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### **Bitches Ain't Shit, But Hoes and Tricks**

The 'rap' genre's success and rampant spread throughout western culture can be summarized by the very nature of the title I've given this essay—a common occurrence, a catchy line of cadence with brutal and unabashed sexism. As a society, we've become desensitized to these sexist messages, which are both ambiguously and blatantly connoted in the lyrics. Today's rap is filled with representations of women through which they are sexualized, objectified, and, in some cases, physically harmed. The quintessential problem presented is not only the objectification of the physical attributes of females but also of their character and personality. The rapper refers to a female's character and existence as an object that demands ownership and obedience, where she has no role in this world beyond what the rapper infers. This misogynistic portrayal of women is very evident in popular music and has particularly become a defining attribute in the genre of rap. Through the suggestions of words and imagery in rap lyrics and music videos, the bodies and personalities of females are exploited, belittled, and sexualized by male and female rappers. Many factors contribute to this problem, affecting the mainstream and particularly the youth consuming this media.

Misogyny and inequality between men and women have plagued society throughout history. Dr. Mel Konner, a researcher in anthropology and human nature, defines misogyny, sexism, and chauvinism as a singular entity. Although the stringent dictionary definitions of each term give slightly different meanings, they all describe “ideologies and methods for controlling,

restricting, suppressing, denigrating, and when necessary physically harming women so that men can be in charge of their reproductive capacities, limit [women] mainly to reproductive and other subservient roles, and avoid competing with them in an open market of human effort, talent, and skill” (Konner). Throughout this research paper, I will be using these terms interchangeably to characterize and express these harmful and negative attitudes and behaviors of both men and women towards women.

Although many artists in other genres also promote sexism and gender inequalities, rap artists tend to do it more viciously, frequently, and bluntly. I will use Billboard’s rankings for Top Selling Rap Albums in 2013 to provide examples of the most popular, contemporary hip hop artists that are capable of reaching the largest audiences worldwide. Billboard uses the sales data of albums compiled by Nielsen Soundscan, a music data company, to rank the highest selling rap albums in present day. Based on these popularity rankings, I have selected three male artists who clearly exemplify the misogyny that exists within the rap genre: 2 Chainz; Juicy J; and Tyler, the Creator. I will not only be looking at lyrics of one of their most popular songs but also at the music videos that accompany those songs, including Juicy J’s “Bandz a Make Her Dance,” 2 Chainz’s “Birthday Song,” and Tyler, the Creator’s “Bitch Suck Dick.” I will also use an album entitled “Pink Friday” by Black female rapper Nicki Minaj, who has also occupied top spots on Billboard’s Hip Hop charts. Using her album, I will look at how women within the rap genre objectify their own bodies and characters.

There are many major institutions and social organizations that contribute to this sexist culture, which is externalized in the lyrics of rap music. In her study, Merideth Lavande connects the pornography industry to the increasing hypersexualization of females in music. The sexualization of performance by female artists themselves appears to be an act of empowerment

but instead “supports a larger media universe that directly profits from sales of adult entertainment products” (Lavande 314). This link supports the corporate control of female bodies in the media and the targeting of the music industry and its consumers by conglomerates with ties to the pornography market. In Lavande’s analysis, numerous large corporations that have an immense amount of power in the media use the performances of female musicians as a source of influence in popular culture; this is all due to the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which deregulated the limits of media ownership and thus allowed for the creation of these mega-media companies. This persisting hegemony leads to a problematic situation in which society feels it has control over what is shown in popular music. In reality, the large corporations are the ones that feed us sexualized imagery in hopes of boosting sales in other media, like pornography. This leads to a high level of female sexual objectification in music, which affects the millions of consumers exposed to these images.

In addition to the corporate interest in pornography, looking closely through a racial lens reveals the commodification of black sexuality. A feminist analysis by Guillermo Rebollo-Gil and Amanda Moras investigates how misogyny in rap music is not necessarily a gendered social issue but a political one. They argue that it is the music industry itself and the increased commercialization of music that produce this sexism (Moras and Rebollo-Gil 119). These assumptions about the cause of misogyny in rap music look to black men and ignore the agency and control of the music corporations that hold the power over these rappers—corporations consisting mostly of white men who control the boardrooms of the music industry. The authors argue that the “treatment of black sexuality plays an integral role in the racist power hierarchy” persisting in America today (121). They also argue that the “sexualized images of black women in Hip Hop must also be understood as a reflection of white patriarchal commodification of black

sexuality” and the “institutionalized images of blackness in the white imagination” (Moras and Rebollo-Gil 121, 130). The music industry, and hip hop in particular, is subject to the same institutionalized racist forces that exist in all other facets of our society. The use of black female bodies by music corporations exploits women for monetary gain and should be understood as a result of white patriarchal racism.

