

Rap and Misogyny

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Rap music is one of the most famous genres of music out there today, becoming somewhat of a staple since its rise in the 1970's, with adolescents to adults listening, enjoying, and creating it just the same. The genre has gained remarkable popularity and influence. But for a genre of music that has such a huge impact on society and culture, especially the influence that it has on the younger audience and their attitudes, rap music contains many topics that are seen by the general public as negative, such as drugs, violence, and gangs. Perhaps, however, the biggest issue presented in rap music is its notorious reputation for its role in the objectification and belittlement of women, or misogyny, whose very definition is simply a hatred or prejudice against women. The misogyny in rap leads to many issues and concerns, such as belittling women through the choice of words used to describe them which influences the male perception of women, aids in promoting unrealistic body standards, and undermining a woman's role in society to that of only existing for a man. With this, comes the rise of female rappers, such as Lil Kim, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion, fighting against misogyny and working to reclaim their sexuality through their music, and fighting for the empowerment of women around the world.

To begin analyzing the misogyny contained in rap music, the first thing one should look at is simply the choice of words used to describe women in many of the most popular rap songs out there, and the impact these words have on individuals. These words are anything but positive, including, but most definitely not limited to, words such as "hoe", "slut", "bitch", "whore". The sheer derogation showcased in these words, the verbal abuse, is perceived by many as a completely normal, day-to-day thing, and many would most likely be almost disappointed if songs didn't feature these derogatory terms or explicitness. According to Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) "Producers not only encourage artists to become "hardcore" but also reject or marginalize artists who go against the grain. As a result of such practices, a directly proportional

relationship has developed between rap music's explicitness and the sale of its records" (p.2).

The normalcy of this verbal abuse, and rappers being urged to do so, contributes to how the male audience perceives women. In the song "Ain't No Fun (If the Homies Can't Have None)" Snoop Dogg (1993) raps, "Pass it to the homie, now you hit it/ Couse she ain't nothin but a bitch to me/ And y'all know, that bitches ain't shit to me/ I gives a fuck, why don't y'all pay attention/ Approach it with a different proposition, I'm Kurupt/ Hoe you'll never be my only one, trick ass bitch." Throughout the song, Snoop Dogg, along with the featured artists Nate Dogg, Warren G, and Kurupt, continue to paint an image of this woman as being a thing that him and his "homies" pass around for sex. The descriptions of women in most rap music are perhaps the greatest example of the issue of sexism in today's age.

With the profanity used in describing women in rap comes perhaps a bigger issue caused by this misogyny, which is the creation of unrealistic body standards in women. Tune in to any rap song and there is a 100% chance that you will hear commentary about women's bodies. Most rap songs include the portrayal of women with a small waist, big breasts, and a big bottom as the ideal woman. Women are exposed to the media and music constantly telling them what they should look like, portraying a body type that is most appealing to the male gaze. "In fact, girls with high media exposure are more likely to be dissatisfied with their body image and be more pressured to form their bodies into the "perfect" image" (Gilbert, 2016, p. 2). Today, we see a drastic rise in women getting surgical procedures, such as breast augmentation, liposuction, or buttock augmentation, in order to achieve the ideal. Young girls, and really women of any age, develop a very low self-esteem, a diminished positive view of oneself, and decreased sense of self because of this. With this also comes the glamorization of dressing a certain way, predominantly in a very provocative fashion in order to gain male attention. In the video "Dance

(A\$\$)” Big Sean (2011) there are half naked women, including the female artist Nicki Minaj, dancing around Big Sean as he raps lines such as “I got girlies half naked that shit look like the grotto/ How your waist anorexic and then your ass is colossal/ Drop that ass make it boomerang.” The glamorization of a specific body type, especially considering the great influence it has on one’s confidence, is exceptionally harmful towards women.

