

4-2018

# When Feminism Meets Hip-Hop

Kylie Thompson

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp\\_theses](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## eCommons Citation

Thompson, Kylie, "When Feminism Meets Hip-Hop" (2018). *Honors Theses*. 192.  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp\\_theses/192](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses/192)

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu).

# When Feminism Meets Hip-Hop



Honors Thesis

Kylie Thompson

Department: English

Advisor: Thomas Morgan, Ph.D.

April 2018

# When Feminism Meets Hip-Hop

Honors Thesis

Kylie Thompson

Department: English

Advisor: Thomas Morgan, Ph.D.

April 2018

## Abstract

This paper was conceived from an interest to apply my understanding of race and gender to a genre I love: hip-hop. Hip-hop began as a socio-political genre and as a means of advocacy via its ability to mobilize listeners toward social change. As hip-hop became more popular, its recognizable features were taken and appropriated for mass production and consumption, applying economic pressure to severely obstruct its original purpose and function. Yet, hip-hop continues to lay claim to being an important artistic genre through artists' innovative adaptation of form and the presence of deeper political critiques. While these social critiques have predominantly focused on matters of race and class, a long-standing history of feminist challenges exists within hip-hop as well. Since gendered oppression occurs on a global scale, pervading all facets of society, hip-hop not surprisingly reflects the dominant culture's sexist values. Some female hip-hop MCs, however, have been able to challenge the sexist culture of the industry and establish a hip-hop feminism; albeit the large-scale commercialization of hip-hop makes it especially difficult for women's voices to be heard in a political context that runs counter to pervasive patriarchal structures. I contend that female hip-hop MCs take specific feminist interventions in conjunction with the manipulation of gendered language in order to assert a feminist voice within the particularly sexist industry of hip-hop. Specifically, I take up a radical feminist understanding to argue the effectiveness of interventions that create actual change versus remaining complicit with masculine power.

## Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my friends and family for supporting me throughout this process. My friends have given me their continued motivation; in particular, my long-time roommate, Katherine, has spent countless hours debating philosophical life questions with me over a glass of wine or two. My family has been my rock through all the ups and downs: my brother, Andrew, introduced me to the world of hip-hop and has spent many hours on the phone with me sharing new music and talking over lyrics; and, my mother inspires me on a daily basis to continue working toward women's rights and to continue bettering myself as a human being.

I would also like to thank my professors for their guidance along the way. Rebecca Whisnant, Ph.D., introduced me to feminist theory and has had a profound impact on my thinking as a radical feminist and activist. Her wit and eloquence I can only aspire to. David Fine, Ph.D., has consistently pushed me to think in new and increasingly complex ways, urging me to consider love and healing in introspective as well as broader terms. Finally I'd like to extend thanks to my advisor, Tom Morgan, Ph.D., for whom I have an immense amount of respect as both a friend and a mentor. I am forever grateful for his willingness to work with me over the past few years. My writing has grown in ways I never could have imagined. All of my professors, including those not mentioned here, have had an impact on expanding my perspective as a learner and scholar. I would not be where I am today without each and every one of them.



## Table of Contents

Abstract	Title Page
I. Carving a Space for Hip-Hop Feminism	1
II. Hip-Hop as a Socio-Political Genre	4
III. Feminism: Liberal vs. Radical	6
IV. Black Feminism in Hip-Hop	10
V. Conformity With The Male Gaze	14
VI. Resisting Patriarchal Manifestations	18
VII. Connecting Black Feminist Thought Across Generations	29
VIII. Critical Reflections	32

## I. Carving a Space for Hip-Hop Feminism

This paper was conceived from an interest to apply my understanding of race and gender to a genre I love: hip-hop. Contentious debate entangles hip-hop in a political battle reflecting larger social structures that pervade society from the surface to the core. The conservative complaints of hip-hop that I grew up hearing contrasted my opinion of hip-hop as a powerful and artistic genre. When I began to gain a more evolved understanding of our country's socio-political climate, I started to see hip-hop in the current moment as a convergent manifestation of culture and counterculture. My growing feminist and race consciousness spurred me to consider hip-hop under a critical lens. I even took an English undergraduate course focused on analyzing hip-hop, from the genre's history and form to its use of language to transform meaning. I would be remiss not to emphasize how this course shaped my interest in pursuing research on hip-hop in a more focused way. I also enrolled in courses thereafter on feminist social change and feminist thought, which molded a clearer understanding of my own feminist politics. Thus, the intersections of my undergraduate interests culminate here, in examining what emerges when feminism meets hip-hop. Admittedly, I have faced difficulty as a white female in understanding black female subjectivity. My aim therefore is to explore the confluence of race and gender as it yields complexity in the lyrics of female hip-hop MCs.

Research on the specific intersection of feminism and hip-hop represents a small, but interesting body of work. Scholars take different approaches to the subject, bringing one another into conversation about the different interventions that female hip-hop MCs have taken over the history of the genre. While some focus on specific regions, like

Havana hip-hop or Caribbean hip-hop, others focus on specific time frames such as hip-hop in the 80s or 90s. Joan Morgan, Imani Perri, Gwendolyn Pough, and Patricia Hill Collins represent some of the most influential thinkers in this area of study. In particular, Joan Morgan coined the term “hip-hop feminism” in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* to describe the unique position of black women within the hip-hop generation. Black women used hip-hop feminism as an outlet outside the dominant white, heterosexual feminism of the time. However, I believe that ideological connections exist across and between these two seemingly opposed groups, connecting white and black feminists in a socio-political battle against patriarchal oppression. Despite historical conjecture about the lack of inclusivity of second-wave feminism, a radical ideology serves to benefit women of all colors and classes through a collective understanding of empowerment and liberation.

Interestingly, well-known scholarship within the subfield looks at feminist interventions without first supplying a critical discussion of feminist politics regarding empowerment. This may, admittedly, be due in part to the difficulties female hip-hop MCs encounter in trying to succeed in the male-dominated field; problematic feminist interventions reflect the real contradictions present in black female lives. Still, there is value in acknowledging and critiquing a problematic representation of femininity especially when it occurs in a form that functions as an agent of socialization such as music. Music not only reflects culture, but also has the power to shape and influence cultural conceptions – music can both present cultural resistance and reaffirm cultural ideals. According to law professor and scholar andré douglas pond cummings in his comparison of hip-hop and critical race theory, hip-hop in particular “...has become a

dominant cultural force in the world, and, in many ways, has become the voice of a generation” (513). In what follows, I aim to expand the body of work that studies hip-hop through a feminist lens by seeking to establish a radical feminist ethos that I, then, apply to my reading of female hip-hop MCs’ lyrics.

