta rap”, initiated after the death of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls, making an era in Hip Hops history and culture. Next-generation rap artists presented a new attitude, an attitude which Larsen calls the “Hugh Hefner lifestyle”, presented by money, women, and drugs (Larsen, 2006, p. 60).

Yet, today’s rap music seeks to push such attitudes and stereotypes even further. One of these stereotypes includes viewing the female as a “gold digger”, which are presented in well as many female artists as male. While the most obvious example of such discourse is “Gold Digger” by Kanye West with lyrics like “Now I ain't sayin' she a gold digger, But she ain't messin' with no broke niggas”, countless other examples from female rappers come to mind: “Flashing Light” by Kanye West (“she don’t believe in shooting stars, but she believe in shoes and cars”), “My Type” by Saweetie (“rich nigga, eight figures, that’s my type!”), “Something Real” by Summer

Walker and Chris Brown (“My last nigga was a bitch nigga, I need a nigga with about six figures”), “No Scrubs” by TLC (“a scrub is a guy that thinks he’s fly (...) and just sits on his broke ass”), “Where The Bag At?” by City Girls, where “bag” is a metaphor for money, often considered a “duffle bag” (the very first line of the song is: “I need a nigga who gon' swipe them Visas”), “Rich Sex” by Nicki Minaj (“It ain’t such a thing as broke and handsome”), etc.

Interestingly, while women in such Hip Hop are reinforcing the “gold-digger” image, an image which is usually seen as a negative trait in society, they are simultaneously aiming to show how their standards are increased, which the audience of Hip Hop culture allows them to do. Yet, the values of such standards remain materialistic and not morally or intelligently motivated. Complimentary to the “gold-digger” stereotype, there is also a stereotype for men being only after sexual relations with women. Let me also exemplify the extensiveness of this matter (while also demonstrating how their economic powers allow them to do so): “Fucking Problems” by A\$AP Rocky (“I will pay to make it bigger, I don't pay for no reduction”), “Dip” by Tyga (“first thing first, I fuck, get all the money”), “No Limit” by G-Eazy, A\$AP Rocky and Cardi B (G-Eazy’s line “fuck with me and get some money” and Cardi B’s line “fuck him then I get some money”), “For Free” by DJ Khalid and Drake (“this sex so good I shouldn’t have to fuck for free”), and “She Will” by Lil Wayne and Drake (“for the money and the power and the fame right now, she will”), “Loyal” by Chris Brown, Lil Wayne, and Tyga (“took a broke nigga bitch, I can make a broke bitch rich”).

Because Hip Hop has the massive capability to reach out to an endless number of people, the most successful artists have an enormous influence and power in society. Hip Hop identity becomes influential especially for young people who adopt Hip Hop behavior in their everyday life. If Hip Hop culture, then, indulges in viewing women as sexual objects, praising sexual relationships over romantic relationships, is this not only beneficial for men? And what are the potential dangers for women in such cultures? Again, such attitudes may also be in favor of prostitution (or even rape), because it normalizes the idea that sex and money are the main powers of the two sexes, allowing them to be used in uneven power-dynamic relationships.

The recognition of the male Hip Hop artist as a “thug” also takes its contributes to toxic masculinity because it can disregard the male as an emotional being. The goal is to have women to sleep with but never catch romantic feelings, which is noticeable in the lyrics of "I Love It", e.g.: "Then I fucked up on her cousin, or her sister, I don't know nothin", yet countless of other

examples come to mind, but let me provide some of them. In “Fucking Problems” by A\$AP Rocky the chorus goes “I love bad bitches that’s my fucking problem (...) if you findin’ somebody real it’s your fucking problem, bring them girls to the crib maybe we can solve it”, in “How Many Times?” By Chris Brown and DJ Khalid, the chorus “How many times I gotta tell that ass to come over? (...) you know how a nigga feel ‘bout wasting time”, in “The Hills” by the Weeknd, he says “I only call you when it’s half-past five, the only time that I’ll be by your side, I only love it when you touch me, not feel me (...)”, in “In Da Club” by 50 Cent goes “I’m into having sex, I aint into making love so come give me a hug”, the chorus of Rae Sremmurd’s “No Type” goes “I aint got no type, bad bitches is the only thing that I like”, and in “FEFE” by 6six9ine and Nicki Minaj, the lyrics goes “I don’t even know why I hit that? All I know is that I just can’t wife that”. These are all songs that exemplify such masculinity while restricting male emotions (other than pride, which, in this case, is not especially healthy either) which is harmful to both genders. Because toxic masculinity amplifies gender roles and strong social norms, e.g., by telling them to “man up” or “don’t be such a girl”, it only contributes to an even stronger gender division, while simultaneously giving men mental health complications. But there’s also a form of microaggression towards women in these examples that accentuates patriarchal behaviors, which can induce dominant and violent attitudes.

A part of the “masculine” identity within Hip Hop culture often refers to a man with a lot of money and fame, who can have as many female relations as he wants, without catching romantic feelings. However, sometimes male rappers that lack this can become demasculinized, and hence not considered authentic enough for the Hip Hop culture. To show an example, American Rapper Lil Nas X, who came out as gay in 2019, feels like he is not accepted in the Hip Hop genre as he portrays a different persona in his artistry (e.g., wearing makeup and pole dancing in one of his music videos, just like many female rappers does). To GQ Magazine, he mentioned that “the whole landscape is very hypermasculine” (Harris, 2021). For the females, however, such masculine energy used to be embedded when women like Missy Elliot were on the rise roughly thirty years ago. Yet, Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim introduced a far more sexualized and, at the time, controversial image for female rappers. With their explicit lyricism with matching imagery, female artists within Hip Hop were becoming more sexually liberated, while simultaneously being criticized for being “ratchet” and “ghetto”, terms stereotypically used to degrade black women. Yet, these women created a new pathway for other female rappers who wanted to express themselves in similar ways as the men did.

Moreover, Kanye West and Lil Pump also reinforce harmful beauty standards towards women in lyrics such as: "I'll buy you some new tits, I'll get you that nip-tuck". Such lyrics compliment beliefs concerning women's attributes are limited to their physical appearance, a sexist and dangerous attitude towards women's bodies. Yet, still common in Hip Hop culture and the general society, not only ways in which "pretty privilege" is utilized within our everyday society but also how pop-cultural media treat women who are not "conventionally attractive". Additionally, because West refers to himself as purchasing for the cosmetic procedure, it illustrates how he is also in charge of the action, almost as if the woman's voice does not matter. A similar power dynamic also appears when West and Lil Pump invite promotions of prostitution, for example: "I like my dick sucked, I'll buy you a sick truck", suggesting that as long as the male has economic power, he is able to purchase the female body for his sexual desires. Such incidences commodify the female body as something that has transmission of ownership, as seen emerging more thoroughly through the modern releases of the American Hip Hop genre.

In contrast to usual discourses in Hip Hop, "I Love It" indulges in an interesting and rather unusual approach to women who had extensive sexual history, exemplified in lyrics such as:

"I like hearin' stories, I like that ho shit
I wanna hear mo' shit, I like the ho shit"

In Hip Hop, such women often termed "ho" or "whore", are more often than not considered "slutty" or "dirty", which is very rarely praised and celebrated. Similar to the case in society, "slut-shaming" is often utilized to degrade women for having sexual experiences, whilst men are often praised because they have "game" or "attractiveness". Hence, it is rare to view opposite views of such double standards, especially in modern Hip Hop discourses. Michael Eric Dyson argues that it has historically been difficult to understand that people who are victimized by white supremacy and patriarchy can simultaneously victimize other groups of society, which can result in a boosted sense of masculinity at the expense of women's lives, identities, and bodies (Forman & Neal, 2017, p. 364).

Furthermore, Dyson distinguishes between the "ho", a "loose" woman who drinks and smokes, and "the good sister", someone who restrain from bad boys, does not give sexual relations

easily, and keeps herself free from troubles (Forman & Neal, 2017, p. 366). What is interesting about such an ethical division, however, is the fact that it is rarely "the good sister" that the Hip Hop men spend time with. In their minds, Dyson argues, "the good sister" is not someone who is most likely to concede to their erotic advances. The "ho", however, usually does not only due to similar interests such as sex and drugs but mainly because they are familiar with the fact that she is easily available sexually. Ironically enough, although Hip Hop started as a man dominating genre, which further developed to offer great opportunities for female artists, the modern genre is heavily built in large measure of the dominant masculine voice which rarely respects women.

