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Depiction of Women in Contemporary American Hip-hop Culture

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Abstract

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The thesis “Depiction of Women in Contemporary American Hip-hop Culture”, mainly focused on how female artists self-depict themselves and their bodies in this male dominated music industry over the past 20 years. This thesis connects both cultural studies of the tendencies in Hip-hop and rap and also literature analysis of rap lyrics and shows the progressions in the understanding of the concept of female body in this genre.

Anotace

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Bakalářská práce „Obraz ženství v současné americké hip-hopové kultuře“ se zaměřuje na práci ženských rapových interpretek a jejich zpracování tématiky ženského těla za posledních 20 let. Tato práce propojuje jak kulturní studia tendencí v hip-hopu a rapu, tak i literární analýzu rapových textů a zobrazuje vývoj v chápání konceptu ženského těla v tomto žánru.

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma „Depiction of Women in Contemporary American Hip-hop Culture“ vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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*“I love being a girl. We gonna go hard anyway.
We were put on Earth to go hard.”*

- Megan Thee Stallion

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Introduction

Hip-hop as a cultural movement originated in Bronx, US in the 1970s. Over the years it has evolved into a global phenomenon that influences not only music, but also fashion and popular culture. As a platform, Hip-hop has allowed the oppressed and marginalized ones to express themselves and has served as a space for political and social commentary. For some, Hip-hop is a culture of vandals, gangs, and criminals. For others it is a source of inspiration, a space for self-expression and a way to escape reality. A culture born of poverty, exile and misunderstanding nowadays affects the entire world and like a mirror reflects the culture we find ourselves immersed in. The role of women and female artists in this musical genre has been troublesome from the very beginning. The theme of the female body and identity has been present in Hip-hop culture and music since its early days and is accompanied by a great degree of stereotyping and objectification.

The aim of the bachelor thesis at hand is to explore how female rap artists deal with the gender stereotypes associated with the genre. Moving from theory and history towards close reading, the author will demonstrate how contemporary American female artists, both mainstream and underground, have worked with the stereotype since the beginning of the millennium.

In the first part I will define the concept of rap in the context of Hip-hop culture at large and briefly explore its history, which I find essential to understanding the complexity of this culture and its relevance today.

In the following part I will define the concept and movement of feminism, briefly show its history, and discuss some of its core ideas in the context of Hip-hop. Within the emergent conceptual background, I will delineate concepts useful for the following analysis including the so-called as *Hip-hop feminism*, self-perception in arts and the theory of embodiment.

In the third part of this work, I aim to define the stereotype of the woman and her body as widely used in rap. I will explore its different facets alongside the lyrics of selected male performers who have a considerable influence on the genre.

In the final part of this thesis, I will analyze the lyrics of selected contemporary female Hip-hop artists who deal with the concept of the female body and also respond in some way to the stereotyping. I will divide these female artists into four groups - those who choose not to comment on this topic at all, those who openly oppose the stereotype, those who embrace the stereotype and use gradation to empower themselves, and finally I will follow the artists who

build on the legacy of the women from all these categories and shift the concept of embodiment to higher degrees.

The aim of this thesis is to show how female rap evolves and responds to the objectification and abasement based on gender that is present society-wide. Changes in Hip-hop can serve as parallel to societal shifts and may indicate a changing mood in the public regarding the objectification and sexualization of the female body and identity.

What is Rap?

In 2020, YouTube announced that Hip-hop became the most streamed music genre of that year.¹ A year later the winner of the most prestigious award of Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs), Artist of the Decade, became the worldwide famous rapper, Drake.² In 2022 Ticketmaster marked Bad Bunny's 2022 tour as the top sales day from all tours since 2018.³ These are just a few examples of how much power has Hip-hop gained over time. To understand the current state of rap, the history of Hip-hop itself shall be talked through.

What started as a delineation against the system in the US underground became the world's most popular music genre. Rappers are breaking music charts, collaborating with fashion designers or creating their own clothing lines, acting in movies, or running for presidency. Its impact worldwide is tremendous, and I believe it can serve as a probe to the mindset of today's society. It reflects the ongoing social issues and tendencies. It responds in the raw form to the current world problems and current events. As the revolutionary Hip-hop persona DJ Kool Herc comments on the timelessness of Hip-hop: "Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. Even if you didn't grow up in the Bronx in the '70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all these people, all these nationalities, all over the world together."⁴ This global phenomenon captured the attention of millions of people and secured its position beyond the artistic genre.

This chapter will briefly look at the nature of Hip-hop and the placement of rap in it. It will elaborate on Hip-hop history and explain the origin of the patterns repeated in rap music. It will depict the tendencies in rap today and shortly elaborate about the role of women in it.

¹ Andrea Zarczynski, "As YouTube's Top Music Genre, Hip-Hop Presents Vast Ad Opportunity," *Forbes* (*Forbes Magazine*, April 4, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andreazarczynski/2021/04/03/as-youtubes-top-music-genre-hip-hop-presents-vast-ad-opportunity/?sh=5e9f957454a7> (accessed March 15, 2023).

² Cheyanne Baker, "Drake to Receive Artist of the Decade Award at 2021 BBMAs," *Billboard Music Awards*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.billboardmusicawards.com/2021/05/drake-to-receive-artist-of-the-decade-award-at-2021-bbmas/> (accessed March 15, 2023).

³ Griselda Flores, "Bad Bunny's 2022 Tour Sells out in Record Time," *Billboard*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/bad-bunny-2022-tour-sells-out/> (accessed March 15, 2023).

⁴ Dj Kool Herc, "Introduction," in *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, by Jeff Chang (New York: Picador/St. Martin's Press, 2005), p. xii.

Hip-hop Culture

Rap as an artistic form is embedded in Hip-hop culture and cannot be separated. To understand rap, one must look at the bigger picture. Its origin, original themes and values are still reflected in the present variations of this genre.

Derrick P. Alridge and James B. Steward divide Hip-hop into at least four key elements. These are Rapping (emceeing), Disc jockeying (DJing), Graffiti art and Break dancing.⁵ However, DJ Kool Herc adds that Hip-hop is more than these four elements. For him it is “the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you look, the way you communicate.”⁶ It is a culture and a lifestyle. Complex, vivid, always transforming and rapidly growing.

A Brief History of Rap

Before I step towards the discussion on female identity, it is appropriate to look at the history of rap and its implication. The cultural and geographical foundation of Hip-hop in the 1970s in the South Bronx, US cannot be omitted. I will look at one of the most important milestones in the creation of Hip-hop as it is known today. Also, I will briefly explore the current tendencies and motifs to map how this genre has developed over time.

The Wasteland of South Bronx

To understand the nature of Hip-hop, I will briefly touch on the history of this genre. The roots of Hip-hop are connected with traditional African music, as Neumann states.⁷ But the foundation of the birth of Hip-hop was laid in South Bronx, US in the 1970s.

A journalist and a music critic Jeff Chang in his acclaimed publication chronicles the downfall of South Bronx after World War II where the population, mainly constituted by Irish and Jewish immigrants, was forced to relocate and Bronx was inhabited by African Americans and Hispanic people. Job cuts, poverty, insurance frauds and targeted neglect from the government caused people to protest in June 1977. A huge fire broke down during these protests.⁸ It destroyed the already devastated area into ruins. People were living in constant danger, not just from the poor living conditions and a constant threat of the collapse of

⁵ Derrick P Alridge and James B. Stewards, “Introduction: Hip Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future,” *The Journal of African American History*, Summer, 90., no. 3 (2005): 190.

⁶ Dj Kool Herz, “Introduction,” in *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, p. xi.

⁷ Friedrich Neumann, “Hip Hop: Origins, Characteristics and Creative Processes,” *The World of Music* 42, no. 1 (2000): p. 55.

⁸ Chang, “1. Necropolis: The Bronx and the Politics of Abandonment”, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, p. 7-19.

buildings, but also from the high crime rate and gang activity. It became, in the words of a neighborhood clinic director Doctor Wise, “a Necropolis — a city of death.”⁹ But as a phoenix rises from its ashes, this gives the young people of South Bronx a chance to resurrect. And they did not waste it. As Chang writes: “Give them an apocalypse, and they would dance.”¹⁰ Based on this, Hip-hop doesn’t offer positive themes as a matter of principle. It is not hard to imagine how women might be portrayed in an environment so strongly associated with poverty, crime, drugs, and gangs.

The Party

There is a concrete day, concrete place and a concrete person associated with the birth of Hip-hop. As an expert on Hip-hop culture, Katie Iandoli states, this date was August 11, 1973, and the name is DJ Kool Herc who with his sister Cindy at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue South Bronx organized the first Hip-hop party in history. For many people it represents the birth of something revolutionary, that it is celebrated every year.¹¹ And what was so special about this party? It is the persona of DJ Kool Herc. He was the revolutionary mastermind in the Hip-hop community. As Chang maps, Herc was the one who started to play with the samples. He was observing the break dancers and noticed that they would enjoy the instrumental breaks in songs. He started to mix them and play with them, and the crowds loved it.¹² He is the demi-god of Hip-hop. As Chang in his brief commentary for BBC says:

“Every culture needs a creation myth. I think the story of Herc and Cindy's party, in ways we perhaps don't realise, speaks to the need for joy amidst turmoil, the power of creativity against destruction, the ‘started from the bottom’ ethic that youth will always find a way to express itself.”¹³

⁹ Martin Tolchin, “South Bronx: A Jungle Stalked by Fear, Seized by Rage,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, January 15, 1973), <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/01/15/archives/south-bronx-a-jungle-stalked-by-fear-seized-by-rage-the-south-bronx.html> (accessed March 17, 2023).

¹⁰ Chang, “1: Necropolis: The Bronx and the Politics of Abandonment,” *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*, p.19.

¹¹ Kathy Iandoli, “Intro: Ladies First,” in *God Save the Queens: The Essential History of Women in Hip-Hop* (New York, NY: Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow, 2019).

¹² Chang, “4: Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost His Accent and Started Hip-Hop”, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*, p. 67-85.