Moreover, I contend that female hip-hop MCs take specific feminist interventions in conjunction with the manipulation of gendered language in order to assert a feminist voice within the particularly sexist industry of hip-hop. These interventions function in a myriad of ways; for example, some interventions cater to the male gaze in attempt to assert control while others subvert or confront typical gender conventions to empower. An artist’s choice of intervention realistically factors in to their chances at success considering the nature of the industry as a capitalist enterprise. Since countercultural resistance is often less favorably received than cultural affirmation, popularity complicates an artist’s ability to engage with gendered politics. Keeping this in mind, I specifically take up a radical feminist understanding to argue the effectiveness of interventions that create actual change versus those that remain complicit with masculine power. I will begin with a discussion on the context of Hip-hop as a socio-political genre and then move to explain radical and liberal feminism as it applies to the interventions of female hip-hop MCs, laying claim to the success of interventions that adhere to radical feminist principles. To illustrate the difference between liberal and radical feminist interventions, I will provide a critical analysis of four artists lyrics; Young M.A and Nicki Minaj present lyrics containing liberal feminist interventions while the lyrics of M.I.A. and Rapsody adhere to radical feminist interventions. The strength of Rapsody’s lyrics as a form of radical feminist intervention stems from her ability to deal with the complexity

of identity on a deeper level, engaging in conversation with other black feminist thinkers. In particular, the message set forth within Rapsody's lyrics pertains to Audre Lorde's understanding of the erotic as in direct opposition to the pornographic, a concept I will explain later in greater detail.

## **II. Hip-Hop as a Socio-Political Genre**

Hip-hop grew from its origins in reggae to become a global phenomenon in its own regard. According to the scholar Paul Gilroy, hip-hop is a cultural-political genre, acting as a counterculture movement within what he terms "The Black Atlantic." This space was conceived through a history of colonialism and the slave trade, which led to the Afro-British diaspora and paved the way for rich artistic art forms that transcend boundaries of race and ethnicity while connecting America, Britain, and Africa. In this sense, hip-hop has become an art form that can convey the feelings and attitudes of oppressed people within a global context and in a way that invites awareness and advocates for social justice. Within the context of the United States in particular, the genre's New York roots are socio-political, representing a means of advocacy via its ability to mobilize listeners toward the hope of social change. As hip-hop became more popular, its recognizable features were taken and appropriated for mass production and consumption, applying economic pressure to severely obstruct its original purpose and function. Through its commodification, hip-hop became entrenched within an industry policed by the dominant culture; white male music executives predominantly run the hip-hop industry and produce music marketed toward a white audience. The desire for profit keeps mainstream hip-hop depoliticized because the industry executives find more economic success selling stereotypical depictions of black culture and specifically black



masculinity to a largely white audience. In addition to racial components, the same capitalistic understanding applies to gender; the industry executives produce music that maintains women's degraded position because the status quo sells. Therefore, the hip-hop industry largely participates in maintaining structural systemic inequality under the motive of profit.

Moreover, the industry capitalized on the opportunity to turn hip-hop's artistic socio-political roots into a commodity, draining the life and meaning from hip-hop by embedding the genre in capitalistic structures that essentially perpetuate systems of racial oppression. Yet, hip-hop continues to lay claim to being an important artistic genre through the innovative adaptation of form and the presence of deeper political critiques. While not all hip-hop functions as such, much of it still maintains this insurrectional aspect. The social critiques have predominantly focused on matters of race and class, but a long-standing history of feminist challenges exist within hip-hop as well. Since gendered oppression occurs on a global scale, pervading all facets of society, hip-hop not surprisingly reflects the dominant culture's sexist values. Some female hip-hop MCs, however, have been able to challenge the sexist culture of the industry and assert a black feminist voice; albeit the large-scale commercialization of hip-hop makes it especially difficult for women's voices to be heard in a political context that runs counter to pervasive patriarchal structures. Thus, women must carefully adapt form and manipulate language in order to make their music both marketable and political. It is precisely this dynamic that warrants a disclaimer: the critical analysis I present is not intended to be a direct critique of the artists themselves, but rather to evaluate how particular interventions function within the constraints of the genre, constraints that cut across intersectional

aspects of identity and culture simultaneously. Further, the negotiations that female hip-hop MCs must make contextualize much of the contested struggle between liberal and radical feminism.

### **III. Feminism: Liberal vs. Radical**

One of the most contentious current debates regarding feminism, and feminist challenges to women's oppression, concerns the political differences held by liberal and radical feminists. These differences have largely been thought of in terms of waves. In "Not Your Father's Play Boy," feminist scholar Rebecca Whisnant posits that the wave model is problematic for several reasons – both in that it devalues "important feminist work particularly by women of colour, between, throughout, and independent of the 'waves'...[and] that it wrongly suggests that the differences under consideration are primarily generational rather than political." Instead, she contends "that the difference between the second and third wave is not primarily a matter of age or generation but that, in fact, most of this much-vaunted difference ultimately reduces to the timeworn distinction between radical feminism and liberal feminism" (8-9). Thus, the wave model represents a watered down version of feminism, which essentially weakens the movement by diluting the undergirding political ideologies that have informed each side of this heated debate in favor of generational lumping. While the wave model may be useful in showing certain feminist progressions over time, it seems to overlook the root of political disagreements feminists have historically engaged in throughout the second and third waves as well as in the current moment, moving into the fourth wave. I contend that radical feminism goes about analyzing and presenting solutions to the problematic patriarchal system more effectively than liberal feminism by virtue of its insistence upon

social systems and collective thinking. This understanding will inform my analysis of the following contemporary artists as divided into two camps: 1) the lyrics of Nicki Minaj and Young M.A contain a liberal feminist approach although they differ by way of specific interventions; and 2) the lyrics of Rapsody and M.I.A., which extend a radical feminist interpretation, differing in strength and by way of method.

To begin, we should understand where feminist controversy stems from by examining the political differences between liberal and radical feminism.<sup>1</sup> Liberal feminism boils down to individualism, positing the individual as the ‘be all, end all’ of social life. Through a liberal feminist lens, individual ignorance or false beliefs that can be attributed to tradition perpetuate women’s lack of access to society’s goods. The goal, then, is to remove the barriers that deny women access to societal goods by educating, persuading, and informing on an individual basis. This line of reasoning essentially aims to change or undo the socialization of individuals so that women can have and do what men can have and do. While this may be an important aspect of social change, by placing the focus solely on individuals, liberal feminism ignores the larger system of patriarchy. Enter: radical feminism. Radical feminism shifts the focus from individuals to the patriarchal system, from individualism to collectivism. The problem, then, becomes the enforcement of a patriarchal system and its subsequent characteristics, which affect both men and women through adherence to restricting social conventions. The system remains in place in part because it benefits those who have the power to change it, highlighting

---

<sup>1</sup> In order to distinguish between liberal and radical feminism, I utilize Richard Wasserstrom’s method of questioning in his article “Racism, Sexism, and Preferential Treatment: An Approach to the Topics:” namely, What is the focus?; What is the problem?; Why does the problem exist?; What is the goal or ideal?; and How will it be achieved? I draw this particular methodology from an influential teacher of mine, Rebecca Whisnant.

the role self-interest plays in perpetuating inequality. Hence, the ultimate goal of radical feminism is to dismantle the patriarchal system through collective action that makes further investment in patriarchy costly to participants. To reiterate, the problem with liberal feminism is not that it is fully inaccurate, but rather that it is incomplete. Liberal feminism neglects to account for the larger system, which undergirds and informs its points. Instead, we ought to acknowledge the larger system that informs individual actions, keeping both aspects in perspective.