Similar to the lyrics of "Anaconda" by Minaj, "I Love It" additionally comprises drug use, such as: "Ooh, fuck, she take lines (lines)". Similar to "WAP" by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, the song also emphasizes heavily on sex. The lack of engagement in the song, whether it be socially, politically, or culturally, suggest how the song is not intended as a declaration of change in our society, but for entertainment. While there are no initial concerns with performing musical arts for the purpose of entertainment purposes, there are extensive concerns with the specific discourses used in such entertainment performances, such as endorsing drug use, suppressing emotions for the benefit of multiple sexual relationships, and dismissing females as human beings for commodity.

As for visual imagery, the official single cover consists of a painting of a naked woman wearing hot pink thongs and a towel over her head whilst covering her breasts, painted by Shadi Al-Atallah. As West stated on Twitter, he asked the artist to take inspiration from Kerry James Marshall (Cascone, 2018), an artist who takes inspiration from African American vernacular existence. Hence, the representation and beauty of black women are accentuated within parts of the visual presentation. The music video, however, is set in an endless and sterile hallway with window peaks that contain the naked bodies of women completely covered in mesh material while posing as physical statues or framed artwork. Yet, the women can be seen as alive due to their breathing and minimal movement, but they are all kneeling with their hands behind their backs and their faces down. Kanye West and Lil Pump are both dressed in immense, rectangular suits with matched-sized chains, often compared to the character from the video game, Roblox. They are both seen following Adele Givens through the hallway. The music video presents an interesting dynamic between the artists and women because its contrast of power is extremely prominent. Not only is the artist's literal size accentuated, but the endless

women are seen as silenced and submissive, creating an uncomfortable sphere throughout the whole video. Similar to "WAP", the women are displayed as forms of "artwork", yet "WAP" incorporates marble and gold within the art, suggesting that the art is a piece of value. West and Lil Pump utilize women as submissive, lack of value, and products of commodities. As of February 2023, the music video has over 600 million views on Lil Pump's official YouTube account.

It is important to mention that Hip Hop has not lost all of its authenticity. There are Hip Hop artists of the 21st Century who aim to deliver artistry that goes beyond sexist and misogynistic discourses. However, by way of viewing which songs gain the most profitable outcome, the highest chart peak, and most streams, authenticity is lacking. Sadly, there seems to be a trend within the genre that seeks to reinforce such content, that almost functions as crucial for the genre. Because the expectations of such incidences have occurred, it becomes challenging for both the artists and the listener to develop a new and innovative subgenre within Hip Hop, allowing problematic discourses to maintain.

An interesting connotation of Hip Hop songs as "erotically engaging" for men, is the fact that they are not overly sexualizing themselves as they do with females. Evidently, there are exceptions as seen in lyrics that explicitly discuss sexual desires, however, it is very rarely visually presented, e.g., through their baggy clothing, non-sensual dancing and movement, and the way they express interest in the women. Yet, the components of (toxic) masculinity that ought to represent the male as someone who has easy access to sex in Hip Hop, usually only sexualizes the female body, as it is the woman who is desiring sex in desperate ways. Generally speaking, the sexualized women are usually seen in the background or beside the centered man, who often maintains eye contact with the camera whilst lacking attention to the girls themselves.

Ironically enough, there are arguments that support the claim that men are historically and socially accepted as more sexual than women, as they are biologically more inclined to reproduce quantity in contrast to women. This claim is both accepted and challenged in modern societies. Although critics like MacKinnon (1989), Butler (1999), and Haslanger (Garry, 2017) present sexuality as a product of social constructs, one study from Case Western Reserve University concluded that all evidence reviewed pointed towards the result that men desire sex more than women. The study measures that included thoughts about sex, frequency of sexual

fantasy and intercourse, masturbation, and the desired number of sexual partners among others. The study also refers to Waller's Principle of Least Interest, arguing that whoever wants something the most within a relationship becomes dependent, and often has to provide other offers. This is the reason, the study argues, many heterosexual romantic interactions will result in the man offering resources (for example, food, money, commitment, and entertainment) (Baumeister et al., 2001, p. 270). If so, the perpetuation of these relationships is clearly visible within the modern Hip Hop sphere, I would argue.

Contrastingly, another study from Case Western Reserve University proposed that in response to sociocultural factors, the female sex drive is more prone to be shaped and altered than the male (Baumeister, 2000, p. 370). Nonetheless, because gender identity is recognized as more fluid (or at least more noticeably), the sex drive of men and females is additionally connected to individuality and sociocultural factors. Correspondingly, it may be exactly the reason why masculinity in Hip Hop is producing females to be more sexually available than how they perform themselves, simply because it is "erotically engaging" as Dyson argues (Forman & Neal, 2017, p. 366).

The visual performance of "I Love It" is not unique in the discography of West and Pump. West's music video for "Bound 2" from his 2013 album *Yeezus*, a single that was nominated for two Grammy Awards incorporated a mimic of sexual intercourse between himself and his previous wife, Kim Kardashian. His wife at the time is seen topless during the session, whilst West himself is fully dressed in an oversized t-shirt. As of March 2023, the video has been viewed over 100 million times on West's official YouTube account. Another example occurs in Lil Pump's official music video of his 2018 track "Drug Addict", where the artist himself is seen fully dressed in his multiple diamond chains around his neck in a hospital with women pushing his bed in minimal clothing and high heels. These are only two examples from the artists of "I Love It" themselves, yet there are countless of other incidences from the visual parts of the genre, for example the music video which has 1,9 billion views on YouTube entitled "Hotline Bling" by Drake, where we instantly encounter an office workspace with females only, moving towards females sensually dancing in slow motion along with a fully dressed artist. Another example is seen in the music video 1,4 billion people have viewed of "Taste" by Tyga, where he is seen at a pool party where women are in bikinis dancing and twerking alongside the rapper who is fully dressed.

Whether it was intentional or not, the wit and humor of "I Love It" can also be recognized as a satirical response towards modern Hip Hop, by way of showing how influential artists are able to make profits from "poor music". Elements of simple tracks that lack sophistication and clever wordplay simply resonate with how minimalistic yet explicit lyricism can dominate the music charts in the American Hip Hop sphere. In other ways, "I Love It" may also represent the literal problem with how the genre has developed towards, including submissive imagery, sexist lyrics and irruptive power dynamics. Nevertheless, "I Love It" perfectly exemplifies the theory that Hip Hop culture and lyricism have developed from a socio-political genre that expresses politics by emphasizing the imperfections of societies, towards a genre that is majorly concerned with sexist content with misogynistic discourses. Some might even categorize the song under a sub-genre in Hip Hop, often referred to as "comedy rap", which aims to be amusing and funny as opposed to musical excellence. Yet, the problem of its discourses still remains the same: sexist and misogynistic.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSIONS

SEXISM IN HIP HOP FROM A CAPITALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

By viewing music as a collaboration of pleasure and entertainment, it is important to keep in mind that such matters are always preoccupied with sexual exploitation for the sake of making a profit (Larsen, 2006, p. 3), and this shifted immediately when the profit-oriented record labels entered the Hip Hop sphere (Salaam, 1995, p. 304). The capitalistic properties of the music industry are influenced by the fact that sex and sensationalism sell, which is articulated within the lyricism yet also seen in visual imagery and performances, and common tendencies of a capitalistic society is to exaggerate everything for entertainment and profit. While there are undoubtedly such properties within every musical genre, I shall argue that Hip Hop (in addition to RnB and pop due to some of its shared characteristics) has extreme cases of such matters, which especially relate to sexism and misogyny. However, it is important to preface that society itself has been, and continues to be, influenced by sexist matters, and the idea that sex sells. Salaam argues that this indeed goes beyond music, as the number one movie in America is usually a sex-filled "love" story (Salaam, 1995, p. 304). This may be one of the reasons why sexism and misogyny are visible in the socio-cultural impact of Hip Hop because Hip Hop is often to be seen as a reflection of our everyday society.

In fact, a considerable part of Hip Hop music that is mainly produced for radio and visual play does indeed contain an obscene amount of sexist talk and imagery, and on many occasions, these are properties presented in rap songs exclusively because they sell (Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012, p. 120). Ultimately, continuous behavior is bound to become normalized within our society, which eventually seeks to push boundaries further. The limits for what we can call the "shock factor" (the idea that shocking content is prone to engage the public) are pushed. The artists, in addition to the record labels, are forced to deliver even more problematic lyrics in order to stay relevant, and hence, make profitable music which is ultimately the goal of viewing music as a form of entertainment for the public.