The misogyny contained in rap music doesn’t just belittle women or tell them what to look like, but it plays a role in essentially dehumanizing women, portraying them as objects with no other role in society but to serve the man, often in a violent way. Women are referred to as “gold diggers” only after the money and lifestyle of these rappers, and in turn they reiterate that this gives them the right to treat women as nothing but an object with the sole purpose of their personal satisfaction. Women are not depicted as intelligent or capable, but rather as they have no value or opportunities without a man, making them seen fragile and the entire concept fetishized. Hegemonic masculinity is a common theme across rap music, which essentially institutes that the masculine is dominant and needs to portray masculine qualities. As stated by Baker-Kimmons and McFarland (2011), “Women are common currency in the rhetorics of masculinity expressed in many all-male settings. Rappers and other men are able to show how masculine they are by distancing themselves from femininity. They claim to be the opposite of women, not emotionally attached to women, and more aggressive than women” (p.339). These men view themselves as more powerful, having no feminine qualities, an asserted dominance over women, insinuating that because of their status, connections, capability to provide for women, and their lack of showcasing emotions, they have full control over the women they associate with. The desire to be seen as “macho”, a “pimp”, or a “hustler” rules over morals, especially those concerning women and how they should be treated. This has proven to be

increasingly harmful in society, as many rap songs showcase this in a violent way towards women, often sharing disturbing stories of real occurrences such as the attempt to ruin women's lives, sexual assault, and physical abuse, such as the powerful, yet wildly disturbing, message showcased in the song "Dance with the Devil" Immortal Technique (2001) where he raps, "She struggled hard but they forced her to go up the stairs/ They got to the roof and then held her down to the ground/ Screaming, "Shut the fuck up" and "Stop moving around"/ The shirt covered her face but she screamed to the clouds." In this song, Immortal Technique is telling a story of a character named William, or "Billy", and his main concerns of making money and gaining the respect "in the eyes of his crew", wanting to be seen as a hustler and powerful, prove his dominance/masculinity, since a young age because of the things he was exposed to, and telling the lengths he was willing to go to in order to do so, such as sell drugs, murder, and sexually assault women. The gender roles and dehumanization of women shown in rap music are immensely disturbing and wrong, and influence society in a wildly inappropriate way.

The misogyny in rap music, while prevailing, has often been challenged by women in the rap scene reclaiming their sexuality and empowering other women. These female rappers, including Lil Kim, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion, break down barriers and create success in the industry, serving as role models and inspiration to challenge the ideas of a male dominated field by fully embracing their femininity, sexuality, and proving their independence. Lil Kim's role in feminism in rap is a prominent one, as she was among the first female rappers to actually speak on female desires and their pleasure, rather than the more common showcasing of the desires and views of men. Along with Lil Kim, the rapper Cardi B is a very popular, more recent, feminist icon in the rap industry. In "Bodak Yellow" Cardi B (2018) raps, "I be in and out them banks so much/ I know they're tired of me/ Honestly, don't give a fuck 'bout who ain't fond of

me/ Dropped two mixtapes in six months/ What bitch working as hard as me?” Throughout her entire discography, Cardi B raps lyrics that portray the message of her being independent, both financially and sexually, and tears down the common message in rap music that women need men to achieve anything in life, constantly empowering other women to do the same and not look for validation or base one’s self- esteem on what the male dominated media depicts. She often shares stories about her past and how she got to where she is now. According to Williams (2017), “Cardi B is a multimedia entertainer with a prominent presence on reality television, social media and in hip hop. On those multiple platforms Cardi B shreds the same web by being authentic and true to herself, her past, and all of her identities. In media interviews and on Love & Hip Hop Cardi B owns and discusses her past employment in strip clubs without shame” (p.1116). Cardi B works to redefine feminism so that women from all backgrounds and walks of life can reclaim their power without being ridiculed for it. Another female rapper known for her empowerment of women is Megan Thee Stallion. Megan made the term “hot girl” popular through her songs, one which empowers women and serves to boost their confidence, a term which she herself defined as “being a Hot Girl is about being unapologetically YOU, having fun, being confident, living YOUR truth, being the life of the party, etc.” These female rappers, among a multitude of others, work to redefine rap culture and its inherently misogynistic views.

Overall, misogyny in rap is a very prominent issue that we face. It degrades women and serves as a major influence to many all over the world in regards to their views of women. Misogyny includes the profanity that is used to describe women in rap songs and its impact on peoples’ interactions with women, creates a lowering self-esteem in women across the globe due to its idealization of body types, and, to put it plainly, dehumanizes women and creates a toxic masculinity in the world of rap. The effects that the objectification occurring in most rap songs

has on society are most negative and violent altering of people's perception of women and femininity. The genre, however, includes many prominent female rappers who embrace their sexuality and reclaim it, using these misogynistic views in a way that completely tears them down. These female rappers include Lil Kim, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion, who's work serves as a source of empowerment for women everywhere.

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