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Lowering the Bar: The Effects of Misogyny in Rap Music

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Lowering the Bar

The Effects of Misogyny in Rap Music

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Introduction

On July 12, 2020, rapper Megan Thee Stallion was shot in the foot, allegedly by fellow musician Tory Lanez. Florida A&M University student De'ja Stokes writes that while numerous people sent their well-wishes to Megan, several social media users and even celebrities, including rapper 50 Cent and television personality Draya Michele, “made jokes and memes about Megan being shot.” Since her traumatic experience, Megan has heralded the “Protect Black Women” movement, which aims to curb misogyny and violence against the aforementioned demographic. This incident is yet another example of the most painful forms of misogyny handed to African-American women since their enslavement over four centuries ago, a phenomenon that places most of the responsibility for the harmful effects of the hatred of black women on white patriarchy. However, rap, a musical genre initially created by African-Americans to uplift their community, has evolved into an amalgamation of misogyny, colorism, and violence against their women. Society’s negative disposition towards black women and a lack of accountability among their male counterparts contribute to the prevalence of misogyny among African-American male rappers.

The Context of Rap Music

Definition and Aesthetics

To grasp the effects of misogyny in rap, one must comprehend the history of both misogyny and rap. For starters, the terms “hip-hop” and “rap” are not interchangeable. Social work professors Ruby M. Gourdine and Brianna P. Lemmons state while hip-hop is an urban culture that involves music, fashion, and lifestyle and is most popular with

young people, rap is its musical component (60). Sometimes, people who listen to the genre may use the two terms interchangeably, which can be confusing when discussing musical genres. The aforementioned terms have become intertwined to the point that disassociating them from each other can be an arduous task.

A notable aesthetic of today's rap music is its domination by black men. In his 2006 documentary *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, filmmaker Byron Hurt recalled hearing renowned producer Suge Knight referring to the genre as "a man's game" (1:34-1:44). Women have struggled for equality in various aspects of the music industry, and a scant number of female rappers have achieved the popularity of their male counterparts. Consequently, the saturation of male artists within rap music (and the music industry in general) may coincide with the amount of negative lyrical content. But most rap music contains positive content and inspires activism. Studies have shown that "rap music can be used by the African American community as an incentive for social movement" (Conrad et al. 136). Music that inspires listeners generally garners a large fanbase, especially in certain communities largely uplifted by the arts. So an abundance of the positive, conscious aspects of rap can promote higher standards within the genre.

Origins

Rap music originated from several sources, including African and African-American storytelling. These art forms sometimes involved music and dance, a trait similar to contemporary hip-hop (Lindsay 19). Most songs from these traditions are a form of narration, and rap involves a spoken conversation. Although some may argue

that today's SoundCloud rap contains more elements of singing, rap has historically provided a platform for people to simply discuss their predicaments in spoken musical form. Rap also parallels the African-American church in that both involve preaching to the community (Lindsay 20).

Aside from the religious and regional influences on rap, rap particularly developed from the practice of insults. For example, traditions such as "toasting," "signifying," and "playing the dozens" among people of African-American and Caribbean descent influenced modern-day "battle rap" (Conrad et al. 135). These practices also manifest themselves in art forms ranging from jokes about people's mothers to the comedy television series *Wild N Out*. Within rap, some rappers ridicule their peers for enjoyment, but others engage in "beef" that could spark violence. Additionally, rap originated from spoken word and poetry by comedians, DJs, and soul singers in the 1960s and 1970s accompanied by jazz or African percussion. For example, the poet Gil Scott-Heron "matched radical polemic with soulful jazz backings" with his 1971 recording "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (Toop). Scott-Heron's hit stood out in the musical landscape of the 1970s, as it mostly involved speech instead of singing. His poetic flows amidst a minimalist instrumental background may have influenced early rap.

Early History

In terms of geography, rap originated in impoverished black and Latino neighborhoods in the South Bronx riddled with crime and violence. Specifically, the genre developed "in the black community's house parties, public parks, housing

projects, and local jams” (Weitzer and Kubrin 8). The introduction of a creative outlet can illuminate a dire environment; rap invigorated the residents of the South Bronx and inspired them to take pride in their community. In 1979, rap trio The Sugarhill Gang introduced the genre to mainstream audiences with their song “Rapper’s Delight” and (as suggested by the title) invoked the concept of rapping, and the song’s “lighthearted subject – its own rhythms – and fresh sound captured audiences” (qtd. in Lindsay 19). Furthermore, the song coincided with the expansion of the focus of the genre from aesthetics and improvisation to composition (Toop). “Rapper’s Delight” combined the contemporary lyrical component of rap with a familiar musical landscape, which respectively attracted old and young audiences.

In the early 1980s, the worsening situation in the South Bronx and other current events marked a shift in the lyrics and mood of rap music. These issues included the War on Drugs, mass incarceration, and violence against and among African-Americans in urban neighborhoods (and not just in New York) (Lindsay 30). One single from 1982, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message,” typified the departure from the positive attitude of early rap and the arrival of elaborate descriptions of the struggles faced by residents of the South Bronx (Toop). The saturation of positive, light-hearted media amid a crisis can irritate those who prefer to consume the material that reflects reality. Fans of rap favorably responded to artists who demonstrated enough concern about their situation to discuss it with the masses. Although rap reflects reality, it benefits from a healthy balance between playful narrative storytelling and graphic content.

While men dominated rap music in the early 1980s, by the middle of the decade, women began making inroads into the industry. For instance, in 1988, MC Lyte began a string of accomplishments of female rappers by becoming the first solo female rapper to release a commercially successful album, *Lyte as a Rock* (Chamberlain 1:38-2:04). The immense number of male rappers can overshadow the efforts of their female peers. Therefore, MC Lyte set the stage for female pioneers in rap that generally avoid displaying (and often combat) societal stereotypes of black women.

Later on in the decade, gangsta rap initially garnered popularity for introducing mainstream audiences to West Coast rappers, although it would later become notorious for its misogynistic content. Since this period, the musical style has expressed the frustrations and struggles of African-Americans in Southern California (Hoston 41). However, Howard University sociology and anthropology professors Terri M. Adams and Douglas B. Fuller note that “overt misogyny in rap did not emerge in this genre of music until the late 1980s” (939). Gangsta rap should have received a sterling reputation for criticizing the problems plaguing the black residents of the Southland. But the genre eventually morphed into an outlet for multiple rappers to exhibit the misogyny and violence their predecessors once denounced. However, during the golden age of rap in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the genre’s content was diverse, balanced, and mostly uplifting. Historian Kevin Powell considered this interesting blend of rap “a diversity of black male expression” (qtd. in Hurt 45:00-45:23).

Consumption and Popularity

Countless music lovers enjoy rap, as it has gradually become the dominant music genre in America. *Forbes* explains that “in 2017 rap/hip-hop took the place of rock for the [dominant] genre of music in the United States for the first time” (Gray 35). Various genres have dominated the American music charts during certain decades, from rock and roll and Motown to disco and Latin pop. The statistic in *Forbes* demonstrates that rap has permeated American pop culture. One reason for the dominance of rap is its current popularity among youths (Hoston 42). Most musical genres have their niche audiences, and the younger generation may enjoy rap because they can relate to it more than their elders.

Since men dominate the genre, it is unsurprising that they enjoy it more than women do. In the experimental group of a survey of college students conducted by Prairie View A&M University political science professor William T. Hoston, male participants comprised the bulk of those who claimed to habitually listen to rap music and expressed their enjoyment of the genre. Meanwhile, many of their female counterparts admitted they rarely consumed the genre and communicated their disdain for rap music (55-56). The majority of opinions in previous studies and articles criticizing the genre for its misogynistic content mostly come from women. This demonstrates that because most people who participate in rap are male, they are mostly responsible for curating the lyrics in the genre. However, the majority of people who consume and promote rap music are white. In the aforementioned documentary *Hip Hop*, scholar James Paterson estimated that 60-70% of fans of rap are white (qtd. in Hurt

49:51-49:59). This is a stark contrast to the belief that African-Americans are the primary consumers and curators of rap.

Backlash and Criticism

Audiences have noticed that the most popular styles of rap have shifted over the decades. Musician Lauryn Hill lamented this fact in her 1998 song “Superstar,” in which she observed how the genre “started out in the heart” but eventually deviated from its conscious lyrics (qtd. in Houston 65). In the past few decades, a few rappers, such as Tupac Shakur, have openly participated in the misogyny and violence they once criticized to achieve mainstream success. Therefore, black men (who comprise the bulk of rap musicians) should take responsibility for the transformation of mainstream rap from its positive roots to its mostly degenerative content. Additionally, young people, who are the largest consumer base of rap, have often complained that previous generations tend to dislike it. During a community forum, most adult participants considered the music “offensive” and believed it “did not rise to the level of artistry that the music of their generation had, even while admitting earlier forms of hip hop and rap music were acceptable to them” (Gourdine and Lemmons 58). Adults often remind their children to “do as they say, not as they do.” However, the younger generation quickly criticizes elders who denounce activities passed down to the youths.

The backlash and criticism against rap do not just originate from casual listeners, but also community leaders. Teachers deter their students from the excessive consumption of the genre. Per Gourdine and Lemmons, some of them believe that rap sends a message that children should bypass obtaining an education in favor of living a

hedonistic lifestyle involving wealth, drugs, and crime (60). In today's economy, society considers pursuing higher education as the gateway to the American dream.

Consequently, involvement in illegal activities can hinder the mainstream pathway to success, and some may view rap as a negative influence, especially on children. So artists must tread lightly when detailing their realities in rap music to avoid encouraging younger listeners to involve themselves in debauchery. Additionally, the media's negative portrayal of hip-hop and rap has led politicians, religious organizations, and law enforcement to decry the genre. In fact, per sociology professors Guillermo Rebollo-Gil and Amanda Moras, the New York Police Department once established a "Hip Hop task force" that "often work[ed] in tandem with FBI agents to monitor the activities of rappers" (122). Although law enforcement officials see investigations into the activities of hip-hop musicians as a deterrent to bragging about criminal lifestyles, they may also hinder rappers from discussing their eyewitness accounts of neighborhood poverty and violence in their music.

