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CONFESSIONS OF A BLACK FEMALE RAPPER: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY
ON NAVIGATING SELFHOOD AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

by

CHINWE MAPONYA-COOK

Under the Direction of Jonathan Gayles, PhD

ABSTRACT

The following research explores the ways in which a Black female rapper navigates her selfhood and traditional expectations of the music industry. By examining four overarching themes in the literature review - Hip-Hop, race, gender and agency - the author used observations of prominent Black female rappers spanning over five decades, as well as personal experiences, to detail an autoethnographic account of self-development alongside pursuing a music career. Methodologically, the author wrote journal entries to detail her experiences, as well as wrote and performed an accompanying original mixtape entitled *The Thesis* (available on all streaming platforms), as a creative addition to the research. The author then coded the journal entries and song lyrics using affective methods coding cycles. The author concluded that the best way to navigate selfhood and traditional expectations of the music industry was to put her selfhood first, regardless of how other Black female rappers performed on and off stage, or what consumers or music executives expected of Black female artists.

INDEX WORDS: Black Feminist Thought, Autoethnography, Black Women, Music Industry, Hip-Hop, African American Studies, Hip-Hop Feminism, Race, Gender, Agency

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by

CHINWE MAPONYA-COOK

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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2020

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ON NAVIGATING SELFHOOD AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

by

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me the gift that is this lifetime. I would also like to thank Him/Her for the ability to use my voice and writing to heal myself and others. I would also like to acknowledge my Ancestors, Guardian Archangels, and my entire Spirit Team who led me to and through this program that has allowed me to further explore my deepest truths and wildest dreams, all while protecting my head and heart.

Furthermore, I would like to dedicate this study to my dad, Dr. Cook, my mom, Mamakiri Maponya, my sister and nephew, Lexie Pie and Grayson, as well as my martial arts instructor, Master Isaac Thomas. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to my favorite person in the whole world, my baby brother, Wali K. I love you all very much.

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Femcees: Female emcees

Herstory: The study of past events, particularly as it relates to women's involvement

1st Generation of Black Female Rappers: 1980s

2nd Generation of Black Female Rappers: 1990s

3rd Generation of Black Female Rappers: 2000-2016

4th Generation of Black Female Rappers: 2017-Present

1 INTRODUCTION

In an interview with Ewey (1999), Ms. Lauryn Hill commented on what it meant to be a woman in the music industry:

I think when you're a woman, you have to assert yourself even a little more. The record companies sign an act and they have ideas about how that act should sound. They think when you win with a formula, why change the formula? But if you're trying to be an artist, then the idea is to grow and to not stay stagnant. (p. 64)

Hip-Hop has come a long way since its inception in 1973 and was first mentioned by Billboard in 1977 (Rap of Ages: A Timeline, 2007). Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, Black women infiltrated the genre with rhymes of fury, boasting art comprised of being yourself and overthrowing a corrupt system. As rap became more commercial, and hence profitable, the lyrics and image of Black female emcees inevitably shifted. As labels pushed for more sexy artists, one must ask are Black female rappers merely “caricatures [that] fuel the image of racialized groups serving as racialized sexual spectacles and entertainers for majorities” (James, 1999, p. 140)? Or are these artists asserting their agency by owning their sexuality in a patriarchal industry garnered toward the white male gaze? In the following pages, the multifacetedness of Black female emcees is discussed as it relates to the evolving expectations that have been concocted in order for them to achieve numerical success via social and industry acceptance and how that evolution has impacted a Black female rapper’s personal journey in the 2010’s and beyond.

1.1 Background

The Black female rapper is a rare, one-of-a-kind image whose space is fought for and solidified based on her talent and looks. In order to understand why Black female rappers’ images and agency have boiled down to certain expectations, we must first understand the historical context of Black women’s images, as well as how these images relate to Hip-Hop.

After slavery, African American men and women were delegated to positions that reflected the skills they had acquired on the plantations. For men, that meant physical labor, and for women, that meant more domestic duties (Davis, 1972). Because of the racist perceptions that accompanied slavery and the Jim Crow period, this resulted in their white counterparts fixating six primary stereotypes on African American people (Pieterse, 1992). For men, those stereotypes included the “Tom”, “Coon” or “Buck”, and women were classified as the “Mammy”, “Sapphire” or “Jezebel” (Bogle, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the female stereotypes are further explored. The Mammy is typically illustrated as an asexual, dark-skinned, round/large woman who has unwavering loyalty to the white family that she serves, as opposed to her own family (Sharp, 1993). The Sapphire, also known as angry black woman, verbally emasculates the Black men that are around her and stands with her hands on her hips, indicating her sassiness (Dunn, 2008). Dunn (2008) describes the Jezebel as “a woman motivated by her sexual abilities to use men to get what she wants” (p. 114).

As time pressed forward, technology advanced and more opportunities opened up for Black people. We begin to see women in movies; however, their roles were limited to that of the “slave/servant, or the sexual conquest” – a damning combination of Black women’s lack of agency stemming from the antebellum period and solidifying the argument that Black women’s bodies were seen as objects for the amusement of others (Bell, 2004, p.156) . This is a long-standing issue exemplified by the degradation of Sarah Baartman a.k.a. the Hottentot Venus in 1810, who was a South African woman that traveled Europe as part of an exhibition to display her large posterior and elongated labia (Netto, 2005; Ward, 2015). At one point Baartman was sold to an animal trainer in Paris where she was instructed to behave animalistically in a cage

(Washington, 2006). Two hundred years later, we see the same objectification of Black women's bodies in our beloved genre of Hip-Hop. Miller-Young (2008) contends:

Long a symbol of deviant, repulsive, and grotesque Black Sexuality and Black womanhood, Black women's rear ends became newly fetishized through hip-hop music in ways that sought to recognize, reclaim, and reify their bodies as desirable, natural, and attractive. (p. 270)

Scholars, Perry (2003), Pinn (1996) and Shelton (1997), as well as activists, assert that male Hip-Hop artists discuss and present women as sexual objects, less than human, and caricatures, similar to the hegemonic practices of their European counterparts. Unfortunately, this objectification occurs for Black women participating as "eye candy" in the music videos and the actual rhyming talent; which prompts the following questions: will Black women be able to redefine socially constructed behavior and gender roles and why do Black women attempt to fit into said constructs that rarely take their culture, body image, and history into consideration (Ward, 2015)? Both questions will be addressed in the pages to come.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how a Black female rapper experiences the duality of selfhood and the perceived expectations of her performance as an artist in the music industry. This study explores when Black women's voices became prominent in the genre of Hip-Hop, how these women were portrayed to consumers, and what type of shift occurred in those images throughout the decades. The main goal of this study is to acknowledge the various images embodied by Black female rappers on and off stage, and how those personas may affect the agency of forthcoming artists.

A qualitative research design is used to delve into this topic. An autoethnographic study was selected in order to include the researcher's experiences as a Black female rapper, as well as

a consumer of Black female rap. Listening to and interpreting music is a very individualized experience for all people. While the researcher is sharing personal opinions of current music and the portrayal of these artists, thorough research has been conducted to support these claims. The researcher is confident that the goals of this study will be met based on solid research, as well as legitimate consumer observation.

1.3 Significance

This study is significant because there is a lack of scholarly work that examines what it takes to be a successful Black female rapper. There is research focusing on the interpretation of lyrics and the evolution of stereotypes depicted by Black women, as seen in Moody (2011) and Oware (2009). However, there is no clear explanation of how or why those various aspects connect to create the women we see today and have seen in the past in this genre.