¹³ Rebecca Laurence, “40 Years on from the Party Where Hip Hop Was Born,” *BBC Culture* (BBC, January 20, 2023) ,<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20130809-the-party-where-hip-hop-was-born> (accessed March 18, 2023).

It was a breath of fresh air. A movement created in youth culture for the youth culture itself. Hip-hop connected all the dots together and created the pattern which developed into the phenomenon known today.

Rap Today

What started as an unplanned experimental part of the Hip-hop movement deep in the American underground developed into one of the most known, streamed, and profitable music genres.¹⁴ Rap is not just a genre itself. It overgrew the borders of the US and became a world-wide phenomenon.

Being born in the 1970s among the streets of South Bronx, themes like poverty, discrimination, sex, violence, drugs, and the desire to escape will forever be ingrained in Hip-hop culture. This in many cases takes a step forward and evolves into egoism, open sexism, misogyny, glorification of drug usage and the gangster mentality. As scholars Terri M. Adams and Douglas B. Fuller in their article "The Words Have Changed But the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music" point out, we should be cautious about providing this influence on a platform of such a size.¹⁵ However, rap has overgrown this stereotype and even though it is connected to these motifs and associations. Importantly, as Neumann concludes: "Rap music has become a mouthpiece communicating the feelings of many youths around the world [...]."¹⁶ Rap is diverse, always altering and responding to the changes in the public. Undoubtedly, it is an important cultural phenomenon for the research in society since it immediately reacts to any changes in subculture as well as globally.

Rap and Women

Hip-hop is generally considered an unfeminist environment. Joan Morgan, author, and journalist who coined the term *hip-hop feminism*, asks herself in her book "When the Chickenheads Come Home to Roost" an important question: "I have to wonder if there isn't something inherently unfeminist in supporting a music that repeatedly reduces me to tits and

¹⁴ Kelefa Sanneh, "The Message: Why Should Hip-Hop Have to Teach Us Anything?," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, October 7, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/oct/07/the-message-why-should-hip-hop-have-to-teach-us-anything> (accessed March 18, 2023).

¹⁵ Terri M. Adams and Douglas B. Fuller, "The Words Have Changed But the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music," *Journal of Black Studies*, 36, no. 6 (July 2006): p. 954.

¹⁶ Neumann, "Hip Hop: Origins, Characteristics and Creative Processes," p. 62.

ass and encourages pimping on the regular.”¹⁷ The position of women in this male-dominated culture is considerably problematic. As stated, rap displays the current ongoing trends and mood in the society. Adams and Fuller conclude that the artists who write misogynistic lyrics “are a reflection of the unconscious acceptance of negative categorizations of women and, in particular, African American women by the general American public.”¹⁸ In this chapter I looked at the overall history of Hip-hop. But how is the gender reflected in the genre? How do the rap lyrics reflect the role of women in society? How exactly are the concepts of female body and personality depicted across different contemporary artists? And most importantly, how do female artists themselves deal with this the macho tendencies and stereotypes of rap?

¹⁷ Joan Morgan, “From Fly-Girls to Bitches and Ho’s,” in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 66.

¹⁸ Adams and Fuller, “The Words Have Changed But the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music,” p. 955.

Rap and Its Connection to Feminism

This thesis is focused on the identity and self-depiction of women in the Hip-hop industry, it will be mainly relying on the feminist theory. This chapter will depict a brief history of this movement and it will shortly elaborate on the definition of feminism. There will also be discussion of the term *hip-hop feminism*. Since there will be a huge focus on self-depiction of women artists the embodiment in Hip-hop will be talked through.

Feminism Nowadays

Defining feminism might be difficult, similar to Hip-hop. According to Oxford English Dictionary feminism is defined as “advocacy of the rights of women (based on the theory of equality of the sexes)”¹⁹ This theory was written by Judith Murray published as the essay “On the Equality of the Sexes” in 1750. In her revolutionary paper Murray states the foundation of feminism that talks about unjustified genders disparity: “Our souls are by nature *equal* to yours; [...] we are not fallen lower than yourselves.”²⁰ Surely, this is the foundation of feminism, as any cultural or political movement, it has evolved over time and expanded its original territory. I shall look at the current state of this movement, since changes in women Hip-hop might be related to changes and spread of feminism in the society.

What started with Theory of Equality of the Sexes, in the 19th century continued as a First-Wave feminism characterized by a united suffragette movement fighting for the women’s right to vote has developed over time and shifted with the social and political changes in the society. The Third-Wave Feminism follows up the Second-Wave from the 1970s but modifies previous trends and brings focus on new areas. As the professor from George Mason University R. Claire Snyder in her paper summarizes, Third-Wave Feminism moves away from a unified perception of reality of the oppressed genre and leans much more towards personal experiences. It includes themes of race, non-normative sexuality, and personal expression in addition to gender.²¹ However, there is no single consensus within the movement on what feminism should look like. In addition, the publicist Constance Grady in her article proposes the question, whether the mass media and internet are shifting the movement onto its Fourth-Wave thanks

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “feminism,” accessed May 06, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69192>.

²⁰ Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes,” *The Massachusetts Magazine. Or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*, II, no. III (March 1790), p. 134.

²¹ R. Claire Snyder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34, no. 1 (2008): p. 175-196, <https://doi.org/10.1086/588436>.

to for example #MeToo and Time's Up phenomena.²² Two of the most prominent movements advocating against sexual harassment and assaults towards women.

The lines defining the movement are less clear than they have been before, and since there have been positive changes in the society thanks to the feminist movement. In the last decade the importance of pop-culture, television, internet trends and social media grew immensely. Snyder recognizes that the third-wave literature rather than on traditional politics makes an emphasis on the importance of Hip-hop music, female pop icons and beauty culture.²³ This can implicate, that Hip-hop culture can display the tendencies and changes in the feminist movement. This thesis's main aim is to display the shift in Hip-hop music and how female artists' view on themselves as women evolved.

As the norms in society change, feminism gradually embraces new topics, broadens the field of interest, and shed some of its previous discourses. The movement outgrew its previous direction and spread into other areas not only feminist activists but to the lives of the general public. As Hip-hop music reacts to the ongoing changes and trends in society there is a possible conclusion that artists too are embracing new topics, changing the sexist narrative and objectification of women and moreover, women's voices are more prominent within the industry. The question is to which extent? Is this a tendency only of the underground, or does it also sink into mainstream music? And how much did feminism tendencies sink into the production of female Hip-hop artists?

Where Are the Women?

Women have an objectively more difficult position in Hip-hop. This applies to the female artist themselves and to the manner women are portrayed in rap music. This can be demonstrated in various examples. American author and journalist Shea Serrano in his acclaimed publication "The Rap Year Book" selects the most important rap songs for every year from 1979 to 2014. In these 35 years he has not chosen a single song performed by a female artist.²⁴ Moreover, the male dominance is also notable in the "Hot Rap Tracks" chart published every year by the music journal *Billboard*. This chart maps the most successful 25

²² Constance Grady, "The Waves of Feminism, and Why People Keep Fighting over Them, Explained," Vox (Vox, March 20, 2018), <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth> (accessed April 21, 2023).

²³ Snyder, "What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay," p. 178.

²⁴ Shea Serrano and Arturo Torres, *The Rap Year Book: The Most Important Rap Song from Every Year since 1979, Discussed, Debated, and Deconstructed* (New York: Abrams Image, 2015).

Hip-hop songs every week based on the sales and streaming of these songs. From 2000-2020 there are only two female artists as the most listened one in that year. In addition, apart from 2013, in the top 3 songs of each year there is at least one song that objectifies a woman and reduces her only to her body features.²⁵ Women face a challenging position in rap. Being a female performer in this misogynistic environment means that each of them must deal with such an ideological setting somehow. Female artists must ask themselves whether they would follow the conventions of this genre or fundamentally remake what Hip-hop actually is.

Female Hip-hop artists have been always overshadowed by their male peers. This men dominated industry defines the way women are perceived. Not only are they victims of tremendous objectification and sexism. Women artists have a much harder time getting into the spotlight and being taken seriously.

Hip-hop Feminism

The question that many have to ask themselves is whether a person who is a feminist can also be a fan of Hip-hop and rap music. As a feminist writer Jessa Crispin in her book states: “They are still giving their money and attention to musicians who tell them they are worthless pieces of ass, now open your mouth bitch and take my dick.”²⁶ This problematic issue also addresses Morgan. She discusses the interconnectedness of Hip-hop culture and feminism, highlighting the ways in which Hip-hop has both oppressed and also liberated women. She challenges the ways in which women are sexualized and objectified, while also recognizing the power and influence that women have in the participation and creation in Hip-hop culture. All of this under an umbrella of *hip-hop feminism*, a term created by her.²⁷ Hip-hop culture has captivated millions of people and as stated, Hip-hop artists hold a tool that can make a huge impact in society both negatively and positively. Therefore, to answer the question can be positive. However, a *hip-hop feminist* should be aware of the dual nature of this musical genre and give the platform to artists representing the ideas and values of feminism.

²⁵ “Billboard Charts Archive,” Billboard, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180316132052/https://www.billboard.com/archive/charts> (accessed March 18, 2023).

²⁶ Jessa Crispin, “1. The Problem with Universal Feminism,” in *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2017), p. 12.

²⁷ Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist*

Self-representation and Hip-hop

So far, I defined rap within the Hip-hop movement, and I also delimited feminism. These two themes are essential to follow up with the main theme of this thesis, self-perception, and perception of bodies of female artists in Hip-hop. I will map how female artists deal with the custom of objectification, their attitude towards the prejudices and manners of sexualization and in a way, degradation. Therefore, in this chapter I will define the terms self-perception and embodiment and their importance in the field of Hip-hop.

The Notion of Self

The question of identity is one of the most prominent in Hip-hop. In this research I will be looking at the self-perception of female performers and within this topic I will be most interested in the issue of embodiment - how they perceive their body. Before defining embodiment and its relevance in Hip-hop, it shall be appropriate to discuss the concept of self-perception in art in general.