Radical feminist Andrea Dworkin argues that four elements of subordination keep patriarchy in place and, incidentally, women subjugated: hierarchy, objectification, submission, and violence. While the first three seem self-evident to an extent, my interest lies in the fourth element – violence. Within the patriarchal system men enact violence against women routinely, which comes to be seen as necessary, natural, right, inevitable, deserved. In addition, violence maintains or enforces the other elements so that the cycle perpetuates itself. According to radical feminists, these elements become sexualized within a patriarchal society through the institutions of pornography and prostitution. However, many women have turned to claim or embrace their sexualities under the guise of true empowerment because they feel valued as a sexual object. This sense of value manifests from a learned conception of gendered norms, which teach women that pleasing men sexually results in male approval, and thus self-gratification. But this liberal sexual empowerment, claiming the right to assert the individual agency to sexualize oneself, is only an illusion because the power given still comes from men and the male gaze. When patriarchal culture promotes sexualized violence and becomes intertwined with the four elements of subordination, then so-called sexual liberation is only an

affirmation of these elements which distribute power unequally, essentially keeping the system in place.

So what? When women feel empowered through self-sexualization, that empowerment still entails objectification and essentially gives men what they have always taken under the system of patriarchy. The justification then is that women have freely chosen it. So in essence the liberal mentality supposes that turning women into sex objects is okay so long as women want to be sex objects. Dworkin undermines this idea when she claims that “the fate of every individual woman – no matter what her politics, character, values, qualities – is *tied* to the fate of all women whether she likes it or not.” Again, this shifts the focus from a liberal, individual understanding to a radical, collective understanding. Under patriarchy, women are oppressed as a class and must stand collectively against oppression in order to see real change and fight subordination. Some may counter this argumentation, asking where radical feminism leaves space for female agency. As long as patriarchy stands, women’s agency is already crippled by the severe limitation of choice. Women experience profound double-binds in regard to sex: they are deemed either “sluts” or “prudes;” “emotional” or “cold;” “accessible” or “dykes.” This list could even be extended. In this way, societal restrictions that adhere to and enforce gendered norms of sexuality limit women’s freedom of choice. When looking for ways to strip ourselves of socially imposed straightjackets, we must not turn to stripping in the sexual sense as it only perpetuates women’s oppression as a class via sexual submission. What I’m after and what radical feminists are after, is changing the system as a whole so that we can start to conceptualize real female agency without gendered confines connected to sex and sexualized violence.

## IV. Black Feminism in Hip-Hop

Since oppression exists intersectionally, to invoke Kimberlé Crenshaw's widely regarded terminology, oppression on the basis of gender ought to be examined in conjunction with other facets of oppression such as class, sexuality, and race. Importantly, gender and sexuality represent two distinct, fluid categories that are often but not always related. Gender refers to a personal identification with gender identification, while sexuality represents a person's orientation or preference with respect to intimate sexual relations. The intersection of gender and sexuality in turn impacts presentation and performance in a number of ways. These specific intersections of identity become prevalent within the industry of hip-hop and serve to produce unique life experiences for black female artists, which in turn affect the music they produce. Black women within the industry fight an uphill battle to reach visibility and thus face limited options, affecting where they align themselves in the political spectrum. Hip-hop scholar Imani Perry elucidates upon this struggle within the male-dominated field claiming, "As a masculinist form with masculinist aesthetics, hip hop, and the art form's masculinist ideals of excellence and competitiveness, have often forced women to occupy roles gendered male" (156). Beyond the logistics of this approach, Perry continues on to assert that female hip-hop MCs actually promote feminism by way of appropriating a "badmen" mentality in that "female 'badmen' in hip-hop... use the language of violence, power, and subversive tricksterism to articulate their artistic prowess" (156). The "badmen" feminist intervention is layered and complex, often taking different forms on the basis of personal identity. Depending upon how specifically female hip-hop MCs employ the "badmen" intervention, it may adhere to either a liberal or radical feminist framework.

For example, one problematic aspect of Young M.A and Nicki Minaj's lyrics emerges not from the appropriation of masculinity, but rather from the use of the masculine "badmen" ideology as a form of sexual power. As a female coming from a homosexual perspective, Young M.A's lyrics seemingly assume the masculine role to establish superiority in comparison to other men, and to assert sexual dominance over other women. In this sense, Young M.A complicates heteronormative sexual dominance by challenging men's masculinity with respect to their sexual performance, but still maintains masculinity as the means to dominate women sexually. Nicki Minaj appropriates masculine sexual power in an effort to control men sexually but does so by sexualizing herself in compliance with the male gaze. Both interventions essentially reinscribe a hierarchy of sexual dominance that continues to disadvantage women. While Perry and I may disagree on the effectiveness of particular feminist interventions, she does come to admit that the overwhelming objectification of women in the current media-focused culture, and its utilization by female hip-hop MCs alongside lyrical interventions, is problematic for a feminist agenda. In addition to lyrical content, female hip-hop MCs develop an image reflected in music videos and other media outlets that often overshadows the complexities of lyrical form. An artist's image plays an important role in their popularity and success. Thus, artists may present socio-political critiques in content while remaining complicit to typical gender conventions in image and personal presentation. So I ask, but to what extent can we allow adherence to typical female objectification for the purpose of economic success justify the perpetuation of gendered and racial oppression?

Within the dominant culture black women are already disproportionately sexualized and objectified in comparison to white women because of the historical subjugation rooted in slavery and colonization so that self-sexualization by female hip-hop artists appears to further harm rather than improve their position within society. For example, through the institution of slavery black women came to be seen and valued on the basis of their reproductive abilities, rendering fetishization an historical pattern. As cited in Sherri Irvin's *Body Aesthetics*, black, lesbian, radical feminist Audre Lorde posits a conception of the erotic for black women, counter to pornographic objectification, that accounts for "resistance and agency, 'for not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society'" (20). In this sense, the erotic refers to an authentic reclamation of women's spiritual and embodied lives, positioning all aspects of life as part of an interconnected, collective reality valuing presence. The erotic, then, denies Western dualistic thinking and extends the scope of the erotic well beyond the sexual. In fact, the erotic is defined in direct opposition to the pornographic because of its deep-seated connection to objectification, which seeks to devalue women's embodied presence by reducing them to mere objects for men's sexual gratification.