Secondly, the few studies like Bennett (2015), Caramanica (2014), Chang (2014) and Pough (2015) that examine Black female rappers are from the perspective of solely consumers or scholars. There were hardly any scholarly documents that were written by an actual Black female rapper. As a creative who writes, performs and produces her own music from a Black woman's perspective, that relatability provides a different level of understanding. This study will serve as a basis for understanding the herstory of Black female rap and demonstrate that there are options for those interested in becoming a part of that genre in the future.

Thirdly, this research offers representation of Black women for Black women by a Black woman. Like the works of Lorde (1984), Collins (1989), Crenshaw (1989), hooks (1984), Davis (1972) and others, this research is a direct analysis of lived experiences and observations. Pough (2015) adds that there has been little scholarship that examines Hip-Hop in terms of Black women's representation, as well as the effects the culture has on the self-image, social identity,

and values of young Black women. Therefore, it is imperative that more studies like this, and those of the great scholar-activists that have paved the way for a Black feminist perspective, is produced in order to shift the stereotypical narratives that do not depict Black women in the most flattering light. This is how we slowly, but surely redefine our agency.

Lastly, there are few autoethnographic and/or creative studies in the Georgia State University database for interpretation. Hopefully, this study will contribute a different approach that will later assist future scholars.

1.4 Methodology

An qualitative method was chosen for this study in the form of an autoethnography. According to Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009), qualitative research utilizes a plethora of methods that allow a more humanistic stance because the phenomena being explored are examined via the eyes and experiences of individual participants. Because of the flexibility this approach offers, personal narratives, experiences and opinions are valuable data which provide researchers with enough instruments to find answers for their research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Therefore, an autoethnography fits the mold for a qualitative study pertaining to the personal experiences of the author's journey of navigating selfhood and traditional expectations of the music industry. Autoethnographies are "...an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 1). By comparing the researcher's experiences with the research concerning Black female rappers' agency, a phenomenological approach is employed by attempting to understand the meaning of these experiences, as well as the recorded experiences of other Black female rappers (Lin, 2013).

1.5 Research Question

The primary research question for this study is: How does a Black female rapper experience the duality between selfhood and traditional expectations of women in the music industry?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

“The unpaid and paid work that Black women perform, the types of communities in which they live, and the kinds of relationships they have with others suggest that African American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female” (Collins, 1989, p. 747). As an oppressed group, Black women’s social positioning results in a different understanding of the world; however, this perspective is nearly impossible to articulate due to a lack of resources and power (Collins, 1989). Those in power (old, white men) are then able to create representation for an already marginalized group; imposing the commodified, animalistic or objectified images they want to see and want society, especially the oppressed, to internalize (Oware, 2009). As a response, “Black feminist thought, then, specializes in formulating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African American women” (Collins, 1989, p. 750).

Collins makes it clear that just because a Black woman is aware of the everyday oppression she experiences being Black and a woman, that does not mean she has fully explored the realms of Black feminist thought. Berger & Luckmann (1966) acknowledge that there are two interdependent levels of knowledge. The first level is the “everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge of a group” (Collins, 1989, p. 750). This is the general understanding and awareness of inequities. The second level is an extended, more “specialized knowledge furnished by experts who are a part

of a group and express a group's standpoint" encouraging women to create new self-definitions for validating said standpoints (Collins, 1989, p. 750).

For this research, using Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework is crucial because "such thought can encourage collective identity by offering Black women a different view of themselves and their world other than that offered by the established social order", encouraging women to trust their subjective knowledge base, or what Audre Lorde refers to as the erotic (Collins, 1989, p. 750). Collins warns against using the same techniques that white males have used to oppress others and disseminate knowledge, and that is why the author believes that conducting an autoethnography with a musical component will resonate well with readers. As African descendants, African Americans are naturally drawn to music and rhythm. So while the researcher found it important to share her story in the form of journal entries, she also thought it would be advantageous to communicate positive messages with her fellow Black people in a form that they could definitely relate to, music.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines scholarly literature surrounding the contextual origin of Hip-Hop, the definition of the term "Hip-Hop", as well as the various elements it comprises. Race, gender and agency are also discussed as it relates to exploring the expectations of Black female rappers by answering the following research question: How does a Black female rapper experience the duality between selfhood and traditional expectations of women in the music industry?

2.1 "You In The Hood Now Baby" (Lil Kim, 2006)

Following World War II, 600,000 manufacturing jobs were sent to the suburbs of New York while city planners dug a seven-mile trench in the middle of the Bronx in order to build an expressway linking the jobs to downtown Manhattan (Cummings, 2018). The trench resulted in

170,000 people, including middle-class Blacks and whites, being relocated, rerouted or removed (Chang, 2005). Their single-family homes were replaced with low-income high-rises that were full of poor African American, Latino and Caribbean immigrants who were now migrating to the United States in multitudes (Cummings, 2018). By the 1970s, the South Bronx was labeled “America’s worst slum” as prostitutes, gangs and heroin addicts lined the streets (Price, 2006, p. 4).

Because of the removal of jobs, the per capita income of the area was half of what was being earned in the rest of New York City (Price, 2006). Additionally, on a larger scale, the city of New York was experiencing a fiscal crisis that resulted in government programs such as Medicaid and welfare being cut, firefighters being laid off and neighborhood fire stations closing (Cummings, 2018). From 1973 to 1977, arsonists in the Bronx destroyed 5,000 apartment buildings, causing children to climb over debris and rubble from fallen buildings everyday (Chang, 2005). Johnson (2018) interviewed a member of a 1970s breaker crew (dancing group) known as Mr. Wiggles about the conditions of this environment and how they affected the youth of the community. Wiggles said that business owners were paying people to burn down the buildings in order to collect the insurance, and the mafia was buying buildings and burning them down when they knew people were inside – giving them very little notice. The now homeless families that managed to make it out were placed in “relo (relocation) buildings” by the government, reinforcing the idea that the poor Afro and Latino people of the South Bronx were a part of a systematic game to destroy their morale, as well as their community (p. 68). New York already felt abandoned by President Gerald Ford who had denied the city a government bailout a couple of years before in 1975 (Hall, 2014). Now, the residents of the Bronx were feeling neglected because public programs were cut, while arson and poverty engulfed their

neighborhood. The devastation from these conditions would serve as the catalyst that fueled Hip-Hop culture.

According to Rose (1994), “Hip-Hop emerge[d] from the de-industrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect . . . [It] is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutality, truncated opportunity, and oppression within cultural imperatives of African American and Caribbean history, identity and community” (p. 21). In other words, the Hip-Hop culture became an outlet for marginalized people living in the unfathomable conditions stated above. They were able to use their everyday experiences as a “strategy for carving out spaces in which to maneuver and resist,” creating what Monica Evans refers to as “Outlaw Culture” (Evans, 1982, p. 268). Outlaw Culture is a series of conscious and subconscious practices that marginalized groups perform in order to move within or completely outside of dominant culture and mainstream legal systems (Evans, 1982). This affects one’s social choreography, which is how a person is trained to move physically and spatially according to society’s expectations (Johnson, 2018). For example, Mr. Wiggles described how, as a kid, he was in the streets early, seeing drug addicts and dead bodies (Johnson, 2018). He and his friends learned “to witness, but not linger,” while travelling in groups and find solace in Hip-Hop, which were all learned street codes imposed by the state’s unwillingness to intervene (Johnson, 2018, p. 67). Their social choreography taught them to physically move and express themselves in the Hip-Hop art form. This was how they survived. In turn, Hip-Hop was and still does serve as a means of celebrating the survivors, while resisting victimhood by examining the social conditions that have created the need to fight to live (Perry, 2003).