Self-perception

To address self-perception in the arts, it is useful to mention self-perception theory. The self-perception theory introduced by social psychologist Daryl Bem proposes that an individual's perception of their own behavior can shape their attitude and beliefs toward themselves.²⁸ When applying this theory to art, it indicates an artist's interpretation of their own identity, emotions, experiencing, and how it is reflected in their artwork. However, this inner judgment is inevitably always shaped by external influence. To quote a feminist theoretician Elizabeth Janeway: "While the private self is the only source of authentic experience, this experience can only be stated and understood through the public image; and we are, in a way, dependent on being understood to value for ourselves the experience we have known."²⁹ When applying such a proposition to the topic of this thesis, one could conclude that the genre conventions of Hip-hop would have a significant role not just in the manner female artists depict themselves through the lyrics but also the way they perceive themselves outside the borders of genre.

²⁸ Daryl J. Bem, "Self-Perception: An Alternative Interpretation of Cognitive Dissonance Phenomena," *Psychological Review* 74, no. 3 (1967): p. 183-200.

²⁹ Elizabeth Janeway, "Images of Women," *Arts in Society*, 1974, p. 17.

Embodiment

I will now elaborate on narrowing the focus from the general self only to embodiment - the perception of the human body. Sociologist Mike Featherstone in his article “Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture” about the body image notes: “Body image is generally understood as a mental image of one’s body as it appears to others.”³⁰ It is the projection of some abstract concepts into the physical body and the way which these concepts work with the body. These abstract concepts refer to a wide range of things that can affect the perception of one’s own body such as nationality, religion, race, particular social class, gender, social group, etc. Inserting the norms of Hip-hop behind this abstract concept, a conclusion that Hip-hop will influence the perception of body image and thus change the notion of embodiment.

In the same article Featherstone emphasizes that “new media and information technologies have the potential to alter the range of habitual perceptive and affective structures which operate in everyday life.”³¹ This conveys that particularly in the last 20 years the rapid development of technology changed the notion of the human body. Since Hip-hop is typically responsive to social change, the analysis of the genre can help us understand the general tendencies regarding embodiment, self-perception, and self-representation.

In conclusion, the concepts of self-perception and embodiment are linked not only to each other, but also to different contemporary social issues. The analysis of contemporary Hip-hop culture can demonstrate the changes that these two concepts are undergoing.

Embodiment and Hip-Hop

To elaborate on the concept of embodiment and self-image of female artists in Hip-hop, I would like to look at the issue of gender representation. The theories of gender and embodiment by a feminist scholar Judith Butler can provide a useful framework for this analysis. In her influential publication “Gender Trouble” Butler claims that gender is not a fixed or biological category, but more so a cultural and social construct that is produced by the repeated acts of performance. These performances create and reinforce gender norms and assumptions.³² From this perspective, Hip-hop culture can be seen as a space where those norms of gender and sexuality are performed but at the same time also challenged and negotiated. Elements typical for this movement such as dance moves, the fashion trends or

³⁰ Mike Featherstone, “Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture,” *Body & Society* 16, no. 1 (2010): p. 194.

³¹ Featherstone, “Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture”, p. 213

³² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

textual content of Hip-hop music contribute to the construction of sexual and gender identities. Butler in her later work “Bodies that Matter” explores how embodiment is shaped by relations of power, and how these relations of power can be both oppressive and also productive at the same time.³³ For this research the duality of the relationships means that women in this genre are facing the decision of choosing their position towards this problem. They can either choose to follow the conventions and to a certain extent see their body as an object of sexual desire, or they can delimit towards those rules and create their own mechanisms to oppose them.

From a feminist perspective, the issues concerning embodiment in Hip-hop culture can be seen as both problematic and empowering. On one hand, Hip-hop culture has been criticized for glorifying misogyny, objectification, sexism, homophobia, and harmful gender stereotypes. But on the other hand, Hip-hop culture has provided many women with a platform that has allowed them to challenge those stereotypes and to assert their own voice and identity.

So far, I briefly mapped the history of Hip-hop and how the roots of this genre still influence its present form and course. I discussed the complexity of this genre, its roots and what are the conditions for its establishment. I also emphasized how important Hip-hop is nowadays and how much influence it has not only in the fields of art. To fully understand the development of Hip-hop it is important to acknowledge the conditions that enabled Hip-hop to evolve and grow. This harsh environment of poverty, alienation and hopelessness are the key forming elements of the genre and they are still to be found in the very base of today's shape of Hip-hop.

I delineated a brief history of the feminist movement. Its evolution and forming throughout the last 200. Similarly to Hip-hop, feminism has overgrown the initial borders and now it is a worldwide phenomenon which has a powerful voice within the society. The feminist tendencies also permeated to Hip-hop. Hip-hop conventions are being questioned through the lens of feminism and many artists must deal with rough questions whether to follow the established rules or to transform the very foundation of the genre.

In the next part of this thesis, I will examine how female artists in the past 20 years have dealt with questions of such kind. What is their response towards constant objectification and sexualization. How these artists work with body image and self-perception. And whether they object to these unwritten rules, prefer not to respond to them or they choose to follow them.

³³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993).

The Stereotype

Up to now, this thesis has been concerned with the history and relation of rap and feminism. I have already outlined that women are heavily portrayed in this genre in a stereotypical way that reduces complex female identities merely to their body features and sexuality. Female artists are therefore faced with the decision of how to deal with and respond to generic conventions of such kind. Before I proceed to the closer discussion of female artists' approaches, I find it important to demonstrate what exactly is the stereotype the women are facing in Hip-hop music and culture. Therefore, in this chapter I will offer a close-reading analysis of the lyrics of selected male artists from the last 22 years. Songs selected for this chapter have enjoyed the favor of both fans and thus have been ranked in various music charts and critically acclaimed. The aim of this brief introductory analysis will be to delineate a stereotype of a woman formed in these lyrics, which I will then work with in the contrastive analysis of the lyrics by different female artists.

Female Identity as a Sexual Object

Jay-Z's song "Big Pimpin'" (1999) in collaboration with UGK is one of his most successful Hip-hop records ever. Serrano selected this song as the most significant rap song for the year 2000. His choice is based on the effect and success this song had.³⁴ Moreover, it peaked #18 on "Hot 100" *Billboard* chart, one of the most prestigious music single sales charts in the US, where the song maintained its position for 18 weeks.³⁵ Although this is mainly revolving around the reckless lifestyle, one can also find how women are perceived.

"I'm a pimp in every sense of the word, bitch
Better trust than believe 'em
In the cut where I keep 'em
'Til I need a nut, 'til I need to beat the guts
Then it's, beep beep and I'm pickin' 'em up

³⁴ Serrano and Torres, "2000," *The Rap Year Book: The Most Important Rap Song from Every Year since 1979, Discussed, Debated, and Deconstructed*.

³⁵ Watson, Elijah, and Danielle Pascual. "Jay-Z's Top 30 Songs on the Billboard Hot 100." *Billboard*, May 2, 2022. <https://www.billboard.com/lists/jay-z-top-songs-billboard-hot-100/jay-z-girls-girls-girls/> (accessed April 13, 2023).

Let 'em play with it in the truck”³⁶

In these lyrics one of the basic stereotypes that portray women in rap can be found. The performer views himself as a “pimp”. Women are useful to the lyrical subject only as a mean to satisfying his sexual urges. Beyond that he has no interest in them.

Power and Violence

In 2011 Tyler, The Creator released his album “Goblin” that reached #1 in the *Billboard*’s “Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums” chart of that year.³⁷ In the song “Bitch Suck Dick” (2011) featuring Jasper Dolphin & Taco, Jasper raps:

“Punch a bitch in her mouth just for talkin’ shit
You lurking, bitch? Well, I see that shit
Once again, I gotta punch a bitch in her shit
I’m icy, bitch, don’t look at my wrist
Because if you do, I might blind you bitch”³⁸

These particular verses refer to the perception of the violent power relation between men and women. In such a prototypical attitude, the woman is not only spoken to with insults, but the rapper openly threatens her with violence and shows his dominance as a male.

Female Body as a Sexual Object

When focusing on the representation of the female body, a uniform image of women as a tool for satisfying desires can be encountered. In 2020 Pop Smoke was awarded as the Best New Hip-Hop Artist at the BET Hip Hop Awards.³⁹ In the same year he released an album *Shoot for the Stars Aim for the Moon* (2020) where in the thirteen song “Mood Swings” in

³⁶ Jay Z featuring UGK, “Big Pimpin’,” *Vol 3... Life and Times of S. Carter* (New York: Roc-A-Fella Records & Def Jam Records, 1999), album.

³⁷ “Tyler, the Creator,” *Billboard*, <https://www.billboard.com/artist/tyler-the-creator/chart-history/blk/> (accessed April 20, 2023).

³⁸ Tyler, the Creator featuring Jasper Dolphin and Taco, “Bitch Suck Dick,” *Goblin* (London: XL Recordings, 2011), album.

³⁹ Denise Warner, “Here Are All the Winners from the 2020 BET Hip Hop Awards,” *Billboard*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/music/awards/bet-hip-hop-awards-2020-winners-list-9474019/> (accessed April 20, 2023).

collaboration with Lil T-Jay both artists openly brag about their expensive lifestyle, items, and women, especially their body parts:

“Start liftin' up your dress, start kissin' on your neck
Start rubbin' on your butt, start massagin' your breasts
I ain't wanna give you a baby just yet, so I backed out and nuttled on your breasts”⁴⁰

Although the intention of the whole song can be interpreted as positive, as the woman is compared to nobility and divinity: “She a queen, like Nefertiti”⁴¹, the woman in this song is still perceived mainly through sexuality and her body is reduced only to the parts that please the speaker.

In 2022, Drake, six-time winner of the prestigious Grammy Award given annually by the Recording Academy of the United States, brought out cooperative album *Her Loss* (2022) with another Grammy awarded rapper 21 Savage, where in the first song of this album “Rich Flex” featuring Young Nudy the image of a woman is reduced again:

“Took her panties off and this bitch thicker than a plot,
All my exes ain't nothing, them hoes busted
If my oops ain't rappin' they ass duckin'
You ain't ready to pull the trigger, don't clutch it
I know you on your period, baby can you suck it?”⁴²

Again, a woman's physical look and sexual performance are highlighted while other qualities and features are neglected.