There are, of course, always exceptions. Artists like J. Cole (in songs like "Love Yours" and "No Role Modelz", where he discusses the beauty of struggles and the dangers of idealizing, for example, "reality stars", respectively). Other examples include Kendrick Lamar ("PRIDE"), and Childish Gambino (in his song "This is America" where he criticizes racism and the frequent mass shootings in America). Anderson. Paak's "6 Summers" criticizes gun laws and

former president Donald Trump's sexual harassment allegations, to mention a few. These are artists that have songs that attempt (at least in some ways) to present political and vulnerable self-critical lyricism within their music. These songs are not necessarily only meant for entertainment purposes, but rather for self-reflection and societal growth. These artists, however, also have other songs which contain considerably sexual lyricism and imagery (for example, "Wet Dreamz" by J. Cole which discusses Cole's first sexual experience, emphasizing the physical properties of the girl with lyrics "long hair, brown skin with a fat ass", "YAH." by Kendrick Lamar with the lyrics "But it's money to get, bitches to hit, yah"). Such properties are likely to have made them the recognizable artists they are today, as they indulge in the ongoing trends developed in the culture. So why do these artists, who have deliberately shown how some of their morals are sculpted, reinforce sexist and misogynistic discourses in other songs?

This "shock factor" was seen in Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda", a song that deliberately discusses her as a sexual and profitable property for men's sexual desires, while endorsing drug use and neglecting non-curvy women within her lyrics. Her visual imagery (both the music video but also her live performances) of this specific song was undoubtedly a significant part of the song promotion for "Anaconda", allowing her to reach the "shock factor" among her reach. Yet, the problem for Minaj is that many will now recognize her specifically for "Anaconda", and not for her prior and future music. For instance, in her 2009 song "Autobiography", Minaj vulnerably discusses her father's issues with drug abuse and her regret and pain towards the abortion that she had when she was sixteen. Minaj has also released explicit music and imagery since "Anaconda", yet these often fail to deliver the same commercial success as "Anaconda", because they fall short of innovativeness from her discography. I do not mean to imply that Minaj has been unable to deliver successful releases, however, it is not uncertain to acknowledge that "Anaconda" remains one of Minaj's most recognizable songs within her discography.

There is an important distinction between a female artist who is sexualizing herself, and a male artist who is sexualizing females. The thesis has previously attempted to differentiate between sexual liberty and sexual exploitation. But in such cases, we might additionally distinguish between the artist themselves and the music industry as a profitable business while simultaneously investigating who specifically is making the most profit from such sexist exploitation. The artists themselves are naturally profiting from their music, yet it is important to remember that in most cases, there are powerful marked teams and record labels that are

projecting ideas onto the artists to make a profitable business. Artists, who have developed a crowded fanbase, reinforce such ideas, without authenticity and individuality, allowing their articulation to become less personal. Hip Hop/RnB artists like SZA and Tinashe have both been open about their struggles with record labels subtracting the liberty of their own music (Strauss, 2020 & Wally, 2020).

Additionally, there will always be someone who “pays the price”. By using sexual exploitation of the female body, along with its degrading misogynistic property and dangerous stereotypes, women are progressively becoming more objectified, and rape culture is maintained. A new question surfaces: Is it not a problem that music makes money off of women's bodies (especially the music label and not the women themselves?) Is the problem accentuated when additional objectification of the female body occurs within its lyrical and visual performances?

An important element to consider is that sources of such cultural influence have also developed as a result of our continuous internationalization. Not exclusively is the industry heavily concentrated around sexist imagery, but it is also more available and unrestricted now than ever before. Previous influential platforms were found in newspapers and books, which may create a more diverse and intelligent influence on people as it additionally presents cultural and political references. Yet today's major platforms around digital screening such as television and social media also allow audio communication and can be presented by algorithms. Because these devices are accessible to most people in modern societies, the widespread of the genre becomes greatly widespread among the younger generation. This is significantly seen when certain music becomes dominant on chats due to TikTok's distribution, both new and old music. To give an example, American artist Miguel's single "Sure Thing" from 2010 returned to Billboard Hot 100 in 2023 due to a "viral wave" on TikTok (Abraham, 2023). Additionally, several songs by female rapper Doja Cat have been accompanied by viral dances and challenges on the app that ultimately made her songs go viral (Yaghnani, n.d.), resulting in her asserted place within the culture.

Not only does such internalization make an extensive reach to the younger generations, but it also contributes to Hip Hop's remarkable place as a genre. In fact, in 2021, Billboard argued that RnB and Hip Hop have been the dominant musical genre on the American chart since 2017, outgoing both pop and rock (Billboard, 2021). Larsen argues that today's youth is enveloped and often inspired by such elements, especially Hip Hop for young people (Larsen, 2006, p. 3).

The positive development of this is that the Hip Hop genre establishes the more widespread and respectable recognition it deserves. The downside, however, is that the internalized misogynistic and sexist discourses become merged into the genre, permitting younger generations to advocate such discourses.

THE WIDESPREAD OF PORNOGRAPHIC CONTENT IN HIP HOP AND GIRLS AS SEXUAL FREAKS

Has modern Hip Hop become the genre that ought to possess and indulge in sexual content to allow songs to become successful? It is significantly evident that "Anaconda", "WAP" and "I Love It" are not three songs that exclusively produce sexually explicit content both lyrically and visually within modern Hip Hop music. In fact, modern discourses are very often centered and represented around such imagery and articulations, which are often referred to as "soft porn". Since its release in 2012, Rihanna has accumulated over 400 million views of her music video for "Pour It Up", which incorporated several blends of women pole dancing and Rihanna dressed in high luxury Chanel brand, a bra made of crystals with a fur coat over, and high heels covered in a dollar-printed design. In 2019, Cardi B released the accompanying music video for her single "Press" which starts off with two women making out, preceded by Cardi B herself in underwear smoking a cigarette while loading a handgun. Later, Cardi B is in front of twenty to thirty women dancing in choreography, everyone completely naked. In 2020, 6ix9ine released his official video for "GOOBA", featuring women dressed up in one color each representing the artist's colorful style while dancing and twerking behind him. His video has received over 800 million views on YouTube.

Indeed, the sexual content of Hip Hop is not only common, but it is also virtually necessary. The pornographic content in modern Hip Hop inevitably produces additionally nuanced problems. In "Sexuality", Catharine MacKinnon suggests that pornography provides an answer for what men want sexually, which is then again provided in pornography which allows men to access and possess accordingly. According to testimony, MacKinnon argued that what men want is "women bound, women battered, women tortured, women humiliated, women degraded and defiled, women killed", or in a soft-core, women that are "easily accessible, have-able" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 138). Yet, it is important to acknowledge that the content of pornography has developed over the past thirty years, and it is highly unlikely that what "most" men want is

“women tortured” and “women killed”. However, pornography is still notorious for the possession of women as submissive figures in its sexual content, and it is not acute to support the idea that most pornographic content is mainly made “for men”. Hence, the sexual and pornographic content provided in Hip Hop may also be seen as such, which often diminishes and objectifies women as a form of an entity solely based on their sexual abilities.

Due to the music industry's profitable knowledge regarding sex and sensationalism, the lyricism produced become centralized around such discourses. Examples include “Beat that pussy up like Emmet Till” from “Karate Chop” (remix version) from a track released in 2013 by Future and Lil Wayne, referencing the torture and abduction of then 14-year-old Emmet Louis Till. Wayne received critique for his inappropriate verse and was later removed in respect from Till’s family. In 2013, Mac Miller and ScHoolboy Q dropped “Gees” which incorporated explicit lyrics that indulge in a sexual relationship with religious nuns: “Make a nun throw it back while I pull her scarf” and “She gave me head, my nuts touched her cross, boss” proceeding with “bitch, suck my dick before I slap you with it”. MacKinnon also discusses the victimization of already vulnerable women, including black women, Asian women, disabled women, retarded women, and even little girls (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 138). In 2009, Young Money (artists consisting of Lil Wayne, Drake, Jae Millz, Gudda Gudda, and Mack Maine) released a record called “Every Girl”, which included the lyrics with a pejorative term: “Taking V-cards from retards”. From his album *Goblin* released in 2011, American rapper Tyler, the Creator incorporated “Rape a pregnant bitch and tell my friends I had a threesome” from the song “Tron Cat”. In 2015, Tyga dropped a single in response to him dating (at the time) underage reality star Kylie Jenner, where he incorporated lyrics about justifying his relationship: “They say she young, I should’ve waited, she a big girl, dog when she stimulated”. Rapper Future released “My Collection” in 2017, which included the lyrics: “girl you my possession, even if I hit you once, you part of my collection”.