Further, Lorde's understanding of the erotic in her famous essay "The Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power," represents "an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (89). Many female hip-hop MCs, I would argue, are asserting that creative energy in their art, their craft. The pervasive self-objectification manifested in mainstream, contemporary hip-hop



would be in direct contradiction to Lorde's directive toward a new understanding of the erotic that encompasses joy and connection in all aspects of life. In fact, she warns against systems, such as the ones that commercialized hip-hop is entrenched in, that value profit over the spiritual linking of mind and body because it "robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment" (88-9). In this sense, the strongest feminist interventions within the space of hip-hop resist the temptation of sexual objectification for profit and instead conceptualize a new understanding of female empowerment outside the dominant systems of oppression.

To get a better sense of the intertwined threads of feminist thought within contemporary female hip-hop MCs' lyrics, I will provide a critical analysis of four female MCs who seem to be making feminist statements within their lyrics and physical representations, to differing degrees of success based on the radical feminist understanding I have argued thus far. To reiterate, the lyrics of Nicki Minaj and Young M.A both seem to adhere to liberal feminist principles that purport sexual empowerment, albeit they do so by different interventions. Young M.A as a self-identifying black, lesbian female occupies the space of the "badman" by participating in male behavior towards women so as to out perform her male competition. This intervention reinforces masculine power as well as the subsequent degradation of other females. Nicki Minaj as a black heterosexual woman also appropriates a "badman" ideology by using the language of male sexual power to posit female sexual empowerment. This intervention asserts the individual agency to sexualize oneself, but ultimately reverts to serving the male gaze. In contrast, the lyrics of M.I.A. and Rapsody seem to propose a more radical viewpoint that attempts to challenge patriarchal structures and the elements of subordination by

subverting gender norms and challenging typical masculinity. They too take different paths in doing so, Rapsody's approach being stronger via its ability to engage on a deeper level with intersectional oppression, to call upon feminist thinkers, and to conceptualize a new understanding of female empowerment through Lorde's sense of the erotic.

## **V. Conformity With the Male Gaze**

Black, female hip-hop MCs Nicki Minaj and Young M.A attempt to subvert the stereotypical conceptions of the female subject, but assume a problematic masculine perspective in their effort. In particular, the feminist interventions present in their lyrics support the traditional gender binary rather than challenge it through a liberal approach to individual empowerment. Each artist importantly comes from a different perspective, adding to the nuance and complexity of their respective interventions; both females recognize a restrictive feminine/masculine dichotomy, but Young M.A speaks from a homosexual perspective whereas Minaj takes on a heterosexual perspective. The specific invocation and manipulation of gender expectations in the artists' respective lyrics ultimately revert to seeing the female subject through a masculine lens, which, ultimately, allows dominance to silently continue via compliance and complicity.

The lens through which women are seen – and, in turn, see themselves through – should be understood in order to fully grasp the complexities of combatting sexist perceptions. Importantly, the dominant position of men in society awards power that subsequently shapes a societal lens in masculine terms. From this masculine lens the world is ordered and interpreted, assigning masculine values and assumptions that inculcate a sexist social and political landscape. Further, males possess the luxury to assume or ignore feminine needs and promulgate their own sexual expectations. The

sexual objectification and exploitation of women are ubiquitous implications connected to masculine sexual power. Notably, these values are difficult to dismantle because they come from within a deeply ingrained sexist framework disguised as natural or inherent. When the masculine position is appropriated in attempt to garner power on an individual level, the framework of sexism remains intact and liberal feminist interventions ultimately perpetuate hierarchy.

Gender conventions dictate the expectations of sexual behavior, producing an atmosphere in which the deviant may attempt to prove their respectability according to dominant terms. In “Eat,” Young M.A defies gender expectations, but simultaneously leaves gendered constructs in place rather than dismantling them, explaining, “That just make them look less of a man, fam / And to sit on ya’ll is part of the damn plan / they just mad cause I beat the pussy like bam bam.” The third line contains a simile between the target, “I,” and the vehicle, “bam bam,” modified by “beat the pussy.” “Bam bam” refers to the animated television character Bamm-Bamm Rubble, from *The Flintstones*, who had excessive strength and would swing a club. “Beat the pussy” is slang terminology referring to male sexual use of the female body without regard to female subjectivity. The beating of the club invoked by the vehicle “bam bam” suggests that the penetration of women serves as a way of competing with men by appropriating dominant male power through a show of violent sexuality. Hip-hop scholar Scott Crossley explains how hip-hop lyrics commonly replace intimacy with violence through conceptual metaphors that foreground sexual acts in violent terms. The second line further develops the notion of appropriating violent masculine standards. “Plan” highlights the intentionality of a scheme, arranged in advance. The intentional plan to appropriate dominant male power

through sexualized violence, thereby, attempts to invert expectations by surpassing males at their own game. However, assuming the masculine sexual perspective maintains female objectification, treating females as sexual objects to be conquered in the pursuit of symbolic prowess. This objectification ignores female subjectivity and maintains the power of typical masculinity, demonstrating how conformity reinscribes female subjugation.

Asserting female control in the landscape of sexual power is one way to complicate the fight against objectification and degradation. In *The Pinkprint*'s "Feeling Myself," Nicki Minaj manipulates the language of sexual power to claim authority, but also maintains degrading presumptions of female sexuality, saying, "Kitty on fleek, pretty on fleek / Pretty gang always keep them niggas on geek / Ridin' through Texas, feed him for his breakfast." In the first line "kitty" is characterized by "fleek." "Kitty" is slang that represents a vagina. "Fleek" is also slang, referring to a perfect or flawless appearance in accordance with social conventions. The flawless appearance of female genitalia represents the demands of sexual access and desire placed on the female subject. In the second line, possession of a typified female body maintains the ability to "keep them niggas on geek," suggesting that men can be controlled through sexual desire — a masculine idea, indeed. Further, "geek" is a double entendre: in one sense it is a slang term referring to oral sex, and in another sense it means to get overly excited, specifically in a nerdy manner. Therefore, sexual appearance coupled with sexual performance becomes a way to control men by keeping them excited sexually. In the third line, "Feed" indicates the action of giving men what they want, typically associated with traditional female gender roles as a sexually accessible housewife and caretaker. In context, "feed

him” translates to receiving oral sex, which may seemingly attempt to place women in the position of power through controlling the sex act. Although this female sexual empowerment appears to give women control, it also maintains their position as sexual objects that must cater to male desire in order to manipulate male abstractions of femininity. Further, inhabiting spaces of masculinity in order to lay claim to feminine control inverts rather than subverts gendered roles, demonstrating how appropriation preserves subordination.