The Context of Misogyny and Misogynoir

Misogyny, Misogynoir, and Hegemonic Masculinity

In layman's terms, misogyny is the hatred of women. Specifically, Terri Adams and Douglas Fuller define misogyny as an attitude that "reduces women to objects for men's ownership, use, or abuse" and "diminishes women to expendable beings" (939). Misogyny has existed since the advent of time, as men have always viewed the opposite gender as inferior to them. Therefore, society must change its perspective on women to eradicate misogyny in all facets of life, including the arts. But the misogyny

prevalent in rap is what feminist blogger Moya Bailey calls “misogynoir,” which refers to the hatred of black women (Lindsay 29). Additionally, misogynoir consists of the stereotypes and exploitation of black women in multiple facets of American culture that form the backbone of societal patriarchy (Weitzer and Kubrin 24). The combination of racism and misogyny is profound; consequently, society often positions black women at the lowest rung of their hierarchy. So both white people *and* black men share the responsibility of altering the view of black women.

Misogyny and misogynoir are a fraction of hegemonic masculinity. George Washington University sociologist Ronald Weitzer and criminology professor Charis Kubrin write that hegemonic masculinity requires men to dominate women and shames these men into suppressing their emotions and opinions that differ from the “norm” (5). In other words, society expects men to “toughen up,” “be a man,” and “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” whenever they experience problems. At times, the idea of “manning up” involves aggressive standards of masculinity, such as violence and abuse. And to meet these standards, black men often exhibit misogyny and homophobia. In particular, Mark Anthony Neal, an author who specializes in African-American culture, notes that society expects these men to display a “stunted, conservative, one-dimensional, and stridently heterosexual vision of black masculinity” (qtd. in Oware 24). The primary image that people brainstorm about black men may be a violent, aggressive person. The influence of hegemonic masculinity often leads black men to play up this stereotype in rap as well as sports, movies, and television. If society changes its idea of manhood and black men alter their idea of masculinity, this new perspective will trickle down to rap.

It may disturb most people that some black men earn “respect” for displaying extreme forms of misogyny. For instance, they may gain notoriety for bragging about their promiscuity and ridicule their peers who do not exhibit aggressive standards of masculinity (Weitzer and Kubrin 14-15). Several rappers have responded to this phenomenon, including Mase in his 1997 song “I Need to Be.” He expresses his discomfort with the peer pressure to have sex with a woman and how his encounter leads him to feel “like a molester” (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 14). In rap music, “it is a badge of honor for men to verbally and physically abuse women, and men win respect from other men when they act like ‘players,’ ‘pimps,’ and exploiters of women—financially, sexually, and emotionally” (Weitzer and Kubrin 12). Rewarding certain behaviors can trigger their repetition. Placing peer pressure on men to exhibit aggressive misogyny and honoring them for it only further encourages them to continue displaying this debauchery. If black men halt the praise of misogyny in rap and instead harshly criticize it, then the phenomenon will eventually diminish.

Origins

Both misogyny and hegemonic masculinity among African-American men developed from the slave trade. Per University of Richmond human relations and sociology instructor Matthew Oware, black men have constructed an aggressive form of masculinity to compensate for the resources they have lacked since their arrival on the North American continent (25). Some people can develop a resilient persona after dealing with major hardships. Black men may have learned to be “hard” after experiencing centuries of forced submission to their white slave owners. Also, society

has viewed the bodies of black women as commodities (or at least sexual objects). The sexual objectification of black women stems from “stereotypes that date back to colonialism and slavery and...are still quite salient today” (Weitzer and Kubrin 16). For instance, in the 1810s, several Europeans took Sarah Baartman, a native of South Africa, to their continent and displayed her voluptuous nude figure to ogling spectators, treating her like a zoo animal (Lindsay 10). This demonstrates that the extreme sexualization of black women has existed since the era of European imperialism and colonization. The display of Sarah Baartman reduced her from a human being to a mere focus of the white gaze. In short, the societal stereotype of black women as sexual objects has contributed to the misogynistic content in rap music.

The various stereotypes of black women that exist in the genre are nothing new. First, the “Jezebel” stereotype, which originated during the Civil War, describes an attractive yet promiscuous black or racially ambiguous woman (Lindsay 11; Herd 579). Second, the “Mammy” stereotype, which stemmed from the maple syrup brand Aunt Jemima and the classic movie *Gone with the Wind*, refers to an overweight, dark-skinned, bossy caretaker who forms the basis of the “Sapphire” stereotype (Lindsay 11; Adams and Fuller 944). In turn, the “Sapphire” stereotype, which developed from the vintage radio program *Amos n’ Andy*, spawned the “baby mama” stereotype, which refers to a manipulative, gold-digging, unwed mother (Lindsay 11, 55). And finally, Denise Herd, a behavioral science professor at the University of California at Berkeley, states that societal stereotypes of a “Jezebel,” “Mammy,” “matriarch,” and “welfare queen” are analogous to the images of a “freak,” “gold digger,” “diva,” “lesbian,” and “baby mama” in rap music (579). Music provides a vehicle for

artists to espouse their beliefs rooted in society. Societal stereotypes of black women often lead to dismissals of their concerns due to their perceived promiscuous, annoying demeanor and physically unattractive appearance. When hip-hop incorporates the aforementioned clichés of black women, it can cause long-standing damage to the demographic.

Sociological Impact

Misogyny, misogynoir, and hegemonic masculinity exist in all facets of daily life, besides music. As previously mentioned, white American patriarchy places black women at the bottom of their societal hierarchy. Author Zora Neale Hurston once referred to them as the “mules of the world” who “have been and continue to be [how] others assert their sense of importance” (Adams and Fuller 948). For example, the government’s accusation of black mothers abusing the welfare system stems from the “baby mama” stereotype, which portrays these women as manipulative, greedy, and selfish (946-947). For one group to thrive in a patriarchal society, others (particularly minorities) must struggle. Because society views women as inferior to men and black people as subservient to other races and ethnicities, black women face intersectional hate from both white people and black men. If black men treat their female counterparts with more respect, it may influence white people to change their perspective of black women and appreciate them.

Stereotypes concerning black women divide society rather than unite it. Sociologist La Francis Rodgers-Rose claims that these “myths...divide Black men and women, and they have served as rationalizations for the status quo” (qtd. in Adams and

Fuller 953). Both men and women must work together for the common good, so dividing society along gender lines does not alleviate gender-based problems, such as domestic violence, unequal pay, and misogyny in music. Rap music that perpetuates misogyny only fans the flames of the ongoing battle of the sexes.

Health and Behavioral Impact

Misogyny also affects women's health, especially that of black women and girls, in that a disproportionate amount of this demographic experiences violence. One particular study by the National Crime Victimization Survey found that over 20% of black women will become victims of rape in their lifetime (Houston 51-52). This statistic should not be surprising, given society places black women at the bottom of their hierarchy. Marginalized groups, such as black women, can become the primary targets of discrimination and even violence. Basic human decency towards black women may deter the despicable acts done to them. After their victimization, stereotypes of black women come into play when they attempt to receive justice after being wronged. Several national crime reports demonstrate that almost 94% of black female rape victims avoid reporting their experiences to law enforcement, likely because societal stereotypes often blame them for their victimization (52). Everyone faces a sense of shame when reporting their victimization to law enforcement. However, black women receive the most flak for attempting to seek help because society simultaneously views them as capable of withstanding pain and places them at the bottom of their social hierarchy. People must recognize that black women experience trauma, just as numerous other people do, and support them through their ordeals.

Although rap music encourages men to have unprotected sex with numerous women, it strictly forbids women from deciding against following through with unplanned pregnancies. According to health professor Marybec Griffin and ethnomusicologist Adele Fournet, “thematic analysis of the messaging around abortion in rap music found that the negative and amoral messages contained in rap music aligned with [a] lower total number of abortions among Black women” (292). Feminists may view this as yet another attempt for men to control women, particularly their health. And it likely angers black women that they must follow through with a pregnancy and child-rearing in which their partners sometimes refuse to involve themselves.

And unsurprisingly, some rappers exhibit misogynistic violence outside of the recording studio. For example, in 1993, Tupac Shakur, who was notorious for waffling between conscious and misogynistic lyrics, was convicted of sexual assault (Houston 46). One must carefully listen to the words of some rap songs, as the musicians behind the detrimental lyrics may act them out in real life. Shakur’s conviction may come as a shock to some of his casual fans given his socially conscious lyrics (particularly in his 1993 song “Keep Ya Head Up”). This demonstrates that rappers who publicly discuss positive topics in their music may be privately misogynistic.

Impact on the Media

Besides music, other forms of entertainment have promoted various forms of misogyny. Particularly, reality television has exhibited colorism, dysfunctional relationships, and aggressive behavior on the part of its female cast members. For instance, the *Love & Hip Hop* franchise showcases relationships between rap and R&B

musicians, their significant others, and others within their social circle. It also “presents misogynoir in the form of sexist behaviors, hypersexuality, abuse, homophobia and hyper-aggression of its characters” (Johnson 65). One must recognize that reality television producers may manufacture problematic content for ratings, but for the most part, the genre depicts a certain angle of a grim reality. If rap contains graphic elements of misogyny, violence, and dysfunction, then the amplification of these issues on television (by several artists who appear on such series) should not be a surprise.

Additionally, the media has portrayed women as “femme fatales.” Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin define a “femme fatale” as “a villainous woman who uses her beauty and sexuality to exploit or victimize innocent men,” and the female leads of movies like *Double Indemnity*, *Fatal Attraction*, and *Basic Instinct* exemplify this trope (17). Several rappers, such as Mase, describe the stereotype in their music; in his song “I Need to Be,” he implies that some women lie about their ages to accuse their partners of statutory rape at a later date (16). Portraying black women as liars and schemers perpetuates the stereotype that they are untrustworthy “Sapphires.” If black men avoid describing most of their female counterparts as liars, then society may do likewise and quit victimizing black women.

Lastly, some rappers promote pimp culture, a form of sexual objectification, in their brands. Weitzer and Kubrin write:

Ice-T, Snoop Dogg, Jay-Z, and others claim to have been real-life pimps; at least one rapper (K-Luv the Pimp) has been arrested for pimping and pandering; a 2003 film called *Lil' Pimp* starred a 9-year-old boy as the film's hero; and a year

after Nelly released his 2002 song and video, "Pimp Juice," he launched a new energy drink of the same name. (20)

The promotion of pimp culture in the media, especially a movie starring a child as a character called Lil' Pimp, glamorizes the predatory nature that clouds sex work.