To summarize this, the stereotype of women in Hip-hop is very closely linked to sexuality. Sociologist Ronald Weitzer and criminologist Charis E. Kubrin in their content analysis “Misogyny in Rap Music” analyzed 403 Hip-hop songs and according to their research 67% of these samples displayed sexual objectification of women. Moreover, 47%

⁴⁰ Pop Smoke featuring Lil Tjay, “Mood Swings,” *Shoot for the Stars, Aim for the Moon* (New York City: Victor Worldwide & Republic Records, 2020), album.

⁴¹ Pop Smoke featuring Lil Tjay, “Mood Swings,” 2020.

⁴² Drake featuring 21 Savage, “Rich Flex,” *Her Loss* (Toronto & New York City: OVO Sound & Republic Records, 2022), album.

exhibited distrust in women and 18% legitimate violence towards them.⁴³ Female body is seen as an object of desire over which the man has dominance. This is further supported by the genre's audience at large. Artists who perform such misogynistic lyrics are not only given a platform, but they are also acclaimed and awarded for music built on the mentioned stereotypes. This tradition of objectification might be based on the history and tradition of the genre but perhaps should not serve as an excuse for a contemporary production. Adams and Fuller in their article warn of "the potential shaping force that misogyny in rap may have on how young people may view themselves and the relations between the sexes."⁴⁴ These influences also female artists, as they stay in a difficult position whether to give in to peer pressure or go against the tide.

⁴³ Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin, "Misogyny in Rap Music," *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (2009): p. 12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x08327696>.

⁴⁴ Adams and Fuller, "The Words Have Changed But the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music", p. 952.

The Response

The position of women in rap has long been a thorny issue. Female voices in the male dominated Hip-hop culture have always been sidelined or subjected to gender-based discrimination, both in the industry and in society at large. Women in Hip-hop face more difficulties in order to make people listen to them and to hear their voice through the rap lyrics. Hip-hop as a genre is ambivalent. On one hand it offers creative freedom, innovation and invites artists to bring new ideas and practices. It gives people a space to voice their concerns and raise their voice against discrimination and unfair politics. On the other hand, the influence of the history and tradition of the genre ties hands on some issues. As it has been argued, artists in the genre often show sexism, objectification, and misogyny to varying degrees. In the following part of this thesis, I will analyze a sample of lyrics by female artists to show how women in Hip-hop deal with these genre conventions and how they respond to it, if so.

Omission

The first group of female artists I will mention are those who either do not respond to the issue of sexualization at all or it is not the main concern of their lyrics. The ones I have selected for this analysis work with some form of self-concept, identity, or personal empowerment in their music.

Rapsody, who received three Grammy nominations, in her latest album *Eve* (2019) one of the main concerns is the issue of the identity of Black women and celebrates the legacy of Black women. In the album opener song “Nina” in the first verse she raps:

“Emit light, rap, or Emmett Till,
I drew a line without showing my body, that’s a skill”⁴⁵

In the first verse she deals with the question of the choices that she must make as a conscious rapper. She can either use the platform to be the light and through her lyrics educate or let the environment of Hip-hop destroy her. She mentions Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Black teenager who was murdered by white men in 1955 and whose death sparked the

⁴⁵ Rapsody, “Nina,” *Eve* (Raleigh & New York City: Jamla Records & Roc Nation, 2019), album.

emerging civil rights movement in the US.⁴⁶ In the second verse she emphasizes that was able to make a mark in the industry without having to show off her body.

Another female artist focusing on self-discovery and personal growth in her lyrics is Tierra Whack. In her song “Meagan Good” (2021) she raps about the issue of the end of a friendship.

“I don't regret nothin' we did and I hope you don't neither
I know it irritates your soul, the simple fact I don't need ya
I used to feel like I would die if we wasn't speakin'
Now I feel like I can fly and I found my beacon
My heart want love, so I gotta supply it
Your love wasn't healthy, so I'm on a new diet”⁴⁷

Tierra Whack comments on these lines in the Genius Verified video about this song: “The distance gave me time to just really feel and see everything and react and reflect. And I was just like, you know what, this isn’t good for me anymore.”⁴⁸ She talks about how letting go of something can be painful but is necessary for a person to grow and evolve.

Lastly, I want to mention the work of another female artist, Jean Grae. Her lyrics touch on a variety of topics from personal issues to politics. A musical scholar Martin Connor says in his blogpost “The Jeanius of Ms. Jean Grae” about her music and her writing skills: “The entwining between what she wants to express and the exact words she uses is flawless.”⁴⁹ She is known for the technicality of her music and application of music theory to lyrics writing. In a song “Black Girl Pain” (2004), where rapper Talib Kweli invited her to collaborate, she reflected on her South African roots.

“For all my cousins back home,
the strength of Mommy’s backbone
The length of which she went for raising, sacrificing her own

⁴⁶ Michael Ray, “Emmett Till,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., April 27, 2023), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Emmett-Till> (accessed April 29, 2023).

⁴⁷ Tierra Whack, “Meagan Good,” *Rap?* (Santa Monica: Interscope Records, 2021), album.

⁴⁸ Genius, “Tierra Whack ‘Meagan Good’ Official Lyrics & Meaning | Verified,” interview, 4:00 to 4:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xZrEz1Zv7U>.

⁴⁹ Martin Connor, “Rap Music Analysis #7 – the Jeanius of Ms. Jean Grae,” RAP ANALYSIS, April 9, 2015, <https://www.rapanalysis.com/2015/04/rap-music-analysis-7-jeanius-of-ms-jean/> (accessed April 21, 2023).

The pain of not reflecting the range of our complexions”⁵⁰

She raps about the misery that women of color live in the areas of South Africa, her birthplace, and all the sacrifices these women make for their children. She also addresses the variety of colored people’s ancestry and that they are not obligated to identify with any of the races.

Looking at the whole thing, one can see the complexity and diversity that rap offers. Artists can choose to go their own way and express their perspective on the complex topic of race, self-perception, self-development, belonging, etc. The space for self-expression still represents one of the key values of Hip-hop as a genre and female artists can choose to follow the path of the established traditions or create their own.

Going Against Conventions

The second group I will be concerned about is formed by those female artists who are speaking out against established norms and publicly expressing their disapproval and dissatisfaction with the discourse of the Hip-hop genre. An academic Gwendolyn D. Pough in her essay “What It Do, Shorty?: Women, Hip-Hop and a Feminist Agenda” defines Hip-hop feminists as “women and men who step up and speak out against gender exploitation Hip-hop.”⁵¹ These artists, therefore, can be considered Hip-hop feminists, since their lyrics not only disregard the gender norms in the music discourse, but even oppose them. This wave of female rappers belongs to the turn and the beginning of the millennium. In this chapter, then, I will focus on the lyrics of Missy Elliot, and Queen Latifah, who are two big names in this regard, and whose legacy has helped shape the rap narrative of today.

Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliott is one of the most profound female Hip-hop artists. In 2015 she received The Innovator Award that recognizes female artists that oppose conventions in music and with their new ideas they create a positive change. Apart from that she won four Grammy Awards, as a first female rapper she was inducted to the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2019, she was also honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2021, and many more. Her lyrics are known for its innovation, celebration, and empowerment of women.

⁵⁰ Talib Kweli featuring Jean Grae, “Black Girl Pain,” *The Brain Struggle* (New York City & Los Angeles: Rawkus Records & Geffen Records, 2004), album.

⁵¹ Gwendolyn D. Pough, “What It Do, Shorty?: Women, Hip-Hop, and a Feminist Agenda,” *Black Women, Gender + Families* 1, no. 2 (2007): p. 80.

In “Work It” (2002) Missy raps about having sex with men and following her desires freely as a woman.

“I love your braids
and your mouth full of fronts
Love the way my ass go ba-bum-bum-bum-bum
Keep your eyes on my ba-bum-bum-bum-bum
You think you can handle this? Ga-dunk-a-dunk-dunk
Take my thing off and my ass go boom
Cut the lights on so you see what I could do”⁵²

This revolutionary perspective of liberated women owning their sexuality going against the conventions is one of the biggest traits her lyrics are offering. Missy turns narrative and form against male rappers and takes the lead in the sexualization. She owns her body, and she decides what she wants to do with it.

Another song where the unapologetic narrative of Missy Elliot can be shown is the song “Pass that Dutch” (2003).

“Misdemeanor on the floor, pretty boy, here I come
Pumps and bump make you wanna hurt somethin’
I can take your man, I don’t have ro sex ’em
Hang ’em out the window, call me Michal Jackson
I’m a pain in your rectum
I am that bitch y’all slept on”⁵³

When focusing on the sexuality and embodiment in these verses, a demarcation towards the genre tradition can be found. She is twisting the perceptive and this time it is she who chooses the men, and they obediently follow her, although they might be in a relationship. She seems to be proud to do whatever she wants, turning the originally derogatory term “bitch” used as a slur by male rappers into a description of herself that she is happy about, although it might trigger the people with a different mindset.

⁵² Missy Elliot, “Work It,” *Under Construction* (The Goldmine & Elektra, 2002), album.

⁵³ Missy Elliot, “Pass That Dutch,” *This Is Not a Test* (The Goldmine Inc. & Elektra, 2003), album.

The impact Missy has had on the narrative in female Hip-hop is immense. Cultural and Linguistic Anthropologist Nikki Lane in her article “Black Women Queering the Mic: Missy Elliott Disturbing the Boundaries of Racialized Sexuality and Gender” confirms that: “Missy consistently questions and, thus threatens the heteronormative, patriarchal systems that maintains men’s dominance in the rap industry [...]”⁵⁴ To give a platform to such an artist like her is a necessity for a change in how Hip-hop understands and pictures women.

Although this thesis focuses mainly on lyrics from the beginning of the millennium, the influence that Queen Latifah had on female rap cannot be ignored. Her Grammy Award winner song “Unity” (1993) is a great example of how dissatisfaction with the direction the tradition has taken in Hip-hop goes back further than the beginning of the century.