Moreover, both invoke conventional gender expectations, using their perspectives to manipulate, but ultimately reinforce male sexual expectations. Young M.A. challenges male power by expropriating masculine sexual violence for herself, taking on the male perspective to subsequently conquer and degrade women in the same objectifying ways. This complete disregard for female desire and subjectivity reflects the cultural disdain for women created by the lens of the male gaze; participation in male competition reinforces female subjugation. These types of examples are common within her lyrics. For example, in “Walk” Young M.A raps,

Didn't mean to fuck her  
She had a cramp, so I rubbed it out  
Kick bitches out, wave bye with my rubber out  
Your opinion doesn't matter  
That's one thing I don't give a fuck about

Nicki Minaj attempts to manipulate male sexual desire with the intention of seizing control and power, but ultimately conforms to the expectations demanded of females. This conformity maintains women’s position as sexual objects, lending appropriation to

the preservation of subordination. Minaj's lyrics, too, regularly demonstrate a pattern of this problematic intervention. For example, in "Anaconda" Minaj raps,

Come through and fuck him in my automobile  
 Let him eat it with his grills and he tellin' me to chill  
 And he telling me it's real, that he love my sex appeal  
 Say he don't like 'em boney, he want something he can grab

Further, the difficulty in navigating power and dismantling masculine privilege reveals the capacity for patriarchy to reassert hierarchies of gender, demonstrating how reassertions of dominance reflect underlying compliance.

## **VI. Resisting Patriarchal Manifestations**

While some female hip-hop artists utilize their platforms to promote themselves sexually and portray a sort of sexual dominance, others work toward what I would argue to be a more effective feminist stance in crafting lyrics that open a space for feminine thought outside the dominant power structure. In other words, artists such as M.I.A. and Rapsody challenge Dworkin's four elements of subordination and re-conceptualize the feminine self. Rather than perpetuate female subordination, their lyrics critically evaluate how an unjust culture informs their thoughts and actions, and they attempt to evade this influence through intervention and resistance. Furthermore, M.I.A. and Rapsody, in their respective songs, "20 Dollar" and "Black & Ugly," investigate their own identities as women in relation to the larger social structures that enforce norms and expectations, demonstrating that effective hip-hop feminism can exist within a space in which an independent authenticity can set the stage for liberation. Both artists also incorporate similar themes in their songs, including notions of identity and personal demons within a

larger consumerist culture that values profit over ethical considerations. Within this societal framework, these artists navigate a landscape of prescribed femininity, bringing to bear the problematic implications that conformity and misappropriation present. Rather than submit to a feminine strategy that reinscribes subordination, they configure bars that express their own feminist understandings of themselves outside of traditional, societal context and expectation. Beyond self-representation, these artists also critique the social systems that dually affect individual experience and are perpetuated through collective participation.

Systems of power and privilege apply pressure to comply by offering a set of limited choices that ultimately function to perpetuate the system. In “20 Dollar,” M.I.A. highlights the sexualization of women under patriarchy and refuses to comply with societal standards, saying,

People judge me so hard cause I don't floss my titties out

I was born out of dirt

like I'm porn in a skirt

I was a little girl who made good, well au revoir, adieu

In the first line, the slang term “floss” means to flaunt, or show off. In this sense, refusing to flaunt her breasts, or thereby sexualize herself as an object of the male gaze, warrants scrutiny and judgment in a society that demands women to perform a certain role for the benefit and desire of men. Noticeably, this directly contradicts the message seen in Minaj’s lyrics, although it is not intended as a direct critique of her specifically. The second line expands upon the refusal to self-sexualize, invoking a simile that uses the phrase “porn in a skirt” as the vehicle by which to transform the target phrase, “born out

of dirt.” The former refers to the institution of pornography, which maintains women’s subordination through violent degradation and objectification of the female body. The latter phrase intimates the notion of inheriting poverty, or being impoverished due to family circumstances beyond one’s control, and having to overcome class barriers in order to find success in life. Taken together, the vehicle phrase transforms the target through the implication that pornography presents an illusory option for women to escape poverty. Pornography represents just one option within a system of limited options that pose functional barriers to the advancement of women in society, especially poor, disadvantaged women. Essentially, women in this circumstance face a double-bind: they can remain impoverished, or try their luck in an industry that does not live up to its lucrative reputation and, in addition, maintains notions of female inferiority. In this sense, the refusal to objectify oneself as a sexual object aligns with a radical feminist framework that conceptualizes one’s self-proscribed identity, sexual or otherwise, as forming independent of social pressures and, therefore, reflecting female agency.

The rejection of cultural norms communicates a refusal to conform to gendered ideals that limit the perception and expansion of self. In “Black & Ugly,” Rapsody takes up the challenge of reconciling identity apart from Western beauty standards that reinforce unattainable ideals meant to objectify the female form as the inferior sex, saying,

So concerned wit weight I'm mo' Chucky than I am chubby  
Confidence of a porn star the day I cut the horns off  
Took all my demons threw em down hill in a buggy  
Then stood on top the hill and did the milly rock and dougie.



The first line contains a reference to the horror film “Chucky” in which a doll becomes possessed with a demon. The concept of possession, therefore, transfers to the concerns of body image; meaning, self-scrutiny represents a possessive demon within a society that rewards idealized feminine forms. The second line advances the notion that cultural ideals become damaging demons through the utilization of a metaphor between the implicit subject, “I,” and “porn star,” modified by “confidence” and set within the context of “the day I cut my horns off.” The context, here, uses “horns” as a metonymy for the internal evil that self-polices based on projected standards of beauty. Cutting off the “horns” removes cultural norms from the conception of self and replaces self-doubt with “confidence.” Further, “confidence” modifies “porn star,” drawing a parallel between the empowerment expressed by females within the porn industry, who, ultimately, profit from their own objectified bodies, and the self-assurance achieved through excising norms. Although the empowerment claimed by “porn stars” becomes illusory in a radical feminist sense since they remain objects of the male gaze, the “confidence” ascertained, here, serves to reject the male gaze and all categorical standards. Thus, the result is one of celebration as evidenced by the performance of “the milly rock and dougie,” both popular dances invented by male hip-hop MCs. The dancing emulates the embodiment of a less categorically gendered space by appropriating masculinity on feminine terms. Further, in excising the demons of culturally enforced self-policing, the embodied response of dancing communicates authentic feeling outside of typical conventions, and the possibility of liberation.

Disparate notions of power arranged along the intersections of identity create a complex web of disenfranchisement. M.I.A. critiques the larger culture and economic

pressures that undergird and inform individual experience of oppression and its manifestations, rapping

So we're shootin' until the song is up

Little boys are acting up

And baby mothers are going crazy

And the leaders all around cracking up

We goat-rich, we fry

Price of livin' in a shanty town just seems very high.

In the fourth line, “leaders” refers to the men in control of countries all over the world, particularly powerful western countries. “Cracking up” characterizes those “leaders” as indifferent to the societal problems that persist, or even increase, across the globe. In this sense, the social problems seen in the second and third lines exemplify issues that exist on an individual level, stemming from the social constructs surrounding poverty and gender. While “little boys” act out, asserting violent masculinity and becoming involved in crime and gun violence, their “mothers are going crazy,” meaning they recognize that bad behavior gets rewarded within a culture of masculinity, but feel powerless to change it. The last line highlights the “price” connected to participating in a toxic, unjust culture, which just may be life. Moreover, these lines set up contrasting images of those who suffer from being systematically kept in a particular space and those with power who benefit from maintaining rigid hierarchies of class and gender. The stark contrast points to the absurdity of injustice and calls for liberation from cultural constructs that disenfranchise based on hierarchic scales regarding race, class, and gender. Further, highlighting dynamics of privilege and power as rooted in white, upper-class masculinity

creates a new space for feminine thought, illustrating how a feminist vision undercuts conformity.

