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“The Misogynistic World Of Hip Hop”

Hip Hop. A powerhouse genre. A genre that sometimes can combine other genres of music' elements and make that one perfect song that can connect with anybody and also everybody. For as long as I remember Hip Hop has been my happy place. In my point of view the way artists like Kendrick Lamar, or Biggie Smalls rapped relatable lyrics with a mixture of close hitting stories equated to poetry. They did it all and more over a soothing, cool beat. Hip Hop is like crack to me. It combines elements of storytelling while making you feel so much more than what a story can tell you. The creativity-driven side of me loves everything regarding Hip Hop for its artistic ways but the feminist side sees an ongoing problem. The feminist side of me sees a flaw in the whole concept of the “freely (saying what you want) expressive” aspect of creating a rap. We as a society are guilty of turning a blind eye to the ongoing sexism and exploitation of women that is blatantly displayed in Hip Hop. You see, I love Hip Hop but does Hip Hop love me? Hip hop was born on the whole purpose of unifying people and bringing a different perspective to an issue. But now as I dig deeper into the world of hip hop, I have discovered-a very ugly side to the culture aligned with it. And it all comes down to one ugly word: misogyny. Misogyny casts and continues to cast an ugly glow over male Hip Hop, while working hand in hand with sexism. But why and how it came about? Is there anyone being affected by this? Who and maybe what is behind all this?

Part 1: General Analysis

History & Social Impact

Hoe. Thot. Bitch. Gold digger. Cheater. Words like that are becoming more and more commonly used in Hip Hop. Words that are now used to represent me and/or describe me. A woman. In specific and more socially aware terms, a black woman. The first time I heard those words used in a song I liked I ignored it. I considered the lyric as just the rapper expressing themselves and describing what they thought of a woman they knew or was involved with. But then it showed up in more and more songs I like disguised behind iconic lyrics and hard-hitting beats. It was then I realized I couldn't escape it. Turns out it wasn't just an issue in my generation, but been around for past ones too. "2 Live Crew" started the misogynistic lyrics upon the debut of their first album, "As Nasty As They Wanna Be". The controversy behind their lyrical content grew substantially. Their music video sparked more fire for the depiction of girls shaking their butts, grinding, and giving the innuendo of sex. It is here where they claim Hip Hop's exploitation of women really began. Women from then that were involved in anything Hip Hop had a negative image shed on them. It was mostly due to the sexually explicit lyrics that male rappers now used to sell their albums and the videos showcasing them. A present time example is Ugly God's song "I'm Tryna Fuck" where he raps "Bitch you better twerk or I'm snitching that you're cheating/Bitch I wanna see a show, throw that neck and show some cleavage". A music video example is Nelly's video for "Tip Drill" that was filled with women in bikini's grinding. The use of women and their bodies being showcased as talent in Hip Hop and

not their minds wasn't just a new thing. But some of the blame for sexual exploitation falls heavily on ideals that have been there since the dawn of time: sexism and the effects of it.

Sexism is an ideal defined as men are seen as part of a superior gender and are of more importance than women due to how strong and structured they may seem. "The term emerged from the "second wave" feminism of the 1960s and 80s" (Masequesmay 1). Society falls very guilty of degrading women who freely and unapologetically sexually express themselves. It's deemed not appropriate but men who display women as sexual objects are given glory. For example, rapper Megan Thee Stallion, a 21yo college graduate from Miami, FL, with her lyrics from her song Captain Hook, "Dance on the d--k, now, you been served/ I like a d--k with a little bit of curve/ Hit this p---y with an uppercut/ Call that n---a Captain Hook". People refer to the song as disgusting and label her a whore. Some even judged Megan for always wearing revealing outfits. Unfairly, people had a different reaction when they hear, Cash Money Records biggest star, Lil Wayne, make a song about sex -- "But man, I ain't never seen an ass like hers....That pussy in my mouth had me lost for words"; Wayne's song got him a hit on Billboard charts culminating in a Grammy award. Even though these incidents are years apart from each other it shows certain beliefs that never left: the only way women can be seen in a sexual way or expressive of their sexuality is if they are exploited by men. It is also connected with a long acknowledged mindset of women having to be seen as desirable for men or they are of value. This mindset and sexism, in general, is a pure product of misogyny which is the dislike of, contempt for or ingrained prejudice against women. The problem is not the rap videos with beautiful women simply being beautiful, the problem is the lack of content expressing that women can be other things beside beautiful.