“I walked past these dudes when they passed me
One of ’em felt my booty, he was nasty
I turned around red, somebody was catchin’ the wrath
Then the little one sad, “Ha ha, yeah me, bitch,” and laughed
Since he was with his boy, he tried to break fly
Huh, I punched him dead in his eye
And said, “Who you callin’ a bitch?” Yeah!”⁵⁵

Queen Latifah in these lyrics stands up for women not only in Hip-hop but in the whole society. She objects to sexist behavior and verbal degradation of women by men.

In this chapter I analyzed the lyrics of artists Missy Elliot and Queen Latifah. Both played an important role in turn-of-the-century Hip-hop culture. Their lyrics openly challenge stereotypes and speak out against sexism, misogyny, and the objectification of women’s bodies by men both within and outside the genre. Their pioneering style and idiosyncrasies set the stage for the following female artists who decided to outspokenly define themselves against the stereotypes in Hip-hop.

⁵⁴ Nikki Lane, “Black Women Queering the MIC: Missy Elliott Disturbing the Boundaries of Racialized Sexuality and Gender,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 58, no. 6-7 (2011): p. 778, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.581921>.

⁵⁵ Queen Latifah, “U.N.I.T.Y.,” *Black Reign* (Los Angeles: Motown, 1993), album.

Embrace of the Stereotype

Another possible response to objectification and sexism is to accept the stereotype to some extent, but at the same time to turn it around and in a way negate it. In this chapter, I will look at the lyrics and persona of female rapper Nicki Minaj and the female artists who use similar artistic methods to her such as Cardi B, Iggy Azalea, and Lil' Kim. Their common feature is the strong use of hypersexuality in both lyrics and performance. Opinions about female artists in this group are twofold. One side sees this act as supporting the stereotype and contribution to the misogynist environment in Hip-hop, the other sees its gradation as a kind of opposition and a stand against it.

Nicki

The influence of the persona of Nicki Minaj in the Hip-hop industry is astounding. She was the first female rap artist to enter the mainstream and from the beginning of her career in 2007 she has built such a successful career like few others. In 2023, she ranked #10 in *Billboard* magazine's "50 Greatest Rappers of All Time"⁵⁶, making her the best female rapper in the world for all time. She has won over 300 music awards, including three firsts in Guinness World Records, and has sold over 100 million records worldwide.⁵⁷ Her impact is tremendous, and her career is groundbreaking in the Hip-hop world in many ways.

The subject of her texts, among other things, is often the image of women and their sexuality. Her tone is very straightforward and often portrays women as sexual beings. Nicki uses her body as an instrument within her performance style like no one before her. Scholars recognize revolution and innovation in her lyrics, performance, and personality, as well as how big is the impact she has towards society and other artists. Writer Seth Cosimini in his essay "I'm a Motherfuckin' Monster" appreciates that her "linguistic, corporeal, sartorial, musical, and visual play makes use of the inherited and perspective roles Black women's bodies are *supposed* to perform as well as her audiences' expectations of seeing these performances reproduced."⁵⁸ She takes that stereotypical view of women and lets it build up to the point where the stereotype becomes a weapon against itself. And she does it through

⁵⁶ Gail Mitchell Carl Lamarre et al., "50 Greatest Rappers of All Time," *Billboard*, February 14, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/lists/best-rappers-all-time/50-rick-ross/> (accessed April 27, 2023).

⁵⁷ Deena Zaru, "All Hail the Queens: A Look Back at the Legacy of Women in Hip-Hop," *ABC News* (ABC News Network, October 18, 2021), <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/hail-queens-back-legacy-women-hip-hop/story?id=80516610> (accessed April 30, 2023).

⁵⁸ Seth Cosimini, "I'm a Motherfuckin' Monster!," *Feminist Formations* 29, no. 2 (2017): p. 49-50.

the word play in her lyrics, fashion choices and visual production. Cosimini for example talks about how she uses the symbolism of a Barbie doll: “Her play with Barbie recalls a vacant and passive representation of femininity while simultaneously opening a space of resistance through redefinition of what constitutes feminine appearance [...]”⁵⁹ Nicki is a performer that redefines the role of women not only in Hip-hop. Her reinterpretation of the stereotype about the female body, sexuality and self-perception has had a huge impact and is changing the rules in Hip-hop and beyond.

An example of lyrics where Nicki owns her sexuality is “Feeling Myself” featuring Beyoncé from the album *The Pinkprint* (2014). In the second verse she raps:

“Ridin’-ridin’ through Texas, feed him for his breakfast
Everytime I whip it, I be talking’ so reckless
He said “Damn, Nicki, it’s tight,” I say “Yeah, nigga, you right”
He said “Damn, bae, you so little, but you be really takin’ that pipe”
I said “Yes, daddy, I do, gimme brain like NYU”⁶⁰

As Nicki often does in the relationships, she depicts she puts herself into a dominant position. The breakfast can be understood as a euphemism for sexual intercourse which she initiates. The male participant is almost hypnotized by the female rapper, and it is she who sets the pace and dominates.

The always present dominance is also found in “Barbie Dream” from the album *Queen* (2018).

“You wanna fuck me, you gotta give me some special head
'Cause this pussy have these niggas on some special meds”⁶¹

Here Nicki raps about demanding oral sex from her sexual partner. In addition, she also talks about the intensity of the sex, after which men usually fall asleep when she is done with them.

⁵⁹ Seth Cosimini, “I’m a Motherfuckin’ Monster!,” p.57.

⁶⁰ Nicki Minaj featuring Beyoncé. “Feeling Myself,” *The Pinkprint* (New Orleans & New York City: Young Money Entertainment & Cash Money Records & Republic Records, 2014), album.

⁶¹ Nicki Minaj, “Barbie Dream,” *Queen* (New Orleans & New York City: Young Money Entertainment & Cash Money Records & Republic Records, 2018), album.

The way for Nicki Minaj was paved by predecessors such as Queen Latifah or Missy Elliott. However, their take on the stereotyping of women is different. As a researcher Theresa Renee White in her article “Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionistin' Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?” compares these two artists, she concludes that:

“While in one sense, Nicki and Missy are objectified in a male-dominated culture, these two women are making a difference in the way Black women’s sexuality is viewed—Nicki as the sexual entrepreneur, and Missy as the contemporary woman who uses her sexuality as power to control her own fate and fashion as an independent standpoint.”⁶²

As stated, Nicki has made a huge impact on other female artists that followed her footsteps in the way the stereotype is handled and used toward itself.

Kim

Although Nicki Minaj is the most visible female rapper and her style prominently uses the stereotyping of women in Hip-hop, she was not the first artist who used such methods.

A Grammy awarded rapper Lil’ Kim has entered the scene with a successful debut album *Hard Core* in 1996 and since then she has continued to produce music that makes her one of the iconic names in the Hip-hop scene. Her lyrics were revolutionary as she raps “about oral sex, throwing the word pussy around like it was currency, something entirely new for female rappers.”⁶³ She was the first one to directly respond to the male rap and its stereotype. Meanwhile other female rappers at the turn of the millennium vocalized their disapproval of their objectification and “were discussing making love, then Lil’ Kim was talking about fucking.”⁶⁴ Lil’ Kim was a provocateur, and her attitudes were associated with gangsta rap. Along with her persona and overtly sexual lyrics, she is perceived by the public

⁶² Theresa Renee White, “Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionistin' Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?,” *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 6 (2013): p. 621.

⁶³ Iandoli, “Chapter Ten: Let Your Freak Flag Fly,” in *God Save the Queens: The Essential History of Women in Hip-Hop*.

⁶⁴ Iandoli, “Chapter Ten: Let Your Freak Flag Fly,” in *God Save the Queens: The Essential History of Women in Hip-Hop*.

in two ways. One side sees Kim as a supporter of the stereotyping of women in Hip-hop. She is criticized for the hypersexuality of her lyrics and the explicit language she uses. The other side perceives this artist as a feminist revolutionary who defines herself against the boundaries that the music genre creates, thus she opens the door for other female artists who want to express themselves in the same ways as she does. Sociologist Tricia Rose leans towards the first group, as she writes in her book “The Hip Hop Wars”: “This side tries to claim that artists like Lil’ Kim are expressing their sexual freedom and that hip hop supports women’s self-expression—as long as it dovetails with male sexual fantasy.”⁶⁵ Yet, there are experts who see Kim as a groundbreaking artist who has done in Hip-hop what no one has done before her. As professor Greg Thomas in his book “Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh - Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil’ Kim’s Lyricism” talks about the subversion of Lil’ Kim’s artwork: “Yet it is this Hip-Hop that is the context of Lil’ Kim’s revolution within a revolution at the musical level of lyricism. Her revolution is about power, knowledge, and pleasure. It is full-bodied and intellectually devastating.”⁶⁶ Although the interpretation of her work is twofold, similarly to Nicki Minaj, Kim is a huge driving force in female rap and her legacy in the Hip-hop genre is indelible.

How Kim uses the default setting of men in Hip-hop towards women can be seen in the lyrics of “Suck My Dick” from the album *The Notorious K.I.M.* (2000). The title already shows Kim taking a typically male derogatory approach and turning it against the male gaze:

“Imagine if I was dude and hittin’ cats from the back
With no strings attached, yeah nigga, picture that
I treat y’all niggas like y’all treat us, no doubt
Ay yo, yo, yo, come here so I can bust in ya mouth”⁶⁷

Here Kim adopts a male perspective on sex and how men in rap treat women during a sexual encounter. She talks about treating them the same way they treat all women. In the last verse Kim demands ejaculation on a man's face, which is a complete role reversal.

⁶⁵ Tricia Rose, “Sexism Isn’t Really a Problem,” in *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 235.

⁶⁶ Greg Thomas, “Introduction: Hip-Hop’s ‘QUEEN B@#\$H’ Lyricism: From Hard Core to The Naked Truth and Beyond,” in *Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh: Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil’ Kim’s Lyricism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

⁶⁷ Lil’ Kim, “Suck My Dick,” *The Notorious K.I.M.* (New York: Atlantic & Queen Bee Records & UNDEAS Recording, 2000), album.