The concern for profit opens the door to greed and self-interest, and distorts humanity by delineating worth. Rapsody subverts the importance of profit by denying greed and choosing to value the diversity of human life when she raps,

You all about the benjamins, I'm all about the family

I got the fellas rockin, see we working on a dynasty

Black and ugly as ever and still nobody fine as me

No one been as kind as me

Only one kind of me.

The first line uses parallelism to prioritize “family” over “benjamins.” “Benjamins” acts as a metonymy for the power of money as a model of success. Money, as a motivating factor within the hip-hop industry in particular, serves as a tool by which the industry manipulates artists into producing depoliticized messages that can be marketed to a much larger, mostly white audience. In subverting the prospect of money for the purpose of “family,” the socio-political message resurfaces as an important vehicle by which to call out injustice and advocate for compassion and camaraderie among people. Further, “black and ugly” represent synonymous terms within a racist culture that historically demonizes and subjugates others based on the appearance of skin tone. The reclamation of these terms inverts their connotations, making them positive markers of self-worth rather than degrading insults. The last two lines expand upon the notion that appearance should not dictate worth through clever homophone play with the word “kind.” The first appearance of “kind” refers to kindness as a character trait or disposition, while the

second “kind” highlights the uniqueness of such kindness. Together, “kind” symbolizes the refusal to accept judgments of appearances and, thereby, the refusal to be grouped and stereotyped. Instead, the uniqueness of human identity should be drawn from substantive qualities, and allowed to flourish independently of suppressive social constructs. The development of radical female agency, in this way, frees individuals from the pressures of conformity and opens the door for liberation.

M.I.A. and Rapsody’s lyrics both work on multiple levels; they examine female agency removed from socialized patriarchal norms, and they critique the social systems that affirm and reward submission to oppression. In this sense, M.I.A. and Rapsody achieve a radical feminist consciousness that recognizes individual participation within larger social systems. In order to create and sustain a more egalitarian society, we ought not only change ourselves, but also work to change those larger systems that operate *because of* participation, and in order *to perpetuate* participation. The cyclical nature of the problem means one must examine each level and work to create individual as well as collective social change, like when Rapsody undercuts the cultural valuing of profit and reclaims stereotypical conceptions of black femininity in “Black & Ugly.” In regards to inner confrontation, these artists must navigate their position as women within a male-dominated field in a male-dominated world. They challenge their own sexualization and reject objectification, finding new ways to conceive of an authentic self. Authenticity allows them to break the cycle of participation and to critique the culture that hinges upon it. They censure social systems that value superficiality and profit, and bolster substantive qualities in order to pave the way for a future in which individual radical agency accounts for the collective take down of an oppressive culture, generating liberation.

Another aspect both engage is the way that typical masculinity socializes boys in becoming men who act as leaders in a male-dominated and male-identified society. The phenomenon of this transformation creates a cycle in which boys participate in the perpetuation of unjust social systems through the socialization of patriarchal masculinity. While male leaders pull the strings, boys fail to break cyclical toxic masculinity. Understanding this dynamic locates the gender divide and masculinity in particular as a root force of oppressive systems. Systems of power connected to masculinity inform the intersection of race and gender. In “Power,” Rapsody confronts violent masculinity as perpetuating oppression, rapping,

Badge make police feel powerful in the hood

Guns make us feel powerful but they don't do no good

I know my blackness powerful and they don't like that

I know some niggas sold theirs, sit back and watch 'em tap dance.

The repetition of “powerful” in the first three lines draws attention to the different contexts in which that particular type of control or dominance applies. The first “powerful” refers to the control police officers feel from wearing an arbitrary “badge,” which assigns membership to a socially constructed group. The “badge” acts as a synecdoche for the system of power writ large; moreover, the “badge” itself does not transmit power, but rather systems of control and dominance enforce a hierarchal order in which the “badge” comes to signify the unjustified power police officers assert in poor, black neighborhoods. The police brutality referenced in the first line triggers a response in the second line wherein “guns” serve as a reactionary tool against injustice. The violence connected to “guns” and masculinity in general only creates the illusion of

feeling “powerful” because it perpetuates black stereotypes and does not actually overcome unjust systemic inequality. Instead, black men remain trapped within the cycle of violence and disenfranchisement.

The third sense of “powerful,” however, offers a shift, one that opens space for a black feminist voice. In this context, “powerful” describes “blackness,” meaning power emanates from within, from blackness, and establishes a sort of authenticity of self. In a society that systemically disadvantages blacks, the reclamation of power through “blackness” threatens the current social system. Furthermore, the third line also calls attention to “they” as opposing the particular reclamation of black, female power invoked within the line. “They” refers to males both black and white that experience a threat to their masculinity through the assertion of this power. When read in conjunction with the next line, “they” can be viewed in relation to “sold” as a means to specifically call out black males that are seen as sell outs for catering to whiteness and white power rather than with “blackness.” The effort to join whiteness renders them merely pawns within the larger system that maintains white, male privilege. Thus, the multiplicity of work achieved through the levels of interpretation accompanying “they” and the relation of “sold” identifies and confronts the power dynamics that keep blacks subjugated by whites and females subjugated by males. Moreover, where violence reacts against power, blackness must find its voice so that authenticity creates authentic power at the intersection of gender and race.

Patriarchal masculinity and white ideology creates a foundational web of privilege and disempowerment. In “Boyz,” M.I.A. challenges masculinity in conjunction with power systems, saying, “How many shots without the chase? / Boys there? / How many?”

/ Boys there? / How many?” “Shots” represents a double entendre, referring both to alcohol and to bullets fired from a gun. Both definitions invoke the violence that exists in diasporic, African communities which continues without recourse. The following lines use repetition to draw attention and invite thought to the reasons that senseless violence ensues. “Boys” serves as an infantilized definition depicting males without the power embodied in masculinity; additionally, “boys” are socialized to become men according to typical masculine standards, and in turn lead nations. Because of unrest and poverty, “boys” take up violence under the direction and/or manipulation of leaders who remain exempt from consequence. In this sense, a sort of cyclical violence ensues in which boys who take orders from men, and then eventually replace those men, enact violence. The question of “How many?” relays the disparity felt when faced with unending systems of male power. How far will it go and when will the cycle end? By pointing to masculinity as the source of cyclical violence, feminism digs in its heels to create space for new conceptions attached to the role of maleness.