Sexism also rears its ugly head when it comes to a long Hip Hop tradition of men being tasked with deciding if aspiring female rappers are worthy of a seat at the table in the Hip Hop world. Even when women are shown through history of being capable of holding their own. For example, during the 70s women were known for combining Jamaican deejaying remix skills with African American and Latinidad vernacular poetry at parties in the South Bronx with roles as DJs which contributed greatly to Hip Hop culture. Additionally, they headlined and were emcees of their own groups like Sherri Sher's Mercedes Ladies and female solo rappers like Sha Rock. Although all this happened they still to this day have to acquire the male approval stamp in order to get fame. A prime example of this is 37 year old Queens rapper Nicki Minaj and her male dominated music label Young Money. Nicki rose to fame and was signed to Young Money mostly due to her connection to Lil Wayne and Drake, a well known Grammy award winning rapper. Both male rappers who featured her on their songs which gave rise to her career. Sadly, Nicki isn't the only aspiring female rapper who laid victim to this tradition. It happened in the past with Biggie Smalls and Lil Kim, a veteran female rapper. Lil Kim notably, due to the pressure of being desirable with her public career, bleached her skin and got plastic surgery to appear more white since her dark skin wasn't seen as attractive. Also it was the case with Remy Ma and the Terror Squad. Moreover, Rick Ross's comments about how signing a female rapper would be a bad business move further cosigns the fact that women aren't taken seriously when they are shown as artists. He backs his view by saying he would be so focused on her good looks that he would have to fuck her a few times. Once again demeaning them to being noted as "eye candy".

Another product of sexism is the notion the Hip Hop culture pushes that there can only be one woman shown on top in Hip Hop. Women and others are trained into a mindset that there is a spot for only one woman on top in Hip Hop as the industry is mostly dominated and controlled by men. This is proven in the case of two female rappers Cardi B and Nicki Minaj. “Bodak Yellow”, the only song to top the Billboard charts by a female artist in 19 years. A remix that became a go-to Instagram caption and Snapchat sing along. One of the many songs that challenge Hip Hop’s views on silent but sexy women with it's raucy, powerful, sexually expressive lyrics and feel good beat. Two years ago when Cardi B came on the scene, it seemed like even early on in her career people were comparing her to another chart-topping female rapper named Nicki Minaj. There were many discussions on social media on who was better, how Cardi was now the new queen of rap, etc. In the midst of all of this, it made me wonder: Why there had to be one queen? And why did they have to compare the two of them? I mean there have been feuds in Hip Hop before like Meek Mill and Drake where Meek Mill accused Drake of using a ghostwriter for his songs but this whole felt different. Maybe because this feud wasn’t based around lyrical skills like most male Hip Hop artists but the blame is put on the Internet. The Internet is to blame with it's false generated narratives and “truths” and their overanalyzation of the ladies’ lyrics and motivations. People put an up and coming rapper against a veteran just because they shared a gender and race. Some might say the Hip Hop culture’s lack of accessibility to women and the history of women being pit against each other at the expense of men is to blame. If there wasn’t such little space and so much male approval that women had to attain in Hip Hop maybe Nicki wouldn't have felt threatened enough to throw a shoe at Cardi during New York Fashion Week. Maybe Cardi wouldn't have initiated a fight believing rumors

that Nicki talked bad about her child. And maybe if we as a society didn't have such a bad reputation of pitting women against each other i.e. reality tv shows like "Love and Hip Hop" showcasing women almost every episode fighting with each other over a man or with magazines praising one body type over another. Maybe it would have been easier for these women to not fall victim to the false narratives being put out. Instead maybe they would have been friendly towards one another, acknowledging the beauty in having two women on top of the hip hop music charts crushing their male counterparts.