Indeed, the unethical sexual content within pornography is also present within modern Hip Hop culture, which seeks to advocate for a certain "explicit expressive" that is provocative yet still made possible for artists to articulate. For some artists, the backlash of such lyricism is inevitable. For example, Tyga’s “Stimulated” is removed from Spotify and YouTube, and Lil Wayne’s Emmet Till reference was removed from “Karate Chop” due to the public’s response. Still, the lyrics of Tyler, the Creator’s, “Tron Cat” and Young Money’s “Every Girl” are often considered outrageous but also witty, perpetuating the possibilities of problematic discourses

within the Hip Hop community. The genre, as Dyson argues, ought to be "erotically engaging" for male gazes, advocates problematic interpretations when discovering women, even underage girls, as possessions that are victimized and physically injured during such sexual relations. The nuanced interpretation of what can be considered problematic and not does indeed allow problematic discourses to resurface, as some lyricism can be considered "obscure yet funny".

When Lil Pump and West collaborated with PornHub, they both indulged in an ongoing trend that combines Hip Hop with pornography. It is important to preface that sexual content was also conveyed by Hip Hop artists of the 1990s, simply because sexual content is conveyed in everyday society. What is different, however, is not only how such content is accentuated within the lyrics and visual performance, but also the quantity that is accessible. In other words, the sexual contents are both more vulgar and prominent. For example, The Notorious B.I.G.'s "Big Poppa" from 1995 (which for the reference refers to women as "ladies", "honey's" and "sweeties" with "style and grace") incorporated the lyrics "allow me to lace these lyrical douches in your bushes", yet simultaneously encouraging women to play men like men play women, e.g.: "to the honey's gettin' money, playin' niggas like dummies". 2Pac's 1996s track "California Love" included "Pack a vest for your Jimmy in the city of sex". Yet, there is a prevailing trend that came to convey further explicit sexual content at the beginning of the 21st century. The trend was, according to Jane Larsen, initiated by Snoop Dogg's 2001 film *Snoop Dogg's Doggystyle* (Larsen, 2006, p. 66), an 86-minute film that merges hardcore pornography and Snoop Dogg's own music videos, featuring other famous male rappers and numerous porn actresses. Larsen also provides other examples of the lucrative combination of porn and rap music, including a sequel *Hustlaz: Diary of a Pimp*, and rapper 50 Cents' featuring his rap group G-Unit interactive sex movie called *Groupie Luv* from 2005. Hence, prior to Snoop Dogg's pornographic video from 2001, there was sexual content that has subsequently reformed towards pornographic content. Content which often is utilized by modern Hip Hop artists has become a significant part of the identity of the culture.

Are the women in Hip Hop becoming more like their male colleagues? With numerous examples, the thesis has attempted to illustrate ways in which female artists have contributed to presenting themselves as sexual beings, and even sexual "freaks" that are unbothered by society's perpetual slut shaming and continuous critique. As outdated gender roles and stereotypes challenge women in everyday society, modern female Hip Hop artists may serve an important role in ways that contradict such properties. Victorian values that seek to perpetuate

the non-sexual women as "pure" and "innocent" develops towards sexual liberty and the power shift in sexual relationships. However, the industry's misogyny itself is inevitable: either the artists represent themselves in a way that society considers "clean and classy", or they are presented as "unholy", "self-centered", and "vulgar". The double standard and contradiction of how male and female artists present themselves are prominent.

Because the properties of modern Hip Hop serve as an important identity-forming tool for young people, female artists can act as an important representation to challenge such patriarchal double standards. Still, it is important to remember the possible dangers of sexual objectification disguised as sexual liberty in the ways artists utilize such properties. In other words, female artists may objectify themselves behind a veil of empowerment, presenting themselves as feminists that explore and express their sexual desires. Concurrently, the artists perpetuate a glorification of animalistic and sexist notions that objectify and accentuate the commodity of the female body. Additionally, and perhaps ironically, there is still the potential possibility that female artists need to present themselves in such sexual vulgarity solely because it engages commercial success within the music industry.

Although the examples provided serve rather extreme instances of problematic sexual discourses, there is surely an underlying internalization with general sexual content within the genre. It is in fact so prominent within modern Hip Hop that it is almost *expected*, particularly for artists whose goal is to produce music for mass popularity and musical charts. Is it possible that the current trends of sexual content are available in Hip Hop as mere results of the occurrent sexual development from the outside society? There are, of course, sexual properties in rock, metal, pop, country, funk, and soul, it is everywhere. Yet, with Hip Hop being the most dominating genre in America for the last five years, the product of pornographic content is extremely potent among audiences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A significant part of the visual art forms of modern female rappers is their physical appearance. As previously stated, the "thug" and "pimp" persona of the male characters often indulge in baggy clothing, not unusually containing expensive chains as necklaces and "iced out" watches. For the females, however, the blueprint is broader, yet commonly includes skintight or little

clothing, beat makeup, and extensive jewelry. Yet, the most considerable mention that is left unnoticed is how modern female rappers indulge in their hairstyles. The common measure of previous artists such as Lauryn Hill, Missy Elliot, and the trio of Salt-n-Pepa, is that they were expressing their hair of African culture narratives, i.e., dreadlocks, cornrows, and natural curls.

Modern artists analyzed in the thesis, Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion are accentuating Eurocentric beauty standards of straight and long hair, as they usually make their public appearances in wigs and extensions. In fact, it would not be controversial to argue that the vast majority of modern black female rappers engage in such hairstyles. To name a few (which also happen to be the most successful): Saweetie, Doja Cat, Latto, Flo Milli, JT, Yung Miami, BIA, and Azealia Banks. Then why does Hip Hop, as a culture and genre made for and by black people, shift its authenticity from African American culture towards Eurocentric beauty standards? And why are such trends occurring for the female artists and not the males, who inherently proceed to reinforce braids, cornrows, and afros as seen by Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar, Drake, J. Cole, Travis Scott, Jay-Z, 21 Savage, The Weeknd, and countless others?

Outside of the Hip Hop sphere, women's appearance has almost always been of importance, yet black women's hairstyles might be even furtherly restricted. It is strange then, how the women of Hip Hop are reinforcing the "white-girl" hair as opposed to celebrating their natural locks when such was employed by previous female artists within the same genre. It is important to mention, however, that black women have historically been subject to discrimination concerning their hair. Kristen Denise Rowe exemplifies how black women are weaponized in public spaces for their hairstyles by showing incidences of girls being expelled, fired, or in other ways disciplined for the way they style their hair. Sociohistorical concepts of beauty, she argues, place weight on black women's hair being polished, managed, and styled (Rowe, 2019, p. 22). Indeed, there are still ways in which black women and girls are hegemonically scrutinized for how they style their hair that simultaneously embodies a level of irony. Black female artists fail to indulge in a raised awareness over the idea that natural hair is beautiful regardless of hair type, especially in the pop-cultural aspect of modern black female rappers.

Indeed, physical appearance is prominent and important for female rappers. Other examples of songs from the last years include lyrics from Megan Thee Stallion's 2020s track "Body", the

chorus goes "Body crazy, curvy, wavy, big titties, lil' waist", in Monaleo's 2021 track "Beating Down Yo Block" she says "bitch I'm fine, slim waist, pretty face, he know I'm a dime" and in Flo Milli's 2022 track "Conceited", she raps "Face like a model (what?), body like a stripper (yeah)", Chris Browns "Loyal" from 2014 goes "Got a white girl with some fake titties". Simultaneously, the importance of physical appearance also allows the use of plastic surgery both utilized and criticized. For example, in "Top Off" by DJ Khaled ft. Jay-Z and Beyonce from 2019, Beyonce raps "My body, my ice, my cash, all real, I'm a triple threat". In "Shether" from 2017, a remake of Rapper Nas' diss track of Jay-Z's "Ether", Rema Ma disses Nicki Minaj with lyrics: "talkin' about bringin' knives to a fight with guns, when the only shot you ever took was in your buns" following with "the implants that she had put in her ass popped". Minaj responded the same year with "No Frauds", where she includes: "you a fraud committin' perjury, I got before and after pictures of your surgery" followed with "left the operating table still look like naw".

