

Tamara Wong
Gender, Music and Sexuality
Maria Sonevytsky
Thursday, December 17th 2016

Artist Statement: The Identity of Black Masculinity and Reclamation of the Female Body through Modern Rap

My project is a reflection and conversation between four texts, discussing the identity of black rap artists and their use of women as props to create a hyper masculine presence in their videos and lyrics. I used Keyes, "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Identity via Rap Music Performance", "The Persistence of Sentiment" by Mitchell Morris, "Women of Color in Hip Hop: The Pornographic Gaze" by Margaret Hunter, "Shake It, Baby, Shake It: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip Hop" by Margaret Hunter. I then discussed the reclamation of the female body, including constructing a new identity through four sub categories shown in the Prezi. Although my project was not exactly a stereotypical "artistic" piece, alike a poem or a video, I think that it truly reflected the message without being overwhelming with information.

Over Thanksgiving break, I was watching MTV music with my sixteen-year old cousin, who was intrigued by these rap artists surrounded by women. He told me that he wanted to grow up and always be in an abundance of women as well, this made me question what roles the women had in the music videos. I began to question why these rappers felt the need to fill their spaces with scantily clad women while also rapping about their selfish sexual intentions.

I also wondered how there had been no retaliation by feminist music artists, or even female rappers. This is how my research began, as I started to watch and

also analyze through the lens of “The Pornographic Gaze” and how these women become voiceless, fundamentally turning into props to create a more masculine presence through the gaggle of women adoring and dancing near the artist. What furthered my research was how little agency the dancers in the background had, working to please the man, possessing little to no character themselves. Reid- Brinkley, the author of the “Essence of Respectability: Black Women’s Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap and Music Video” makes a good point specifically on Nelly’s Trip Drill video stating,

“ The content of “Tip Drill” was so explicit that the video achieved rotation only on Black Entertainment Television’s late night hit show Uncut. The video includes voluptuous women in skimpy bikinis strutting around in stiletto heels. The video also depicts women making out with one another and a scene in which Nelly swipes a credit card down the crevice of a woman’s rear end” ¹

This image itself is awful, as it becomes a portrayal of male fantasy. There becomes a direct separation between gender roles, giving the male the dominant stance, telling these women what to do and the women turning into over sexualized objects serving as pornography in the background. Through Nelly’s actions, he ultimately is making the woman out to a money making machine, using her rear as a way to assert his dominance.

¹ Reid Brinkley, Shanara. *The Essence of Respectability: Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap*

Music and Video. N.p.: Indiana University Press, 2008. Print.

What else becomes a prevalent feature in masculine music culture, often seen in black rap as well is the hatred towards woman to a point where they aim to punish and humiliate her for angering them. Through the lens of the pornographic eye, can this clearly be seen, Hunter stating,

“Men’s anger toward women is increasingly present in mainstream video pornography, best exemplified by the typical money shot of a male actor ejaculating in a woman’s face, often while calling her names such as slut, cunt, bitch or whore.”²

What Hunter is alluding to is the stigma of humiliating women in public pornographic spaces in order to feel masculine, viewing the woman as the man’s sex slave. Through calling her all these names, the women clearly has no agency to stand up for herself, strengthening the discourse of women appearing as a pleasure props for the man.

However what several female rappers have done an exceptional job of is reclaiming the identity of the body. Through grasping the attention of the public, they have successfully been able to voice their opinions on the absurdity of the body as just a sex symbol. Nicki Minaj for example received multiple slut shaming comments about her video, *Anaconda*, however she chose to rise above the critics stating, “shame on them for commenting on “*Anaconda*, and not commenting on the rest of the over sexualized business we’re a part of.”³

² Hunter, Margaret. *Women of Color in Hip Hop: The Pornographic Gaze*. San Francisco: Jean Ait Belkhir, Race, Gender & Class Journal, 2009. Print.

³ Beaudoin, Kate. *Feminism: The Nicki Minaj Approach*. New York: Mic.com, 2015. Print.

The music video had the intention of glorifying curvaceous women, mocking the stereotypical male rap video's women in the background, bringing the dancers to the front, adding herself in to signify equality amongst them all. She received an immense amount of backlash, but instead of allowing it to get to her, she chose to address how none of the critics choose to address the bigger issue of the female objectification in music, specifically targeting her due to the fact that she in fact is a woman.

Through the creation of the four sub categories, have female rappers shown that they are more than just the side props hanging off men's arms at parties. They have added a three dimensional layer to their persona, singing and rapping about equality amongst the sexes and how women need to start being treated with respect as opposed to just serving the needs of men.

Works Cited:

- 1) Hunter, Margaret. *Women of Color in Hip Hop: The Pornographic Gaze*. San Francisco: Jean Ait Belkhir, Race, Gender & Class Journal, 2009. Print.
- 2) Hunter, Margaret. *Shake It, Baby, Shake It: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip-Hop*. New York: Sociological Perspectives,, 2011. Print.
- 3) Beaudoin, Kate. *Feminism: The Nicki Minaj Approach*. New York: Mic.com, 2015.
Print.
- 4) Keyes, Cheryl. *Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces ,Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance*. N.p.: American Folklore Society, 2000.
Print.
- 5) Morris, Mitchell. *The Persistence of Sentiment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. Print.