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“The Black Female Rap Renaissance”:
An Intertextual Analysis Of Black Female Rap Lyrics As A Functional Feminism

by

Candace Hasan

Under the Direction of Maura Bernales, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
M.A. Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

2024

ABSTRACT

Can women's liberation organizations draw inspiration from Black female rappers as contemporary feminist role models and embodiments of anti-misogynoir? Black female rap music asserts that women and femme-identifying individuals can counter harmful and oppressive portrayals by rapping life into alternative realities. Artists like Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, and City Girls actively resist patriarchal and heteronormative norms through their assertive and explicit lyrics, distinctive wardrobes, and performances. This paper utilizes intertextuality to delve into the themes and patterns across Black female rap music to illustrate how these artists use their craft to subvert violence, racism, and sexism, thereby reshaping the prevailing images of Black womanhood. The intertextual analysis presented in this paper aims to describe and justify a curriculum designed to enrich identity exploration among young people and to be instrumental for feminist organizations. Through a critical examination of the lyrical content of Black female rap music, this study aims to uncover how these artists transcend traditional stereotypes of Black womanhood and sexual objectification, providing a survival guide for subverting patriarchal dominance for us all.

Index words: Black feminism, hip-hop feminism, rap music, Black womanhood, resistance, curriculum

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HOOCHIE-COOCHIE RAP

“You can turn this album off right now ‘cause all you gon’ get is some real City Girl shit/scammin’, trickin’, pussy rap”- City Girls, RAW (2023)

Rap music is a critical medium employed by Black women to carve out spaces in society rather than trying to make room for themselves within crooked existing frameworks. Black female rap artists like Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, and City Girls are committed to rejecting patriarchal, heteronormative respectability politics in their lives through aggressive and often explicit lyrics, wardrobes, and performances. When I listen to Black female rap music I am empowered by the back talk and enlightened to take up space in rooms that used to confine me. Female rap music reminds me I don’t have to cook, clean, or shut up to validate my experiences of womanhood. The principles of hip-hop feminism encourage me to show up as a feminist and still expect this man to pay for cocktails and calamari. However, contemporary debates around Black women and rap music have left us clinging to an either/or fixation. Are Black female rap artists maintaining anti-feminist performances bred out of capitalistic consumption *or* are these women actively negotiating their sexual subjectivity and resisting patriarchal dominance? As a listener, I believe the debate surrounding Black women in the rap industry is a lot more nuanced and requires more than just an analysis of the Black bodies present. Joan Morgan, the mother of hip-hop feminism, requires us to have “a feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays” meaning, a feminism that embraces the ambiguity of our experiences. This project is informed by Morgan’s call to bravery, as I experience Black female rap music that tells me I can be both/and; both a well-respected woman *and* a sex-positive ratchet bitch. Therefore, I see Black female rap music functioning as a space for conscious-raising discussions at the fragile intersection between Black womanhood and feminism. By intertextually examining the themes present in Black

female rap lyrics we can critically evaluate how those messages lend to the prevailing conversation of feminism, womanhood, and more generally, those impacted by patriarchy. Out of a place of pure fandom, I came across the following research questions: What messages are Black female rappers sending to other Black women about our oppression and our liberation? Can we point to Black female rappers as examples of contemporary feminist resistance and embodiments of anti-misogynoir? How can non-profit women's liberation organizations use hip-hop feminism as a guide to advancing their missions for collective liberation?

By challenging the misogynistic politics of Black womanhood, Black female rap artists are mirroring how millennial Black women are second-guessing traditional gendered norms in favor of more explicit and ratchet representations. Nonetheless, like the majority of the mass media entertainment industry, mainstream music is enveloped in the male gaze and created to satisfy the desires of misogyny and patriarchy. However, the chants of body-positive, the explicitly sexual desires, and the refusal to settle for less are all part of the generational shifts millennial women are experiencing in part due to what I refer to as the current "Black Female Rap Renaissance" we are encountering. In recent years, Black female rap artists have demanded well-deserved recognition and attention for their contributions to the music landscape. Cardi B became the first woman to ever win Best Rap Album at the Grammy Awards in 2018. Megan thee Stallion became the first female rapper to win Best New Artist at the 2021 Grammys in over 20 years. The popularity of these artists and the heavy circulation of their non-normative ¹self-produced narratives situate us in a world of more diverse, sexually liberated, and autonomous