The Proliferation of Misogynistic Rap

History

While the exact beginning of overt misogyny in rap is debatable, some suggest that it permeated the genre in the early 2000s. Out of ten rap songs examined in a study by Gretchen Cundiff, five contained multiple occurrences of misogynistic content (77). Although this conclusion originates from a small sample, it is reminiscent of the problematic use of numerous models who appeared in rap music videos in the 2000s. These "video vixens" would be subject to abhorrent sexual objectification and colorism. This indicates that African-Americans should avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and hold rappers accountable for objectifying women in their music and videos.

Speaking of video vixens, misogyny in Rap is especially prevalent in its music videos. In a study of the medium, rap music videos from 2006 contained more instances of materialism and misogyny than those of positive themes, such as political awareness, expression of culture, and community unity (Conrad et al. 147-148). Music videos emphasize the imagery discussed in their accompanying songs, and rap music videos demonstrate countless visuals of wealth, hedonism, and objectification. And as a study by Melanie Lindsay that examined misogyny in rap music videos from 2004 to 2014

indicates, this problem did not decrease over those years; rather, it has either expanded or remained stagnant. Lindsay's perusal concluded that the number of misogynistic stereotypes in rap music videos did not change dramatically during the decade she examined (56). Misogyny has existed since the advent of time; due to this long-running societal predicament, it is unsurprising that it pervades the music industry. Even with increased awareness of misogyny in rap, eradicating this issue will require backlash and criticism from all societal fronts.

Other Characteristics

Numerous factors contribute to misogyny in rap music, including poverty, the structural issues and biases within the music industry, and societal expectations of gender relations (Weitzer and Kubrin 26). Black men exhibit misogyny, in part, to reclaim the control they lost to white supremacy during slavery and beyond. Some of them misplace their anger they should display towards society and lash out at black women. So these men must reconsider their feelings towards their female counterparts to curb the misogyny that plagues rap. And although most rap singles do not contain misogyny, they can do more to criticize it. Ronald Weitzer and Charis Kubrin state that even rap songs from 1992 to 2000 with lyrics about "independent, educated, professional, caring, and trustworthy" women do not denounce misogyny (25). This conclusion demonstrates that music with open criticism of misogyny is exceedingly rare. Sometimes, "conscious" rappers may fail to exhibit flattering images of black women, so mainstream rap musicians must publicly discuss African-American women in a positive light.

Women's Role

Of course, misogyny in rap mostly targets women. In University of Central Arkansas student Kayla Gray's examination of singles on the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts from September 29, 2018, occurrences of misogyny are more frequent than those of misandry, 195 songs to 34 (45). These figures are not surprising; if the general public disrespects women, one will likely expect musicians of all genres to enact similar behaviors. This demonstrates that societal stereotypes of women (particularly black women) manifest themselves in pop culture.

Ironically, one of the largest audiences of misogynistic rap consists of women. For instance, women's and gender studies instructor Gwendolyn D. Pough explains that "female hip-hop heads are part of the crowds at shows and support rap by buying the music even when most of it is sexist and degrading to black womanhood" (qtd. in Rebollo-Gil and Moras 126). The traditional societal role of women is to support men's actions, whether beneficial or detrimental to themselves. Some black women may believe that upholding their male counterparts consequently uplifts the entire African-American community, as society views men as the dominant gender in society.

But it appears that some female fans of rap have disregarded the disrespect from their male peers and internalized the belief that they must support them. Though female rappers initially criticized misogynistic content created by men, some of them later incorporated such lyrics into their craft. Author Cheryl Keyes once wrote about how female rappers' attempts to make inroads into the male-dominated rap scene required them to exhibit certain standards of masculinity, yet this often results in their continuation of the misogyny that plagues the genre (Williams 299). Additionally, while

some rappers, such as Lil' Kim and Mia X, flip the B-word to empower themselves, others spin the negative connotation of "gold-digging" into a positive portrayal of hypergamy, the act of entering a relationship with a person of higher socioeconomic status (Weitzer and Kubrin 24). The imitation of standards of masculinity is a subtle form of support for men; this may range from glorifying sex and violence to referring to themselves as derogatory stereotypes.

The fact that black women cannot dictate what male rappers spew out in their music does not help matters. Bakari Kitwana, the former editor-in-chief of the rap magazine *The Source*, notes that "a thinking woman who questions incites the physical violence of her male peers" (qtd. in Rebollo-Gil and Moras 126). Society often dismisses black women who decry discrimination against them as "angry" or "aggressive." The silencing of female rappers – and black women in general – forces them to comply with potentially harmful misogyny. In essence, an outlet should exist for black women to safely vent their frustrations brought on by misogynoir.

Black women participate in their objectification in rap music because of the misogynistic standards placed upon them. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, a professor of women's studies at Spelman College (a historically black women's university in Atlanta), explains that while "these women appear not to be resistant," she hopes they would "understand the extent [to] which they are participating in a culture which commodifies women sexually" (qtd. in Hurt 27:06-27:26). Some black women may adhere to societal expectations to maintain employment, a relationship, or even respect from their peers. For some female rappers, self-objectification is their ticket to financial security since society has not rewarded the positive portrayal of black women in rap, and record labels

have yet to provide financial security to female rappers who aim to combat misogyny in rap music.

But an even greater limit on the self-expression of black women is the concept of respectability politics. This idea, coined by African-American studies scholar Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, is a range of moral standards intending to help black women raise their social status. However, they inadvertently reinforce white patriarchal standards (Durham et al. 724-725). Even conscious female rappers, such as Lauryn Hill, preach about “modesty, purity, and self-respect” (Williams 299-300). Respectability politics contradict themselves in that they simultaneously help and hurt black women. Although the concept may prohibit self-objectification, it often inhibits black women’s sexual identity. Essentially, this demographic must tread a fine line when prescribing respectability politics to their peers.

Deflections and Dismissals

The numerous deflections and dismissals of misogyny in rap further perpetuate the issue. Some black people believe that issues greater than misogyny in rap music exist at the moment. Per Guy-Sheftall, “racism, police brutality, black male incarceration are the issues that we should be concerned about” (qtd. in Hurt 26:11-26:25). The snub of a social issue as trivial can silence those who demand attention to it. Although racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration are important social issues, misogyny in rap is indeed a large problem in the artistic field. Downplaying the latter problem as a minor subject can prevent society from making a concerted effort to curb it.

Other people, particularly young black men, dismiss claims of misogyny in rap because of their strong appreciation for the genre. A 21-year-old male junior in college interviewed by William Hoston elaborated, “Rap music is an expression. It expresses good and bad. We let the bad overshadow the good. I’m not going to talk negative to women or try to have sex with everyone I see. I know guys that do that” (qtd. in Hoston 59). The musical content of rap often desensitizes its audiences to its misogynistic lyrics. People may live vicariously through a song by reciting its lyrics without carefully analyzing its meaning in favor of attention to instruments. Furthermore, the deflection from the conversation surrounding misogyny in rap silences black women. For example, in 2004, when Nelly announced a bone marrow drive at Spelman, several students criticized him for the misogynistic music video for his 2003 song “Tip Drill,” in which he infamously swiped a credit card down a woman’s buttocks. In Byron Hurt’s documentary *Hip Hop*, alumni Asha Jennings and Lauren Clark claim that rather than fulfill their request to address the controversial visual, Nelly pulled out of the drive, which disappointed them (22:31-23:04). Sadly, Nelly may have further alienated his black female fans by dismissing their criticism of his notorious video. This serves as another example of the stereotype of the “angry black woman,” where society views black women as intrusive for expressing their concerns.

Responsibility for Misogynistic Rap

So just who is responsible for misogyny in rap? On one hand, most people believe that musicians should be held accountable for their lyrics. In his aforementioned survey, when Hoston asked if “rap artists should be more accountable for their lyrical

content...93 percent of those in the experimental group strongly agreed” (60). Although the survey did not define accountability, one may imply that it involves calling out rappers for unacceptable lyrics or behavior. This can range from openly criticizing musicians on social media or even refusing to listen to their music, which would reduce their streaming revenue. After people hold them accountable for their actions, the embarrassment and financial repercussions faced by rap musicians may provoke their humility and desire to change.

However, some people believe women are solely responsible for their portrayal in the media. Several participants in Ruby Gourdine and Brianna Lemmons’ forum discussing misogyny in rap music “believed that males were simply products of their environments” (62). While society provides grace to men for their mistakes, they show no such leniency towards women, particularly black women. In a paradox, the music industry appears to force black women to walk on eggshells by conforming to societal norms and then blames them for following their instructions. Still, others believe that the media brainwashes rappers to perpetuate problematic stereotypes of black women. Chuck D, a member of the legendary rap group Public Enemy, compares some of his peers to robots in that they “follow a program that gets played out for them” (qtd. in Hurt 55:14-55:38). Numerous rappers do not live the hedonistic or misogynistic lifestyles they describe in their music. Sometimes, rap musicians may discard their personal beliefs, which likely contrast misogyny in the genre, to receive handsome profits. But they must buck societal stereotypes of them and choose to respect black women.

Speaking of media corporations, white-owned record labels control mainstream rap and determine which topics are the most profitable. Per Weitzer and Kubrin, “the

music industry sends agents into...neighborhoods [riddled by poverty and crime] for the express purpose of gathering 'street intelligence' on what is popular; they do this by visiting record stores, clubs, and parties" (8). Overt misogyny and aggression begin with thoughts of objectification and hostility; if left unchecked – and encouraged by record companies – they can morph into slurs, and eventually, crime and violence. This illustrates how society must combat its implicit bias (including the concept of "street intelligence") to curb outward misogyny in rap. Additionally, white-owned record labels with zero connections to the genre's origins will disregard its misogynistic content for profit. Ellen Chamberlain, a broadcast journalism student at Wayne State University, elaborates that these labels "seem to be investing in the most degrading and destructive lyricism that they can find" because "sensationalism sells" (6:27-7:03). The sole concern of white-owned record companies is the financial reward of their artists' content. Some labels will resort to desperate measures to earn money, including perpetuating stereotypes of African-Americans (specifically women). Because society places black women on the bottom of the social hierarchy, their sentiments may not matter to record companies.

Despite the finger-pointing, black men share the bulk of the responsibility for most of the misogynistic content in rap. University of Central Arkansas sociology student Frank Benton studied 100 music videos from 2014 and discovered that music videos by male hip-hop and rap artists contained rates of the aforementioned content at least 90% higher than videos by female artists and male pop artists (22).

African-American men have dominated rap, and white men have carried popular music. The latter genre does not appear to exhibit as much overt misogyny as the former,

especially when it comes to music videos. Rappers should work to buck the stereotypes of misogyny and violence, both aurally and visually.