Certainly, physical attributes are emphasized, and the degradation of other females utilized by female rappers has come to be a flawed and insufficient development of the genre. It is fair to mention that in his 2017 track "HUMBLE", Kendrick Lamar criticizes the creation of a perfect appearance. He raps: "I'm so fuckin' sick and tired of the Photoshop" which he proceeds with him wanting to see "somethin' natural like afros" and "ass with some stretch marks". In "Escape From LA" from 2020, artist The Weeknd sings "LA girls all look the same, I can't recognize" which follows by "the same work done on their face, I don't criticize". Drake's "Jimmy Crooks" from 2022 goes "love the way they hang, babe, fuck the silicone". Hence, not every rapper desires to indulge in extreme beauty standards, but the need for such lyricism might exhibit just how centered the culture has become around bodily appearance.

MISOGYNOIR

With Hip Hop as a macho-powered culture, male artists who market themselves as "gangster", "thug", and "pimp" images always serve heteronormative and masculine identities as a way of asserting their masculinity. Such identity often suppresses them as emotional, yet sexual beings that ought to initiate women for sexual relationships. The relationship between the overly sexual behaviors of (black) women and the problematic impacts of male exploitation and sexual

desires serves great extensive content within modern Hip Hop discourse. Black women are often referred to as "loud", "freaks", "dominant" and "aggressive", which serves a racist, prejudiced, and misogynistic function. It is abnormal how the cultural framework of Hip Hop gives a voice to the voiceless, especially black people, yet internalizes misogynoir within its articulation. However, black female artists like Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion serve an important function of redefining the stereotypes on their own terms. Consequently, they may also reinforce the stereotype within the way they portray themselves. Hip Hop and RnB artist Beyonce is one of the artists who have attempted to challenge such properties. In her *Lemonade* album from 2016, she samples Malcolm X's phrase "The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman". When Beyonce performed "Formation" during the 2016 Superbowl, she included an all-black female dance cast, all performing in black afros and Michael Jackson-like attire, with accompanying lyrics of "I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros, I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils" and "I just might be a black Bill Gates in the making".

Simultaneously, there is also a mythology of "the angry black woman", which serves a stereotype of the Black woman as inherently bad-mannered and angry. This is where modern Hip Hop, especially female artists, represents a positive and important comeback. In Minaj's "Barbie Goin Bad", she finishes off her song with "Whenever I do something they say I'm the angry black woman, I'm just playing around and having some fun" after she has been discussing how she has been "fucking three to four times a day, I'm feeling real good, I'm rehearsing for the tour". While today's black female artists serve an important function of trying to fight back at misogynoir by flaunting and acculturating their black culture and beauty (for example, Nicki Minaj's perpetuation of referring to herself as a "Black Barbie"), the masculine sphere still exists. Male artists like Kanye West have lyrics that support the black female, for example in "Stronger" ("let's get lost tonight, you can be my black Kate Moss tonight"), yet have recently been heavily criticized for fronting controversial opinions, including wearing a "White Lives Matter" t-shirt during his fashion show (Mier, 2022) and stating that "slavery was a choice" during an interview (Aniftos, 2018). Although Hip Hop serves as an important culture to redefine or even diminish the racist stereotypes of black women, it is still unfortunate that artists like Megan Thee Stallion fail to be exclusively known for her 2020 lyrics "Now here we are, 2020, eight months later, and we still ain't got no fuckin' justice for Breonna Taylor" from "Shots Fired" in favor of "WAP" and "Body".

HIP HOP'S NEW IDENTITY

The commercial success and widespread of modern songs represent a new identity that modern Hip Hop encapsulates. In 2022, Billboard Staff attempted to break down the "The 15 Best Hip-Hop Songs of 2022", which included Latto's "Big Energy" with lyrics "Bad bitch, I could be your fantasy, I can tell you got big dick energy" and "Broke niggas to the left, we 'on't want it". Other tracks included Lil Uzi Vert's "Just Wanna Rock" with lyrics "shawty got that body-ody, ah" and "hit her once, no ties", Lil Baby's "California Breeze" with lyrics "I can't fuck with shawty, 'cause she got a big mouth", and "hit her once, no ties", and Drake's "Jimmy Crooks" with lyrics "I can tell her head good before I even know, Bitch, don't tell me that you model if you ain't been in Vogue" (Billboard, 2022). Two years prior, Billboard created "The 20 Best Rap Songs of 2020: Staff Picks", which included "WAP", "The Box" by Roddy Rich with lyrics "She sucked that nigga soul, gotta Cash App", "Savage" by Megan Thee Stallion with lyrics "If it ain't about the money, then you know I'm gon' ignore it", "Pussy Talks" By City Girls and Doja Cat with lyrics "Boy, this pussy talk Euros, Dollars and Yens (...) Boy, this pussy talk Bentleys, Rovers and Benz" and "Don't nothin' but this cash make this pussy talk", and "Go Crazy" by Chris Brown and Young Thug with lyrics "Just tell me what to do when I get it, babe, Gucci and Prada" (Billboard, 2020). When Billboard, as a highly influential music platform, recognize these songs as representing, what they categorize as "the gold standard", the identity is clear: socio-political properties pave the way for materialism and sexist imagery.

Sexism is everywhere, so is it possible that the music community as a whole contains more sexism today than prior? What about genres like rock and pop? A study that measured instances of present sexism in the top ten songs of 2013 with five categories; gender roles, inferiority, objectification, violence, and stereotypes all targeted women, found 117 instances present in fifty songs. The songs investigated were from genres of [rap], Hip Hop, country, rock, alternative, and dance. The study found that rap and Hip Hop (in the study used as two genres and not interchangeably) had the most instances of all sub-categories of sexism than the rest of the genres. 48 instances (out of 61 total) of objectification were present in rap and Hip Hop. In stereotypes, Hip Hop was responsible for 34 out of 37 instances. (Neff, 2014, pp. 21-23). To summarize; the coherent sexism measured was far more present within rap and Hip Hop than in any other genre.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

After the discussion with my parents who claimed that the Hip Hop genre lacks diversity and fails to discuss other areas but "boobs, butts, and bitches", I was left melancholy. This is partly because I knew that they had failed to capture the essence of the music and the culture, but also because I knew they had a point. Although the complexity of the modern part of the genre is present, today's Hip Hop is not mainly known for its diversity and field of important discourses. It might very well be for the people who often engage with the culture, but not for people like, for example, my parents.

So what happened? When Hip Hop started to construct its characteristics during the 1970s, the community in which it was established was often faced with racial injustice, poverty, and hopelessness. Hip Hop then became an area for political and societal issues to be articulated. Although racism, poverty, misogyny, and sexism are still present problems within American society today, the market for such discourses is suppressed in popular modern music. It is not to say that such discourses are non-existent, yet it is to say that such music fails to reign in the dominant sphere of modern music.

By endeavoring to present how the culture and aesthetics of the community are so much more than just its lyricism by the deficiency of visual image, persona, and attitude among artists, it is fair to recollect Hip Hop as a *culture*, and not just a simple "music genre". The intent of the thesis was not to argue that the complexity of modern Hip Hop has lost all of its authenticity. The music community is widely represented by artists who deliberately articulate important discourses with lyrical talent and compositions, which have been exemplified by modern artists such as Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, and Anderson .Paak. Yet, most modern Hip Hop artists have settled to deconstruct the complexity of oppression, which ultimately results in irrelevancy toward their individual and societal direction of politics and intellectualizes, to pave way to greater relevance towards validation and profitable powers. Not only do such oppressions refer to 21st-century racism, but also to internalized misogyny and sexism. There are also artists of modern Hip Hop that question the direction in which the lyrical articulation and the aesthetic of the Hip Hop community are headed. For example, In Kanye West's "Stronger" from 2007, he raps "Damn, they don't make 'em like this anymore [...] do anybody make real shit anymore?" and in A\$AP Rocky and Tyler, The Creator's 2018 song "Potato Salad", Rocky raps "All the

super seniors mublin' and rappin' [...] I find it hard to find actual talent". Ironically though, these three artists indulge in the same forms of the direction they seem to be criticizing. Although such lyrics indulge in the persona of the confident and cocky character that is present within the culture, the contradiction is still prominent.