¹ Despite allegations that some rappers do not write their own lyrics, it is important to distinguish between the act of lyric writing and the construction of a narrative. The concept of 'self-produced narratives' in rap does not solely hinge on the literal penmanship of the lyrics but rather on the authenticity and perspective from which these narratives are delivered. The understanding of self-produced narratives in rap transcends the question of who writes the lyrics, focusing instead on the authenticity of the narrative voice and the personal truths it conveys.

women that we can point to as examples of contemporary feminist resistance. In doing so, Black female rap music creates space for young women to enter into a conversation of self-identifying feminism and how hip-hop feminism, in particular, creates that conversation.

I intend to argue that the themes and patterns across Black female rap music are recoding traditional stereotypes of Black womanhood and Black women's sexual objectification that provide us with a programmatic guide to navigating patriarchy and eliciting feminism. I will first provide the historical context of the notorious debates of Black women and hip-hop by outlining the previous scholarship published on the intersection of hip-hop culture and feminism. Secondly, identify the themes and messages I see throughout the lyrics of three top-selling Black female rap artists, Megan thee Stallion, Cardi B, and City Girls, highlighting narratives that encourage conversations on capitalism, sexuality, bodily autonomy, and erotic pleasure. Then, I will provide the methods of my working argument by describing the way I see Black female rap music as operating in a resistance space and what strategy the text deploys to do this critical work. Lastly, I go deeper into the social and material implications of this work to connect my analysis to a curriculum for feminist non-profits on the bridges between hip-hop feminism and individual liberation. This endeavor is aligned with my future aspirations in both my graduate career and community involvement.

SO, WHAT WAS SAID?

I. Hip-Hop Feminism as a Cultural Generation of Thinking

Previous scholarship on Black feminist hip-hop studies, particularly in the U.S., has focused on the efforts within hip-hop to contribute to progressive agendas and encourage feminist discourse around the politics of Black women's bodies and sexualities (Morgan, J. 1999, Durham, A., Cooper, B. C., & Morris, S. M. 2013, Pough, G. 2007). Those engaged in hip-hop feminism and Black feminism frequently position their movement in contrast to white women's feminism, perceived as inaccessibly academic and lacking awareness of the intersectionality of gender and race (hooks 1999, Morgan 1999, Collins 2002). Where Black feminist studies and hip-hop culture intersect has been canonized for its creative invitations into new questions on representations and Black embodied experience while simultaneously generating tension between Black feminist theory and hip-hop feminism. Joan Morgan, the originator of the term, "hip-hop feminism", distinguishes the difference between the two schools of thought when criticizing the "foremothers feminism" for its obsession with oppression, respectability, and man-hating agendas in her classic text, "When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost". Scholars admit, unfortunately, that much of what Black feminism really stands for has been stereotyped by negative connotations and obscured Black women's intellectual traditions (Jamila 2002). Morgan and others explain that feminism is historically so unattractive for younger Black women because of our Black feminist mothers who came before us solely defining feminism as the victim (read as women) and the oppressor (read as men), leaving behind discourse heavily perceived as divisive in communities of color.

Hip-hop feminism came to be when Morgan used hip-hop as the cultural backdrop to theorize "a functional feminism for herself and her sistas — one that seeks empowerment on a