Common Misogynistic Themes in Rap

Overview

Ronald Weitzer and Charis Kubrin list several misogynistic themes that exist in rap music, including but not limited to: derogatory names, sexual objectification, distrust of women, violence against them, and prostitution (11). Specifically, out of 403 hip-hop and rap songs from 1992 to 2000 analyzed by Weitzer and Kubrin, 90 contained these themes. This percentage (22.3%) is small yet significant enough to warrant further analysis. Out of this collection:

- About half of them or more contained either sexual objectification (at 67%), derogatory terms (49%), or distrust of women (47%).
- Meanwhile, one-fifth of the songs included instances of violence against women (18%) or prostitution (20%).
- Fewer (5%) contained misogynistic themes perpetuated by female rappers (Weitzer and Kubrin 11, 13, 16-17, 19, 20-21, 23).

Misogyny comes in many forms: not just verbal (related to derogatory terms), but also mental (objectification and suspicion) and physical (prostitution and violence). Rappers must curb their misogynistic thoughts to avoid spewing out such hatred of women in their lyrics and videos.

Objectification of Women

Numerous studies have concluded that objectification of women is the most prevalent misogynistic theme in rap music. For instance, 93% of hip-hop and rap music videos in 2014 in Frank Benton's study featured characters donning provocative attire, while 68% of the videos showcased their subjects exhibiting sexual gazes (22-23). This demonstrates that misogyny often begins in the brain with thoughts of objectification. Additionally, previous research has shown that objectification exists in various forms. Per Benton, it includes attire worn to attract the opposite sex; suggestive motions and gestures; explicit song lyrics; the sexual gaze (or focus) on body parts; and emphasized femininity, or the exaggeration of feminine aesthetics and sexuality (18-19). Objectification does not just involve thoughts about women; if left unchecked, misogynistic thoughts can morph into slurs and, eventually, sexual aggression. Furthermore, a specific aspect of objectification in rap, colorism, mostly targets women. A study of rap music videos from 2006 found that more male subjects had Afrocentric features than female characters did, and vice versa for female characters and Eurocentric features (Conrad et al. 149-150). Colorism and objectification affect men and women, but not equally. While society fetishizes dark-skinned men and light-skinned women, it simultaneously subjects dark-skinned women and light-skinned men to discrimination and bullying.

One type of objectification in the genre involves some male rappers discussing sex in vulgar terms. According to Bakari Kitwana, these artists include "graphic, often crude, violent, self-hating, women-hating and anti-black, abusive sexual representations" in their craft (qtd. in Rebollo-Gil and Moras 126). In 1992, Oakland

native Too Short described various graphic styles of sexual conquest in his song “Step Daddy:”

Get freaky, and do it wild

On the floor, doggy style

While your bitch be crying “please don’t stop” (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 15).

These obscene descriptions of intercourse with another person’s partner may influence his young fanbase to engage in similar activities. Describing these acts of sexual conquest is not only degrading but also embarrassing to the person perpetuating such misogynistic tendencies. Also, in his 1996 collaboration with Uncle Luke, “Bust a Nut,” The Notorious B.I.G. (also known as Biggie Smalls) bragged about giving his sexual partner a “golden shower,” which he defines as “pissing on hos” (qtd. in Adams and Fuller 951). Biggie’s narration of sex is reminiscent of R. Kelly’s scandal in the 2000s when a videotape leaked of him urinating on a young girl. And in Redman’s song “Keep On ‘99,” he boasts about transforming “an independent woman back into a hoochie” through degrading sex (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 14). The rapper essentially believes that graphic sex with a self-sufficient woman will lower her self-esteem. In short, the promotion of degrading descriptions of sex in rap may inspire black men to objectify their female counterparts in real life.

Other rappers believe that casual or unprotected sex is a symbol of masculinity. Weitzer and Kubrin write that in 1991, the group N.W.A “capture[d] this theme with a song titled ‘Findum, Fuckum, and Flee’” (13). In essence, N.W.A’s motto demonstrates

how they find women to sleep with and quickly end their relationships after “doing the deed.” The group perpetuates the cycle of misogyny in rap by reiterating the idea that women are only good for sex. And in Biggie Smalls’s 1994 song “Big Poppa,” he bragged about spotting women “that should be having [his] baby” (qtd. in Griffin and Fournet 299). The fact that he boldly proclaims his intentions is profound. Biggie continues the cycle of misogyny in rap by implying that women are only valuable for childbirth. These displays of casual and unprotected sex in rap ironically symbolize men’s insecurity, not their masculinity.

Pimping and prostitution are additional facets of the objectification of women, and several rappers portray themselves as “pimps” through their flashy attire and possessions as well as promises of wealth to their female partners. Weitzer and Kubrin write that rap is the only genre in which “both prostitution and pimping are defined as legitimate economic pursuits and celebrated” (21). By promoting prostitution, rappers fail to recognize its connections to human trafficking, which does not sound attractive compared to “pimping.” For instance, in Twista’s 2004 song “Overnight Celebrity,” he “tries to persuade scantily clad women that he will make them famous (‘an overnight celebrity’) if they have sex with him” (Lindsay 47). Twista continues the cycle of misogyny in rap by reiterating the idea that women are sexual objects and gold diggers. And the music video for Snoop Dogg and Pharrell Williams’ 2004 collaboration, “Drop It Like It’s Hot,” portrays the artists as “pimps” by featuring them wearing profuse jewelry but does not showcase any “apparent” prostitution (Lindsay 48-49). Although no acts of prostitution and pimping appear in the video, the media particularly glamorizes them in

the black community. By celebrating prostitution, rappers fail to recognize its dangers as well as the subjugation of women involved in the field.

Moreover, some rappers view women as sex objects. Conscious rapper Mos Def's 1999 song "Ms. Fat Booty" may shock his core audience, as he tends to avoid misogynistic lyrical content (Williams 298). Sometimes, rappers like Mos Def do not intend to disrespect women, but his description of a female posterior as "fat" or "thick" perpetuates the cycle of misogyny. Additionally, in Scarface's 1998 song "Use Them Hoes," he not only encourages his peers to sleep with prostitutes without paying them, but he also demonstrates "what they pussy made fo'" (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 21). These lyrics not only view women's body parts as objects but also glorify prostitution.

If the objectification of women in rap music is egregious, it pales in comparison to that of rap music videos. Aside from the notorious credit card-swiping scene in Nelly's video for his 2003 song "Tip Drill," he also features "half-naked women in different suggestive scenes such as stripping, simulating a ménage à trois, and exhibiting bisexuality" (Houston 54). He perpetuates the cycle of misogyny in rap by claiming that women are just "tip drills," who are only attractive because of their bodies. Also, in one scene from the video for Rich Gang's 2014 song "Lifestyle," "several women move together on a large bed, sexually rubbing each other's bodies. The women look directly at the camera, suggesting the performance is to entice the male onlooker, not to pleasure each other" (49). Nelly's "Tip Drill" video may have inspired Rich Gang to incorporate performative bisexuality into their video for "Lifestyle." Rich Gang continues the cycle of misogyny in rap by implying that women only sleep with each other to please men. A final video from 2014, which accompanies "Fight Night" by Migos,

features two women fighting in a boxing ring for men's attention (50). By pressuring women to experience jealousy and violence to receive their attention, Migos perpetuates the aforementioned cycle. Overall, the representation of women's bodies as mere sex objects in rap lowers their self-esteem and emboldens more egregious misogynistic behaviors.

Derogatory Terms and Stereotypes

After objectification, derogatory terms are the second-most common misogynistic theme in rap, per several studies. Particularly, Kayla Gray's study of the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts on September 29, 2018, found that about half (45%) of misogynistic lyrics on the featured songs contained sexual slurs and derogatory words (43). Two of the most common derogatory names used by rappers are the "bitch" and "ho." Terri Adams and Douglas Fuller write that rap replaces the "Sapphire," the stereotype of the selfish, "money-hungry, scandalous, manipulating, and demanding woman" with the "bitch." Meanwhile, the "Jezebel," or the caricature of the immoral "sex object that can be used and abused in any form to satisfy the sexual desires of a man" and obtain material possessions," is analogous to the "ho" in rap (948). The derogatory terms that harm women outside of music continue the cycle of misogyny by permeating rap.

In Snoop Dogg's 1998 collaboration with C-Murder and Eddie Griffin, "DP Gangsta," Snoop disrespected several women who refused to sleep with him with the phrase, "fuck you bitch" (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 12). And while the title of his 1992 collaboration with Dr. Dre, "Bitches Ain't Shit," is self-explanatory, Dr. Dre further incorporates misogyny into his craft by asking, "How could you trust a ho?" (qtd. in

Weitzer and Kubrin 16). By respectively referring to women who set boundaries as “bitches” and supposedly promiscuous, “gold-digging,” and untrustworthy women as “hoes,” Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre perpetuate the cycle of misogyny by causing harm to black women’s self-esteem. The music video for Juvenile’s 2003 song “Slow Motion” raises the bar for misogyny in that he not only refers to women as “bitches” and “hoes,” but even worse, “children play in the background [while] women dance suggestively, smiling as if the rapper’s slurs...flatter them” (Lindsay 47-48). Juvenile’s actions may influence children to call women derogatory names, and the younger generation may inherit the cycle of misogyny because Juvenile perpetuates it in front of them. Essentially, words such as “bitch” and “ho” perpetuate misogynistic stereotypes of black women.

There are numerous other derogatory terms used to describe black women in rap music. According to Weitzer and Kubrin, “Other rappers condemn the slut, tramp, whore, hoochie, ‘lying-ass bitch,’ ‘shitty hoe,’ ‘prima donna bitch,’ and so forth. A favorite rap term is ‘chickenhead,’ which reduces a woman to a bobbing head giving oral sex” (Weitzer and Kubrin 11). Although these terms appear less common in rap than “bitch” and “ho,” they are nonetheless disgusting. Rappers who disrespect women with these insults perpetuate misogynistic stereotypes. Also, Ellen Chamberlain hinted that the second P in the title of Naughty by Nature’s 1991 song “O.P.P.” refers to a woman’s private parts (3:23-3:31). Audiences may recite the song’s famous chant without understanding its meaning. The disguise of a woman’s body part as a catchy hook encourages derogatory names and objectification. And in the LOX’s 1998 song “Bitches from Eastwick,” Sleek Louch refers to a woman who sleeps with him and proceeds to

rob him as a “bitch” and a “slut” (qtd. in Adams and Fuller 950). Shaming women for being “sluts” is a common misogynistic trait that Sleek perpetuates in his lyrics.