Discourse Community

A discourse community that can be connected to this genre is the community known as video vixens. Video vixens are known as the beautiful women showcased in the male rap videos. They primarily communicated by meeting on video sets and from there exchanging contact info so they could share between each other opportunities to be in other music videos. They also can be found on social media. In the early 2000s, they were also shown as a symbol of confidence and beauty with the array of body types and skin tones they had. They didn't fit the image of the girls shown on the covers of Cosmo but they still made sure they were unforgettable with their irresistible attitudes. Most of them were women of color and them being shown in that light pushed forward a total makeover of the music video industry. More thought was put into music videos because of them and therefore due to the music videos being more detailed and aesthetically pleasing made the CD sales grew higher. This paved the way for them to live a more lavish lifestyle. That was all in the past though, Fast forward to 2018 with CD sales less and streaming becoming a more active thing; smaller budgets were given to music videos and

now also to video vixens. The whole image of video vixens was now transformed. The goal amongst this community was to be shown as a mirror of self love for women of color who don't normally see themselves in mainstream media but now the capitalist approach to find these beauties tainted it. To find video vixens now directors go to strip clubs or look to "insta baddies", that is women with a huge following on Instagram mostly for being pretty, to be in music videos. They weren't like before making women go through interviews evaluating their personas in order to be cast in music videos but instead inviting women to be in music videos just based on their bodies further spurring the objectification of them. Body positivity became a thing of the past with rappers choosing to glorify one specific body type (curvy and petite with a big ass and boobs) in their videos over the others. So now to communicate outside the community and get jobs in order to still be a part of the community, video vixens and aspiring ones were forced to make social media accounts. They are forced to upload pictures of their body and pictures that exaggerate their beauty in hopes to be seen as desirable enough to be contacted by a director, producer or manager in charge of a video. They also were falling to the effects of sexism. Video vixens now go from in the early 2000s being paid \$10,000 per video to making less than \$500. Additionally the language used by the video vixens changed. More commonly now they didn't have actual speaking roles instead used their bodies to communicate an idea or even get a job. Now in videos vixens were forced to play second best and do certain moves to shine light on the rapper. Women were once again being designated as disposable sex objects, hypersexualized with less clothing on and erotic portrayal.

Part 2: Focused Analysis

Rules & Message

In regards to the article “When Misogyny Masquerades as Entertainment: Looking at Today’s Rap & Hip Hop” by Neha Makkapati. She expresses the same frustration as me. She wonders like me why it is so easy for men in hip hop to sexualize women. The intended audience of the article by Makkapati are maybe people who once like me saw the very sexist lyrics as just words and now want change. She communicates this by ending the article saying “By listening to these artists, I am not supporting rappers’ misogyny. Instead, I hope and advocate for change while still appreciating rap music as my favorite genre”. The message of this text and example is to highlight the causes (or some of the self proclaimed rules of male hip hop) and effects of the microaggressions towards women in hip hop. The constraints involved seem to be the people that continue to ignore the issue of women being exploited in Hip Hop. The importance to me was that it helped answer some of the questions I had about the rules and message of Hip Hop. She claimed it had to do with a cycle which I’ll later go more into depth about and which made me think about the dangerous effects. The importance it has to society is it shows to them the toxic reasoning behind their exploitation so they can help stop it while also resonating with a lot of people’s thoughts about it.

One cause for the microaggression can be the enforcement of hypermasculinity.

Hypermasculinity refers to having characteristics such as (1) the view of violence as manly, (2) the perception of danger as exciting and sensational, and (3) callous behavior toward women and

an regard toward emotional displays as feminine. There is a cycle (or things that can be associated as rules to dominate charts in the hip hop world) attributed to Hip Hop for men that are given to them from young. Men from a young age were taught to feel powerful that you must have the most women, money, and drugs. The cycle/rules stems from hypermasculinity and continues as men try to fit in with others or follow the rules. This cycle is why they treat women as a marginality in the world of rap and also use their bars to designate women as such. In rap, Rappers use bars or lines to express how they are feeling. It's like poetry or even writing a story except a story for a rapper can be written as a verse and is composed of bars. A bar is basically described as the lyrics of a rapper. A rule in Hip Hop is lyrics describing the violence, and mistreatment of women are ok because this is what Hip Hop grew up on. It's been present in rap songs since the dawn of time and cosigned by rap legend Snoop Dog who told Sky News, "he has "no regrets" over his previous lyrics because "that was how [he] was trained when [he] first started". Snoop Dogg is referring to his own past lyrics on the song "Bitches Aint Shit" where he said, "B*tches aint sh*t but h*es and tricks / L*ck on these n*ts and s*ck the d*ck / Get the f*ck out after you're done / And I hop in my ride to make a quick run.". Hypermasculinity, these vulgar words and encouragement of violence words towards women in Hip Hop gives leeway to the same energy in real life towards them. For example Fairly new rappers such as 22 year old Kodak Black and fallen rapper Xxxtentacion with the incidents of abuse they have with women in their own lives. And it doesn't help that through all of this they still maintain large fan bases and billions of streams.