spiritual, material, physical, and emotional level” (23). Through a generational desire to relate to our influences, hip-hop feminism grew to be a contemporary framework to examine the experiences of Black womanhood and reject the arguments that attack Black women’s ability to contribute to that influence. The tension between Black feminist theorists and hip-hop feminists embodies a generational debate, where our elders critique hip-hop feminism for its encouraged ratchet culture and anti-feminist accomplishments, while the latter contends that traditional Black feminist theory is overly preoccupied with narratives of oppression and respectability politics, and criticized for its insufficient representation of sexual representation (Durham, A., Cooper, B. C., & Morris, S. M. 2013). However, where the two schools of feminism overlap hinges on Black feminist theorist Patrica Hill Collin’s idea that white masculinist thinking is attached to the binary of either/or thinking, whereas Black feminist thought is positioned to analyze the world from a both/and perspective (152, 2002). No one disagrees that “Black women’s centrality in African-American families and communities reflects the both/and conceptual orientation of Black feminist epistemology”, indicating that Black women required an alternative standpoint in which to build knowledge, different from the dominant ‘Eurocentric masculinist’ knowledge production (Collins, 2006). Nonetheless, Morgan set the tone for those coming after her to recognize hip-hop’s ability to articulate the pain of the Black community and use that knowledge to create a redemptive, healing space. We begin by recognizing its illuminating, informative narrative ability to articulate the timely concerns of communities of color (1999). For me, someone twice removed from Joan Morgan’s generation, it is significant for me to be continuing this work as it facilitates a generational dialogue between the pioneers of the movement and new voices. This dialogue is crucial for addressing evolving issues, challenging

existing paradigms, and revisiting the ongoing need for inclusive and intersectional approaches within feminist theory and practice.

Hip-hop feminism explained by Brittany Cooper means, we care about the way male dominance limits our life choices and life possibilities, however, we want to talk back to that on a hip-hop soundtrack while shaking our asses. We are reminded that hip-hop was a sound conceived by the struggles of Black and brown youth back in the 1960s. Therefore, we must see hip-hop as a generational narrative through which we enter into any conversation; a generation of thinking that leaves it up to each group, each generation to construct their *own* understanding of how to achieve their objectives (Cooper 2008). Authors like Whitney Peoples, Shani Jamila, Brittany Cooper, and Janell Hobson contend the overall objective of Black feminism is to empower Black women as we struggle against the pervasive oppressions that define Western culture. Regardless, many have concluded for any movement to maximize its effectiveness, it has to be applicable to the times (Jamila 2002, Peoples 2008, Morgan 1999, Hobson 2008). The research done for this project agrees that hip-hop feminism's evolving presence is not only evidence of the movement's relevance and strength but also reflects its continued interest in democratizing the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Durham, A., Cooper, B. C., & Morris, S. M., 2013). The feminist interventions that emerge within hip-hop culture, both overtly and subtly, reflect the diversity and complexity of what Black feminist theory offers and allow us to examine how representations and images can be simultaneously empowering and problematic.

II. Black Women's Social Existence through Popular Culture

In addition to the cultural relevance of hip-hop within Black life, Black feminist scholars have examined hip-hop for its capabilities in providing a backdrop for Black women to negotiate

their social existence in an attempt to express independence, self-reliance, and agency (Emerson 2002). Rana Emerson and others argue that hip-hop culture and rap music hold radical and liberating potential. This potential, they argue (Davis 1995; Jamila 2002; Morgan 1999; Pough 2004) should be facilitated by a contemporary feminist movement, one that speaks to younger feminists, particularly those of color. They offer that beyond the problematic degradation women face via its incontestable misogyny, hip-hop provides a space for young black women to express their race, ethnic identities and to critique the social establishments around them. Moreover, hip-hop feminists contend that hip-hop is also a site where young black women begin to build or further develop their own gender critique and feminist identity (Keyes 2000; Pough 2007; Byrd 2004; Peoples 2008).

“Hip-hop is misogynistic so it must be anti-feminist,” said every anti-feminist to ever live. However, despite the potential constraints posed by the often conflicting and stereotypical themes present in music videos, research illustrates that a more nuanced and complex portrayal of Black womanhood arises in the representation of women in the music industry (White 2013, Collins, 2005). For instance, when Theresa Renee White explores the fashion, aesthetic, and imagery of two major Black female hip-hop stars, Nicki Minaj and Missy Elliott, she contends that the sexual politics of hip-hop culture indeed help to redefine their sexuality, agency, and subjectivity (White 2013). Black feminist scholars have asserted time and time again these artists have all the power and platform to either differentiate from or subvert the male-enforced sexual roles females are expected to play in hip-hop culture (White 621). Through those possibilities of redefining your social perception, I’ve picked up this work by exploring the generational difference in the objectives of Black female rappers over the decades.