As a result, Hip-Hop's "Golden Era" (1980s) was cultivated by the many different experiences of individuals coming from this South Bronx community. Concerning sociopolitical issues during that time, "individuals may point to different defining events, but all share a crystal clear understanding of coming of age in an era of post segregation and global economics" (Kitwana, 2003, p. xiv). Kitwana asserts that the crises in the post segregation African American communities were and still are plagued with America's unfulfilled promises of equality and inclusion, disparities in education, healthcare, employment opportunities, wages, housing and mortgage loan approvals. This crisis also includes the lasting effects that the war on drugs, the escalating tensions between young Black men and women, and the generational gap have on Black youth culture (Grant, 2002). Subsequently, like the Blues which derived from secular slave songs that developed into testaments of the poorest and most marginalized Black people in the Mississippi Delta, the hardships of the South Bronx in the 1970s inspired Hip-Hop culture and later Rap (Larson, n.d.).

2.2 When I Say Hip, You Say Hop

Today, Hip-Hop has evolved into a cultural phenomenon that has taken on a life of its own. However, at its core, rapper KRS-One (2013) defines it as such:

Hip is to know. Hop is movement. Awareness. Movement. Consciousness and movement. Intelligence and action - activity. So hip and hop, or Hip-Hop, means conscious movement... I'm hip to my hop. I know why I move... I'm aware of what I'm doing. I'm deliberate. This is what Hip-Hop means without anyone's opinion or anything... And surprisingly enough this is what we're actually doing in society... in nature. (55:32)

Hip-Hop is described as a house (or entity) comprised of graffiti, breakers, DJing and years later emcees or rappers (Cummings, 2018). Graffiti first became prominent in the 1960s in Philadelphia and then New York City. Although graffiti was popular before Hip-Hop, it became heavily associated with it because it was illegal and supposedly symbolized rebelliousness and

individuality, similar to this new “Outlaw Culture.” Early breakers, or b-boys/girls, were dancers who freestyled exaggerated moves (Rose, 1994). As party culture grew amongst young African Americans and Latinos in the South Bronx, DJ’s became instrumental in developing the soundtrack for Hip-Hop culture. They played prerecorded songs, sometimes in public parks, while graffiti artists illustrated the walls and breakers battled for “ghetto celebrity status” (Johnson, 2018, p. 64).

Cummings (2018) contends that when DJ Kool Herc, referred to as the father of Hip-Hop, invented the “merry-go-round” technique in 1973, he opened the door for DJ’s to become producers. The “merry-go-round” was a DJing style of “spinning break beats back to back.” He noticed that the crowd at parties would go crazy in between songs when just the instrumental was playing. One night, he warned the crowd that he was going to try something new. Instead of playing songs full out, he went back and forth between the instrumental breaks from James Brown’s “Give It Up Or Turn It Alose,” “Bongo Rock” by Incredible Bongo Band and “The Mexican” by Babe Ruth and the crowd loved it. The result of DJ Kool Herc’s experiment bore the dance rhythmic breaks that would become the ultimate foundation of Hip-Hop known today as looping.

In 1975, through much trial and error, Grandmaster Flash revolutionized the science of DJing altogether. In 2016, during a first account interview with one of New York’s first Hip-Hop radio stations, Hot 97, Flash detailed his various inventions, such as the wafer or turntable slipmat (which reduced friction and made the vinyl easier to turn), Torque Theory (how fast a record plays at full speed from inertia), the Peek-A-Boo system (this enabled him to preview breaks in the headphones before the crowd heard it) and most famously, the Quick Mix Theory (Hot 97, 2016). Unlike the DJs before him, Flash knew that in order to obtain the perfect breaks,

he would have to physically control the vinyl by placing his fingers on the record and draw timed intersections on the vinyl so that four bars forward equaled six counterclockwise revolutions, resulting in a full loop or a beat long enough for an emcee to tell his or her story. This method became known as Quick Mix Theory. Referring to Quick Mix Theory, Flash states, “It is also arguably the beginning of what is known today as Rap” (Hot 97, 2016, 30:33).

Cummings (2018) details what happened once Grandmaster Flash figured out how to mix tracks in order to make the perfect blend of beat and melody. Flash thought the instrumentals were enough; however, the crowd did not respond positively to just the looped music, and he realized he needed someone to hype the crowd up. Flash recruited a friend, Cowboy, who used a call-and-response method to get the party crowd excited again. This initiated the fourth aspect of Hip-Hop culture: MCing. MC’s started out as DJ aids and their jobs varied from “microphone controller” to conducting “mic checks” to “moving the crowd.” MC’s rewrote lyrics from popular R&B songs of the time or used poetry from civil rights activists The Last Poets. By 1982, partygoers came to hear the rhymes of the MC’s just as much as the DJ’s mixes. This resulted in the formation of crews. Crews were neighborhood groups comprised of individuals who contributed various skills within one of the four elements of Hip-Hop previously stated. According to Ewoodzie (2017), “the required skills and responsibility of each crew member, the style of their performance, the venue in which a crew performed, and a crew’s attire all came to have great significance for the internal logic of the emerging entity” (p. 109). Additionally, competitions amongst crews invoked a strong sense neighborhood pride and creativity in performers, especially once battle rapping emerged. Battle Rapping had had long roots in African American communities. For decades, young Black men and teens would “Play the Dozens,” which was a contest to see who could come up with better insults about the other

person, which was and still is the main element of a successful battle rapping (Wald, 2012). Al-Amin (2002) painted a picture of what playing the Dozens meant for poor Black kids in the ghetto:

The teacher would test our vocabulary each week, but we knew the vocabulary we needed. They'd give us arithmetic to exercise our minds. Hell, we exercised our minds by playing the Dozens... In many ways, though, the Dozens is a mean game because what you try to do is totally destroy somebody else with words... But for dudes who couldn't it was like they were humiliated because they were born Black and then they turned around and got humiliated by their own people, which was really all they had left. But that's the way it is. Those that feel most humiliated, humiliate others (p. 34-35).

While this game of wit was used as a mere form of expression, there are underlying implications of internalized oppression that can damage the healthy development of an individual, as well as a community (Bartky, 1990). This has been an ongoing concern for Hip-Hop analysts who criticize Gangster Rap - particularly because of it being the most prominent and longest lasting element of Hip-Hop culture, and it specializes in put-downs of Black men and women.

2.3 Race Is In The Buildin'

According to Butler (1990), social constructionism is the notion that people's understanding of reality is overwhelmingly socially situated. Social constructionism is the idea that knowledge and social institutions are created by the value ascribed to any issue of human life by actors within the system, rather than naturally evolving. For example, one aspect of social construction is race. Race is an idea created to keep a group subservient to the dominant culture. It is then social construction's job to maintain this status in order to support capitalism, which is the basis of America's economy. In order to support an entire economy, macro systems of racism have been put in place in the form of institutionalized racism (Butler, 1990).

Institutionalized racism was intensified once Hip-Hop became more popular in the 1980s by way of Rap, despite the 1950s and 60s civil rights legislation. The dissonance in Hip-Hop emerges when Hip-Hop celebrates the association between Blackness and these systematic forms of racial oppression such as poverty, anti-intellectualism, ignorance, irresponsible parenthood and criminal lifestyles or violence, while rejecting and criminalizing the culture and people who create it (Rose, 2008). This discordance furthers the notion that negative aspects of culture is perpetuated by social constructs that have always used Black Americans as the scapegoat for everything that is wrong with America. Ironically, the same institutions that promote and consume that content criminalize the people making it, proving that although Black culture is American culture, “the music’s been recycled for consumption, with little care for the context of this consumption” (Johnson, 2020, p.1). For example, according to Nielsen Music, in 2017, R&B/Hip-Hop accounted for 24.5% of all music consumption in the United States, making it the most listened to genre for the first time since Nielsen began recording electronic sales data in 1991 (Caulfield, 2018). Additionally, Billboard reported that 70% of the top ten albums of 2018 were Hip-Hop/Rap and so were 50% of the top ten singles. These numbers illustrate that Rap has evolved into becoming a part of pop- culture (Travis, 2012). But “embracing Black music is not the same as embracing Black people, after all, no matter how often our music is created with a specific gaze toward our experience” (Johnson, 2020, p.1) That experience is repackaged, commodified and criticized heavily. Rose (2008) identified important differences between the criticisms of Hip-Hop or Rap and other forms of entertainment that are produced and consumed primarily by white people.

