

Sexual dominance in hip hop



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“ Take a couple days off take it off leave nothing but ya t-shirt ya panties on. Damn right imma get that thang imma put my name on it all night imma whip dat thang allstate betta put a claim on it i claim my territory, [...] In my sex room, all that I wanted! Legs in the air, witcha toes pointed! So baby welcome to my sex room!” (Ludacris, Sex Room).

This idea of sexual dominance, as seen in these lyrics by Ludacris is only one of the prevalent issues in the Hip-hop industry. Hip-Hop today has become one of the most popular genres of music in our society and has rapidly. Due to its enormous cross-over appeal, hip hop culture has become a potentially great unifier of diverse populations. Although created by black youth on the streets, hip hop’s influence has become worldwide. Approximately 75% of the rap and hip hop audience is nonblack. It has gone from the fringes, to the suburbs, and into the corporate boardrooms.

“ Like many groundbreaking musical genres, rap has expanded popular aural territory. Bringing together sound elements from a wide range of sources and styles and relying heavily on rich Afrodiasporic music, rap musicians’ technological in(ter)ventions are not ends in and of themselves, they are means of cultural ends, new contexts in which priorities are shaped and expressed” (_____95).

With such a strong following over the past two decades from the various cultures, hip-hop has contributed greatly to the growth of our culture and the views of various aspects it encompasses, such as the interpretation of gender roles and lifestyle. Gender roles are defined by _____ as “ a set of perceived behavioral norms associated particularly with males or females, in

a given social group or system”()). Through these graphic and implicit songs and images portrayed by Hip-hop artists, it has brought people of our society today to interpret the gangster lifestyle, which many of these rap songs embrace as an acceptable form of culture. Not only has this gangster culture/lifestyle become more widely accepted, but it has become a driving force in the hip-hop industry, drastically changing the way in which both males and females are being represented and beginning to present themselves to adapt to this popular culture.

The success of films like “ Goodfellas”, “ Scarface”, The Godfather trilogy and TV series like the Sopranos document all too well America’s fascination with the gangster lifestyle. Since the introduction of hip hop in the late 1970’s countless rap songs have distinguished a lifestyle of unrelenting violence, vulgarity, misogyny and crime reinforced in the showing off of weapons, expensive jewelry, and scarcely dressed women which are seen as sex objects that are to be used and discarded at will. Well known rap artist of the twenty-first century, 50 Cent shows a perfect example of the gangster lifestyle which culture has recently began to embrace in his song, I Get Money here,

Im stanky rich, Ima die tryna spend this shit, Southside’s up in in this bitch,
Yeah I smell like the vault, I used to sell dope, I did play the block, Now I play
on boats, in the south of France, Baby, St. Tropez, Get a tan? I’m already
black Rich? I’m already that Gangsta, get a gat Hit a head in a hat Call that a
riddle rap Shit, f**k the chitter chat (50 Cent).

The money, weapons, “dope”, and materialistic objects in this quote, such as the boat all directly show the way in which modern hip-hop depicts how they think culture should be and what is necessary to gain that gangster image. This masculine gangster image has become so successful at penetrating the very core of the hip-hop community that its biggest stars have become casualties. These stars begin to blur the lines between the bad boy roles they depict in their songs and videos with reality ultimately placing themselves in trouble with the law; and worse, ending in their death just as in the cases with two popular hip hop artist/rappers Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. Although everyday people may not take these bad boy ideals to the extremes that these artists do, people are greatly influenced by the more cultural aspects of the gangster lifestyle such as the clothes, jewelry, cars, and possession of women as sexual objects. The glamorization of such lifestyles, as the reinforcement of stereotypes, and the interpretations of society have quickly began to impact American culture as it cultivates a thuggish and materialistic stance as the bona fide response to what is necessary to fit into our culture and society and along the way has produces its own set of gender roles. In every aspect of hip-hop gender roles are inescapable. The gangster life style itself is greatly based around masculinity. “Beyond Beats and Rhymes, author Kevin Powell says, “We live in a society where manhood is all about conquering and violence.... And what we don’t realize is that ultimately that kind of man hood ultimately kills you”. As a male growing up in this hip-hop culture, the lyrics, and evocative images are telling you that to be a man you must evoke a sense of strength and power, but not everyone has that power. One way in which you can gain access is through the use of your body and your ability to present yourself

physically as somebody who deserves respect, this is exactly what these hip-hop artists have done. Look at artists such as 50 Cent who has sculpted himself to fit this masculine idea associated with hip-hop, by creating a muscular physique, tattooing his body, and placing expensive “bling” around his neck. Videos expand on this idea of masculinity as they show these artists with extensive amounts of extravagant materialistic goods such as cars, houses, or boats and multitudes of submissive women in and around them. This masculine, gangster lifestyle along with the hip-hop ideals have especially shaped societies view of female gender roles through various avenues.