For example, pioneers such as Missy Elliott, Queen Latifah, and Eve reflected the *external* revolutions of their era, navigating respectability politics and striving for legitimacy within the growing rap industry. In contrast, contemporary artists like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B mirror the *internal* revolutions young Black women face today, with a focus on self-discovery, identity, and sexuality, marking a shift from collective societal challenges to individual empowerment and expression. In both instances, these hip-hop artists were able to utilize pop culture to negotiate their lived realities and create space for the world they wish to build. So, while yes, controlling images of Black womanhood are disseminated and legitimized through social institutions and then proliferated by popular culture, many scholars admit Black women are *still* able to articulate other key themes of self-valuation, and self-determination amidst images, debates, and social eras. The shifting objectives of Black female hip-hop artists over the decades serve as a mirror to the evolving landscape of social existence and acceptance that Black women must be in limbo with. Overall, we are taught that closely examining the *nuance* of how women in hip-hop assert their identities and resist the racialized male gaze will be fruitful in developing coherent strategies for empowerment and help to undo the prevailing legacy of controlling images (Balaji 2010).

A METHOD TO THE BADNESS

This analysis adopts an intertextual narrative approach. I am particularly interested in the themes of bodily autonomy, sexuality, capitalism, and erotic pleasure discussed and the narrative devices that overlap across songs to give social meaning to Black female rap music. My mission is to connect this analysis to organizational curriculum that can be taught to feminist non-profits on how to develop intersectional, generation-specific, conscious-raising discussions based on hip-hop feminism. I will be examining the lyrics of Megan thee Stallion, Cardi B, and City Girls; three top-selling Black female rap artists who have made their significant claim to fame within the last five years. An intertextual approach to interpretation explores how patterns across a series of related texts contribute to a structured meaning system that opens audiences' interpretive agency (Cloud 1992).

As Hoerl and Kelly note in their discussion of the post-nuclear family, "Although no single scholarly interpretation is going to be shared by different audiences of any particular text, similar themes and images across popular media texts point to the cultural forms by which different audiences may come to recognize the shared values of a culture." Likewise, "repeated themes across texts may highlight or obscure the disagreements and conflicts over which different groups struggle" (Hoerl and Kelly, 107, 2010). Many media studies scholars admit to the persuasive function of popular culture, however, Bow claims that the function "is not so much to provide solutions to cultural conflicts but, rather, to negotiate the parameters of the debate" (Bow 1996). Thus, by intertextually examining the messaging in Black female rap lyrics, we can give meaning to the themes and patterns across the genre that are recoding and repurposing traditional stereotypes of Black womanhood and Black women's sexual objectification in favor of more complex representations.

A LYRICAL LAYDOWN

I. Patriarchal Capitalism

When navigating identity in society Black women face unique challenges at the crossroads of patriarchy and capitalism, presenting distinct pressures shaped by both gender and racial dynamics. However, rap duo City Girls hailing from Miami, Florida have swapped societal slutshaming for their pussy-proclaimed superpowers. “I make a nigga pay a bill right before he lick it/I’ma ride that dick like a broom on wicked,” (*That Old Man* 00:31) raps Yung Miami, as she brings us into a world of more explicit financial demands by Black women. When Megan Thee Stallion raps “Buy me everything in my cart if you my boyfriend/ Invest in this pussy boy/ Support Black business” (*Suagr Baby* 0:05), she is empowering a conversation about the socio-economic status of Black women and challenging the nearby stigma attached to sex work as a means of support and survival. Cardi B’s iconic anthem lyric, “Broke boys don’t deserve no pussy//I know that’s right” (00:21 *UP*) discusses the boundaries of her body being attached to the priority of financial security. These lyrics together challenge the patriarchal capitalism embedded in Black womanhood by outwardly associating your body with monetary value, material acquisition, and explicit sexual desire. This conversation holds particular significance for Black women, given the hyper-racialized and gendered impacts of patriarchy and capitalism. In particular, by delegating gender roles, capitalism ensures that society is controlled and in alignment with patriarchy. Consequently, it’s crucial to understand how capitalism maintains and exploits gender to grasp which messages challenge these oppressive norms. In this context, asserting that one’s sexual availability is contingent on a partner’s financial capability becomes a form of resistance. Adding to this, while Black women are often relegated to roles of sexual objectification or viewed through an outsider’s sexual perception, these artists are showcasing