Kim has remained persistent in her lyricism throughout her whole career. In the song “Found You” from the 2019 album *9* Kim uses similar words as her male peers:

“I’m a cutie with a big booty
Big bag, I like big dicks, big ice
I got that good pussy, make a nigga cum fast
Then I let him use my face as a cum rag”⁶⁸

In a male rendition, these verses would sound degrading and to some extent even humiliating. However, Kim’s expression and personality oozes confidence and ownership of her sexuality and her body.

Lil Kim’s contributions to female Hip-hop has paved the way for many female artists, one of them being Nicki Minaj. When addressing female embodiment Kim uses the same words in her lyrics as her male counterparts. Nevertheless, this wordplay does not serve to degrade, although some may think otherwise, but the artist empowers women through hypersexualization. The same themes used by male rappers like “sex, violence, and of course money were the key components of Lil’ Kim’s credo,”⁶⁹ as well as similar language made her one of the most impactful female rap artists, and her courage to use the stereotype in her own manner and consistency of her narrative helped to further the shift not only in Hop-hop.

The Legacy

Lil’ Kim is the pioneer of the hypersexualization in Hip-hop, meanwhile Nicki Minaj is the face of the contemporary female Hip-hop scene. Both artists have influenced many following female performers in their self-perception, symbolism of the female body and ownership of their sexuality. In this chapter I will look at the artists that Kim’s and Nicki’s bold wordplay and lyricism allowed to continue and create their own feminine way in this male-dominated industry. I will be tackling the lyrics of Iggy Azalea, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, as the names of these artists are steady in the Hip-hop mainstream, enjoy commercial success and are critically acclaimed for their artwork.

A four-time Grammy Award nominee and a holder of the record in The Guinness World Record for most weeks at number one on the U.S. single chart for a rap single by a

⁶⁸ Lil’ Kim, “Found You,” *9* (Queen Bee Records, 2019), album.

⁶⁹ Iandoli, “Chapter Ten: Let Your Freak Flag Fly,” in *God Save the Queens: The Essential History of Women in Hip-Hop*.

female interpreter, Iggy Azalea is another prominent female rap personality who uses hypersexualization in her lyrics, performance, and styling.

Especially in the beginning of her career, she used explicit language and openly depicted sexuality. The song “Pu\$\$y” from her first mixtape *Ignorant Art* (2011) is an example of such a song:

“I mean I don’t believe this!
You are going to turn down a pussy like this?
Staring you smack in your face
No man can turn down this pussy
I don’t know any man that can refuse this pussy”⁷⁰

In this song Iggy raps straightforwardly about her self-confidence in the sexual act and about her body. Which again is the turning of the narrative used by male rappers to assert and display dominance over women. Although in her later work Iggy has shifted away from her original style and expressiveness, she is one of the most prominent female artists in this style of rap.

Another very prominent artist of this group is undoubtedly Cardi B, a rapper born in the birthplace of Hip-hop, Bronx. Before starting her Hip-hop career, she was an exotic dance performer. This kind of dance is on the same boundary lane as her rap lyrics. For some it is an art form, for some it is a dehumanization of women and their bodies. Her eccentric appearances and bold explicit lyrics have helped her break into the Hip-hop mainstream, and her active social media presence makes her one of today's most prominent celebrities. In 2018, Time magazine ranked her among the “100 Most Influential People” in the world.⁷¹ As an artist she holds six world records in the Guinness World Records and is the first female rapper to ever win the Grammy Award for Best Rap Album as a solo artist.

Her lyrics are known for using sexually explicit language, boasting about her success and wealth while asserting her dominance in the industry. These motifs can be found in her debut single “Bodak Yellow” (2017).

“My pussy glitter is gold, tell that lil’ bitch play her role

⁷⁰ Iggy Azalea, “Pu\$\$y,” *Ignorant Art* (Los Angeles, 2011), album.

⁷¹ Taraj P. Henson, “Cardi B,” Time (Time), <https://time.com/collection/most-influential-people-2018/5217533/cardi-b> (accessed April 29, 2023).

I just arrove in a Rolls, I just came up in a Wraith
I need to fill up the tank, no, I need to fill up the safe
I need to let all these hoes know that none of their niggas is safe”⁷²

In this song Cardi brings up her past as an exotic dancer and asserts her dominance in the field of Hip-hop with her unmatched work ethic. Interestingly, in addition to defining herself against male colleagues, Cardi also mentions females both on the level of Hip-hop and on the level of personal relationships. The fact of asserting dominance in both genders separates her from the other female artists in this group. The other female rappers mostly only speak out against men. A recurring motif in her lyrics, besides sexuality and dominance, is wealth. The “brag culture” is a typical motif of male rap, and Cardi is a female rapper who uses this Hip-hop element in addition to the sexism stereotype. With this being said, Cardi is undoubtedly one of the central figures in contemporary female rap, pushing established methods further and adding an aspect of wealth and money to the stereotype of sexualization.

Finally, I would like to mention the work of Megan Thee Stallion, winner of three Grammy, the 2022 Billboard Music Awards in the Top Rap Female Artists category and, like Cardi B, one of Time magazine’s “100 Most Influential People of 2020”.⁷³ The evolution of her career is of interest, beginning at an early age with her mother, who was also a rap artist. In an interview for Vulture magazine, Megan says that it was her mother who is her biggest inspiration and the reason why she decided to choose a career in the Hip-hop industry.⁷⁴ Women in rap inspire each other and carry forward the core ideas of Hip-hop not only between each other, but even intergenerationally. Although her lyrics explicitly depict sexuality and desire, she comments on it as an expression of self-love:

“I’m just in love with myself. I love it so much, and I just love my body, and I feel like it really just comes off in my music. [...] It’s just how I am. I’m not a character;

⁷² Cardi B, “Bodak Yellow,” *Invasion of Privacy* (New York: Atlantic Records, 2017), albums.

⁷³ Taraji P. Henson, “Megan Thee Stallion Is on the 2020 Time 100 List,” *Time* (Time, September 23, 2020), <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2020/5888165/megan-thee-stallion-pioneer/> (accessed April 27, 2023).

⁷⁴ Hunter Harris, “How Did Megan Thee Stallion Become the next Hottest Rapper out of Houston?,” *Vulture*, April 25, 2019, <https://www.vulture.com/2019/04/megan-thee-stallion-profile-big-ole-freak.html> (accessed April 28, 2023).

everything I do is very natural. I feel like it really comes across in my music, and I like to make other women feel like it, too.”⁷⁵

With the song “Big Ole Freak” from the album *Tina Snow* (2018) she entered for the first time the *Billboard* “Hot 100” chart which helped her enter mainstream rap music and establish her name within the industry.⁷⁶ Megan describes this song as: “Just super sexy. Very confident, very free. I mean, when I listen to it, it just make me want to dance in the mirror by myself. I do that all the time. It just makes me feel really sexy.”⁷⁷ This shows that even through explicit language and depiction of women's bodies in a stereotypical way women can find a source of empowerment and self-love. In chorus of this song, she raps:

“My body addictive, it’s drivin’ him crazy
I think I gotta run from him
Don’t know what to do without it
He fuckin’ wit’ you? I doubt it
They don’t understand that I’m all in his head
And it’s nothin’ to do with my body”⁷⁸

She describes how the male counterpart is addicted to her body and her sexual performance. She also assures that he has no reasons to be unfaithful to her, because she has enchanted him so much that all his attention is directed only to her. However, in the last verse, she alters the original narrative and clarifies that although she is self-conscious about her body and knows that she is visually attractive to him, she has captured his fancy for more than just that reason. Megan implies that there she is more beyond her physicality and that it is just as relevant and intriguing as her body.

⁷⁵ Harris, “How Did Megan Thee Stallion Become the next Hottest Rapper out of Houston? (accessed April 28, 2023).

⁷⁶ “Billboard Hot 100,” *Billboard* (*Billboard*, March 21, 2023), <https://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/2019-05-18/> (accessed April 28, 2023).

⁷⁷ Harris, “How Did Megan Thee Stallion Become the next Hottest Rapper out of Houston? (accessed April 28, 2023).

⁷⁸ Megan Thee Stallion, “Big Ole Freak,” *Tina Snow* (Houston & New York: 1501 Certified & 300 Entertainment, 2018), album.

Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B are artists with unmistakable lyricism and personalities. Their collaboration in 2020 on the single “WAP” an abbreviation for “wet-ass pussy” aroused contradictory reactions.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, “WAP” entered the Billboard “Hot 100” chart of 2020 as the first female rap collaboration, making this song a milestone in Hip-hop.⁸⁰ This sex-positive song may have caused controversy, but it cannot be denied that its honesty and explicitness is on the side of women’s empowerment. In the fourth verse Megan raps:

“Put him on his knees, give him somethin’ to believe in
Never lost a fight, but I’m lookin’ for a beatin’
If the food chain, I’m the one that eat ya
If he ate my ass, he’s a bottom-feeder”⁸¹

Megan refers to an oral sex her partner would perform as an implication of a form of worship towards her. She asserts her dominance when metaphorically she has never lost and by “looking for a beatin’” she denotes a search for a sexual encounter. In the last two verses she again positions herself in a position of dominance, where she also becomes a provider for those lower on the food chain, i.e., men.

To conclude, all three artists mentioned in this chapter build on the legacy of Lil’ Kim and Nicki Minaj in their own personal ways. Their signature style uses a typical stereotype used in male Hip-hop, turning it around and using it to empower not only those artists, but all the women who listen to these songs. Women all over the world must face the objectification of their bodies on a daily basis. It takes a lot of boldness to stand up to them, because the pressure on what a woman should be is enormous. As journalist Danielle Koku in her article “Let’s talk about sex: how Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion’s WAP sent the world into overdrive” writes: “Meg and Cardi’s loud, empowering exclamations made an impact, but they’re not the first. Women – and female rappers in particular – have always talked about

⁷⁹ Gabriella Paiella, “Wait, What: The Week in ‘WAP,’” GQ (GQ, August 14, 2020), <https://www.gq.com/story/the-week-in-wap> (accessed April 29, 2023).

⁸⁰ Gary Trust, “Cardi B’s ‘WAP’ Tops Billboard Hot 100 for Fourth Week, the Weeknd’s ‘Blinding Lights’ Makes History in Top Five,” Billboard, September 21, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/cardi-b-wap-number-one-fourth-week-hot-100/>.