One of the major forms which have contributed to the demoralization of female gender roles is imagery in the forms of both film and photography. From CD covers and posters to music videos and movies, women are portrayed in hip-hop as sexually dominated objects. CD covers such as Gangster Rap by Ice T, Tip Drill by Nelly, and Night at the Booty Bar by Disco D all show women in very little, to no clothing centered around the lead male artist which conveys to the viewers the sense of male dominance over these women. Even female hip-hop artists have conformed to this misogynistic and demeaning lifestyle as they too, through posters show themselves wearing very little clothing and using the sexual inference of lollipops or popsicles in order to appeal to the male gaze. “Even these female rappers, such as Missy Elliot, are likely to display a fair bit of sexual preoccupation” (Brummet 252). If these celebrity icons, are conforming to this misogynistic ideal how do we expect the youth of our society to not conform as well? These images have quickly contributed to culturistic production of a disease much like

bulimia, a cultural sickness of our time. “ That sickness is becoming the psyche of young women. Who they are in this culture, where they fit, what their value is, or their lack of value, because if this is the only image that they see of themselves in a pseudo-glamorous way, meaning if they look at a fashion magazine there’s no girl that looks like ‘ Tamico on the block’ [an average black girl], but in the videos there is,” she said. “ But they see them in this one objectified way and it’s hurting them.” While media images might be written off as “ only pictures” or “ fantasy representation,” they remain a very real part of American culture, with real-life implications for viewers and consumers. As if these explicit still images are not demeaning enough, the technological advance have allowed these women to be portrayed in an even more graphic way through the multi-media form of music videos.

At the beginning of the music video era in the late 1950’s these forms of media were used as a means of marketing to boost music sales, but today we have strayed a great deal from music videos such as the 1961 video *Travelin’ Man* by Ricky Nelson which consisted of him standing on the stage with a few intercessions of different places around the world thrown in. For the most part the gaze in this video is focused on a male figure not a women as much of these hip-hop videos today are. The women in these videos greatly outnumber the artist in these videos and through the actions, are portrayed as walking “ bling” of these male artists, just like the chains around their necks or their fancy cars. “ Women, then, are offered as objects to be looked at. They are, often literally, hangers on, writhing around the male center of the image. Think how many music videos show women reaching longingly for the male star” (Brummet 252). One of the videos that

that most explicitly does this is the controversial music video produced for Nelly's song Tip Drill which portrays every aspect of the gangster lifestyle and completely degrades women through explicit and erotic behaviors and actions. Nelly uses these women as hypersexualized props to fuel male fantasies and show his power and masculinity over them. This video immediately starts out by showing women in very little clothes, even some without any clothes. As it progresses you see Nelly and a few other men walking into an extravagant home with women lined up along a winding stairway as if they were women of a whore house ready to be selected, and then they all turn to the side to show their curves. Throughout the video you see Nelly and his crew throwing money at these women including at their genitalia as the women shake their asses and rub themselves or rub each other while the men watch. One can also see the misogynistic views as the rappers control the women, at times putting them into positions as if they are toys of sexual pleasure, yet for the most part these women in the video are placing themselves in these sexual positions implying the complete control of the man's will has over these women. Unlike the still images which hint to sexual actions, for example the lollipop in relation to oral sex, these videos actually act them out in ways which are not open for interpretation.

Studies have discussed and demonstrated correlational links between young people's degree of media involvement (including the like or dislike of a particular genre) on sexual attitudes and gender schemas (Hansen Hansen, 1991; Roe, 1995; Rubin, 2002; Ward, Hansbrough, Walker, 2005) For example, teens with highly sexual " media diets" were shown to be more

likely to engage in sexual intercourse than teens with low sexual content in their media diets.

This quote solidifies the idea of how these music videos are directly contributing to the sexual demoralization of these women through the interpretation of the female identity. The identity portrayed by these women in this pseudo-reality/culture evokes the idea that all women must be skinny, curvy, wear scantily clad clothing, and act sexually forward and submissive in the presence of men as in the videos. Women in hip-hop are portrayed, in [...] videos, as either silent, willing strippers or complaining, troublesome meddlers. The characters that they play have such a limited role that they need to look a certain way immediately to fit their role in society. “ No longer do we feel that the body is a more or less disappointing ‘ given’ instead, the body is the outer expression of our self” (Giddens 104). Although the images depicted in these videos may represent a pseudo-culture/reality young women today are taking this identity and interpreting it as a true reality, acting the same actions out in their everyday life. Hip-hop imagery screams to women that beauty is only skin deep and that they are here for no other reason than to please men sexually. Although both videos and photographs explicitly and directly show the actions and characteristics which define women in hip-hop, the most prominent form of portrayal, lyrics cannot simply be passed over.