sexual subjectivity by leveraging sex as a means to assert financial dominance over men, reversing the traditional dynamics that have historically disempowered women. These lyrics draw on the controversial standard of only settling with men within a certain tax bracket and these artists are unapologetically stating that to be their sex partner, you are *indeed* required to support them financially. Therefore these artists are rejecting traditional expectations of Black women and saying no more to their socioeconomic status being exploited by elements outside of their control. It is an element of patriarchy to insist on controlling women with money and objects, however, these artists are repurposing that script by saying you can't control me however, I still want your money and your things!

II. Bodily Autonomy

Black female rap music has the prowess of encouraging critical conversations around bodily autonomy and sexual agency. Megan thee Stallion admits it, “My body, my motherfucking choice/ain't no lil dick nigga taking my voice” (*Gift & a Curse* 1:56) is a response to the frustration felt after the falling of Roe (2022) while accounting for and expressing the now lingering fear attached to reproductive autonomy. She goes on to release the hit single “Plan B”, where she addresses a former lover she feels disappointed by and shows that she knows her worth, “poppin Plan B/cause I don't plan to be stuck with you” (00:30). On a similar note when Megan thee Stallion raps “Lick, lick, lick, lick, lick/This is not about your dick/These are simply just instructions on how you should treat my clit,” (*Pimpin’* 0:27) it is opening up to a conversation on the overwhelmingly pitiful performance of men in intimate relationships. JT, of the rap duo City Girls, raps, “Keep it in, is you crazy?/Don't be lazy, nigga, I ain't tryna have yo' baby” as she condemns a lazy sex partner attempting to impregnate her. All of these lyrics speak to contemporary conversations millennial women are having about owning their sexual

experiences and reproductive agency. As a Black girl, you grow up hearing that you perform sex for the pleasure of a man and that your pleasure lies in your partner's pleasure. These lyrics challenge societal assumptions of women being passive sexual objects during sex and instead encourage women to direct their experiences in the bedroom aggressively. By doing so they contribute to a broader discourse on the norms and dynamics within romantic relationships and address the need for open conversations about sexual satisfaction. The significance is that Black female rap music does not attempt to appeal to traditional tropes that satisfy men and the male gaze. Instead, it disrupts the male gaze and re-uses those misogynistic expectations of Black womanhood to enlighten younger women to appeal to their *own* experiences and sexual agency.

III. Sexuality and Erotic Pleasure

Cardi B has been refreshingly open about her bisexuality, fearlessly embracing her identity and challenging societal norms with her unapologetic authenticity. In the critically controversial hit song “WAP” Cardi B raps, “I don't wanna spit, I wanna gulp/I wanna gag, I wanna choke/I want you to touch that lil' dangly thing that swing in the back of my throat” (1:40) communicating her erotic desires needed for heterosexual sexual satisfaction. In a similar chart-topping single, the artist goes on to rap “Point me to the biggest slut/Baby girl come top it off” (1:55), expressing her desire for a same-sex person to finish the job. Yung Maimi, of duo City Girls, raps, “Fuck sayin' the right thing, you gotta have the right check//Let her eat this WAP², still ain't turn into no dyke yet” (*Line Up* 00:45) entering a conversation about the spectrum of sexual orientations and experiences. The other half of the City Girls, JT, takes it further, rapping “Pretty like a transgender//Sit this pussy on his chin in my chinchilla” (*No Bars* 2:10). These lyrics show that these top-selling female artists are not afraid to address sexuality and their