⁸¹ Cardi B featuring Megan Thee Stallion, “WAP,” (New York: Atlantic Records, 2020), single.

sex.”⁸² Iggy, Megan and Cardi are among the many vocal advocates for women’s sexual freedom and self-possession of their own bodies. In her study, White points out that: “These artists use their fashion sensibility, lyrics, and image content in the media to either differentiate from, or subversive the male enforced sexual roles females are expected to play in hip-hop culture.”⁸³ Their peculiar way of operating with the norms of the genre resonates with a lot of audiences and proves to be very efficient in pushing and challenging these established conventions.

This Is Me, This Is My Story

The legacy of female artists mentioned in the previous chapters has left an everlasting mark on the world of Hip-hop. Their clear voice defining themselves against the stereotype that the music genre produces and their use of the stereotype for self-empowerment created a space for the work of the female artists who came after them. In this chapter, I will examine texts by women artists who continue the tradition of using female sexuality as a tool for self-enhancement but go beyond that. These female artists see their sexuality and their bodies as an important component of their personhood and give these features prominence in their texts. However, with their lyrical statements they go further. In addition to sexuality and physicality, they reveal other layers of personality in their music lyrics. To illustrate new directions and tendencies of female Hip-hop, I will focus on artists from the mainstream represented by Doja Cat, representatives of the underground such as Rico Nasty and cupcakKe, and I will also look at the lyrics of Princess Nokia, Noname and DoeChii, who stand somewhere in between. All these artists deal with the concept of embodiment, and each adds her own handwriting to it.

Doja

The first envoy of the “new generation” of female rappers is Doja Cat, Grammy Award winner, one of the Times Magazine’s “100 Most Influential People of 2023”⁸⁴, and two-time winner of the iHeartRadio Music Awards for 1 Billion Total Audience Spins. Her

⁸² Danielle Koku, “Let’s Talk about Sex: How Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion’s WAP Sent the World into Overdrive,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, November 25, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/nov/25/queens-of-rap-cardi-b-megan-thee-stallion-wap> (accessed April 29, 2023).

⁸³ White, “Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionist! Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?,” p. 621.

⁸⁴ Baz Luhrmann, “Doja Cat Is on the 2023 Time 100 List,” *Time* (Time, April 13, 2023), <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2023/6269994/doja-cat-2023/> (accessed April 29, 2023).

career is intertwined with her success on social media and the viralization of her videos and music, which helped her enter the Hip-hop mainstream, making her one of the biggest female musicians of recent times.

One of Doja's tracks that reached a billion spins is "Need to Know" from the album *Planet Her* (2021). This song could be categorized as a follow-up to the Lil' Kim and Nicki Minaj Line. Doja utilizes elements of sexuality as she raps:

"Tryna see if you could handle this ass
Prolly give his ass a panic attack
Sorry if I gave a random erection
Prolly thinkin' I'm a telekinetic
Oh, wait, you a fan of the magic?"⁸⁵

The whole song uses a similar way of working with the stereotype as it was seen in the previously mentioned female artists. Doja depicts her body as enchanting and appealing in the dimension of sexuality. As a result, she has dominance over her male partner and is able to control and manipulate him as she pleases. As already mentioned, hypersexualization is a very successful tool to achieve the interest of genre listeners and will be one of the reasons why this song is so well received by audiences.

However, Doja has added her own spin to the usage of the stereotype. Opening song of the same album, "Woman" (2021), expands the perspective limited to female sexuality. In the first verse she raps:

"She give tenfold, come here, papa, plant your seed
Shen can grow right from her womb a family
Provide lovin' overlooked and unappreciated, you see
You can reciprocate
I got delicious taste, you need a woman's touch in your place
Just protect her and keep her safe
Baby, worship my hips and waist

⁸⁵ Doja Cat, "Need to Know," *Planet Her* (Los Angeles & New York: Kemosabe Records & RCA Records, 2021), album.

So feminine with grace”⁸⁶

This is a significant shift from the style of portrayal of women and their bodies that has been explored so far. Doja veers away from the established norm and comes up with an image of the female body as the source of life, the catalyst of feminine energy and divine.

Doja Cat’s music and lyrical skills bring a blend of the use of hypersexualization and a new understanding of women as divine beings whose powers are almost magical. She builds on the legacy of Nicki Minaj, referring to her in the song “Boss Bitch” (2020) with the line “Keen in the club, tryna pipe a Barbie”⁸⁷. Simultaneously, Doja also brings new ideas and shifts the narrative of female rap as one of the genre’s biggest figures.

The Underground

Underground music is generally understood as a subgenre that is not subject to commercialization and mainstream trends. It has always been an environment for the birth of new directions, ideas, and practices, which artists are free to exploit as they are not restricted by the policies of major record labels. Underground is a space that provides artists with the opportunity to experiment and define themselves against established norms, which is eventually permeating mainstream music. Scholar Adam Haupt in his book “Stealing Empire - P2P, Intellectual Property and Hip-Hop Subversion” links underground Hip-hop music with *conscious hip-hop* which is “the version of hip-hop that is largely seen as a tool for critical and socially conscious engagement”⁸⁸. That implies that the Hip-hop underground provides the basis for any Hip-hop subgenre that challenges and questions norms and inequities in society. In this chapter I will analyze work of the artists who push the atmosphere to the more combative side of the spectrum.

Rico Nasty is a Hip-hop artist that brings energy to both of her lyrics and to her performances. Her lyrics are assertive and confrontational with music mixed from rap, punk, metal, and rock. She encounters the listener with forceful lyrics and a position of dominance. Rico portrays female sexuality in her lyrics and uses it as a source of her strength. She

⁸⁶ Doja Cat, “Need to Know,” *Planet Her* (Los Angeles & New York: Kemosabe Records & RCA Records, 202), album.

⁸⁷ Doja Cat, “Boss Bitch,” *Birds of Prey: The Album* (New York City & Burbank: Atlantic Records & WaterTower Music, 2020), album.

⁸⁸ Adam Haupt, “Noise from POC and Black Noise,” in *Stealing Empire: P2P, Intellectual Property and Hip-Hop Subversion* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), p. 184.

addresses it in the interview for NME when she comments on the liberation that female rappers bring while using these themes as a source of self-empowerment:

“Let these guys know that they can’t tell you what to do. I’mma shake this ass, and you’re going to watch it and you’re going to pay my bills. I love it because it’s time women stop worrying about what men think about them. We might not say we are, but [women can be] really mean and like ‘That’s that hoe shit!’ and it’s really not. It’s really just having fun and enjoying your life.”⁸⁹

This clearly shows how women in rap view their sexuality and their body. The original meaning of the stereotype of hypersexualization, which was supposed to denote the degradation of women by men, has been turned around by female performers and is now used to their advantage. In her lyrics, Rico addresses the value of women in her typical forceful way. In the song “Big Titties” featuring Bauuer & EARTHGANG from the album *Anger Management* (2019), she speaks to women as follows:

“I’m so supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
You wonder why your life suck, it’s because you ain’t focused
Don’t give that boy the pussy if you know he ain’t worth it
You ain’t learned yet? You worth way more than a Birkin
If that nigga got you out here looking crazy like a circus”⁹⁰

Although there is a narrative in the song where rappers show their dominance, privileged life, and ability to get anyone, Rico emphasizes here that a woman must be aware of her self-worth and not to lower herself and her standards for the sake of someone who is not worthy of her. This contrast extends the classic rap norm and alters the connotations that the song conveys.

⁸⁹ Kyann-Sian Williams, “Rico Nasty: ‘I Definitely Resonate with Being a Pop-Punk Princess,’” NME, September 11, 2020, <https://www.nme.com/big-reads/rico-nasty-cover-interview-2020-iphone-nightmare-vacation-2750494> (accessed April 29, 2023).

⁹⁰ Rico Nasty featuring Bauuer and EARTHGANG, “Big Titties,” *Anger Management* (New York City: Atlantic Records, 2019), album.

However, not all female rappers agree with the mainstream direction of Hip-hop music. Another rapper from this category is independent artist cupcakKe. In her lyrics and beyond, she openly disdains her colleagues and the path they have chosen. In cupcakKe's diss track "How to Rob" (2020), she takes aim over the whole spectrum of female rappers from Lil' Kim to Doja Cat:

"Fuck around and spell Doja Cat, 'cause Doja Cat, that just mean she pussy
Who the fuck is this bitch named Suki? Poppi' up when promoters can't book me
Since you love to be on OnlyFans, I'm the only fan at your show, what's goodies?"⁹¹

In these verses cupcakKe degrades Doja Cat to only a part of her body. She also mocks rapper Sukihana for performing on OnlyFans, an online platform used in many cases to share explicit content and ethical sex work. Although cupcakKe is the author of songs such as "Vagina" (2015) or "Deepthroat" (2015), one can see that women in rap are not one in the same, and their approach to the issue of embodiment can be different.

In this chapter I looked at the work with the symbolism of the female body of two representatives of the rap underground. Rico Nasty and cupcakKe's unconventional and more experimental practices show not only that Hip-hop offers a complex view of diverse topics, especially on women's bodies, but also that artists in this genre have different opinions and rap is a medium to demonstrate those opinions to the world.

More than a Body

Following on from the previous chapter, I will introduce female artists whose names are beginning to grow, and their current position stays somewhere between the mainstream and the underground. I would like to demonstrate how their work has evolved in relation to the artists mentioned earlier.

Princess Nokia brings both more experimental melodies and a more complex view of the female body to the Hip-hop canon. In the song "Tombody" (2016) she addresses the issue of beauty standards:

"With my little titties and my phat belly
I could take your man if you finna let me

⁹¹ cupcakKe, "How to Rob (Remix)," (Chicago: Stonecutter Records, 2020), single.

It's a guarantee that he won't forget me
My body little, my soul is heavy"⁹²

Princess Nokia does not portray her body as divine here, quite the opposite. She admits that she is not confident about her body. However, she understands that as a being she is much more than just a physical shell.