While the causes of female sexualization in rap music are somewhat surprising, the effects of exposure to the sexualized images and words seem to be consistent with our expectations. A study at a large Midwestern university investigates the effect of the sexual objectification of females on men’s sexual beliefs using a survey-based evaluation and statistical analysis. The authors note that the undergraduate male participants who watched music videos containing heavy sexual objectification of female artists “reported more adversarial sexual beliefs,” “more acceptance of interpersonal violence” and aggression toward women, and “more negative attitudes about sexual harassment” and the legitimization of harassing females when compared to their other male peers that were exposed to videos with less female sexual objectification (Aubrey, Hopper, and Mbure 360). According to the researchers, this is partly due to a media-priming effect on males, which associates women’s uses of their bodies to unfairly manipulate men—a “deeply entrenched cultural beliefs about women’s sexuality” among society (374). A fascinating point of this study is that in a content analysis of popular and recent music videos, female artists tend to objectify themselves more than male artists objectify females in their videos.

This study coincides with another experiment conducted at North Carolina University in 2007 in which Michael Cobb and William Boettcher analyzed the effects of misogyny in rap music. Male and female college-aged participants were separated into random groups: two

groups were exposed to either a song with extremely sexist hip hop lyrics by rap artist Eminem or to a song absent of sexist lyrics with a similar rhythm by the Beastie Boys, and one was a control group that was not exposed to any song. After an analysis of their survey data post-exposure, the researchers found that there is a positive correlation between listening to misogynistic rap lyrics and having sexist ideals (Cobb and Boettcher 3031). These negative effects stemming from exposure to sexual objectification of women show how harmful the lyrics can be for male rap music consumers and their ideologies.

The impressions of this sexual objectification on young women also have ramifications. Several associations have been uncovered in a study revealing the relationship between black media use and the African American adolescent girls' focus on beauty and appearance. The study shows how influential the media, and especially music and musicians, can be in the development of self-worth and body image for young girls (Gordon 254). The study also emphasizes how role models can be influential in the identity of young girls and their self-concept, especially for African-American adolescents. This focus on physical attractiveness, which is perpetuated by the popular music industry today, is extremely problematic for young people (Gordon 255). Female musicians promote sexual objectivity of their bodies, inhibiting the development of self-image and negatively impacting the ideologies of the young girls who identify with these female artists.

## **Lyrics**

### ***Sexual Objectification***

A close analysis of rap lyrics reveals the blatant sexist messages that exist within the artist's words. One of the most prevalent notions is the sexual objectification and

commodification of females. In one of 2 Chainz's most popular tracks "Birthday Song," he refers to female bodies as objects in various different ways. He begins the song by stating, "All I want for my birthday is a big booty ho," which displays the female as something that can be gifted, a coveted commodity. This implies that women merely exist to serve men as sexual beings and that they have little agency over their bodies. Neither their character nor any other facet of their personality is emphasized as important other than the necessity of having a large butt. This crops up in a later lyric when he refers to the same female, saying, "She got a big booty so I call her Big Booty." The idea that the sexualized butt is the only relevant part of her identity asserts that she is only good for providing sexual enjoyment for the male artist.

Tyler, The Creator's song "Bitch Suck Dick" intensely promotes females as sexual objects intended to fulfill the desires of males. One of the featured rappers of the song states, "Shut up bitch, suck my dick, you fuckin' bop, you better swallow it." By advocating the belittlement of her character and the silencing of her thoughts and opinions, the rapper reduces her primary function to an oral sexual act, which reiterates in such a simple line that females are to rappers merely a sexual being, a slave whose role in the relationship is to be a subordinate object for sexual pleasure. He then goes on to say, "Your bitch work for me, she my dick washer," implying his control over the woman and her body and her role as his personal oral sex provider. This mental and physical domination diminishes the female's control of her own body and her sexual partners. By making her sole role that of performing oral sex on the male, the female is limited to her body and is commoditized for the male and his desires.