² Wet. Ass. Pussy from the popular song WAP by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion

sexual desires and the diverse ways it can show up in the experiences of Black womanhood. Black women, especially younger women, are often pressured within the Black community to perfectly conform to expectations and norms in heterosexual relationships and experiences. For instance, Cardi B was accused of “queerbaiting” in 2021 by Rolling Stones (Mendez), as critics were confused about how someone who openly raps about women is married to a man and birthed two children.³ This is why I argue that Black female rap music is not only radically anti-misogynoir, it is also queer. Queer as in actively challenging and eschewing the dominance of heterosexism and heteronormativity (definition by SPARK Reproductive Justice). As Cardi B raps about same-sex intimate desires while embodying heterosexual expectations as a mother and wife, she is stretching the boundaries of queer representation and establishing a non-normative point of view for Black women. These lyrics serve as a vital narrative that counters the limiting expectations that are placed on Black women and their journey in sexual self-subjectivity. These artists are allowing for nuance within that journey so we do not become polarized and narrow in our thinking of Black women’s sexuality and what is available to us.

In conclusion, the landscape of Black female rap music offers a critical space for challenging the stifling constraints of patriarchal capitalism, asserting bodily autonomy, and exploring sexuality and erotic pleasure. Artists like City Girls, Megan Thee Stallion, and Cardi B are at the forefront of this movement, using their lyrics to confront societal slut-shaming, advocate for financial independence, and assert control over their bodies and sexual experiences. In a genre historically dominated by male perspectives, Black female rap music stands as a formidable force where artists reject limitations and assert their identities fully. Their bold statements that embrace nuance are not just lyrical expressions but powerful manifestos of

³ As if bisexuality in itself isn't a spectrum of experiences that will never neatly fit into any one box..

resistance against the conventional prevailing narratives imposed on Black women. Furthermore, their embrace of diverse sexual orientations and experiences, including the complexities of bisexuality as demonstrated by Cardi B, opens up critical conversations about the multifaceted nature of Black women's sexuality at the intersection of queerness; queerness as in not normal, disruptive, non-heteronormative, unconventional. These artists are reshaping the narrative around Black womanhood, allowing for a more inclusive and expansive understanding of Black women's full identities and experiences. Through their music, they are creating a legacy of empowerment for younger generations by offering new perspectives on feminism, sexuality, and gender roles, proving that Black female rap music is not only a platform for entertainment but a catalyst for social change and a source for fostering conscious-raising conversations for Black women everywhere.

FUNCTIONAL AF

“Can you be a good feminist and admit out loud that there are things you kinda dig about patriarchy?”, asks Joan Morgan 25 years ago. I ask today, can you be a good feminist and show up to a date with your daddy issues still expecting this man to pay for your cocktails and calamari? For Joan Morgan, the muva of hip-hop feminism, and many other women, that feminism is hip-hop feminism. An intersectional feminism that admits out loud you have to buy everything in my cart if you wanna be my boyfriend! A feminism that wrestles with elements of patriarchy and manages to flip them on its head to repurpose and mitigate its impact. The elements of patriarchy like capitalistic respectability politics, outdated norms around sexuality, and assumed modest behavior, that these artists are responding to. Based on historical tenements of Black Feminist Theory and even white feminism, previous generations have sustained claims that resist patriarchy and its oppressive attributes in its entirety. In response, almost 25 years ago, Joan Morgan stated that we are in search of a functional feminism for herself and her sistas, “one that seeks our empowerment on a spiritual, material, physical, and emotional level” (7). This generation, reflected in this “Black Female Rap Renaissance”, is attempting to capture that functionality by allowing parts of patriarchy to benefit them and benefit feminism.

This “Black Female Rap Renaissance” is marking a shift from centering collective societal obstacles to embracing individual empowerment, transitions, and expression. The previous pioneers of Black female rap music, like Missy Elliott, Queen Latifah, and Eve were similarly mirroring the *external* revolutions of their era, like navigating respectability politics and striving for legitimacy within the flourishing rap industry. However, what makes this “Black Female Rap Renaissance” different is these contemporary artists like Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, and City Girls reflect the *internal* revolutions young Black women face today, with a focus on