Firstly, many critics of Rap interpret the lyrics literally and as a direct reflection of the artist performing them. To them, Rap becomes criminal propaganda based on autobiographical

events of the individuals performing these lyrics about killing, carjacking, abusing women, selling drugs or killing cops. Once critics associate these lyrics with individuals, it is easier for them to ascribe those behaviors to an entire group of people; thus, reinforcing negative stereotypes about African Americans. Once the negative stereotypes are associated with Black people, it serves as causal analysis to support a variety of agendas such as more police in Black communities, more censorship of expression, and more prisons to accommodate more Black and Brown people.

Secondly, Hip-Hop receives more attention for its violent content and the perception of that content is magnified. Fried (1999) conducted a study where she concluded that this perception of violence in Hip-Hop is magnified because Hip-Hop is so closely related with African Americans. The societal perceptions in stereotypes of African Americans cause Hip-Hop to fall under the same stereotypes and perceptions as well. Although we live in a very explicit society where violence is produced by white institutions and depicted in television shows, video games, and horror films, “the bulk of the popular criticism about violence in popular culture is leveled at Hip-Hop” (Rose, 2008, p. 36).

The violence illustrated in Hip-Hop/Rap has conveniently allowed critics to have “proof” that Hip-Hop is a reflection of generally “dysfunctional black urban underclass culture” (Rose, 2008, p. 62). Dysfunctional culture includes violence, crime and prison culture, sexual deviant/excess and illiteracy, the names given to children, fashion choices, everyday behavior and matriarchal family structures; all of which are direct descendants of slavery, Jim Crow and the civil rights era. In turn, that “dysfunctional culture” becomes a myth that bleeds onto society and it becomes a threat because the music will “lure middle class whites into unsanctioned sexual and other behaviors deemed a threat to acceptable society” (66). However, Rose asserts

that all Black musical genres that whites participate in and appreciate are criminalized when they are popular with the youth and then revered in later decades: “The pattern of responding to new Black expressive cultures as dangerous invasions while venerating older ones is a pillar of contemporary racism even as it appears to be evidence of racial tolerance” (67).

Harrison (2009) explains how Black American youth culture developed throughout the 20th century. Previous generations of Black youth created their own culture from the 1920s to the 1960s like that of Jazz, Blues, Rhythm & Blues, Funk, and Soul, the culture was shaped on values grounded in the family, church, school, social responsibility and Black pride. Recent generations, like the Hip-Hop generation, have turned to themselves, global images and products, as well as peers because of technological advances and corporate growth. There is now more influence from media and entertainment. Technological advances have blurred the lines between Black youth middle-class, coming of age in a suburban or rural setting, college-bound or streetwise urban dwellers. For example, whites have become the biggest consumers of rap music, a trend which dates back to the early to mid-1990s. Moreover, it is the partnership of Hip-Hop and corporate media that has brought us the negative images in the rap music that people complain most about because the exposure of Hip-Hop artists tends to go to those who push the most negative images and morally questionable lyrics.

When Hip-Hop and Rap became mainstream in the 1980s, it was difficult to separate its cultural identity from that of its commercial production and consumption (Grant, 2002). Sadly, the Puerto Rican and Latino people that had also been instrumental in Hip-Hop’s birth faded into the background as Rap’s mainstream appearance became attached with African American voices like that of Public Enemy (Berky & Greer, 2006). Thus, Rap became marketed as an African American art form, strongly associated with “poor and predominantly Black communities of

post-industrial cities” (Grant, 2002, p. 6). This racialization made it easy for white businessmen to package and develop cheaply bought talent into what was commercially lucrative (Washington, 1996).

Black people are not new to being used in this way. With the inception of the transatlantic slave trade, Black bodies no longer belonged to its rightful owners. Spillers (1987) stated that African bodies were reduced to a thing, “becoming *being for* the captor,” resulting in a captive body or entity whose literal and figurative value was completely interchangeable (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). Literal bodies were made fungible (Snorton 2017, Spillers 1987, Hartman 1997). The economic definition of fungibility is the simple expression that something has value - it can be exchanged for another good of equal worth. Slaves were indeed fungible in this sense because they were exchanged for money, other slaves, crops like tobacco or sugar, gunpowder, cloth, iron, brandy, etc. However, looking deeper, Hartman asserts “the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, desires, and values” (Hartman, 1997, p. 21). Once Black bodies were commodified, it was impossible that they could avoid being controlled by their captors. Black people - their bodies, minds, and value – belonged to their owners: white men. This economy has not changed much, especially within commercialized Hip-Hop. The value exchange becomes extremely transparent with Black female emcees in the 1990s, where their bodies are literally being exchanged for record sales proving that their gender influenced how much agency they possessed in their career’s images.

2.4 “Ladies First” or Last?: An Exploration of Gender’s Effect on Agency in Hip-Hop

According to Russell (1996), agency is “the power to alter at will one’s perceptual inputs” (p. 48). These inputs are based on the cultural, biological and social aspects that

contribute to our being (Frie, 2008). From a psychological standpoint, humans are not to rely on biological and cultural factors alone in order to establish agency because we have the capability to remix these factors in ways that are meaningful to the agent (Frie, 2008). So what does this mean for Black female Rappers? From the beginning, these women were afforded limited agency, but not because of overt sexism. Everyone, including males and females, participated in a homogenous Hip-Hop culture. Women participated in Rap the same way that males did; sharing their lyrical message of Black consciousness in the 1980s, and Gangsta Rap in the 1990s, as well as Rapping styles or cadences (Oware, 2009). That was the way Rap was done, so that is the way women did it too.

However, as Hip-Hop and Rap culture developed and became more commercialized, so did another way to perpetuate hegemonic patriarchy by way of the male gaze. Mulvey (1999) stated that “the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey, 1999, p. 837). Women are meant to be looked at first in a way that is most desirable to hegemonic patriarchy’s constructs. According to Butler (1990), these constructs are based on gender performativity, which describes how individuals participate in social constructions of gender. Gender is a social identity that is internalized by individuals. The social expectations for gender norms cause individuals to behave accordingly, as gender is omnirelevant, meaning other people are always judging others’ behavior to be either male or female. Social constructionists argue that gender is developed through social interactions and is a social relationship. So what benefits from the way that gender has been socially constructed? Capitalism and patriarchy. These constructs are rooted in ego and serve as an “erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as an object” (Mulvey, 1999, p. 835). With this, women become “passive” objects who “freeze the flow of action in erotic

contemplation” (Mulvey, 1999, p. 837). In other words, they relinquish their agency for the pleasures of men. As long as capitalism remains the dominant means of production, then, it is virtually impossible to comprehend how women are oppressed and how that oppression affects their relationship with men. This relationship is affected by the socially constructed patriarchal system of domination used to make women subservient. Patriarchy uses factors such as biological differences in reproduction, men’s need to control women’s sexuality, the sexual division of labor, and the psychosexual effects of mothering as tools to establish dominance (Butler, 1990).