Lastly, a few rappers claim not to intentionally disrespect women with derogatory terms. For instance, Weitzer and Kubrin note that “Ice Cube talks about a ‘wholesome ho,’ and Too \$hort refers to his ‘finest bitches’ and a ‘top-notch bitch’” (11). Although the adjectives in these descriptions of women appear flattering, the nouns are still misogynistic. Furthermore, Ice Cube and Too Short often use misogynistic language in their music. Similar to objectification, these derogatory remarks and multiple others denigrate the self-esteem of black women.

Distrust and Suspicion of Women

Another common misogynistic theme in rap is the distrust or suspicion of women. Specifically, some men who have recently acquired wealth can possess the fear of encountering “gold diggers.” Weitzer and Kubrin elaborate, “[t]hey have achieved rapid upward mobility and celebrity status, and thus have precarious new wealth that can be lost” (19). This terror is common among people who quickly acquire various kinds of earnings, including lottery winners. Because men typically earn more than women do, their fear of “gold diggers” may stem from their internalized sexist belief that women should be economically subservient to them. One example of this trope is Kanye West’s 2005 single “Gold Digger,” which won a Grammy Award the following year. In this song, West complains about a woman who seduces a man to acquire his money (Weitzer and Kubrin 18). Early in his career, West usually avoided incorporating misogyny into his craft, sans this reference to hypergamy. Although “Gold Digger” does not bash the

song's namesake, it does not celebrate women who date and marry for wealth.

Portrayals of black women as "gold diggers" in rap perpetuate the stereotype that they are untrustworthy.

While several female rappers embrace this trope, listeners may view this hypergamous endeavor in a positive light. Some women in Weitzer and Kubrin's analysis of rap music from the 1990s "reinforce the idea of women as gold diggers interested solely in exploiting men" (18). Some African-American femininity commentators encourage hypergamy among black women to buck the stereotype of dating beneath their income level. Unfortunately, any efforts by black women to improve their lives are often deemed unacceptable by their male counterparts. One instance of hypergamy among black women in rap is Missy Elliott's 1999 collaboration with Lil' Mo, "Hot Boys," in which Missy demands her male partner provide her with material possessions: Lexus, Mercedes-Benz, and Lincoln Jeeps as well as platinum Visa cards (Weitzer and Kubrin 18). While Elliott essentially reiterates the tradition of men as providers who take care of their partners, men will still view her as a "gold digger" for asking them to fulfill their aforementioned role. Until this viewpoint changes, even women's portrayals of themselves as "gold diggers" or hypergamous in rap will continue to perpetuate the trope.

While the prospect of losing newfound wealth terrifies some rappers, others fear the permanent ramifications of unprotected sex. Melanie Lindsay writes that their music videos "tend to focus on the cost African American men bear when greedy baby mamas seek to extract child support payments and other forms of support" (55). Some of these consequences include poverty, resentment, and the resulting hardships of dating

women who expect men to provide for them financially. The risk of sexually transmitted diseases is also a lyrical subject. For instance, in Ice Cube's 1995 song "Friday," he claims to wear two condoms during sex to supposedly prevent the contraction of a sexually transmitted disease although "this practice increases the likelihood of condom malfunction." In his words, "dat HIV'll make ya dick hang sideways" (qtd. in Griffin and Fournet 298-299). The rapper's flawed logic essentially does not protect him from the aftermath of sexual activity; instead, it backfires.

Violence Against Women

The few examples of outright violence against women in rap are particularly disturbing, and this theme often accompanies other misogynistic concepts in the genre. For example, while 40% of the songs analyzed in Gretchen Cundiff's survey contained themes of physical violence, 20% described sexual assault and conquest, and 40% incorporated multiple themes (76-77). Violence is often a "last resort" in the cycle of misogyny; unrestrained misogynistic thoughts can transform into risky behaviors, including promiscuity and aggression. If society at least attempts to rid itself of misogynistic thoughts, this will likely reduce physical attacks against women.

Additionally, rap music that brags about aggressive sex often incites violence against women. Weitzer and Kubrin found that in rap songs from 1987 to 1993, lyrics "take pride in women being 'drilled,' 'wrecked,' and otherwise roughed up during intercourse. Men demonstrate their dominance over women by such representations of rough sex" (20). This shows that rappers who describe sex in graphic terms may commit similarly

worrying acts of violence. Rappers who degrade women with vulgar descriptions of sex perpetuate the cycle of misogyny in the genre.

Additionally, several black male rappers portray themselves as violent. In 2012, Kitwana claimed that “nearly all male rappers ‘trying to make it’ market themselves as gangsters” – a claim that still holds weight (qtd. in Rebollo-Gil and Moras 125). The music industry often pressures black men to depict criminal lifestyles for maximum profits. So rappers who brag about violence preserve stereotypes that adversely affect them. One such artist, Big L, once claimed in his 2010 song “Devil’s Son” to be “a stone villain known for killing and raping nuns” (qtd. in Hoston 49). While some rappers brag about their violent exploits, only a few boast about sexual assault and consequently maintain the trope of black men as predators. Rap musicians who call themselves violent repeat the cycle of misogyny in the genre.

Speaking of taking pride in rape and violence in varying levels of graphic detail, Rick Ross shamelessly rapped about illegal activity in his 2013 collaboration with Rocko and Future, “U.O.E.N.O.” In this song, he boasts about drugging a woman’s champagne with the substance Molly and sleeping with her while she’s unconscious, as exemplified by the lyrics “she ain’t even know it” (qtd. in Hoston 48-49). Of course, Ross received immense backlash for these lyrics because, as mentioned earlier, few rappers brag about sexual assault. Another example of the shameless boasting about rape comes from Vado’s 2012 song “We Outchea,” in which he discusses gang rape (a sexual assault committed by a group) with the lyrics, “My niggas fucked and we raped that” (qtd. in Hoston 49). Vado may not have received as much flak for his lyrics as Rick Ross did because the former has less name recognition than the latter. However, bragging

about a gang rape does not lessen the detrimental impact of these sickening lyrics. And in the Geto Boys' 1989 song "Mind of a Lunatic," the late Bushwick Bill claimed a woman deserved rape because:

She's naked, and I'm a peeping tom

Her body's beautiful, so I'm thinking rape

Shouldn't have had her curtains open, so that's her fate (qtd. in Hoston 45)

By blaming a woman for her sexual assault, Bill participated in the silencing of rape victims. Shaming black women for their traumatic experiences perpetuates the "Jezebel" stereotype in that they supposedly make themselves available for unwanted sex. Ultimately, rappers who admit to violence – or at least describe violent acts in great detail – can risk permanently tarnishing their reputation or worse.

Several rappers have boasted about violent crimes against children and received rewards from the music industry. One egregious example is the Notorious B.I.G.'s 1997 song "What's Beef?" In this song, Biggie claimed that his friend Gutter kidnapped, raped, and murdered kids, then "[threw] them under the bridge," a possible reference to the Atlanta Child Murders in the late 1970s and early 1980s (qtd. in Hoston 47). And in DMX's 1998 single "X-Is Coming," he threatens to break into another man's house, kill his wife, and rape his teenage daughter. However, the album containing the song managed to chart despite the disgusting scenario he describes (Hoston 47). Society tends to shun those who commit crimes against children, but inexplicably, rappers appear to be exempt from the cold shoulder.

Misogyny in Eminem's Music

Eminem was one of the most popular rappers of the early 2000s, yet he has incorporated an abundance of various types of misogynistic content in his music. In Cundiff's survey, Eminem, Ludacris, and Mystikal each exhibited misogyny in at least three songs from the 2000s, with Eminem performing five songs with misogynistic themes (77). This rapper's prevalence in several other studies demonstrates his numerous degrading lyrics toward women. Perhaps his race provides him a "pass" to spew some of the vilest content in rap music. Therefore, black rappers must hold their white peers to the same appropriate standards when it comes to respecting women in rap, and Eminem is certainly no exception.

For instance, in his 2000 song "I'm Back," Eminem claims that he'd rather have sex with a woman "with no rubber" (qtd. in Griffin and Fournet 301). This boast of unprotected sex with a woman speaks volumes about Eminem's misogynistic tendencies. Men like him may not worry about the consequences of the aforementioned activity, such as pregnancy and disease, because they likely believe the responsibility of protection falls on women. However, in his 2002 song "Drips," Eminem expresses his frustration after engaging in sexual activity without using a condom (301). While Eminem laments the possible ramifications of unprotected sex (likely an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection), he should have considered them long before partaking in such an activity.

However, Eminem's objectification of women and fear of the consequences of unprotected sex pale in comparison to his hostility toward all women, including relatives. In his 2000 song "Under the Influence," he claims that "all bitches [are] hoes, even [his]

stinkin' ass mom" (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 12). This disdain for women manifests itself in other forms of misogyny, and Eminem continues the vicious cycle by perpetuating sexist stereotypes. But the most appalling example of Eminem's contempt for women is his smash-hit 2010 collaboration with Rihanna, "Love the Way You Lie," in which they describe an example of domestic violence (of which the latter artist was a victim). Eminem elaborates, "You push, pull each other's hair, scratch, claw, hit 'em. Throw 'em down, pin 'em / Im'a tie her to the bed and set this house on fire" (qtd. in Cundiff 77). Although one may argue that the song raises awareness of domestic violence, Eminem's history of misogyny in rap overshadows that notion. And while Eminem likely targets women of his race for his graphic lyrical content, society must still hold him and white men accountable for beginning the phenomenon of misogyny in the first place.

Effects of Misogynistic Rap

Desensitization

Consumers of rap can become desensitized to its misogynistic content because they tend to focus on its instrumental component more than its lyrics. For example, Neha Makkapati, a student columnist for the University of California, Santa Barbara's newspaper, *The Daily Nexus*, writes that she was "never fazed by the way rappers talked about sex, drugs and money" and "always figured this was just a part of the genre and never thought twice about it." Music serves numerous purposes, such as the inspiration to synchronize with the rhythm, melody, or harmony. The instruments of rap,

particularly its rhythmic components, can become a distraction to the point that listeners may ignore problematic lyrics.