Rhetoric, language is never simply a form of expression it is a functional tool that is manipulated to achieve desired ends. Once again hip-hop brings another form, lyrics to contribute to producing the identity of what it means to be a woman in this hip-hop culture through written text. A beat, a picture,
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even a video, like Lil Wayne's can show certain ideals through imagery, but do not have a definitive meaning without lyrics. Lyrics are what make these graphic, shameful female stereotypes definitive. The words used in hip-hop are highly rhetorical and greatly define who a rapper/hip-hop artist is.

According to "Read it in Brail, It'll Still be Funky" by _____ it states that "Rap lyrics are a critical part of a rapper's identity, strongly suggesting the importance of authorship and individuality in rap music" (____95). A concrete example of these rhetorical degrading lyrics is expressed through Three 6 Mafia's song, Slob on my Knob here,

Slob on my nob Like corn on the cob Check in with me. And do your job Lay on the bed And give me head Don't have to ask Don't have to beg Juicy is my name Sex is my game Lets call the boys Lets run a train Squeeze on my nuts Lick on my butt The natural curly hair Please don't touch First find a mate Second find a place Third find a bag to hide the whole face Real name Grover I said Ben over (Three 6 Mafia, Slob on my Knob).

From the lyrics of this song one can see the vulgar language that has become associated with women in this culture. Whoever made up the saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me", was obviously not around at the time hip-hop was produced because these words are not only hurting individuals in a verbal sense, but physical sense as well. When did so many young women, especially those from the middle and upper middle-classes begin to find pleasure in being called "Bitches and Hoes" instead of slapping the person referring to them in that degrading manner? Music of the past never conveyed the message that hip-hop does today; the lyrics have drastically changed and have brought the culture of <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-dominance-in-hip-hop/>

our time to change with it. In the 1950's Elvis became a revolutionary, being crowned "The King of Rock Roll", his hip shaking beats and smooth love lyrics helped him to capture the hearts of many especially the women. Today those smooth love lyrics have turned into words of hate, violence, sex, and drugs followed by base pounding, head rattling beats. I'm sure that Elvis didn't capture the hearts of millions of women by calling them bitches, ho's or whores like many of the hip-hop songs of today do. The lyrics of today have moved from the passionate lyrics of artists such as Elvis, Tony Benet, Stevie Wonder, and Boyz II Men, to degrading sexual lyrics of artist such as Nelly, 50 Cent, Tupac, NWA, and Dr. Dre. Analyzing lyrics such as these from one of Elvis' famous songs Love me Tender here, it is almost impossible to not interpret and identify the compassionate and loving meaning of his words, " Love me tender, love me sweet. Never let me go. You have made my life complete. And I love you so. Love me tender love me true. All my dreams fulfill. For, my darling I love you. And I always will" (Elvis Presley, Love me Tender). Even within these first two versus it shows how much Elvis cares for the person he is talking about, saying things such as " never let you go", " You make my life complete", and " I will always love you". You don't see that compassion in lyrics such as these from songs like Bitches Ain't Shit, by Dr. Dre here, " Bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks. Lick on deez nutz and suck the dick. Get's the fuck out after you're done. And I hops in my ride to make a quick run. I used to know a bitch named Eric Wright. We used to roll around and fuck the hoes at night". Comparing these there is no doubt that times have changed and that instead of expressing the loving nature as lyrics of the past have, they degraded women to bitches and ho's. " There are the lyrics, which heavily feature the terms bitch and ho

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as standard forms of reference for women” (Brummet 252). Hip-hop has directly extended its threats specifically towards women using their lyrics to objectify them as objects of sexual pleasure, violence, and disrespect. “ We’re telling people women are bitches and ho’s and sluts and not worthy of respect,” she said. “ And that’s exactly how society is seeing us” (<http://www.cnn.com/2005/SHOWBIZ/Music/03/03/hip.hop/index.html>). This young woman here understands the idea that these lyrics are actually talking about her and all the other women that listen to these hip-hop songs, not some made up person or just the girls in the videos, like other girls believe. “ It’s funny when I hear women when these rappers are calling women; you know bitches and hoes say they’re not talking about me. I say yo! They are talking about you. If George Bush were to get on national TV and makes a speech and started calling black people niggers, would you be like, I don’t know who George Bush is talking about, but he ain’t talking about me” (Byron Hurts, *Beyond Rhythm and Beats*). A cultivation of rhetorical lyrics, videos, and images have brought hip-hop to become one of the most influentially, culturally evolving forms of music/media and along the way has produced gender roles which have degraded our sociological views of women.