In reference to Hip-Hop, we have seen this performance of hegemonic patriarchy by Black men in Rap’s music videos, as well as the lyrics. Looking for a way to assert their masculinity in a white man’s exclusionary, racist and patriarchal world, Black men in Rap took it upon themselves to display hypersexual behavior towards women (Sasaki-Picou, 2014). For example, for years, Rap videos have fallen under the scrutiny of scholars, concerned parents and everyone in between for the degradation of women who parade around artists with no more than a bikini on and are referred to as video vixens or groupies (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). The criticism is heavily centered on how these depictions affect young minds because social identities are constructed by “commodified sex produced by media or audiences that are increasingly segmented by the social constructions of race and gender” (Brooks & Hérbert, 2006, p. 297). Media, in turn, determines how we compose our realities at a young age and follow us long into adulthood. These realities are based on the fact that “whiteness is particularly adept at sexualizing racial difference, and thus constructing others as sites of savage sexuality” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p.45). Edwards (1993) argued that the Black women featured in music videos

embody physical traits of the tragic mulatto. According to hooks (1994), the color caste hierarchies affect black females due to racist and sexist thinking:

Light skin and long, straight hair continue to be traits that define a female as beautiful and desirable in the racist white imagination and in the colonized Black mindset... Stereotypically portrayed as embodying a passionate, sensual eroticism, as well as a subordinate feminine nature, the biracial woman has been and remains the standard other Black females are measured against (p. 179).

Female emcees are not exempt from these depictions either. Like the video vixens, Black female emcees assume the same body type. However, a new-age body type was popularized in the 2010s by Black female rapper Nicki Minaj and later socialite Kim Kardashian West and her sisters, known as “slim-thick” (Appleford, 2016). “Slim-thick” depicts an exaggerated “coke bottle shape” consisting of an extremely petite waist, large breasts and round buttocks. This look is often achieved through surgery. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2019), the fastest growing surgical procedures are butt implants and lifts. About 24,000 women underwent buttock augmentation surgery (with fat grafting) in 2018 (2018 Plastic Surgery Statistics Report, 2019). Though naturally African features such as a large buttocks are now popular despite the “othering” past of those such as Sarah Baartman, the other features of this body-type still depict a Westernized look of having long hair and lighter (tanned, but not dark) skin. The new slim-thick look then literally sits on the cusp of American ideals of Black and white beauty, which represents both cultural assimilation and exaggerated cultural stereotypes that are unrealistic (Appleford, 2016).

While the visible physique of Black female rappers like Lil Kim and Nicki Minaj have obviously been surgically enhanced compared to photos and videos of them in their younger days - a fact Nicki Minaj has boasted about in her lyrics such as her featured verse in Big Sean’s 2011 anthem “Dance (A\$\$) (Remix)”, “Kiss my ass and my anus, ’cause it’s finally famous. And it’s

finally soft, yeah, it's finally solved. I don't know, man, guess them ass shots wore off..." - Lil Kim has denied accusations of skin bleaching (Big Sean [Ft. Nicki Minaj] – Dance [A\$\$] [Remix], 2011). When Lil Kim reappeared in 2016 alongside Kim Kardashian West with a brand new appearance of blonde hair, lighter skin and a new figure, rumors of her bleaching her skin swarmed the internet to which she vehemently denied underneath a now deleted post of a video of she and rapper Maino. "The Lil Kim hate is a different type of hate," she explained. "I lightened up the picture because I like when the makeup pops a little more and you can see the beauty of the makeup that @tasha_mack_mua did. Kim [Kardashian West] wanted the picture to look a little darker, because that's the way she liked it" (D'Amour, 2016). But Lil Kim's 2016 appearance drew attention mainly because of what she previously stated in a popular interview with Newsweek in 2000. "I have low self-esteem and I always have. Guys always cheated on me with women who were European-looking. You know, the long-hair type. Really beautiful women that left me thinking, 'How I can I compete with that?' Being a regular black girl wasn't good enough" (Samuels, 2000). So it is no coincidence that sixteen years later, Lil Kim committed to achieving a more European look. Later that year, Lil Kim was also video recorded stating, "I'm like a Spanish girl trapped in a Black girl's body. But I'm all mixed up," which was followed by twenty seconds of her speaking in Spanish chatter (TrueExclusives, 2016). Unfortunately, the video served as yet another testament to the long history of her self-hate inflicted by dysfunctional relationships with Black men.

Contrarily, Black female rapper Azealia Banks has openly admitted to bleaching her skin. On a Facebook Live stream, Banks stated that "being Black is Paradoxical" and there is no difference between wearing 30-inch weaves, getting a nose job and skin bleaching (Azealia Banks France, 2016). It is all a part of Black people assimilating in a white world, or what Dickerson

(1988) interprets as the following: “The depiction and perception of African American women in this country stereotypes has garbled her voice and distorted her image. The real tragedy is that the African American woman herself has too frequently bought this distortion” (p. 179). This is all too true for Banks who was very outspoken in 2014 when it came to accusing white female rapper Iggy Azalea of appropriating Black Hip-Hop culture without contributing to Black issues such as the murders of Eric Garner and Mike Brown (Chang, 2014). However, two years later, Banks is over-explaining and defending her choice to bleach her skin which has subconscious implications of the same self-hate that has plagued Lil Kim for decades.

With the expectation that women in Rap spaces, whether they are video extras or artists, are supposed to look a certain way in order to appease the male gaze, Hip-Hop then begins to function “as a weapon of resistance with the intention of reinforcing male power” (Sasaki-Picou, 2014, p. 104). Historically, this male power has stemmed from a Eurocentric imperialism, where the othering of Black female bodies has resulted in Black eroticism being overly sexualized, “devoid of its physical, emotional, and psychic components” (Lorde, 1984). This is ironic because Europeans’ fascination with Black women’s bodies (as discussed with Sarah Baartman in the introduction) has been inverted to victim blaming in order to overcompensate for their erotic obsession. For instance, the Jezebel stereotype originated, “...from the sexual exploitation and victimization of African American women (by their white slave owners), often a way to justify sexual relations with enslaved women” (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004, p. 429). Collins (2004) argues that the modern Jezebel has been “repackaged for contemporary mass media... whether she ‘fucks men’ for pleasure, drugs, revenge, or money, the sexualized bitch” is using her sexual power to weaken and dominate men (p. 127). This is evident with the second generation of Black female emcees like Lil Kim, Foxy Brown and others. From 1992-2000, female rappers

exhibited “high numbers of female self-objection, self-exploitation, and derogatory and demeaning lyrics about women in general” (Oware, 2009, p. 787). There were some songs, of course, that sought to empower women’s agency similar to those of the 1980s, but the contradiction in the opposing lyrics was eventually washed out by the “hegemonic, sexist notions of femininity” (Oware, 2009, p. 787). It seemed as though they had no control, or agency, over what was expected of their image as they mirrored the men of that time.

Conversely, the first generation of Black female emcees (1980s) emerged with a vengeance and a message of their own: agency. At this time, Rap was about literal rhyming talent, positivity and being yourself, so that is how women participated in these spaces as well. In *My Mic Sounds Nice*, a documentary produced by Ava DuVernay which explores women’s issues in Hip-Hop from the 1980s to 2010, MC Lyte adds the following: “I came up in a time when it was all about inspiring change and provoking thought in a nation of people.” But before women could get their message heard, they first had to challenge or diss a male crew (DuVernay, 2010). In other words, women had to be fearless in order to be recognized and respected. They had to rhyme like one of the guys to even get noticed. According to Chuck D., “If a woman was to step up there on the mic, you know, and she was to hold her own, she was actually doing double what a dude could do” (DuVernay, 2010, Scene 4). This has not changed. For the 2019 BET Cypher, Kash Doll stepped into the ring first and held her own against four male rappers stating, “You rarely see me in Nike, but I don't miss a check. He gotta flood me in water, that's how he get me wet” (BET Hip Hop Awards, 2019). Similarly, the icons, as referred to by Rapper Trina in the above mentioned documentary, such as MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa and Roxanne Shanté proved themselves worthy, and sometimes superior, to their male counterparts

as they excelled in rhymes about sexism, unequal opportunities and feminism (DuVernay, 2010).

Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, MC Lyte and Roxanne Shante inhabited Alice Walker's famous reconceptualization of "feminism" in the expression of their art form: rap. In 1984, using four definitions, Walker coined the term "womanist" and there was never a more fitting time for these Black female emcees to emerge. Similarly, Audre Lorde's interpretation of the term "erotic" was also embodied by these women because of their unapologetic display of women's empowerment. The erotic is "an internal sense of satisfaction" within all women "that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane" (Lorde, 1984, p. 87 -88). In order to tap into this source that is "firmly rooted" in "unexpressed or unrecognized feelings," one must act against the societal pressures imposed by men to suppress our natural power (Lorde, 1984, p. 87). In other words, around this time, there was no shortage of agency assertion.

Walker's first definition of womanist comes from womanish, "usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willfull* behavior" (Walker, 1983, p. 22). The Black female emcees of the 1980s exemplified audacious and courageous behavior in their lyrics and determination to stand up to the guys. They emerged during a time when a female rapper was unheard of and they were not afraid to stand firm in what they believed in and how they wanted to present themselves. Lorde argued that if women challenged the "encouraged mediocrity of our society" then we would yearn excellence and nothing short of it (Lorde, 1984, p. 88). Instead we settle for underwhelming work, which is a reflection of our inability to experience "the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion," limiting our erotic (Lorde, 1984, p. 88).

Being able to express themselves unapologetically, courageously, audaciously and willfully enabled the Black female emcees of the eighties to find their deepest erotic truths. Because they were not being judged by their looks first, but their actual talent, it made it easier for them to explore what Rap meant for them in the most meaningful and non-underwhelming ways. For Salt-N-Peppa, they loved looking fly and dancing non-stop at their concerts. MC Lyte took pride in discussing what was plaguing her community and sharing her experiences the best way she knew how, which was in a story form. Queen Latifah created her own unique sound that was reflective of what moved her spirit, instead of being boxed into what was expected of Hip-Hop artists at the time.

The second definition of “womanist” reads “a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength” (Walker, 1983, p. 22). Additionally, Lorde asserts that the erotic has the ability to dismount the boundaries that stop us from sharing deeply with another person : “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference” (Lorde, 1984, p. 89).

The Black female emcees of the eighties used their voices to relate to other women. As seen and heard by Queen Latifah’s debut single, “Ladies First,” it was all about women’s empowerment during this time. But that message did not and could not last long because, according to Lorde, when women know just how strong they are, they are able to disrupt and corrupt the status quo, especially if they band together and begin “sharing” and realizing they have minimal differences in the patriarchal struggle. “For women, this has meant a suppression

of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives” (Lorde, 1984, p. 88). In other words, women have learned to stifle natural instincts because they are “trivial” or “psychotic” (Lorde, 1984, p. 88). In actuality, women have been programmed to distrust the “non-rational knowledge” that is rooted in women’s emotional flexibility, culture and strength, in order to remain in a place more suitable for men, who inevitably run society and encourage such socializations that disempower women (Lorde, 1984, p. 88).

Walker’s third definition of “womanist” states the following: “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*” (Walker, 1983, p. 22). Additionally, Lorde defines the erotic as such: “When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (Lorde, 1984, p. 89). During this period, the women took charge of their story and the messages that mattered to them. This is evident in the ladies’ lyrics. They were heavily concerned with being comfortable in their own skin and obviously appreciating music and dance, along with their culture.

Lastly, Walker creates an analogy. “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (Walker, 1983, p. 22). This analogy is meant to encompass all women. While these female emcees were making music to relate to their kinfolk, I do believe they were appealing to their intersection of being a woman altogether; fighting against patriarchy for all women. In other words, to be a feminist is to be a womanist, so no matter what race or socioeconomic status one falls in, women have a job to protect fellow women, especially from the male gaze that suppresses erotic freedom. If women were more comfortable and unapologetic with exploring that area, it would only leave room for “various life endeavors [that] bring[s] us close to that

fullness” (Lorde, 1984, p. 88). In the 1980s, there was no glam squad. You came as you were because, for the most part, the only thing that mattered was how you rhymed. Since the first generation of female emcees did not have to rely on their bodies to garner respect in the music industry, they experienced a different level of agency. They also had to successfully diss a male or male crew in order to be recognized in Hip-Hop, which was also empowering. Sexist, but empowering nonetheless. But that agency began to change meaning as the industry preferred the sexy female rapper, and money became the motive. This is important because the effect that men have on Rap really begins to emerge.

In the 1990s there was a shift in Black female rappers engaging in gangsta lyrics, whether they identified with that lifestyle or not, because it was selling and made them look “hard” alongside their male counterparts. Gangsta Rap was a label given to Los Angeles rappers by industry chiefs and music critics in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Grant, 2002). Haugen (2003) explains that this subgenre of Rap details drug dealing, promiscuous sexual relations, tales of territorial violence, selling and using of illegal drugs, as well as various crimes including murder, pimping and armed robbery. While this sounds like a completely different message from Hip-Hop’s early days, gangsta rappers’ narratives also stress a lack of agency because they are forced to engage in (illegal) activities in order to survive (Grant, 2002). The violence and gangs were there before they were born, and in order to be protected, they must join these gangs as well. The robberies committed are out of necessity to put food in their bellies and get someone else before they get got. Although this was the experience of most male rappers growing up in disparaged urban settings, rhymes performed by gangsta rappers do not necessarily have to be based on true stories. According to Kelley (1996), Gangsta Rap is not intended to be taken literally. It is often taken out of context by hegemonic, white, middle-aged adult mainstream culture who view

Gangsta Rap as a disturbance to mainstream culture because of its profanity, seemingly threatening language and illegal images. However, the imagery of this lifestyle is metaphorical and simply used to challenge competitors – which was and still is essential in Rap as explained earlier by Al-Amin’s explanation of “Playing the Dozens”.

Gangsta Rap was intended to be merely metaphorical and express a lack of agency in a different type of style, however it had a reverse effect on African American progress and the Black consciousness efforts of the Black power movements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially concerning Black male – female relations. This regression was evident in the music and Black women began participating in the same “self-exploitation and hyper-objectification” of themselves and other women (Oware, 2009, p. 789). For example, in 1995, Lil Kim, a direct product of Bad Boy and Biggie Smalls’ tutelage, and Foxy Brown, a member of Def Jam Records, changed the expectations of female emcees’ performance on stage (Oware, 2009). They brought sex appeal to the industry in order to complement their stellar flows. Lil Kim was appealing because she was sexy, but still submissive, while Foxy was sexy and aggressive (DuVernay, 2010). Both women rhymed aggressively about sex, drugs and crimes, similar to their male counterparts (DuVernay, 2010). They became masters at appropriating masculine language and behavior (Oware, 2009). They were taking back their agency by being sexual subjects instead of sexual objects (Skeggs, 1993). However, Lorde (1984) warns us that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 112). These women were exceptional in their ability to play a man’s Rap game by employing narratives that were just as gangsta, but they were also using the same “tools” to reiterate the same “sexist and misogynist tropes that present women as hypersexual beings” (Oware, 2009, p.797). Only this time, they were controlled by other women.