The development of the "thug" and "pimp" persona of male artists during the early 2000s glorifies materialistic values, which often possess the ability to achieve sexual relations with women. This glorification was initially presented as a way out of the "hard life" of poverty and inequity yet seeks to develop towards the "good life" with greater economic powers, expensive cars, jewelry, and women. Such representation of "values" serves as objectification of women, because it creates a notion of the woman as a commodity that is attained by economic powers. While some female rappers respond by flaunting their own economic powers, they still indulge in new materialism that encapsulates the importance of their sexual attributes, as seen in "Anaconda" and "WAP".

Due to the artists' influence within the community, they set the blueprint in which the aesthetics proceed to influence the listeners and other artists. This tone is also significantly connected to the "gold-digger" notion, which interestingly, is utilized by female artists as much as male artists. Further problems appear when such notions are utilized particularly by "bragging" and "showing off" the economic and physical powers of both men and women. The correspondence of the attitudes of "in order to get bitches, you need money" and "in order to make money, you need to be a bad bitch" conveys problematic discourse that represses women down to their physical appearance while objectifying them.

While 2Pac and Lauryn Hill were concerned with societal issues, they convey a concept of fairness and respect for women. The lyrics incorporated encourages both men and women to act in solidarity toward one another while repressing societal unfairness. Nicki Minaj aims to celebrate curvy women by disregarding what she refers to as "skinny bitches". Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion present themselves as sexual and "certified freaks" that aim to recollect the economic properties of the man while simultaneously harnessing their bodies by way of doing so. The female artists of modern rap collectively reduce their feminine elements to sexual and physical qualities. Kanye West and Lil Pump focus on their sexual desires of women while simultaneously silencing them visually. The necessary proportions of modern lyricism in Hip Hop indeed indulge in sexual matters. Such "trend" highly stems from a variety of different

factors: the record labels expect sensationalism in order to profit, the specific persona and attitude the artists ought to portray, the aim of sexual liberty among women, and even, *Snoop Dogg's Doggystyle*.

Although there is often little, yet sometimes subtle, room for obvious hateful and criminal articulation within pop culture today, the misogyny and sexism within modern discourses present more nuanced expressions which need to be interpreted. As a result, the challenges of the interpretations create room for misogynistic and sexism as they are less noticeable, which leads to internalized and normalized characteristics of the genre. As the thesis attempted to show, such challenges include male artists repressing their emotions within relationships, the crossbreed of sex and money, the strictly-established and non-inclusive beauty standard, the contradiction of words like "bitch", "ho", and "whore" proceeds to be articulated differently among male and female artists, the representation of females as sexual objects, the difference of which male and female artists present themselves, and lastly, how the genre indulges in content that is usually sexually desirable for male gazes. As for the visual representation of women, which is often presented in groups of other women with little to no clothing along with sensual dancing, it does not share similar sceneries of men, who usually dress in oversized clothing, and expensive jewelry, often presented as a "boss" or the "master". The range in which these features are existent within modern Hip Hop is extensive. In retrospect, the development from 2Pac's "And suddenly the ghetto didn't seem so tough, and though we had it rough, we always had enough" to Kanye West and Lil Pump's "I like my dick sucked, I'll buy you a sick truck" represent a change in the identity of the culture. From Lauryn Hill's "Baby girl, respect is just a minimum" to Nicki Minaj's "Kyuh, I got a big fat ass!" represents a modification of values. The way Hip Hop utilizes its properties marks a change in the culture that makes it possible for artists to internalize misogyny and sexism as not only accessible but also necessary tools to become profitable and participate in the modern identity of the genre.

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APPENDIX

“Rapper’s Delight” by The SugarGill Gang (1980)

I said-a hip, hop, the hippie, the hippie
To the hip hip hop-a you don't stop the rock
It to the bang-bang boogie, say up jump the boogie
To the rhythm of the boogie, the beat
Now what you hear is not a test: I'm rappin' to the beat
And me, the groove, and my friends are gonna try to move your feet
See, I am Wonder Mike, and I'd like to say hello
To the black, to the white, the red
And the brown, the purple and yellow
But first I gotta bang bang the boogie to the boogie
Say up jump the boogie to the bang bang boogie
Let's rock, you don't stop
Rock the riddle that will make your body rock
Well, so far you've heard my voice, but I brought two friends along
And next on the mike is my man Hank, come on Hank, sing that song
Check it out, I'm the C-A-S-AN, the O-V-A and the rest is F-L-Y
You see, I go by the code of the doctor of the mix and these reasons I'll tell you why
You see I'm six foot one and I'm tons of fun and I dress to a D
You see I got more clothes than Muhammad Ali and I dress so viciously
I got bodyguards, I got two big cars, that definitely ain't the whack
I got a Lincoln continental and a sunroof Cadillac
So after school, I take a dip in the pool, which is really on the wall
I got a color TV so I can see the Knicks play basketball
Hear me talking 'bout checkbooks, credit cards, more money than a sucker could ever spend
But I wouldn't give a sucker or a bum from the Rucker, not a dime 'til I made it again
Everybody go: Hotel, motel, whatcha gonna do today (Say what?)
'Cause I'ma get a fly girl, gonna get some spank and drive off in a def OJ
Everybody go: Hotel, motel, Holiday Inn
You see, if your girl starts acting up, then you take her friend
Uh Master Gee, my mellow?
It's on you so what you gonna do?
Well it's on and on and on, on and on
The beat don't stop until the break of dawn
I said a M-A-S, a T-E-R, a G with a double E
I said I go by the unforgettable name of the man they call the Master Gee
Well, my name is known all over the world
By all the foxy ladies and the pretty girls
I'm going down in history
As the baddest rapper there ever could be
Now I'm feeling the highs and you're feeling the lows
The beat starts getting into your toes
You start popping your fingers and stomping your feet
And moving your body while you're sitting in your seat
And then damn, you start doing the freak
I said damn, right outta your seat
Then you throw your hands high in the air
You're rocking to the rhythm, shake your derriere
Ya rockin' to the beat without a care
With the sureshot MCs for the affair
Now, I'm not as tall as the rest of the gang
But I rap to the beat just the same

I got a little face, and a pair of brown eyes
 All I'm here to do, ladies, is hypnotize
 Singing on an' an' on an' on, on an' on
 The beat don't stop until the break of dawn
 Singing on an' an' on an' on, on an' on
 Like a hot party the pop the pop the pop dibbie dibbie
 Pop the pop, pop, you don't dare stop
 Come alive y'all, gimme whatcha got
 I guess by now you can take a hunch
 And find that I am the baby of the bunch
 But that's okay, I still keep in stride
 'Cos all I'm here to do is just wiggle your behind
 Singin' on'n'n'on'n'on n'on
 The beat don't stop until the break of dawn
 Singin' on'n'n'on'n'on on'n'on
 Rock rock, y'all, throw it on the floor
 I'm gonna freak ya here I'm gonna freak you there
 I'm gonna move you outta this atmosphere
 'Cos I'm one of a kind and I'll shock your mind
 I'll put TNT tickin' in your behind
 I said one, two, three, four, come on, girls, get on the floor
 A-come alive, y'all, a-gimme whatcha got
 'Cos I'm guaranteed to make you rock
 I said one, two, three, four, tell me, Wonder Mike
 What are you waiting for?
 I said a hip hop the hippie to the hippie
 To the hip hip hop and you don't stop
 The rock it to the bang bang the boogie
 Say up jump the boogie, dig the rhythm of the boogie, the beat
 Skiddlee beebop a we rock a scooby doo
 And guess what, America: we love you
 'Cause ya rock and ya roll with so much soul
 You could rock 'til you're a hundred and one years old
 I don't mean to brag I don't mean to boast
 But we like hot butter on a breakfast toast
 Rock it up, uh, baby bubbah
 Baby bubbah to the boogie the bang bang the boogie
 To the beat beat, it's so unique
 Come on, everybody, and dance to the beat
 A hip hop the hippie the hippie
 To the hip hip hop and you don't stop
 The rock it out baby boppa to the boogity bang bang
 Boogie to the boogie, the beat
 I said I can't wait 'til the end of the week
 When I'm rappin' to the rhythm of a groovy beat
 An attempt to raise your body heat
 Just blow your mind so that you can't speak
 To do a thing but a rock and shuffle your feet
 And let it change up to a dance called the freak
 And when ya finally do come into your rhythmic beat
 Rest a little while so ya don't get weak
 I know a man named Hank
 He has more rhymes than a serious bank
 So come on Hank, uh, sing that song
 To the rhythm of the boogie the bang bang the bong
 Well, I'm imp the dimp, the ladies pimp
 The women fight for my delight