In the song "Brujas" (2016) from the same album, Princess Nokia also raps about the power of the female community:

"Talk shit, we can cast spells, long weaves, long nails
Corn rows, pig tails, baby fathers still in jail
Good witches, I fuck with, bad bitches, we run shit"⁹³

In this song she refers to her cultural heritage and the fact that women and their powers have often been demonized. Princess Nokia finds in those powers and in the female fellowship a source of strength and self-confidence.

The rapper Noname shows that the female body is a "political playground" for multiple directions starting with Hip-hop and ending with religion. Noname focuses more on some of these aspect in her song "Self" from the album *Room 25* (2018) while using the element of female body as a means of portraying the complexity of women:

"Fucked your rapper homie, now his ass is making better music
My pussy teachin ninth-grade English
My pussy wrote a thesis on colonialism
In conversation with a marginal system in love with Jesus
And y'all still though a bitch couldn't rap huh?
Maybe this is your answer for that; good pussy"⁹⁴

"Pussy" in these verses stands as a metonymy for a woman as such. Noname works with this trope in the opposite manner to the other rappers mentioned as she desexualizes it and reflects on it the qualities and knowledge that a woman possesses. Through the sexual

⁹² Princess Nokia, "Tomboy," *1992 Deluxe* (London: Rough Trade Records, 2016), album.

⁹³ Princess Nokia, "Brujas," *1992 Deluxe*, album.

⁹⁴ Noname, "Self," *Room 25* (Chicago: Phoelix & Noname [exec.], 2018), album.

act, the male counterpart acquires the knowledge and abilities that the female has. The “pussy” thus becomes a teacher and a guide who broadens men’s horizons and educates them, instead of serving strictly for sexual pleasure. The female body is not just reduced to the ability to perform a sexual act, but is made up of many other components, such as knowledge and skills, which are far more fundamental, but unfortunately society does not recognize them that way because it is focused only on female sexual characteristics.

Another artist who has been helped by virality on social media, like Doja Cat, is Doechii. In 2023, she won the Rising Star Award given annually by *Billboard* Magazine to female performers for their significant contributions and inspirations to women in music. Her confident lyricism approaches the essence of womanhood in a complex way and reveals many aspects connected with it.

An exemplary song is “This Bitch Matters” from the album *she / her / black bitch* (2022), where she tackles the emotional side of womanhood:

“The bitch needs more loving, needs more hugging
Needs more soul, needs more something
This bitch cold, but this bitch matters
This bitch will fuck after hours”⁹⁵

Female performers face a lot of pressure to maintain their place and persona within the industry. In this song, Doechii disguises that behind the tough facade of the rapper is a fragile emotional side that does not receive as much space in the Hip-hop world. To be vulnerable is perceived as weakness. Yet Doechii shows that this side is an orderly one, and that the feelings hidden beneath the mask as a rapper are a valid part of her personality.

Doechii takes the meaning of her lyrics beyond the song and releases a music video for the song “Crazy” (2022), where the central element consists of a woman’s body. As Doechii raps:

“Y’all calling me crazy
When a bitch been ballin’ all day like Brady
Long hair, this wavy

⁹⁵ Doechii, “This Bitch Matters,” *she/her/black bitch* (Los Angeles & New York City: Top Dawg Entertainment & Atlantic Records, 2022), album.

'Hop out, First Lady'
You niggas can't date me, look at your savings
You niggas still waiting
Still blowing out daisies, counting on daydreams"⁹⁶

She makes several comparisons to herself to Tom Brady, who is considered the best quarterback of all time, or the wife of the president, implying her dominance and uniqueness. This contrasts with the dystopian music video, which features Doechii and several dancers all completely naked. The female body is desexualized, Doechii and the other actors in the clip are depicting strong emotions. Via Doechii's Twitter, the director C Prinz comments on the clip as, "a piece that challenges the viewer to look at a stigmatized imagery and ask them to see beyond their first impression to see the female form not in moments of sexuality but instead in moments of truth, intensity and power"⁹⁷. Doechii brings a new perspective on the issue of the female body, showing it in a raw light that is meant to provoke and challenge established stereotypes and norms.

The legacy of female rappers defining themselves against conventions, using the stereotype for their self-empowerment and the underground has created a space in Hip-hop for female artists to use the concept of the body as they choose. As a female rapper BLK says for The Guardian: "I feel like there was a glass ceiling before, but this new generation of people coming out are changing things."⁹⁸ As demonstrated in this chapter, the stereotypical portrayal of feminine gender recedes and is replaced by the distinctive expressions and self-determination of individual women artists. The power relations that influence Butler's concept of embodiment are also changing. In contemporary times, women themselves become the source of their own power. It is them who define the value and representation of their bodies.

⁹⁶ Doechii, "Crazy," (Los Angeles: Top Dawg Entertainment & Capitol Records, 2022), single.

⁹⁷ Doechii (@iamdoechii), Twitter post, April 8, 2022, 7:16 pm, <https://twitter.com/iamdoechii/status/1512479633538621444> (accessed April 30, 2023).

⁹⁸ Sam Wolfson, "Rap and the Gender Gap: Why Are Female MCS Still Not Being Heard?," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, September 9, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/sep/09/rap-gender-gap-why-are-female-mcs-still-not-being-heard> (accessed April 30, 2023).

Conclusion

The thesis at hand explored the theme of the female body and its representation in Hip-hop. Using close reading, I analyzed the lyrics of various female rap artists since the turn of the millennium, and I observed how they respond to the strong stereotyping present in rap.

In the first part I defined the position of rap in Hip-hop and briefly showed the history of this artistic genre to outline the origin of the recurring narratives and stereotypes of objectivization and sexual degradation of women that are connected with this movement.

In the following part I focused on the intersections between Hip-hop and feminism. I elaborated on the history of this movement and defined terms such as *Hip-hop feminism*, self-perception in arts and how this affects female rap artists' perceptions and interpretations of their own gendered bodies. Also, within this chapter, I have introduced the theory of embodiment and its critical perspectives on Hip-hop.

In the penultimate chapter I analyzed musical lyrics of selected male performers and through their lyrics I have strived to define the default stereotype connected to the female body in Hip-hop culture. I have shown the sexual undertones, the superiority of the male gender and the power relations that men in Hip-hop often demonstrate towards women.

In the last part, I worked with the text of female artists to show they work with these habitual patterns. I divided female artists into four groups, I mentioned those who avoid the theme of embodiment, those who are reserved towards stereotypes, those who work with it and regain their autonomy using hypersexualization, and finally I analyzed texts of those artists who combine all previous ways of working with the stereotype.

My analysis uncovers an interesting development of the view on this issue both on the synchronic and diachronic levels. In the terms of diachronic development, there is an evolution in how female performers approached the problem of objectification. The 1990s and the turn of the century were characterized by the vocalization of dissatisfaction with the reduction of a woman to her body only. Succeeding female artists adapted the male way of expression and turned the stereotype in their favor and empowerment through embracing hypersexualization. The current trend is shifting female identity beyond physicality and allowing female artists to portray their identity comprehensively and the way they desire. The synchronous trend shows a woman as a complex human being, which involves sexuality and the body, but gives these aspects the same importance as all others.

The research presented in this thesis shows the development of a certain trend in the Hip-hop environment. It contributes to the representation of Hip-hop as a valuable resource for

depicting social changes and shows the development of feminist concerns. It reflects the issue of objectification of the female body and shows how women themselves react to this problem. Future research on the topic of embodiment in Hip-hop may focus on the connection between body objectification and different cultural and ethnic patterns.

Research of the relationship between Hip-hop and the female body has yielded interesting findings and proves that Hip-hop promptly reflects changes in society, which can be used for future research in humanities. Hip-hop continues to be a place for people to express themselves and voice injustice. The genre's popularity shows that this platform serves universally and connects people across society.

Resumé

Ve své bakalářské práci se věnuji zobrazení ženského těla v americkém hip-hopu od začátku 21. století do současnosti. Zabývám se reakcí ženských rapových umělkyně na stereotypizaci, která se tohoto elementu týká, a na objektivizaci těla close-reading analýzou jejich hudebních textů. Snahou práce je zmapovat spektrum různorodosti odpovědí a ukázat vývoj ženského rapu, který se tímto tématem zabývá.

V první části práce vymezuji rap v kontextu hip-hopu a stručně představuji historii tohoto uměleckého žánru, kterou považuji za klíčovou pro pochopení původu opakujících se stereotypů a objektivizace ženského těla spojených s tímto hnutím.

Další část je zaměřena na definování feminizmu, jeho vývoj a jeho propojení s hip-hopem. Rozvinula jsem historii tohoto hnutí a na základě práce teoretiků v této oblasti definuji termíny *sebepercepce*, *teorie embodimentu* a *hip-hop feminismus*.

V předposlední části pomocí hudebních textů mužských interpretů definuji stereotyp ženského těla a konotace, které jej přináší. Ukázala jsem opakující se sexuální podtext, mocenské vztahy a nadřazenost mužského pohlaví, jež je často opakujícím se jevem v tomto hudebním žánru.

V poslední části pracuji s texty vybraných ženských raperek a ukazuji jejich reakci, na tuto problematiku a na základě interpretace jejich textů je rozdělují do čtyř skupin. První skupina, která se tématice těla nevěnuje. Druhá skupina se vůči stereotypu otevřeně vymezuje. Třetí skupina, která si stereotyp osvojí a pomocí gradace jeho smysl otáčí a využije jej k sebeposílení. A čtvrtá skupina, která na navazuje na práci umělkyně z předchozích skupin, jejichž texty s konceptem těla pracují, ale vnímají jej na stejné úrovni, jako další části jejich osobnosti.

Z diachronního vývoje tato práce ukazuje patrný vývoj v přístupu interpretek k problému objektivizace. Synchronní trend ukazuje ženu jako komplexní lidskou bytost, která zahrnuje sexualitu a tělo, ale vnímá tento aspekt se stejnou pozorností jako všechny ostatní. Studium této problematiky přinesl zajímavý vhled jak na vývoj ženského rapu, tak rovněž na Hip-hop jako plnohodnotný zdroj pro další akademický výzkum.

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