On the contrary, some scholars would argue that these women shifted the focus by creating a counter-culture within Hip-Hop that fights misogyny; and this is what makes the second generation of Black female emcees feminists like their predecessors of the first generation. As the baggy look of the 1980s evolved into the sexy look of the 90s, and Rap became more commercialized and more of a product, sex became a major expectation “needed” to sell records. There were exceptions like Lauryn Hill and Missy Elliott who were just as, if not more, successful than Lil Kim and Foxy Brown, but sex in Hip-Hop was the new driving force for profits in the music industry. The new lyrics of these women were all about “anti-sexist, gender defiant, ultra-erotic” content, all while remaining unapologetically Black in performing their experiences as Black women (Thomas, 2009, p. 5). Many people were offended when Lil Kim and Foxy rhymed explicitly about sex, but the same outrage was not shared for male rappers like Jay Z, Biggie and Nas (Jordan, 2018). Social and popular music critics believe that Lil Kim sold her Black body for profits; however, Jordan argues that her moniker, “Queen Bee”, is evidence that Lil Kim is aware of the power of sex and how to use it to her advantage. Thomas (2009) writes:

The ‘nature’ of the Queen Bee is not subject to male domination or strict gender confinement, let alone sexual-erotic oppression or repression. She is a matriarch. She doesn’t serve, she’s served. Her mating is a phenomenon (joyful or lethal). She castrates her willing drones and takes charge of their genital equipment within herself, to fertilize herself, by herself, when she pleases (p. 4-5).

Referring to the first and second generation of female emcees, Jordan (2018) says that these women used Hip-Hip to encourage other women to resist sexist oppression while feeling liberated and empowered. But because so much more revenue was being brought in in the 90s, the sex appeal and candidness of the lyrics drowned out the feminist overtones. Fetishized beauty

images became a major expectation of what was needed for molding successful Black female rappers.

The revenue that Black female emcees garnered in the 1990s reared ample support from major record labels. But as the expectations continued to focus on the selling of sex, labels pushed the notion that female rappers were not selling records at the same level as before; therefore, less opportunity was being created in the early 2000s (DuVernay, 2010). The truth of the matter is that the industry boils down to budget and labels were not interested in the expenses that accompanied female artists, such as hair, make-up, wardrobe and nails (Lucas, 2006). Today, a female emcee's appearance allegedly costs labels ten times more than their male counterparts (Watson, 2008). But one can only scoff at the irony in the industry creating expectations that they did not want to invest in. This became more and more evident as labels dropped their female talent. Previously, in the 1990s, there were at least forty female emcees that could be heard throughout radio stations or seen on television. In the early 2000s, that number dropped to an astounding four as of 2017 (Pearce, 2017)! During the BET Awards in 2014, the nominations for Best Female Hip-Hop Artist included Nicki Minaj, Iggy Azalea, Eve, who had not released a single in seven years, Charli Baltimore, and Angel Haze - an up and coming talent with no mainstream buzz (Caramanica, 2014). Female emcees were allegedly so rare that in 2005, the Grammy's cut the category for Best Female Rap Solo Performance because of a lack of submissions (Watson, 2008).

Less than a week before the 2020 Grammy's, The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences is finally being held accountable for their discriminatory practices against women and women of color. A lawsuit filed by Grammy's deposed president/CEO Deborah Dugan claims that she was sexually harassed by the Academy's longtime outside counsel, Joel Katz

(Christensen, 2020). The lawsuit also cites a 2018 study conducted by the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative that found that only 9.3% of the nominees for Record of the Year, Album of the Year, Song of the Year and Best New Artist and Producer of the Year were women for the years 2013-2018. Additionally, Rap and Contemporary R&B artists were rarely selected as winners for these categories, known as The Big Four. In the 62 years that the Grammy's has been operating, only 10 Black artists have won Album of the Year. The Academy is also currently under more scrutiny because Rap has evolved and the nominations still have not.

With the emergence of Ja Rule singing alongside his female R&B features in the early 2000s, to T-Pain reigniting the torch of auto-tune in his debut album *Rappa Ternt Sanga*, the lines between R&B and Rap have been blurred into oblivion (N., 2014). Much credit is given to Drake's 2009 debut mixtape, *So Far Gone*, and Kanye West's *808 and Heartbreaks* which opened the door for Rapper/Singers like Future and Lizzo. What is even more interesting is that lines between R&B and Rap have been blurred to make Rap more appealing to those who listen to Pop and R&B like Lizzo, who was nominated for various categories such as Best Traditional R&B Performance, Best R&B Performance, Best Urban Contemporary Album, and Best Pop Solo Performance (62nd Annual GRAMMY Awards, 2020). In August of 2019, she insisted that she be a part of the Rap conversation because of said blurred lines accepted by male rappers. In a since-deleted tweet Lizzo wrote, "Sometimes I get pissed that there are people who call Future & Swae Lee rappers and still question whether or not I belong in the rap conversation. But then I remember I have the #4 song in the country, laugh, go back to my dream job and log off" (Peters, 2019). She faced backlash for her tweet because her music and image arguably identify more with Pop, or "the latest familiar avatar for white women" (Johnson, 2020, p. 1). Future and Swae Lee, on the other hand, have identified as rappers and make more Rap-style music. To this Lizzo

responded, “I LOVE future & swae bruhhhhhh... the point went straight over y’alls heads...I’m just saying we all share a similar rap sing style... Stream ‘Sunflower’ by Swae Lee. Stream ‘The Wizrd’ by Future” (Lizzo, 2019). Despite Lizzo’s claims, she was nominated for eight different categories at the 2020 Grammy Awards and won three, none of which were Rap (62nd Annual GRAMMY Awards, 2020).

But what about the Black female artists who dominated 2019 and undoubtedly identify as rappers like Megan Thee Stallion, Doja Cat, Cardi B, or City Girls? Out of the four Rap Categories, the only woman nominated was Cardi B as a feature on Offset’s song “Clout” for Best Rap Performance (Holmes, 2019). Sadly, that lack of inclusion comes shortly after former Grammy CEO Neil Portnow - who was also accused of raping a foreign female artist after her performance at Carnegie Hall, and received backlash for stating that female artists should “step up” in response to an overwhelmingly male-dominated awards show in 2018 - formed a task force to “examine conscious and unconscious bias in the music industry that impacts people of color” (p. 9). Portnow claimed it was “the most diversified roster of committees we’ve ever had in the history of the Academy” (Aswad, Helligar, Trakin, 2018, p. 1). The task force unearthed a severe lack of diversity in the voting process. Between the years 2015 and 2017, the nomination review committees were comprised of 74% male and 26% female while the board is 68% male and 68% white, proving Dugan’s overarching theme of The Academy being a “boy’s club.” But seeing as women did “step up” in 2019, what was The Academy’s excuse for excluding so many talented Black female rappers from the Rap categories in 2020’s ceremony? It seems as though no matter what your performance is, women are still absent from receiving their just do in this space. For this year in particular was it because the space was filled with so many women or was it because they are Black?

The lawsuit, while indicative of potential progress in the music industry, also reminds consumers of how change only occurs when a white woman whistles, drawing upon the role that intersectionality plays in the music industry. Crenshaw (1989) stated, “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (140). In other words, Black women are discriminated against on at least two levels: being Black and being a woman - a fact that is brought to light with the Recording Academy’s recent nominations and awards. Intersectionality is supported by claims such as those of the Moynihan Report which presumes patriarchy or male leadership is the “natural arrangement of society”, which negates the racist, classist and sexist experiences of Black women in general (Moynihan, 1965). According to Walby (1990) patriarchy is a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate oppressed and exploit women” (p. 154). Frazier (1939) promotes patriarchy by describing Black as pathological or caused by physical or mental disease. With that understanding, Roberts (1993) presumes that patriarchy is racist, and because it privileges men it is then sexist. For example, women are expected to perform according to a specific male gaze as discussed earlier by Mulvey; however, Black women’s sexuality becomes devoid of any agency because Black male and female bodies have been subjected to objectification via fungibility for hundreds of years. Because Black women are reduced to objectification, and Black bodies are commodified, they are easily ignored when they point out discrepancies in their careers.