Another form of desensitization to misogyny in rap music is the provision of platforms for it. These platforms include large events, such as televised awards shows, and even acts as simple as referring to rappers who exhibit misogyny in their music as industry “innovators” (Adams and Fuller 954). When troublesome musicians receive fame and recognition, fans are willing to disregard their behavior. The fact that black audiences will particularly defend misogynistic rap musicians is baffling, as it further perpetuates the acceptance of the hatred of black women in the genre.

Additionally, several women believe misogyny in rap does not directly affect them or at least does not lower their self-esteem. Several factors contributing to this phenomenon include “attributing negative feedback to the prejudiced attitudes of the media” and “the viewers choosing whether or not they want to associate with the character based on their values” (Conrad et al. 139). In other words, while some black women distrust mainstream media, others distance themselves from the disrespectful portrayals. In any case, the people surrounding them likely influence them to ignore the misogyny that targets them.

Furthermore, younger consumers of rap music are more vulnerable to the desensitization to its misogynistic content than older generations. Young people who listened to rap music for at least a few hours daily exhibit more misogynistic and violent tendencies than those who listened to the genre for up to an hour a day. Additionally, people ages 18-20 who listened to rap exhibited more of the aforementioned tendencies than people ages 21-23 (Gourdine and Lemmons 67). Although this study did not

examine the effects of misogynistic hip-hop on children, the implications may apply to them as well; after all, people accumulate wisdom and discernment as they age.

Reduced Self-Esteem

Misogyny in rap music can also harm self-esteem; the reduction of black women's self-worth by colorism in the genre's music videos is particularly profound. Specifically, black consumers of rap music videos who compare themselves to black characters with Eurocentric features "may experience a decrease in self-esteem, especially for female viewers" (Conrad et al. 153). Some believe that colorism is the younger sibling of racism in that it affects people within a race or ethnic group. Because society expects women to fulfill certain beauty standards, colorism mostly affects women of darker skin tones. If dark-skinned, unambiguously black women constantly witness their male counterparts objectifying light-skinned or multiracial women in music videos, they may believe they will never be the object of desire for black men.

Aside from objectification, derogatory terms targeted to women and girls greatly reduce their self-confidence. Byron Hurt found it mystifying that some of the women he encountered while filming his 2006 documentary, *Hip Hop*, claimed that the words "bitch" and "ho" in the genre did not affect them (30:21-30:38). Although studies show that female consumers of rap with high self-esteem distance themselves from denigrating words (Conrad et al. 139), this does not always protect their psyche from misogynistic insults. In short, derogatory terms can decimate the self-esteem of young women and girls.

And even media companies that target African-Americans portray negative stereotypes of their core demographic. Rapper Chuck D, a member of the group Public Enemy, once called the television network Black Entertainment Television (BET) the “cancer of black manhood in the world” because of their one-dimensional image of black men as aggressively masculine and misogynistic (qtd. in Hurt 54:17-54:43). Black audiences may find the stereotypes perpetuated by BET as a betrayal. In its early history, BET showcased programs promoting positive aspects of the black community; today, however, it is owned by Viacom, a white-owned company that likely has no stake in issues concerning African-Americans. This demonstrates that “black” media organizations that aim to support the African-American community may hide ulterior motives.

Health and Behavioral Impact

Misogyny in rap is also detrimental to the health and behavior of its audience: black youths, who unwittingly internalize the problematic content and act it out in real life. La Francis Rodgers-Rose writes, “People are taught that dominance is a man’s right. Some boys may not want to dominate, but feel they ought to, in order to measure up to the culture. And they’ve got the music to back them up” (qtd. in Adams and Fuller 953). Men pass down hegemonic masculinity to the younger generation, which sustains this trait. When black boys hear their favorite rap musicians (who mostly consist of adults) exhibiting misogyny in their lyrics, they may consider the behavior acceptable. However, they must learn that toxic masculinity is not the norm, especially for children.

Additionally, the perennial airplay of misogynistic, violent, and homophobic rap music maintains the idea that black men must be “hard.” Specifically, Kevin Powell states that rap and R&B (or “urban”) radio stations repeat a setlist that indicates that the only acceptable form of manhood, particularly for black and Latino men, is to disrespect and display aggression towards women, the LGBT+ community, and each other (Hurt 47:23-47:43). Toxic masculinity particularly affects men of color (particularly African-Americans) because of the hardships they have faced over the centuries. The cycle of radio singles that perpetuate misogyny encourages black men’s bias against women.

Disturbingly, women generally believe that rap music incites violence against them. When asked if the genre encourages violence against women, most female participants in William Hoston’s survey agreed, while most of their male peers disagreed (58). Given the violent content in rap that receives more attention in the mainstream media than other misogynistic themes, this finding is unsurprising. Although most rap music does not exhibit overt misogyny, the commercial sector tarnishes the entire genre; so fans of mainstream rap should call out musicians for downgrading the genre with their misogynistic content.

Sociological Impact

Some believe that rap reflects gender roles among African-Americans. In a study conducted by Spelman College professor Bruce H. Wade and his student, Cynthia Thomas-Gunnar, “more than half of a sample of young educated adult males ‘agreed that rap accurately reflects at least some of the reality of gender relations between black

males and females” (Adams and Fuller 953). Considering the high amount of misogyny in rap, this opinion carries weight, as misogyny aims to control women’s behavior in both society and the arts. Rap music essentially promotes control over the lives of black women and belittles them, which often regulates societal misogyny. Additionally, several rappers have used derogatory terms to emasculate other men. One example is the extreme homophobic F-word, which is used as a slur to decrease a man’s sense of masculinity (Gray 38). At times, derogatory terms normally geared toward women can affect men as well. If a man does not meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity, he may become the subject of ridicule from his peers. In essence, rappers who call their peers disturbing names can lower their self-esteem as they do that of women.

While some white people are interested in hip-hop culture, this can influence their subconscious stereotypes of black people. On a trip to Spring Bling, a hip-hop music festival in Daytona Beach, in 2005, Byron Hurt interviewed several white visitors from Moline, Illinois. They believed the genre reinforces their stereotypes about African-Americans, particularly since they never traveled to the “hood” and gained exposure to the acquisition of wealth and criminal lifestyles through rap (52:08-52:55). As previously mentioned, white people are the primary consumers of rap. Music audiences can brainstorm assumptions about artists based on their material; white listeners, who harbor implicit bias against minorities, may consider rappers as misogynistic or violent after carefully analyzing their lyrical content and extend this stereotype to all African-Americans. Therefore, consumers of rap should remain cautious of its content and avoid living vicariously through the music or allowing it to fuel stereotypes and biases.

Financial Rewards

To put it plainly, violence and misogyny sell – records, merchandise, and beyond. Ronald Weitzer and Charis Kubrin write, “To maximize sales, record industry moguls encourage provocative, edgy lyrics. Producers not only encourage artists to become ‘hardcore’ but also reject or marginalize artists who go against the grain” (6). The mainstream media sensationalizes negative content for views and profits; likewise, commercial rap artists showcase misogyny and violence to earn thousands, if not millions, of dollars. The less emphasis placed on misogyny in rap by record labels, the more positive content that audiences can consume.

The desire for wealth can be overwhelming to the point that some rappers go against their beliefs and exhibit misogyny in rap to sell records and garner fame. Terri Adams and Douglas Fuller elaborate, “Some artists may use such lyrics to gain status, recognition, and high volume sales—when they may not personally believe in what they espouse” (949). Money can alter personalities in unimaginable ways, and it is no surprise that black men, a largely disenfranchised group, will partake in vile misogyny for a simple profit. So rappers must make the effort to refuse to compromise themselves for monetary rewards.

Furthermore, misogyny in rap music may primarily benefit white-owned media corporations that often gain more from misogynistic rap than the artists who sustain such stereotypes. Anti-sexism activist Jackson Katz explains, “overwhelmingly, and this is no great secret, it is white men in suits who are making those decisions. And they’re deciding, this makes money. I’m gonna sell it. I don’t care if it’s hurting people. It’s a business decision, right?” (qtd. in Hurt 56:36-56:56) Considering rap musicians mostly

exhibit toxic masculinity and misogyny for profit, it should come as no surprise that white-owned record labels who earn millions from degrading black women via their artists barely pay these “henchmen.” Ultimately, although misogynistic rap can provide financial rewards, rappers should realize that the detrimental content they spew out withdraws from the happiness of people they harm.

Promotion and Airplay

Unfortunately, the negative imagery in rap music has not decreased over the years but rather escalated. From the 1980s to 2015, studies have found that “images of alcohol, illegal drugs, and violence have increased substantially over time in rap music lyrics in response to corporate pressures and other societal factors” (Herd 586). Money is the primary reason for the increase in detrimental images in rap, as rappers who are only concerned with a giant paycheck may not consider the effect of their negative content on younger audiences. So society should promote positive imagery in the mainstream media to curb the opposite. Simply put, mainstream misogynistic rap music receives a greater amount of airplay than its alternative, conscious counterpart. Columbia University sociology instructor Jennifer C. Lena elaborates, “In the eight years between 1988 and 1995, [major record labels] charted up to five and a half times as many hardcore rap singles as all their independent competitors combined” (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 7). It should come as no surprise that these statistics have only risen since the aforementioned timeframe. As the amount of misogyny and violence in rap grows, the number of positive or conscious topics decreases. Promoting a fair

balance of lyrical content in rap will maintain the genre's diversity and satisfy fans of all backgrounds.

Rap and R&B artists who exhibit misogyny in their craft receive other forms of promotion and accolades. These musicians are rewarded with not only excessive radio airplay and heavy rotation of their music videos but also "lucrative careers in the film industry, with many rap artists starring in films in which they mirror their music personas" (Adams and Fuller 940-941). Weitzer and Kubrin list 50 Cent as such an example, as he "has been frequently nominated for Grammy Awards for songs" that showcase objectification of women, such as "Candy Shop" and "Magic Stick" (14). Society should punish unacceptable behavior, but the entertainment industry appears to do the exact opposite. Providing a platform for misogyny in rap perpetuates the idea that the music industry allows the disrespect of black women. In short, withholding support for musicians who exhibit misogynistic tendencies will pressure them to rethink their lyrical content.

Misogyny in Other Genres

Rap is not the only genre that exhibits excessive amounts of misogyny. The ever-changing music industry has always profited from the marginalization of certain groups of people, including women. Scholar Frank Lay elaborates, "Popular music can be read as a vehicle for heterosexual male concerns [over the advancement of women and gays] and, more importantly, for the recuperation of hegemonic masculinity" (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 6). And Carol D. Lee, a retired professor who focused her studies on education within the African-American community, states that despite the diversity of

content surrounding women in the music industry, “it remains uncommon for women to be presented as independent, intelligent, enterprising, or superior to men...Derogatory images are far more common” (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 4). Historically, society has treated those other than heterosexual white men as unequal. Women and minorities may struggle to achieve the success of straight white men in pop music.