self-discovery, identity, and sexuality. Queen Latifah's groundbreaking debut album soared to the top of the charts in 1989, a full decade before hip-hop ascended to become the top-selling music genre by 1999. This pivotal era of music illustrates the dual challenges faced by Black female artists of the time: not only did they have to carve out a space for themselves within an industry heavily dominated by male voices, but they also had to maneuver through the complex web of respectability politics imposed on Black people. Their work, while deeply personal, also carried the weight of collective aspirations of the Black community, striving for respect and creditability. On the other hand, contemporary feminist rappers such as those discussed represent a new era of Black female artistry in hip-hop, where the focus shifts towards the exploration of personal agency, sexual autonomy, the complexities of identity, and the de-centering of men. This shift reflects broader societal changes, including the rise of digital culture and social media, which have provided platforms for more nuanced discussions around feminism, body positivity, and individuality. This highlights a significant evolution in the genre, showcasing how these artists serve as both mirrors and molders of their respective cultural landscapes. Unlike what previous scholarship has stated, feminism isn't simply black-and-white subordination that happens in isolation, however, like hip-hop feminism is telling us, rather interesting shades of gray that happen across generations, through layers of voices, in a multitude of ways.

“Thee Black Female Rap Renaissance” we are experiencing now is all the reason to allow Black female rap artists to inspire us with modes of resistance, themes of self-exploration, and strategies for empowerment. In recent years, Black female rap artists have slowly begun to receive well-deserved recognition for their contributions to the music landscape and culture. In 2018, Cardi B, a triple-platinum artist, made history as the first woman to win the Grammy Award for Best Rap Album with her debut, "Invasion of Privacy," which also became the

longest-charting album by a female rapper at the time. Megan Thee Stallion marked a significant milestone by becoming the first female rapper to win the Best New Artist award at the 2021 Grammys in more than two decades, further solidifying her impact in the music industry by being honored with the Woman of the Year award at the 2021 Glamour Awards. City Girls were awarded *Variety* magazine's "The Future is Female" Award in 2021. These milestones underscore the dynamic and transformative journey of Black female rap artists, who are not only reshaping the musical landscape but also forging new pathways for empowerment and representation in the broader cultural discourse. When we embrace hip-hop culture as a feminist practice we can create a more inclusive and effective feminist movement that resonates with the complexities of contemporary womanhood.

Hip-hop culture is so important to our feminist functionality because not only does hip-hop have a reputation for being a hotbed for futuristic liberatory agendas, it also acts as a universal way to spread intersectional values and commitments. Much of my perspective on where women's liberation organizations should seek their guidance from is reflective of Joan Morgan's expression on hip-hop culture, she says "we need a voice like our music – one that samples and layers many voices, injects its sensibilities into the old and flips it into something new, provocative and powerful. The truth cannot be found in the voice of any one rapper but in a juxtaposition of many" (8). Therefore, our truth cannot be found in the voice of any one person or one experience, but in the overlapping and juxtaposition of many. I borrow the concept from Morgan that it's up to each generation to define their own feminism and draw on the cultural movements and influences of the time, just as other generations have done.

I'm contributing to a longer conversation of hip-hop feminism by highlighting its ability to push Black feminist scholars past theory to a functioning tool of women's empowerment.

When we critically discuss the nuanced performances of Black feminism and women's empowerment we are creating space for conscious raising dialogue that allows individuals to find their *own* feminist voice. My contribution will detail hip-hop feminism's ability to curate a curriculum for feminist organizations in their pursuit of intersectional feminism and individual liberation. This curriculum will be used to invite community organizers, teachers, parents, young people, nonprofit organizations, and community activists to use this analysis as a blueprint to foster conscious-raising discussions, teach-ins, reflections, self-discovery, and more, based on the feminist teachings of Black female rap music. The purpose is to serve as an organizing tool to help participants explore feminism and its inseparable relationship with Black female rap music. The objective is to encourage participants to critically analyze hip-hop music and media through a feminist lens, identifying themes, messages, and representations that impact perceptions of Black girlhood and womanhood. This endeavor aims to delve deeper into how the themes and narratives in Black female rap music intertwine and intervene with feminist principles, thereby fostering an ongoing conversation of Black feminist possibilities available to us. I hope to prompt individuals to reflect on their own identities, biases, and privileges, fostering personal growth and a deeper understanding of their role within hip-hop culture and feminist movements. By emphasizing the transformative potential of hip-hop feminism to name our oppression and alter our representations, this tangible resource will continue to extend the ongoing dialogue within Black feminist scholarship and hip-hop feminism. Beyond theoretical frameworks, hip-hop feminism emerges as a practical instrument for surviving and subverting misogynoir, discovering feminism while offering a dynamic tool that transcends academic discourse. When we acknowledge the power of exposing and learning from collective *self*-produced narratives, we will be better equipped to shape our generation's journey for collective liberation and self-

exploration. See Appendix A for “Thee Black Female Rap Renaissance: Exploring Hip-Hop Feminism For Individual Liberation” curriculum.