But I'm the grandmaster with the three MCs
 That shock the house for the young ladies
 And when you come inside, into the front
 You do the freak, spank, and do the bump
 And when the sucker MCs try to prove a point
 We're treacherous trio, we're the serious joint
 A-from sun-to-sun and from day-to-day
 I sit down and write a brand new rhyme
 Because they say that miracles never cease
 I've created a devastating masterpiece
 I'm gonna rock the mike 'til you can't resist
 Everybody, I say, it goes like this
 Well, I was comin' home late one dark afternoon
 A reporter stopped me for a interview
 She said she's heard stories and she's heard fables
 That I'm vicious on the mic and the turntables
 This young reporter, I did adore
 So I rocked a vicious rhyme like I never did before
 She said, "Damn, fly guy, I'm in love with you!
 The Casanova legend must have been true!"
 I said, "By the way, baby, what's your name?"
 Said, "I go by the name Lois Lane
 And you could be my boyfriend, you surely can
 Just let me quit my boyfriend called Superman"
 I said, "He's a fairy, I do suppose
 Flyin' through the air in pantyhose
 He may be very sexy or even cute
 But he looks like a sucker in a blue and red suit"
 I said, "You need a man who's got finesse
 And his whole name across his chest
 He may be able to fly all through the night
 But can he rock a party 'til the early light?
 He can't satisfy you with his little worm
 But I can bust you out with my super sperm!"
 I gon' do it, I gon' do it, I gon' do it, do it, do it
 And I'm here, and I'm there, I'm Big Bank Hank, I'm everywhere
 Just throw your hands up in the air
 And party hardy like you just don't care
 Let's do it, don't stop y'all
 A-tick a-tock, y'all, you don't stop!
 Go hotel, motel

“Keep Ya Head Up” by 2Pac (1993)

Little somethin' for my godson Elijah and a little girl named Corin
 Some say the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice
 I say the darker the flesh then the deeper the roots
 I give a holler to my sisters on welfare
 Tupac cares, if don't nobody else care
 And uh, I know they like to beat ya down a lot
 When you come around the block, brothas clown a lot
 But please don't cry, dry your eyes, never let up
 Forgive but don't forget, girl, keep your head up
 And when he tells you you ain't nuttin' don't believe him
 And if he can't learn to love you, you should leave him
 'Cause sista you don't need him

And I ain't tryin' to gas ya up, I just call 'em how I see 'em (you don't need him)
 You know me makes me unhappy? (What's that?)
 When brothas make babies
 And leave a young mother to be a pappy (oh, yeah, yeah, yeah)
 And since we all came from a woman
 Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman (yeah, yeah)
 I wonder why we take from our women
 Why we rape our women, do we hate our women? (Why? Why?)
 I think it's time to kill for our women (why? Why? Why? Why?)
 Time to heal our women, be real to our women
 And if we don't we'll have a race of babies
 That will hate the ladies, that make the babies (oh, yeah, baby)
 And since a man can't make one
 He has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one
 So will the real men get up
 I know you're fed up ladies, but keep your head up
 Keep ya head up, ooh, child, things are gonna get easier
 Keep-keep ya head up, ooh, child, things'll get brighter (ohh)
 Keep ya head up, ooh, child, things are gonna get easier
 Keep-keep ya head up, ooh, child, things'll get brighter
 Ayo, I remember Marvin Gaye, used to sing to me
 He had me feelin' like black was the thing to be
 And suddenly the ghetto didn't seem so tough
 And though we had it rough, we always had enough
 I huffed and puffed about my curfew and broke the rules
 Ran with the local crew, and had a smoke or two
 And I realize momma really paid the price
 She nearly gave her life, to raise me right (oh, yeah)
 And all I had to give her was my pipe dream (yeah, yeah, yeah)
 Of how I'd rock the mic, and make it to the bright screen
 I'm tryin' to make a dollar out of fifteen cents
 It's hard to be legit and still pay your rent
 And in the end it seems I'm headin' for the pen
 I try and find my friends, but they're blowin' in the wind
 Last night my buddy lost his whole family
 It's gonna take the man in me to conquer this insanity (no, no, no, no)
 It seems the rain'll never let up
 I try to keep my head up, and still keep from gettin' wet up
 You know, it's funny when it rains it pours
 They got money for wars, but can't feed the poor
 Said it ain't no hope for the youth and the truth is
 It ain't no hope for the future
 And then they wonder why we crazy
 I blame my mother for turning my brother into a crack baby
 We ain't meant to survive, 'cause it's a setup
 And even though you're fed up
 Huh, ya got to keep your head up
 Keep ya head up, ooh, child, things are gonna get easier
 Keep-keep ya head up, ooh, child, things'll get brighter (ohh)
 Keep ya head up, ooh, child, things are gonna get easier
 Keep-keep ya head up, ooh, child, things'll get brighter
 And uh
 To all the ladies havin' babies on they own
 I know it's kinda rough and you're feelin' all alone
 Daddy's long gone and he left you by ya lonesome
 Thank the Lord for my kids, even if nobody else want 'em (left you all by yourself)
 'Cause I think we can make it, in fact, I'm sure

And if you fall, stand tall and comeback for more
'Cause ain't nothin' worse than when your son
Wants to know why his daddy don't love him no mo'
You can't complain you was dealt this
Hell of a hand without a man, feelin' helpless
Because there's too many things for you to deal with
Dying inside, but outside you're looking fearless
While the tears is rollin' down your cheeks
Ya steady hopin' things don't all down this week
'Cause if it did, you couldn't take it, and don't blame me
I was given this world I didn't make it
And now my son's gettin' older and older and cold
From havin' the world on his shoulders
While the rich kids is drivin' Benz
I'm still tryin' to hold on to my survivin' friends
And it's crazy, it seems it'll never let up, but
Please, you got to keep your head up

Doo-Wop (That Thing) by Lauryn Hill (1998)

Yo, remember back on the boogie when cats use to harmonize like...
Whooo, whooo whooo whooo,
Yo, my men and my women,
Don't forget about the dean, Sirat al-Mustaqim
Yo, its about a thing, uh
If ya feel real good wave your hands in the air
And 'lick' two shots in the atmosphere...
Yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah
Yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah...
It's been three weeks since you've been looking for your friend
The one you let hit it and never called you again
'Member when he told you he was 'bout the Benjamin's
You act like you ain't hear him then gave him a little trim
To begin, how you think you really gon' pretend
Like you wasn't down then you called him again
Plus when you give it up so easy you ain't even foolin' him
If you did it then, then you'd probably fuck again
Talking out your neck sayin' you're a Christian
A Muslim sleeping with the gin
Now that was the sin that did Jezebel in
Who you gon' tell when the reproussions spin
Showing off your ass 'cause you're thinking it's a trend
Girlfriend, let me break it down for you again
You know I only say it 'cause I'm truly genuine
Don't be a hard rock when you really are a gem
Baby girl, respect is just a minimum
Niggas fucked up and you still defending 'em
Now Lauryn is only human
Don't think I haven't been through the same predicament
Let it sit inside your head like a million women in Philly, Penn.
It's silly when girls sell their soul because it's in
Look at where you be in hair weaves like Europeans
Fake nails done by Koreans
Come again
Win win come again, brethren come again, my friend come again, yo come again

Guys you know you better watch out
 Some girls, some girls are only about
 That thing, that thing, that thing
 That thing, that thing, that thing
 The second verse is dedicated to the men
 More concerned with his rims and his Tims than his women
 Him and his men come in the club like hooligans
 Don't care who they offend popping yang like you got yen
 Let's not pretend, they wanna pack pistol by they waist men
 Crystal by the case men, still in they mother's basement
 The pretty face men, claiming that they did a bid men
 Need to take care of their three and four kids then
 They facing a court case when the child's support late
 Money taking, heart breaking now you wonder why women hate men
 The sneaky silent men, the punk domestic violence men
 The quick to shoot the semen stop acting like boys and be men
 How you gon' win when you ain't right within
 How you gon' win when you ain't right within
 How you gon' win when you ain't right within
 Uh uh Come again
 Yo yo Come again, brethren come again, sistren come again, come again
 Watch out watch out, look out look out,
 Watch out watch out, look out look out.
 Girls you know you better watch out
 Some guys, some guys are only about
 That thing, that thing, that thing
 That thing, that thing, that thing
 Guys you know you better watch out
 Some girls, some girls are only about
 That thing, that thing, that thing
 That thing, that thing, that thing