Additionally, since the advent of music videos in the 1980s, at least one-third of them have contained sexual content. In fact, “early content analyses of music videos since MTV went to cable in 1981 have found that 40-75% of music videos contained sexual imagery” (Benton 12-13). Also, in one study, 86% of rock music videos objectified and exhibited violence against women. In another study, 91% of country music videos as of 1999 by male artists oppress women, while 50% of videos by their female counterparts do likewise. And 37% of Chicano rap songs from 1999-2002 analyzed by sociology instructor Pancho McFarland objectify women, while 4% justify violence against them (Weitzer and Kubrin 4-5). Misogyny has permeated all forms of art, both visual and auditory. Once music videos began airing on cable television, misogyny in music found yet another vehicle to display itself. And as rock and country, in particular, have recently incorporated rap into their styles, the misogyny in rap may have seeped into other genres.

Overall, overt misogyny in other genres pales in comparison to the hatred of black women in rap. Kayla Gray’s examination of hip-hop and rap songs on the *Billboard* Hot 100 on September 29, 2018, found that the aforementioned singles contained a higher frequency of misogynistic themes (201 occurrences) than the combination of occurrences (28) from other genres (43). For every misogynistic theme

in pop, rock, or country music that charts, there may be seven in rap music. Rap may be the most popular musical genre, but it is also the most problematic; therefore, misogyny is most common in rap music.

Other studies have specifically suggested that country music does not contain as many misogynistic themes as rap music does. For example, Mississippi State University sociology professor Braden Leap notes that mainstream country singles from the 1980s to the 2000s celebrated men who provided for their wives and children (176). Also, Ronald Weitzer and Charis Kubrin wrote that “country music advertisers pressure radio stations to screen out misogynistic songs to attract desired female listeners” (4). And Denise Herd discovered that “sexual objectification was more prominent in R&B/hip hop and pop videos than in country music videos” (584). When one thinks about country music, they may imagine its “wholesome” qualities. References to sex, violence, and other controversial topics are scant in the genre. If other genres can take the extra effort to prohibit misogyny, so can rap.

A Changing Climate

Backlash and Criticism of Misogynistic Rap

Fortunately, the tide of misogyny in rap may soon turn in a positive direction. Ruby Gourdine and Brianna Lemmons’ forum demonstrated that “[t]he younger the youths, the more they listened. This is important in that it appears that older youths listened less and had less-positive reactions to the misogynistic lyrics” (68-69). Also, some men dislike the misogyny in the musical style exhibited by their peers. Several men interviewed by William Hoston believed that rap music contains excessive

materialism (such as “cars, jewelry, and popping bottles in the club”) as well as “‘degrading’ lyrics that demean women and celebrate rape” (42). When black men refuse to encourage the debauchery that permeates rap, they simultaneously lighten the responsibility of black women to do likewise and fulfill their societal roles as community leaders. So more black men must hold rappers accountable for perpetuating misogyny and violence in rap.

Because misogyny often dominates mainstream rap, the most popular rappers receive the most criticism for their problematic content, as demonstrated by the backlash Rick Ross received for the lyrics in his 2013 song “U.O.E.N.O” promoting date rape. Other examples include Eminem, who won a Grammy for his album *The Marshall Mathers LP* in 2001, and Three 6 Mafia, who won an Oscar for their song “It’s Hard Out Here for a Pimp” from the movie *Hustle & Flow* five years later. Feminist groups condemned both awards for honoring the respective “extreme hostility and violence” and “exploitation of women” (Weitzer and Kubrin 3). Mainstream rap musicians represent the collective of the genre, so when they receive criticism for their misogynistic and violent lyrics, lesser-known rappers may feel as though the backlash also applies to them. Consequently, widely recognized rappers must change the imagery in rap to improve the reputation of the entire genre. Additionally, black women have organized campaigns to criticize misogyny in rap music. For instance, in 2005, *Essence*, a magazine that caters to black women, started a crusade that combated misogynistic rap, which “lamented the depiction of Black women in rap and solicited feedback from readers on ways to challenge it” (Weitzer and Kubrin 3-4). Despite their high consumption of rap music, black women are some of its most vocal critics.

Although this can feed into the “strong black woman” stereotype, the backlash against rap from black women can spark changes within the genre. Therefore, both black women and men must collaboratively criticize the negative imagery in rap to greatly reduce it.

The Role of Feminism

Hip-hop feminism allows black women to simultaneously consume rap music and criticize its problematic content. Adeerya J. Johnson elaborates:

Hip-Hop feminism is the theoretical framework that not only asks for Black women who watch [*Love & Hip Hop*] and are characters on the show to take on some form of accountability, but allows space for other voices to depict their Hip-Hop realities where Black women online can engage in the show without the lens of respectability. (13-14)

Constructive criticism can symbolize love and respect. And in reality, while some black women exclusively enjoy rap and others criticize it, it is perfectly acceptable for them to simultaneously consume the genre and call out its musicians for their misogyny. Also, numerous hip-hop feminists buck at respectability politics. One such example is Cardi B, a rapper who previously appeared on *Love & Hip Hop*. Psychology professors Danice Brown, Rhonda White-Johnson, and Felicia Griffin-Fennell write that Cardi “speaks openly about her sexuality, claims agency on her social media spaces, fights against sexism in the Hip-Hop industry, and is willing to challenge patriarchal

relationships” (qtd. in Johnson 24). The moral standards established by respectability politics can be harmful to women’s self-expression. Although Cardi B may not fit the “traditional” brand of feminism and morality, she is nonetheless entitled to her own beliefs about womanhood. She demonstrates that female rappers combat misogyny by criticizing societal norms.

Several spaces exist for black women (and their male equivalents) to criticize misogyny in rap without the fear of ramifications from black men and white people. It begins in childhood, where schools should allow students to simultaneously critique and engage in rap. Music educator Evan S. Tobias writes that “[m]usic classrooms may serve as physical and dialogical places for unpacking and addressing identity and meaning making through the study and engagement with Hip Hop music and culture” (64-65). The impact of misogyny in rap may affect girls more than women. Aside from the home, school is the most important place for children to learn how to combat misogyny. Therefore, educators must teach children, particularly black girls, that they can simultaneously enjoy rap and criticize it for its misogyny. The internet also provides a safe space for the concurrent enjoyment of rap and backlash against its misogynistic content. For instance, in recent years, the We Are the 44% coalition, a group of hip-hop feminists, used social media to successfully demand that Too Short apologize for “[advising] adolescent boys on how to sexually assault girls. The swift response to misogynoir not only resulted in a retraction by the rapper but also provided an opportunity for serious dialogue about sexual violence in communities across the country” (Durham et al. 731). Some may feel more secure confronting a perceived adversary online than criticizing them in person. In that sense, internet spaces

dedicated to niche groups can be safe places for people to provide their opinions on controversial topics, including misogynistic content in rap. The black women who confronted Too Short for his disturbing comments online demonstrate that safe spaces designed for black women's combat of misogyny can spark major changes.

But overall, black female rap is only safe when it is free from criticism from white people and African-American men. Patricia Hill Collins, a scholar who specializes in race and gender, elaborates:

Safe spaces...imply an exclusion of outside elements, of outside structures. Their power lies in that they are "free of surveillance by more powerful groups"...Rap music as a black male dominated art form and as a white corporate controlled enterprise is not at all free of that surveillance. (qtd. in Rebollo-Gil and Moras 128)

Sometimes, a majority group can hijack a movement created by a minority group; in this case, when white people and black men insert themselves into the business of black women, they divert the focus from campaigns created by black women to themselves and stifle the progress of a movement. White people and black men must respect the boundaries set by black women when it comes to combating misogyny.

Topics by Female Rappers

Some female rappers may place a positive spin on stereotypes designed to harm their self-esteem. Tobias lists several of the personas adopted by these musicians as:

- the “Queen Mother,” who promotes Afrocentric topics and dresses in accompanying garb;
- the “Fly Girl,” who preaches about body image and speaks her mind;
- the “Sista with Attitude,” who raps about female empowerment; and
- the “Lesbian,” who embraces her queer identity despite facing racism, sexism, and homophobia. (57-58)

These characters exemplify the fact that black women showcase a variety of personalities.

Aside from personifying these roles, female rappers often criticize misogyny and objectification. Tricia Rose notes that female rappers chide their male counterparts “for their mistreatment of women in heterosexual love relationships. In these raps, women challenge men’s depictions of them as ‘gold-diggers’ or ‘hoes’ and...address the many fears and concerns that black female consumers may have” (Rebollo-Gil and Moras 128). Eve epitomizes such backlash in her 1999 song “Love is Blind,” in which she confronts the abusive partner of a woman who ultimately dies as a result of domestic violence (Weitzer and Kubrin 23). Once again, this demonstrates that black women are often the most vocal critics of misogyny in rap despite their high consumption of the genre. While their chastisement of the hatred of black women may contribute to the stereotype of black women as “superwomen,” it can also help eradicate the genre’s negative aspects.

Additionally, female rappers demand respect for women and promote female empowerment. For instance, in Queen Latifah's 1989 song "Ladies First," she "discuss[es] women's empowerment and stress[es] the importance of women being accepted as equals in the rap music industry" and calls those who doubt the abilities of female rappers "blind." The accompanying music video for the song features "photographs of Black female abolitionists, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth" (Hoston 55). Queen Latifah's incorporation of notable African-American women in her music video cements her message of female empowerment. Just as the goal of feminists is equality with men, female rappers desire as much success as their male peers, and musicians like Queen Latifah encourage black women to fight for equality.

Also, female rappers assert and set boundaries surrounding their sexuality; a popular example is Lil' Kim. Maxwell Williams, a scholar in African-American music at Cornell University, explains that "by inserting a black female presence into typical performances of hip hop authenticity, rappers like Lil' Kim transform themselves from subjugated objects of the male gaze to culturally legible sexual agents. In this way, they refuse to constrain or deny female sexuality" (299). Although Lil' Kim may contribute to the stereotype of black women as "Jezebels," some female rappers spin misogynistic stereotypes into perceived positive self-representations. And in Paradise's 1994 song "Hoochies Need Love Too," the artist "emphasizes that she does not sleep with men without protection: 'And thinkin' a bad ass hoochie might give the skins quicker. You got another thing comin'" (qtd. in Griffin and Fournet 300). In other words, she reasons that one must not judge a book by its cover. Some black women refuse to exemplify the aforementioned "Jezebel" stereotype and risk their health through unprotected

promiscuity. In short, several female rappers defy societal caricatures of them by protecting their sexual health.