ONE LAST THING BEFORE I GO

When we give meaning to music it electrifies an accessible and creative way to tell the stories of your culture. When revered together, hip-hop and feminism offer pungent ways of challenging traditional stories while simultaneously inventing our own. Black female rap music allows women to exploit and repurpose hypersexual stereotypes and degrading labels, typically for male consumption, for the reclaimed purpose of empowerment and women's entertainment. By doing so, not only are these Black female artists talking back to the male gaze, they are also teaching other women strategies of resistance and subversion. These contemporary Black female rap artists aren't afraid to address patriarchy but rather use patriarchal ideals to alter stereotypes and representations in order to reinscribe new attributes to Black women's human experience. Just like their predecessors who maneuvered through respectability politics and restrictive narratives while keeping the collective goals of the Black community at heart, today's artists are capturing attention by voicing themes of self-discovery and sexual pleasure, centering their personal liberation. Nonetheless, by unapologetically embracing the explicit desires of women, calling for conversations within intimate relationships, resisting patriarchal capitalistic politics, and owning bodily autonomy, we can see how these messages intervene in misogynoir across generations by directly responding to the legacy of problematic representations. In doing so, we not only continue to situate women in a world with more diverse and sexually liberated representations of womanhood, but we are simultaneously creating more possibilities for everyone.

The exploration of the messaging in Black female rap music underscores its key role as a resource for resistance and empowerment through challenging traditional narratives. Arguably, I see Black female rap music contributing to the existence of queer spaces. Queer as in not same-

sex loving, but queer as in non-normative and disruptive. The messaging in Black female rap music provides us with fuel and courage to disrupt the status quo and alter what is “normal”; which are all inherently queer modes of existence. Yes, these cis woman artists are proud of their pussy and thrilled about dicks, however, hip-hop feminism affords us with multiple cultural entrances to interrogate what is normal for our social existence. “No waist, pretty face, make him work for it//If you a boss I'll twerk for it, squirt for it” (City Girls 2023) are queer manifestations because it is actively challenging and eschewing the dominant values of heterosexism and heteronormativity. We are reminded by Patricia Hill Collins's both/and conceptual orientation of Black feminist epistemology that the Western masculinist way of thinking is reliant on the either/or binary to suppress our multifaceted human complexities and bolster supremacy divisive ideals. However, contemporary Black feminist theory champions the both/and possibilities to emphasize the nuance that is available to us through the culture we create.

Through the intertextual examination of lyrics from artists Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, and City Girls, this paper centered on the themes of capitalism, sexuality, bodily autonomy, and erotic pleasure. “Thee Black Female Rap Renaissance” is characterized by increasingly powerful achievements of Black women in the rap game and signals a cultural shift from collective aspirations of freedom to individual liberatory exploration. Hip-hop feminism reminds me that I can be a feminist and still fuck with a man paying all my bills. I really don't have to cook or clean or shut up to enjoy my experiences of womanhood. I'm both an educated radical Black feminist and I'm also an aggressive sex-positive ratchet bitch. No more are the days of binary conversations on representation. It's not you're EITHER an educated bitch or a ratchet bitch. But both! Hip-hip feminism tells me so. Hip-hop feminism not only teaches me but can teach us all

about contemporary embodiments of anti-misogynoir and serve as a guide to negotiating our nuanced social existence on our journey to individual liberation and collective freedom.

APPENDIX

[Appendix A](#)**“Thee Black Female Rap Renaissance: Exploring Hip-Hop Feminism For Individual Liberation”**

The creation of this curriculum is an organizing tool to help participants explore feminism and its inseparable relationship with Black female rap music.

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