“Anaconda” by Nicki Minaj (2014)

My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't
 My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun
 Boy toy named Troy used to live in Detroit
 Big, big, big money, he was gettin' some coins
 Was in shootouts with the law, but he live in a palace
 Bought me Alexander McQueen, he was keeping me stylish
 Now that's real, real, real
 One in my purse, 'cause I came dressed to kill
 Who wanna go first? I had 'em pushing daffodils
 I'm fly as hell, I got 'em thirsty, track and field
 I'm on some dumb sh-
 By the way, what he say?
 He can tell I ain't missing no meals
 Come through and check him in my automobile
 Let him - with his grills, he keep tellin' me to chill
 He keep telling me it's real, that he love my sex appeal
 He say don't like 'em boney, he want something he can grab
 So I pulled up in the Jag', and I hit him with the jab like
 Dun-d-d-dun-dun-d-d-dun-dun
 My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't
 My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt

Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 (Look at her butt)
 Look at, look at, look at
 Look, at her butt
 This-This dude named Michael used to ride motorcycles
 It's bigger than a tower, I ain't talking about Eiffel's
 Real country Anaconda, let me play with his rifle
 P-P-Put his butt to sleep, now he calling me NyQuil
 Now that bang, bang, bang
 I let him hit it 'cause he hang, hang, hang
 All in his- like his name Romaine
 And when we done, I make him buy me Balmain
 I'm on some dumb sh-
 By the way, what he say?
 He can tell I ain't missing no meals
 Come through and check him in my automobile
 Let him - with his grills, he keep tellin' me to chill
 He keep telling me it's real, that he love my sex appeal
 He say don't like 'em boney, he want something he can grab
 So I pulled up in the Jag', and I hit him with the jab like
 Dun-d-d-dun-dun-d-d-dun-dun
 My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't
 My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 (Look at her butt)
 Look at, look at, look at
 Look, at her butt
 Little in the middle but she got much back
 Little in the middle but she got much back
 Little in the middle but she got much back
 (Oh my God, look at her butt)
 My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't
 My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun
 Don't, my anaconda don't
 Don't want none unless you got buns, hun
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 Oh my gosh, look at her butt
 (Look at her butt)
 Look at, look at, look at
 Look, at her butt
 Yeah, he love this fat a-, hahaha!
 Yeah, this one is for my b- with a fat a- in the f- club
 I said, where my fat a- big b- in the club?
 F- the skinny b-, f- the skinny b- in the club
 I wanna see all the big fat a- b- in the m- club
 F- you if you skinny b-, what? Kyuh
 Haha, haha, rrrrrr
 Yeah, I got a big fat-
 Come on
 Hey
 Hey
 Hey

“WAP” By Cardi B Featuring Megan Thee Stallion (2020)

Whores in this house
There's some whores in this house
There's some whores in this house
There's some whores in this house (hol' up)
I said certified freak, seven days a week
Wet ass pussy, make that pullout game weak, woo! (Ah)
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah, you fucking with some wet ass pussy
Bring a bucket and a mop for this wet ass pussy
Give me everything you got for this wet ass pussy
Beat it up, nigga, catch a charge
Extra large, and extra hard
Put this pussy right in yo' face
Swipe your nose like a credit card
Hop on top, I want a ride
I do a kegel while it's inside
Spit in my mouth, look at my eyes
This pussy is wet, come take a dive
Tie me up like I'm surprised
Let's role-play, I wear a disguise
I want you to park that big Mack truck right in this little garage
Make it cream, make me scream
Out in public, make a scene
I don't cook, I don't clean
But let me tell you, I got this ring (ayy, ayy)
Gobble me, swallow me, drip down the side of me (yeah)
Quick, jump out 'fore you let it get inside of me (yeah)
I tell him where to put it, never tell him where I'm 'bout to be
I run down on him 'fore I have a nigga running me
Talk yo' shit, bite your lip
Ask for a car while you ride that dick (while you ride that dick)
You ain't never gotta fuck him for a thing
He already made his mind up 'fore he came
Now get your boots and your coat for this wet ass pussy
He bought a phone just for pictures of this wet ass pussy
Pay my tuition just to kiss me on this wet ass pussy
Now make it rain if you wanna see some wet ass pussy
Look, I need a hard hitter, I need a deep stroke
I need a Henny drink, I need a weed smoker
Not a garden snake, I need a king cobra
With a hook in it, hope it lean over
He got some money, then that's where I'm headed
Pussy A-1, just like his credit
He got a beard, well, I'm tryna wet it
I let him taste it, and now he diabetic
I don't wanna spit, I wanna gulp
I wanna gag, I wanna choke
I want you to touch that lil' dangly thing that swing in the back of my throat
My head game is fire, punani Dasani
It's going in dry, and it's coming out soggy
I ride on that thing like the cops is behind me (yuh, ah)
I spit on his mic' and now he tryna sign me, woo
Your honor, I'm a freak bitch, handcuffs, leashes
Switch my wig, make him feel like he cheating
Put him on his knees, give him some' to believe in
Never lost a fight, but I'm looking for a beating

In the food chain, I'm the one that eat ya
 If he ate my ass, he's a bottom feeder
 Big D stand for big demeanor
 I could make ya bust before I ever meet ya
 If it don't hang, then he can't bang
 You can't hurt my feelings, but I like pain
 If he fuck me and ask, "Whose is it?"
 When I ride the dick, I'ma spell my name, ah
 Yeah, yeah, yeah
 Yeah, you fucking with some wet ass pussy
 Bring a bucket and a mop for this wet ass pussy
 Give me everything you got for this wet ass pussy
 Now from the top, make it drop, that's some wet ass pussy
 Now get a bucket and a mop, that's some wet ass pussy
 I'm talking WAP, WAP, WAP, that's some wet ass pussy
 Macaroni in a pot, that's some wet ass pussy, huh
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores in this house
 There's some whores-

“I Love It” By Kanye West and Lil Pump (2019)

'Cause you know in the old days they couldn't say the shit they wanted to say
 They had to fake orgasms and shit
 We can tell niggas today, "Hey, I wanna cum, mothafucka"
 You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (I love it)
 You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (I love it)
 You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it
 (Love it, love it) (I'ma fuck a bitch, tell her cousin)
 Your boyfriend is a dork, McLovin (dork, McLovin, ooh, ooh, ooh)
 I just pulled up in a Ghost (Ghost)
 Fucked that bitch up out in London (up out in)
 Then I fucked up on her cousin
 Or her sister, I don't know nothin' (uh-uh, woo)
 And my niggas gettin' ignorant
 Like a lighter, bitch, we ignorant (ignant, yeah)
 All this water on my neck
 Look like I fell when I went fishin' (fell)
 So much diamonds on my bust down
 Ooh, fuck, what's the time? (where we at?)
 Me and Smokepurpp sippin' drank (aye!)
 Ooh, fuck, she take lines (lines)
 You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (scoop!) (I love it)
 You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (I love it)
 You're such a fuckin' ho
 When the first time they ask you if you want sparklin' or still?
 Why you try to act like you was drinkin' sparklin' water 'fore you came out here?
 You're such a fuckin' h—

I'm a sick fuck, I like a quick fuck (whoop!)
I'm a sick fuck, I like a quick fuck (whoop!)
I'm a sick fuck, I like a quick fuck (whoop!)
I'm a sick fuck, I like a quick fuck (whoop!)
I'm a sick fuck, I like a quick fuck
I like my dick sucked, I'll buy you a sick truck
I'll buy you some new tits, I'll get you that nip-tuck
How you start a family? The condom slipped up
I'm a sick fuck, I'm inappropriate
I like hearin' stories, I like that ho shit
I wanna hear mo' shit, I like the ho shit
Send me some mo' shit, you triflin' ho bitch (bitch, bitch, bitch)
You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (I love it)
You're such a fuckin' ho, I love it (I love it)
'Cause you know in the old days they couldn't say the shit they wanted to say
They had to fake orgasms and shit
We can tell niggas today, "Hey, I wanna cum, mothafucka"