Another cause for the microaggression can be the rule and fact that rap composed of talks of sex, money, drugs and violence are more inclined to sell. "Sex, money, drugs, and violence sells and these artists know that" stated a insider named Wendy Day, who runs an advocacy group that tries to educate rappers about the hip hop business. "There's some law... They say after 500,000 [CDs], you're selling to a whole different realm. Now you are selling records to young white boys. I think once the corporations understood that, that was their time to come in and take control of it. Once the control was taken away, then came all of the nonsense" (V. Jones D1). These examples show the same message: what drives the music industry is the idea of sex, drugs, money and violence even at the expense of women. Women wearing tight, revealing clothing in videos, women twerking, displays of women half naked on on music covers, all of them are pushed on by the music industry. You see, music labels are commonly influenced by white men who own record labels and they are the ones who push an agenda that many artists cosign in order to get what they know many artists strive for: drugs, money, and women. So of course, to make themselves money and also their clients, the rappers, money they push them also to rap about a certain lifestyle that they know most young men strive for. They also take the fact that young white boys may know nothing about a certain lifestyle rappers of growing up in poverty rappers talk about may be even more attracted to the music. An example of going this lifestyle really does sell can be pulled from Roddy Rich's The Box, where he raps "Pullin' out the coupe at the lot, Told 'em "Fuck 12, fuck SWAT, Bustin' all the bales out the box, I just hit a lick with the box, Had to put the stick in a box, mm, Pour up the whole damn seal, I'ma get lazy, I got the mojo-deals, we been trappin' like the '80's, She sucked a nigga soul, got the Cash App". It debuted at number 3 on the Hot 100 and Billboard reports that Ricch's track racked up

68.2 million weekly streams, the highest nonseasonal stream total since Lil Nas X's almighty "Old Town Road" last summer. This song discussing a distaste for law enforcement with the line "fuck 12, fuck swat", "pouring up the whole damn seal imma get lazy" indicating the use of codeine cough syrup as drug use to sedate him and once again using connecting women to sexual visions this time oral sex: "she sucked a nigga soul" did overwhelmingly well. So it goes to say that the more you rap about gun, drugs, money, sex and violence the more likely you will attain fame and more higher your song will land on the charts thus more money you will make off of it. It also gives you power which is another thing men love. The main message of all these examples are the same: Male Hip Hop artists create an environment of degradation for women due to the enforcements of certain ideals set as rules around them.

All in all, over the years my love for hip hop continues to grow and expand to other artists. But the whole culture as a woman feels very dehumanizing and unfair. Women are more than just objects. They have emotions, feelings, dreams, and personas. I am thankful for women artists like Megan, Cardi B, and Nicki Minaj paving the way for women artists to be able to freely express their sexuality in a genre that mostly focuses on the men. These artists are like saying with their lyrics that you may treat us as objects but we have a depth to us too. And as more and more songs embracing that environment are being made more people became in a way desensitized to it. They saw these lyrics as normal. They also adopted these words into their everyday vocab referring to women now as bitches. Moreover young girls are now citing these same degrading songs as their favorites and it really shouldn't be this way. Future aspiring rappers shouldn't think or get discouraged thinking they have to work twice as hard for a spot in

the Hip Hop community. This topic was interesting to research. I'm a womanist so I always found it interesting to dive deeper into issues that affect women. This research essay changed my view on Hip Hop and actually had me thinking of making a special social media account or blog to bring awareness to this issue. At times I found myself going off track of the guidelines of this topic but it's only because there are so many underlying issues and perspectives surrounding this time. I found it kind of my job to make sure all of it was covered so someone who may read this can develop a properly backed argument. Hip Hop may not exactly love me yet but I'm hopeful with investigations like these in the future it will have way more love and respect for women like me.

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