Similarly, in “Power,” Rapsody speaks out on the violence of war as it is connected to conceptions of male power, rapping,

Bombs over Baghdad to have a flag to brag 'bout

Don't make you a big boy, 'cause you got a nice stack

Carolina home boy, you know we keep a Stackhouse

That's power when you know the game, I'm feeling like a Champ now.”

The first line invokes notions of war via both a reference to the OutKast song, “Bombs over Baghdad,” and through the use of “flag” as a metonymy for national pride. The ability to “brag” connotes prestige and power garnered through some sort of

accomplishment. In context, the bragging of leaders pertains to the power and control gained from sending soldiers to war in order to conquer a land and its people for economic or other purposes. In the next line, “stack” refers to money as constitutive of power. Money and the power attached to it does not necessitate masculine maturity or an elevated status from an ethical, feminist standpoint. The last line clarifies this point by redefining conceptions of power: “power” is drawn in relation to “when you know the game,” emphasizing knowledge. Knowledge of the “game” means understanding systemic constructions of privilege. Understanding systemic power structures allots “power” in that the system can then be navigated and challenged through that knowledge. Further, redefining power in opposition to the systems that reward violent masculinity in the form of war, and the accumulation of wealth and power demonstrates the potential for feminist interventions to foster progress.

Individuals can and do participate in oppressive systems connected to gender and masculinity to differing extents. In “Boyz,” M.I.A. confronts the cycle of toxic masculinity that perpetuates war, rapping, “How many no money boys are crazy? / How many boys are raw? / How many no money boys are rowdy? / How many start a war?” The questions that make up this verse are meant to be rhetorical and somewhat sarcastic by prompting a connection between “no money boys” and the powerful leaders that potentially socialize and manipulate them. The first three lines utilize anaphora, inviting the listener to reflect on “no money boys,” specifically. The “no money boys” are males in poor, African communities who take up violence as a means of survival in the face of a system that disenfranchises them through war and poverty. Further, “crazy,” “raw,” and “rowdy,” characterize the “no money boys” within the questions, respectively. These



adjectives serve to paint a picture of “boys” as lacking the power and demeanor of men by engaging in careless, negligent, and unruly behavior, which ultimately serves to exempt the leaders from blame for their violence. The last line exposes the role of leadership by breaking the pattern of anaphora; the phrase “start a war” refers to the actors behind war rather than an adjective describing the boys, and directly points to masculine behavior. The actors behind war are powerful male leaders who give the orders for violence in order to generate their own power and success while exploiting the “boys.” Therefore, “no money boys” may participate in the system that regulates masculinity and poverty, but only as pawns. The cycle of violence established demonstrates how disenfranchisement fuels despair.

Moreover, the feminist ideologies in both “Power” and “Boyz,” call out the intertwined role of masculinity and race in creating an unjust culture and perpetuating violence in particular. In doing so, a space is opened for feminist re-conceptions of masculinity as it enforces larger social systems assigning power and control. The emphasis on systems and the cyclical nature of the problem signify a radical framework that seeks to challenge the overall system through individual and collective action. These artists recognize hip-hop’s power to mobilize listeners around social justice by raising awareness of the dynamics of power and privilege attached to structures of race, class, and gender.

## **VII. Connecting Black Feminist Thought Across Generations**

Although Rapsody and M.I.A. both demonstrate a feminist consciousness, their specific interventions differ by way of focus and strength. M.I.A. comes from a British background and Sri Lankan Tamil origin, which informs her broader approach to socio-

political oppressions on a global scale. In contrast, Rapsody, as an African-American, takes a narrowed focus of gender, race, and class within the unjust contemporary American culture, giving her room to explore on a deeper level of cultural specificity. I posit that Rapsody's lyrics do more work in pointing out and challenging the confines that all women, and specifically black women face. Her ability to embody Lorde's understanding of the erotic by resisting the temptation of sexualizing herself for commercial success within the hip-hop industry and to conceptualize, instead, an authentic female empowerment that transcends the dominant systems of oppression exhibits one way she accomplishes this. In addition, Rapsody engages and converses with the work of feminist theorists, demonstrating empowerment through connection.

Rapsody illustrates this type of strong feminist consciousness when she draws upon feminist thinker and poet Maya Angelou in her song "Sassy." Rapsody pays homage to Angelou via the incorporation of lines and themes from her poem "Still I Rise." The refrain of Rapsody's "Sassy" specifically invokes the second and seventh stanzas of Angelou's poem shown as follows, respectively:

Does my sassiness upset you?

Why are you beset with gloom?

'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells

Pumping in my living room.

Does my sexiness upset you?

Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds

At the meeting of my thighs?

Rapsody borrows from these stanzas and modifies them slightly, rapping, “I got diamonds tween my knees / Oil wells in thighs / Does my sassiness upset you? / Oh, you mad cuz I survived?! / On the way up.” The first two lines underscore a connection drawn between wealth and autonomy. “Diamonds” and “oil wells” represent both societal constructions that signify the social status of wealth as well as attributes of race and blackness; the origins of “diamonds” relate to coal and both coal and “oil” are black in color. These signifiers of wealth reside in “knees” and “thighs,” attributing markers of social status to the black, feminine form and, thus, calling attention to the intersections of class, race, and gender. In other words, the power usually derived from societal constructions of wealth comes from personal agency instead; value is established in the depths of black femininity, signaling the transcendence of the limiting “black & ugly” stereotype invoked previously. The rhetorical questions in the third and fourth lines add punch to this sentiment by highlighting the actors that would disapprove of undermining typical class, race, and gender conventions. “Sassiness” invokes stereotypical assumptions that confine black femininity to a debased role. In reclaiming this term, “sassiness” is used facetiously to transform the power structure; language once used to demean women in general and black women specifically, now empowers women. “Survived” clarifies this transformation by connecting it concretely to the particular gendered, racist, and classist oppression being overcome. Further, the last line “on the way up” implies the process of obtaining upward mobility. In this sense, the barriers to upward mobility deteriorate in the face of feminine self-worth, demonstrating how authenticity generates liberation.

By invoking black feminist thinker Maya Angelou, Rapsody makes a clear choice to engage with black feminist consciousness, taking her feminist role within the hip-hop genre a step farther than the rest. The specific lines she engages with seek to reclaim feminine power through personal agency mobilized to undermine conventions and revision authenticity. In this sense, Rapsody reclaims an authentic agency rooted in an erotic sense of self that values connection across time and feminist thought. The generation of liberation, thus, works within a radical feminist conception of social change as occurring through individual resistance to social systems so that collective change for the advancement of *all* women may be possible. The layering of class and race in conjunction with gender adds to the depth of social commentary and highlights the intersections of a disenfranchised identity. The result: an image fraught with complexity, but one that to celebrate difference and unite humanity.