### ***Violence Against Women***

Punching, beating, and even threats of gruesome murder toward women are shockingly all themes in hip hop, in which the physical assault and violent sexual crimes inflicted on women

have become commonplace. “I’m loud as fuck, I’m ignorant. Punch a bitch in her mouth just for talkin’ shit.” This lyric in “Bitches Suck Dick” by Tyler, the Creator demonstrates violence towards females and highlights gender inequalities that women face. Initially, Jasper, the featured rapper, implies that he is very vocal about topics of which he is ignorant. He then says that for something so small as speaking negatively about him, he will violently assault his female partner with no shame. This hypocrisy in which the rap artist would physically abuse the woman for sharing a negative opinion of him while he is proudly sharing his uneducated remarks is unacceptable and uncivilized. As a chauvinistic male, Jasper attempts to control this woman by punishing any attempt at challenging him and being an equal. To the rapper, she is viewed as a lesser human—her main role is to appease men, and any pursuit to combat this will result in violence against her.

Further in the song, Tyler himself raps in a way that is aggressive and explicitly violent to females. At the end of his second verse, the rapper asserts, “Gun to her head, your bitch massage my shoulders.” Here, Tyler physically threatens a female, referring to her as a “bitch” and saying he will kill her if she does not comply with his demands, almost as if she is enslaved as his property. He suggests that if she does not adhere to his requests, she will be punished by death.

### ***Derogatory Naming and Shaming***

Bitch, ho, slut, chickenhead, bopper—these are all common names used to describe women in rap lyrics. These derogatory words disparage and perpetuate misogynistic inequalities towards women. Most of these terms are rooted in the shaming of sexual promiscuity and prostitution, which is ironic considering the fact that most of these rappers sexually objectify the females in their music. In “Birthday Song,” 2 Chainz repeatedly refers to his desired woman as a

“big booty ho.” By using the term “ho,” he strips his respect for the woman and creates social inequality between them both. The assumed superiority of the male artist devalues the female and demotes her to a sheer submissive sexual object.

Juicy J’s song “Bandz a Make Her Dance” features Lil Wayne halfway through, in a verse detailing his extraordinary wealth and experiences with women—in this case, with the female strippers he is paying to dance for him. He raps, “I don’t tip, I pay bills, bitches call me Buffalo,” a creative reference to the football team Buffalo Bills. Referring to the dancers with such a demeaning term as “bitches” diminishes their worth as humans. He never discusses their character traits or identity outside of their occupation as entertainers, but rather he glorifies himself as the financial provider for said “bitches.” This shames the women in such a way that they are dehumanized, because their role shifts into one of being the center of entertainment for males. This offensive terminology also contributes to females as weak, pathetic, and powerless, and the male becomes idolized for supporting and holding power over these women with his financial support. The derogatory names used to target females by male rap artists demean and belittle these women, portraying them as subservient objects to men and as existing only for their pleasure and gratification alone.

## **Music Videos**

### ***Male Gaze***

According to Laura Mulvey, a certain gendered bias known as the “male gaze” persists in film. The male gaze is a concept describing how the camera is positioned by and for the heterosexual man, leading to sexist representations of women. As the female body becomes a passive object to the gaze, the male is promoted to the active gazer, and the female becomes



disenfranchised as a sexual object. In Juicy J's "Bandz a Make Her Dance" music video, which has more than 31 million views on YouTube, there are several images in which women are objects of the gaze. Using camera angles to project a male's perspective, women's bodies are commoditized and are reduced to an object of male desire. As they seductively sway and shake their butts, the male gaze actively weakens the female, diminishing her character so that her importance is centered on her body and its ability to provide pleasure for men.

This can also be seen in 2 Chainz's "Birthday Song" music video, in which a woman is shown laying on her stomach on top of the dinner table with people sitting around her and with the bottom half of her body covered in whipped cream and decorated like a cake. The way this scene is shot emphasizes her body as an object of seduction as the camera glides over her cake-like body. Not only is this female subjected to the male gaze because she is placed on the table for the heterosexual video viewer but also because she is a "treat" for those sitting around the table. Her association to food objectifies her even further and degrades her purpose to that of an item placed to titillate those watching her. This portrayal of women uses the camera to promote sexism and the idea that females exist for the heterosexual male viewer.

