

Good the sexual objectification of women in hip hop essay example

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In 1995, popular hip hop artist Tupac Shakur released a song entitled “California Love” that topped the Billboard Music Charts. In 2011, Time magazine named the single on their list of All Time 100 Songs (Adams). The song’s video also became an instant success. The video begins with an image of a woman undressing for the visual pleasure of man who nods his head at the camera with a smile as if to affirm his desirability. Most of the video features scenes of a party where scantily clad women dance around the artists and includes several close-up shots of women’s bottom’s shaking as they dance as well as shots of their barely covered breasts. All the women in this video are sexually objectified and have no role other than as visual and sexual stimulation for the male artists. These types of portrayals of women in hip hop is commonplace and pervades both the song lyrics and videos produced by male artists. Through the lyrics and visual representations of women in videos, the hip hop industry has given a specific gender role to women that casts them as sexual objects. This gender role for women contrasts the image of male hip hop artists as hyper-masculine, dominant and desirable.

Sex is a common message in both male and female hip hop songs but in male songs, sex is seen as a goal to obtain and then brag about. Very few songs relate sex with love or a committed relationship. In these songs, women and sex become interchangeable and women are transformed from human beings into nothing more than the objects of men’s sexual desires. In many of the most popular hip hop songs, women are referred to as “bitch” or “ho,” words that uphold the image of women as sexual objects and instead of equal people. Hip hop lyrics also frequently describe, in vivid

detail, a woman desiring a man; this type of description not only supports the image of women as objects but also supports the image of the male artist as desirable and dominant. For example, one of the bestselling and most notorious hip hop artists of the last twenty years is Marshall Mathers, otherwise known as Eminem. Some of his most popular songs include violent and appalling descriptions of women. In his single “ Fack” Eminem recreates a sexual encounter between a man and a woman, focusing mostly on the woman’s overt expressions of pleasure during sex. In an article discussing the treatment of women in hip hop, journalist Jackson Katz focuses specifically on Eminem and his controversial lyrics about women. Katz says that the misogynistic treatment of women in hip hop has become so commonplace that it does not even warrant commentary anymore when artists release new music with controversial lyrics. The lack of discussion about controversial lyrics has only entrenched these assigned gender roles in hip hop. Instead of creating a conversation about how misogynistic lyrics can potentially influence harm women, these songs are accepted as normal for the genre and no one considers the larger effects on society. These types of songs are not on the fringe of the music industry; they produce high volume sales and are very popular. The album featuring “ Fack” debuted at number one on the American and United Kingdom charts and was certified double and triple platinum in each country respectively (Katz).

While song lyrics were the foundation for gender stereotypes, music videos have perpetuated and cemented gender stereotypes in the hip hop culture. The video for “ California Love,” released in 1995, was mild compared to the more current hip hop music videos. Although not as hardcore as many hip

hop songs, one of the most recent bestselling singles on the Billboard Hip Hop chart was Robin Thicke's " Blurred Lines." The video for this song shows topless women dancing around Thicke as he sings lyrics that " objectify and degrade women, using misogynistic language and imagery that many people would find distasteful or offensive" (Wyatt). One of the often repeated lyrics of the song is " I know you want it," and in the video, that line is followed by an image of the topless woman rubbing against Thicke and nodding, further showing that Thicke is a desirable and dominating male figure. A study of sexual objectification in music videos, explains that music videos are powerful tools for establishing and reinforcing stereotypes because they offer visual representations of the lyrics and images conjured in viewers' minds (Aubrey and Frisby, 476). Aubrey and Frisby found that compared to males, females " were more sexually objectified, held to stricter appearance standards, and more likely to demonstrate sexually alluring behavior" in music videos (475). Taking into consideration the popularity of the song and video, " Blurred Lines" is influential in society, especially among young audiences. Like many other hip hop songs, it assigns popular gender roles to both men and women, roles which, because of their sexual nature, can be harmful to society's views of men and women. If society continues to view men and women in such extreme roles as only sexual objects or objects of desire, other qualities like love and respect become less important. This could potentially lead to increased violence against women and sexual assault.

The two examples offered come from white hip hop artists. Their popularity is not normal in an industry dominated by African American men so their

offensive lyrics could be written off by some as not representative of the industry. However, they are. In fact, Eminem and Robin Thicke's lyrics are highly representative of the gender stereotypes of women throughout the entire hip hop industry. This culture is alarming considering the popularity of hip hop music, especially among youth. A survey taken of 7th to 12th grade aged students found that of the children who had listened to music the previous day, 65% of them had listened to hip hop (Aubrey and Frisby, 477). Hip hop music has also dominated the Billboard and bestseller charts in recent years (Trust). With the increase in popularity, some in the hip hop industry have recognized the need to change the culture because of the large youth audience. Many female and some male rappers have begun, through their music, to work to reverse the perpetuation of these gender roles. Women hip hop artists especially have always tried to relay a message of power and unity in their songs to try and combat the dominant message broadcast by male hip hop artists (Thompson). However, they have largely been unsuccessful at altering hip hop's portrayal of women in misogynistic and sexist tones that perpetuates a degrading stereotype of objectification.

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