### **VIII. Critical Reflections**

Feminism has and continues to carve a space into the commercialized genre of hip-hop, despite the economic and gendered demands that make cultural resistance difficult and unpopular. However, the feminist interventions that emerge, both overtly and more subtly, reflect the diversity and complexity of feminist theory. It only makes sense that how we interpret feminism will in turn effect how we view hip-hop feminism and female MCs feminist interventions. Thus, I believe it is important to critically analyze how feminist discrepancies manifest in cultural agents of socialization like hip-hop. In general, feminism seeks to liberate women from oppression through reclamation of agency. This agency often manifests in sexuality since women are subjugated in large part through sexual means. Along this argument, radical feminism exists in opposition to

liberal feminism, both of which become contextualized within hip-hop music. While liberal feminism seeks to gain female empowerment through reclamation of sexuality and sexualization, radical feminism remains wary of sexualization that conforms to the power of the male gaze. In my view, radical feminism presents the best strategy for confronting gender-based injustice, which undoubtedly intersects with other elements of identity such as race and class. When this radical feminism meets hip-hop, interventions that work to undermine social systems emerge as more valuable in comparison to those interventions that remain complicit with conventional standards of hierarchical power. While this may complicate commercial success, it positions female liberation as a priority and prevents complicity with the male gaze.

The liberal feminist understanding within hip-hop, as exemplified in the lyrics of Young M.A and Nicki Minaj, confronts gendered norms on an individual basis, but remains compliant with masculine power. Specifically, gendered conventions are manipulated in Young M.A's music through engagement in masculine competition over female sexual subjects. This participation lends itself to taking on the male gaze in order to trouble the masculinities of men and subsequently objectify and degrade other women. Further, the inversion of gendered conventions seen in Nicki Minaj's lyrics function by appropriating sexual dominance and depicting men as submissive; however, this approach caters to the male gaze through adherence to women's sexualized form, providing only the illusion of power. Both lay claim to individual empowerment, but remain complicit with social systems that keep women subjugated as a class.

On the other hand, a radical feminist agenda comes to fruition in the lyrics of M.I.A. and Rapsody, which seeks to undermine social systems under a collective mindset

in order to create greater social awareness and social change. Importantly, these interventions often require accepting the cost of more profound commercial success in order to maintain a radical feminist voice. A radical understanding imagines new types of community to undo the damage to both men and women created by unhealthy models entrenched in hierarchy, objectification, and commodification. In particular, the lyrics of M.I.A. confront systems rooted in the power of masculinity, which create global problems such as war and poverty. She resists her own sexualization, recognizing, unlike Minaj, that compliance with an objectified female form will only perpetuate the cycle of injustice. Rapsody demonstrates a more focused social critique as her lyrics examine at length the intersections of race, gender, and class within the American context. I argue that she provides the strongest feminist intervention of the four artists discussed because she embodies Lorde's sense of the erotic through a reconceived authentic femininity that recognizes human connection across space and time. The insistence upon social systems and the necessity of collective change sets these radical feminist interventions apart from liberal feminist interventions. I maintain that this is an important area of critical study because if we do not continue to raise awareness of the unjust social dynamics that inform our thoughts and actions then we will not see progressive change. Hip-hop, as a growing global phenomenon, represents just one cultural outlet that can be examined to raise awareness of the ways in which we may simultaneously remain conforming, but also try to transcend binary conventions.

## Works Cited

- Armstead, Ronni. "Growing the Size of the Black Woman': Feminist Activism in Havana Hip Hop. *NWSA Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2007, pp. 106-117. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317233>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2017.
- Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. New York, St. Martin's, 2005.
- Collins, Patricia H. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and The Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2009.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *The Public Nature of Private Violence: Women and the Discovery of Abuse*, edited by Albertson, Fineman, and Mykitiuk. New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 93-118.
- Crossley, Scott. "Metaphorical Conceptions in Hip-Hop Music." *African American Review*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2005, pp. 501–512. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40033689](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40033689). Accessed 12 March 2018.
- cummings, andré d.p. "A Furious Kinship: Critical Race Theory and The Hip-hop Nation" *University of Louisville Law Review*, vol. 48, 2010, pp. 499-577. PDF.
- Del Guadalupe Davidson, Maria. "Black Silhouettes on White Walls: Kara Walker's Magic Lantern." *Body Aesthetics*, edited by Sherri Irvin, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 15 - 36.
- Dworkin, Andrea. *Right Wing Women*. Perigee Books, 1983.
- Genius*. Genius Media Group Inc., 2018, <https://genius.com>.

- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Gilroy, Paul. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. London, Routledge Classics, 2002.
- Irvin, Sherri. *Body Aesthetics*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde, The Crossing Press, 1984. PDF.
- M.I.A. "Boyz." Kala, XL Recordings Ltd., 2007. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/23vzbZr2ZDIJNZftFAkCqO>.
- M.I.A. "20 Dollar." Kala, XL Recordings Ltd., 2007. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/23vzbZr2ZDIJNZftFAkCqO>.
- Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-hop Feminist*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1999.
- Nicki Minaj. "Anaconda." *The Pinkprint*, Cash Money Records Inc., 2014. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/5ooCuPIk58IwSo6DRr1JCu>.
- Nicki Minaj. "Feeling Myself." *The Pinkprint*, Cash Money Records Inc., 2014. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/5ooCuPIk58IwSo6DRr1JCu>.
- Perry, Imani. *Prophets Of The Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*. Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2004.
- Pough, Gwendolyn D. "What It Do, Shorty?: Women, Hip-Hop, and a Feminist Agenda" *Black Women, Gender + Families*, vol.1, no.2, 2007, pp. 78-99. JSTOR,  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/blacwomegendfami.1.2.0078>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2017.



- Rapsody. "Black & Ugly." *Laila's Wisdom*. Jamla Records, LLC., 2017. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/0IkioqpdjITJwhbRliLoCx>.
- Rapsody. "Power." *Laila's Wisdom*. Jamla Records, LLC., 2017. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/0IkioqpdjITJwhbRliLoCx>.
- Rapsody. "Sassy." *Laila's Wisdom*. Jamla Records, LLC., 2017. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/0IkioqpdjITJwhbRliLoCx>.
- Wasserstrom, Richard A. "Racism, Sexism, and Preferential Treatment: An Approach to the Topics." *UCLA Law Review*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1977, pp. 581-622.
- Whisnant, Rebecca. "From Jekyll to Hyde: The Grooming of Male Pornography Consumers" *Everyday Pornography*, Taylor and Francis, 2010, pp. 114-133.
- Whisnant, Rebecca. "Not Your Father's Playboy, Not Your Mother's Feminist Movement: Feminism in Porn Culture" *Freedom Fallacy: The Limits of Liberal Feminism*, Connor Court Publishing, 2015, pp. 3-15, PDF.
- Young M.A. "Eat." LSB Records, 2016. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/53DzyFaWHnaxGhU5iXrgH5>.
- Young M.A. "Walk." M.A Music / 3D, 2017. *Spotify*,  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/3yWgWgX0CIQ372KGxZxrTE>.