### ***Emphasis on Body Parts***

The focus on singular body parts of the female body such as her breasts or butt depreciates her value as a person and ignores her overall character. In the "Birthday Song" video, a woman is seen carrying a cake in the shape of a butt and is dressed in a thong, maximizing the sexualization of the female's butt. Later in the video, Kanye West appears alongside a cake decorated with large female breasts with prominent nipples. These isolated female body parts highlight how the female body is sexualized into a commodity for satisfying male desires. The body parts are detached from the whole female body, which dissociates the woman from her

character and any other talent or skill she may have and thus limiting the female to being a servant for men and as a sexualized object to be desired.

The video for “Bandz A Make Her Dance” also includes an attention to female body parts. In many of the scenes featuring stripping, the camera zooms in on the woman’s butt as she dances, providing nothing in the camera frame beside this image. By isolating her butt in the camera’s frame, this body part is sexualized and objectified, dissociating the butt from the rest of the woman’s identity as a whole person and diminishing her value to that of serving the male. This emphasizes the misogynistic view of women as sexual subjects who serve men and therefore invalidates her other abilities and any other roles she has as a human being.

### ***Women As Accessories and Decoration***

Rap music videos tend to use females as decoration, background, and accessories—such as with background dancers. This places the female in a less powerful position and decreases the importance of her existence. A scene from Tyler, the Creator’s “Bitches Suck Dick” video shows the rapper at the forefront with two women in the background wearing minimal clothing. They are not serving any purpose other than to dance and provide entertainment to those watching. In another scene these same two women are seen doing random stretches on either side of the featured rapper as he “instructs” a workout from the middle. The rapper does not engage the females, nor does he provide any eye contact or guidance. These women are used as accessories to the scene and have little purpose other than to be a source of amusement.

In the “Birthday Song” video, women are used as a decoration in a different way. Four women, in outfits accentuating the feminine aspects of their bodies, follow Kanye West around as he slowly rides a bike that tows the cake topped with breasts. The women surround him, yet they have no other function than to stand around Kanye and look pretty. Again, these women are

subjects to male desire and are commoditized. Their existence in the scene is limited to their physical appearance and their sexualized image, thus ignoring any other aspect to their being and demoting them to a mere sexual object.

### **Female Rap Artists**

Nikki Minaj is one of the most popular female rappers today and is a role model to girls around the world. Nicki conforms to common gender stereotypes by putting on a Barbie-like persona with a bright wig and hypersexualized costumes. The album cover for one of Nicki's most popular albums, "Pink Friday," accurately demonstrates this dramatic feminization. Her pink hair, hypersexualized outfit, and suggestive position lend to her objectification as a doll—something to be played with, a toy. By epitomizing female objectification, Nicki succumbs to racial stereotypes deeming black females as hypersexual commodities. This can have very harmful effects on young girls and can have a profound influence on their body image and self-concept. The stress on beauty that Nicki capitalizes on negatively encourages this same focus on appearance in young women today (Gordon).

### **Conclusion**

Hip-hop artists today use misogynistic themes in both their lyrics and videos that promote harmful gender inequalities and mistreatment of women. Within the raw words of the rap artists' lyrics, several themes present themselves, including blatant sexual objectification, the horrific and brutal violence against women, and derogatory naming and shaming. The imagery held within rap music videos also contributes to this greater problem through the use of the "male gaze," which emphasizes and isolates female body parts, and through decorating women as accessories. Through the scientific studies reported in this analysis, it is obvious how the sexist

messages in these words and images result in the increased prevalence of chauvinistic ideals in the mainstream population that consumes this music, as well as how this misogyny has negative consequences on the self-esteem and body image of young girls. The brutal attacks on and the shameless objectification of females advocated by both male and female hip-hop artists yield dangerous effects that should not be underestimated. These problematic depictions of women within rap music, and even in the music industry as whole, shed light on the greater issue at hand within our society—one of inequalities between men and women and one that gives value to a women based on her sex appeal and submission to men. These are the fundamental views engrained in our ideologies that have posed problems in the past and in the present and that will continue to be a threat in the future unless we progress into a society that upholds gender equality as an imperative social structure.

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