Positive Developments

One method of curbing misogyny in rap is to incorporate it into music education, allowing students to understand the meaning of the genre's content. Evan Tobias elaborates:

Developing appropriate pedagogies for integrating Hip Hop in music classrooms necessitates an appreciation of the depth and complexity involved in disrupting homogenized narratives while fostering an environment where students can challenge misogynistic and other problematic aspects of rap music while expressing their lived realities and worldviews. (63)

Some children may hear a myth that the entirety of rap is negative. Educators should remind students that all aspects of life have a balancing act, including rap. All adults should teach their children to pay attention to misogyny in rap (and other genres) and avoid living vicariously through the music.

Furthermore, critical consumption of rap allows students to simultaneously critique and enjoy it. Again, Tobias explains:

Music education has the unique potential to fuse aspects of Hip Hop studies and pedagogy while serving as an interface between Hip Hop based education; Hip

Hop, meaning, and identities; and Hip Hop aesthetic forms (Petchauer 2009) as they relate to general education, music, and music education. (69)

Several youths can relate to the reality presented by rap. If students learn about the origins of rap, they may clearly understand the origins of its misogynistic content. If they realize that rap possesses redeeming qualities, then they can concurrently criticize and appreciate the genre.

Another symbol of the changing tide of rap may be the incorporation of homosociality in content by male artists. Matthew Oware states that homosociality involves “individuals of the same-sex exhibiting strong social bonds toward one another in a non-sexual manner” (26). Although black men learn to exhibit aggressive standards of masculinity, most of them frequently display their emotions. Some rappers enjoy sharing their love for their peers in their music, although the mainstream media avoids highlighting this fact. Black male rappers showcase their vulnerability, which contradicts the common image of masculinity. Oware writes that several rappers express public grief over the loss of loved ones, “express deep concern for their close friends...provide them material resources, whether money or a place to stay, when needed” and “build and maintain community with their friends who are near or far” (31). Black men have feelings as does the rest of society, but this combats the stereotype of their aggressive masculinity. The expectation of black men to hide their emotions may conflict with their grief over loss; the stereotype of materialism combats black men’s desire to share their wealth; and the belief that black men quickly resort to violence contradicts their friendships with their peers. For positive images of black men to thrive, they must

recognize the origins of their aggressive standards of masculinity (including misogyny) to avoid repeating history.

Aside from black men, rap should empower all types of black people, including women, children, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities, among other groups. William Hoston reaffirms that “rap music surfaced to empower Black people as a whole, not only to empower Black males and oppress Black females further to promote gender inequality” (53). The black community promotes several rappers as leaders; however, they can publicly perform charitable acts toward their communities yet privately spew out misogyny and violence in their personal lives. African-Americans must look for leadership beyond the music industry, as misogynistic rappers can tarnish the community’s reputation.

Some male rappers have uplifted their female peers, which contrasts the misogyny prevalent in mainstream rap. For instance, in Tupac Shakur’s 1993 song “Keep Ya Head Up,” he wonders:

And since we all came from a woman
Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman
I wonder why we take from our women
Why we rape our women
Do we hate our women? (qtd. in Hoston 46)

Although Tupac was convicted of sexual assault around the time this song was released (46), his questions are viable. Black women create their community through childbirth,

so they do not deserve the disrespect they receive, especially from black men. So black men must appreciate their female counterparts because they are necessary to continue building up their community.

Beyond the music itself, the ownership of rap culture by African-Americans coincides with positive imagery of them. Gourdine and Lemmons note that “[e]fforts to concentrate on positive youth development through the use of hip hop and rap music have been made by a number of organizations that promote programs that focus on the positive aspects of youths” (60). White-owned record labels will disregard misogyny and violence in rap for a profit, but people who are invested in their communities will aim to improve them. If African-Americans take control of their artistic property, they can eradicate the stereotypes of (at a minimum) their musicians. And since even “conscious” rappers sometimes fail to exhibit flattering images of black women, mainstream hip-hop musicians must publicly discuss African-American women in a positive light.

Also, music videos should display positive themes surrounding the African-American community. Fortunately, several rap music videos demonstrate the themes of creating community unity (group solidarity); disaffection toward mainstream society (the hatred of white supremacy); expression of African-American culture; love and romance; and political awareness or advocacy (Conrad et al. 143-144). Viewing uplifting images may encourage people to inspire others through their actions. Music videos that portray positive images of African-Americans can help counteract detrimental stereotypes of the black community.

Another method of reducing misogyny in rap is the provision of a voice for black women, which allows them to control their image. Murray Forman, a rap scholar, elaborates, “Rap provides a medium to mobilize feminist strategies of resistance, to give voice to the experience and concerns shared by young black women, or to explore and articulate various aspects of desire and pleasure” (qtd. in Weitzer and Kubrin 22-23). For centuries, society has silenced black women who criticize the injustices against them. On the other hand, allowing black women to speak their minds without interference will garner the attention of society. When platforms such as social media exist for black women to criticize rap, the men involved in the genre will listen, take the women’s advice, and curb stereotypes. In essence, multiple outlets should exist for black women to safely vent their frustrations brought on by misogynoir.

Additionally, consumers of rap can reduce the prevalence of its problematic content by distancing themselves from artists who showcase misogyny and support musicians who display the contrary. Ellen Chamberlain advises that these rap fans “do not have to support the artists that tear down the community. And if you haven’t noticed, tearing down women does destroy the communities” (12:35-12:46). Also, Melanie Lindsay suggests that “if the African American community refuses to purchase music or concert tickets, rap artists and the record companies will be forced to change the way women are represented in rap videos” (64). Artists who exhibit misogyny should not profit from their unacceptable concept, yet the black community continues to support them. So the refusal of black audiences to listen to rap musicians may inspire the artists to reconsider their misogynistic, violent tendencies. After all, black women should not be obliged to stand by rappers who repeatedly and publicly disrespect them.

Most importantly, the black community must recognize the origins of long-standing racist, misogynistic stereotypes and dismantle them. As Adams and Fuller explain:

The ultimate burden of responsibility must be placed on the social structures of society and the dominant culture, which created, supports, and makes this ideology viable. Only through challenging and changing these aspects of social life will misogynistic ideology be able to be dealt with. (954)

Most people may desire to avoid repeating history, particularly its negative aspects. The black community must halt the practice of consuming music by artists who repeatedly spew out misogyny, colorism, and violence. If the black community continues supporting misogyny in rap, the cycle of misogyny and violence in the real world will never end. Essentially, given the early purpose of rap music of empowering and educating the African-American community, the genre's focus should return to its constructive characteristics.

Looking Forward

Future research concerning rap should focus on several avenues, including homophobia in rap, particularly against black women. Kevin Powell believes that numerous heterosexual black men refuse to spark conversations with their gay peers because “part of the [problem] falls on straight men to really want to begin the process of how we define manhood” (qtd. in Hurt 37:39-37:56). And feminist scholar Tracy

Sharpley-Whiting states that for straight black males, “lesbians and lesbianism are in some respects the final frontier of conquest. The prevailing mentality is that all lesbians need a ‘good stiff one’ to set them on a ‘straight’...course” (qtd. in Oware 25).

Unfortunately, society tends to sweep homophobia under the rug. Avoiding the conversation of homophobia in the black community does not quell it, and the silence surrounding the homophobia towards queer black women can worsen the misogyny aimed at them. Destigmatizing the black LGBTQ+ community in addition to curbing misogyny in rap will eradicate the stereotype that African-Americans are homophobic and sexist.

Other studies should examine how youth in local cultures engage with rap. Evan Tobias writes, “Localized ethnographic studies are thus needed to provide a clearer picture of how young people make meaning and construct their identities through varied engagement with Hip Hop music and culture” (51). Understanding others’ cultures will increase awareness of what harms them. White-owned record labels with no connections to the origins of rap will disregard misogynistic content for profit. If the music industry becomes more aware of local cultures, they may avoid stereotyping their inhabitants. This demonstrates that in general, society must take accountability for its stereotypes of African-Americans, which have contributed to negative content in rap.

Finally, potential research should also explore positive and empowering lyrics. Matthew Oware writes that “more dialogue surrounding black males and rap music should include not only critiques of the detrimental aspects of this popular cultural medium, but also areas of empowering and encouraging messages” (33). Sensational, usually negative, topics sell records and merchandise, and the mainstream media often

focuses on detrimental aspects of rap for financial rewards. The promotion of more positive images of the African-American community will disempower the misogyny that currently permeates rap. If early rap music served as an inspiration to its fans, then the bulk of attention that the mainstream media provides for the misogynistic content in modern hip-hop should be a surprise.

Overall, misogyny is extremely prevalent among African-American male rappers because of societal attitudes toward black women and the refusal of black men to confront and curb disrespect of their female counterparts. The stereotypes and mistreatment dispensed to black women that have existed for centuries have seeped over into rap music. And since its inception in the late 1970s, the focus of mainstream rap has shifted from the uplifting of the black community to the denigration of black women. Although misogyny in rap perpetuates misogyny beyond the music and desensitizes black women to its harmful intrapersonal and sociological effects, it receives abundant airplay and financial rewards.

However, the promotion of positive images of black women and the recognition of the origins of misogyny will greatly reduce its presence in rap music. The success of Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, Doja Cat, and Chika in the 2010s and 2020s has provided women in rap extensive visibility, and audiences should not ignore the accomplishments of countless female rappers for their groundbreaking entry into the genre. Also, a balance of light-hearted and gritty topics will improve the reputation that precedes the genre. Consumers of rap should remain cautious of its content and avoid living vicariously through the music or allowing it to fuel stereotypes and biases. And on a sociological level, black women must tread a fine line when prescribing respectability

politics to their peers. Additionally, black rappers must hold their white peers (including Eminem) to the same appropriate standards when it comes to respecting women in hip-hop. Finally, society must set clear moral boundaries, pressure men to take responsibility for their actions, and halt the encouragement of their debauchery. In short, the cycle of misogyny and violence in rap music will decline when fans of all ages, genders, and races rebuke the negative material.

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