For instance, in 2019, Nicki Minaj tweeted, “I pissed off the same man Ariana just called out for lying. Grammy producer KEN. I was bullied into staying quiet for 7 years out of fear. But I’ll tell my fans the REAL on the next episode of #QueenRadio they deserve the truth. Also,

CONGRATS to everyone who won last night” (Nickiminaj, 2019). Shortly after, she was accused of being an “angry Black woman” who was upset that she did not win any awards. Ariana Grande, a white female vocalist was invited back to the Grammy’s in 2020, performed and was nominated for five categories, expressed discontent the year before over not being allowed to perform the songs she wanted to sing, and did not receive nearly as much backlash as Nicki Minaj (O’Kane, 2019). Nicki was then pitted against Cardi B by BET who wrote in a since-deleted tweet, “Meanwhile, Nicki Minaj is being dragged by her lacefront” after Cardi B became the first solo rap female in the Recording Academy’s history to win Best Rap Album (Lynch, 2019; Kennedy, 2019). BET issued a statement apologizing in an effort to repair the damage, but it was too late. Nicki tweeted that she and Young Money would not headline the BET Hip Hop Experience as performers, nor attend the awards later that summer. Cardi B also responded in a since-deleted Instagram clip stating, “It’s not my style for people to put other people down to uplift somebody else. That’s not my style and that’s not what I’m with. I don’t support that” (Kennedy, 2019, p.1). Fast forward to Deborah Dugan’s controversial lawsuit in 2020, and The Barbz (Nicki Minaj’s fanbase) were on twitter attempting to get #ApologizeToNicki trending as an acknowledgement of the claims she has been making against the music industry for years. To support these claims, Chance The Rapper stated in an interview that he respected Nicki Minaj for her impact in the industry, particularly when it came to making sure artists were paid properly for streams. He also stated that the feud with Cardi B, which stemmed back to Cardi’s debut in 2017, was all a part of the industry’s ploy to sell records. “A lot of that stuff is produced,” he told Big Boy on Real 92.3. “Everything is curated before we get to see it. Like, all the information, the way that they phrase it to us; The way they pit people against [each other]. It’s made for you to accept it a certain way, so a lot of people had to choose

a side. I don't want to speak for them at all, but I feel like to a certain extent they got pushed into that too, and I don't think that all of that was a hundred percent their feelings” (Blakemore, 2019 p. 1).

The beef between Cardi B and Nicki Minaj was not a new concept when it came to female rap artists. Not only had Nicki been put up against and constantly compared to Lil Kim, Remy Ma and Cardi B, but the very first beef between female rappers Roxanne Shanté and Roxanne Roxanne was initiated in 1985, just as rap was becoming mainstream. Around Thanksgiving 1984, radio show host Marley Marl decided to play UTFO's "Roxanne, Roxanne," which was a fictitious story about a woman turning down all four members of their group. "It blew up," says UTFO's Kangol Kid, aka Shaun Shiller Fequiere, in an interview with Weiner (2018). "While everyone else was talking about how much money they had and how many cars they owned, we said that no matter how hard we tried, we couldn't get this young lady. That was keeping it real -- everyone had a Roxanne in their world" (p. 2). The song continued to gain traction thanks to it being featured on *Rap Attack*. Marley Marl and his producers needed Christmas cash and UTFO agreed to do a concert in Harlem. However, once their record began getting airtime on another station, they backed out and left Marl and his crew in a bind. Shanté was walking past the station and offered to do a diss record in order to help bring money in. After some hesitation, Marl recorded Shanté the next day in his apartment (Weiner, 2018). "I'm just the devastatin', always rockin', always have the niggas clockin'. Everybody knows it's me - the R-O-X-A-N-N-E," Shanté rapped ever so matter-of-factly over UTFO's instrumental. Eventually the track was renamed "Roxanne's Revenge" and that was how Shanté's new persona, Roxanne Shanté, was born. In December, she performed her first show in Brooklyn and by January 1985, she was getting booked left and right alongside UTFO (Weiner, 2018).

“Male rappers felt like I was throwing things off,” says Shanté. “If the best in the game is a little girl, then Rap is no longer going to be seen as this masculine thing.” While Shanté had opened the door for female emcees, she had simultaneously sparked a war. But all publicity is good publicity, right? UTFO retaliated by finding a female emcee of their own, Adelaida Martinez, and giving her the stage name “The Real Roxanne.” This prompted a year-long battle known as the Roxanne Wars in which emcees from all over created various retaliations and support records to “Roxanne’s Revenge.” All of the publicity skyrocketed “Roxanne’s Revenge” to number 22 on the Hot Black Singles chart in March of 1985 (Weiner, 2018). “It became a Hip-Hop soap opera - everyone had an episode,” Fequiere tells Billboard. It was a soap opera that led to national tours starring Shanté, UTFO, The Real Roxanne, Sparky D, Biz Markie, Big Daddy Kane and MC Shan. They became The Juice Crew; starting off in skating rinks and ending up in arenas within a few months (Weiner, 2018). Referring to the “Rap beef”, Fequiere said, “Like the WWE: That’s all fake, but it’s entertainment.” However, off-stage “There was no conversation, nothing between us. Just a lot of glares and snarls.” But Shanté was proud to be the villain. “For some reason, the bad guy’s entrance is always better,” she says. “If I’m the villain in this, then yeah, I’m the motherfucking villain! That was the only way to overcome that feeling of being a little girl, of feeling like it was me against the world” (Weiner, 2018).

Being the prominent Black female rapper for over a decade, Nicki Minaj took the brunt as being the villain and victim because the beefs between Black female rap artists indicated deeper issues that the music industry. For one, music executives had no issue starting a war amongst Black women in order to sell records, which is an age old tactic of divide and conquer, and two, there could only be one Black female rap artist to prosper at a time. On an episode of *State of the Culture* featuring Black female rapper Remy Ma (2019), who also had a long-

standing beef with Nicki Minaj resulting in gruesome diss tracks, Remy defended Nicki Minaj concerning the BET's controversial tweet stating the following:

I don't know why people always co-relate. If any female in Rap does anything it has to be compared to what she's [Nicki Minaj] doing or not doing. And especially being BET. It's supposed to be Black Entertainment Television... Why would y'all be pitting two against each other? How can you congratulate one - cause that's what it was... A congratulations to Cardi for winning - and in your next breath you downgraded someone else. (2:02)

When Joe Budden insinuated that Nicki Minaj no longer needs to pander to her fans, be sexy or do extra to remain relevant, Remy Ma (2019) responded:

That's because you're not a female and you're not a rapper, so that's why you probably think like that. As a veteran, as someone who's made major achievements, and achieved so many accolades in her career, she should be past the mark where all of those things don't matter. But as a female - as a Black woman - and you powerful... Don't start losing any of that power... It's nothing wrong with being the 2nd, 3rd, 4th 5th [best rapper in Hip-Hop]. The problem is that no one cares when it's men. It's only like that when it's women. (7:06)

Remy goes on to say that no one is constantly comparing Kendrick Lamar to Jay Z or asking them about one another in interviews like they do with the female rappers. This is a further testament to the gender discrepancies that women experience in the music industry. Unfortunately, they are expected to talk about everything but their music in interviews as a way to garner attention to their music and remain "powerful". Because Nicki Minaj reigned unopposed for so long, when Cardi B debuted on reality television show *Love and Hip-Hop New York* in 2014, no one knew that three years later she would solidify a place in female Rap history by breaking records or spark a new generation of Black female emcees. It was the first time anyone was allowed space on Nicki's stomping grounds and that shocking shift inevitably made room for more than one Black female rapper to flourish at a time.

In order to find the female emcees in 2014, consumers had no choice but to turn to reality television because of the exposure it provided (Caramanica 2014). But one must inquire about

how this exposure affected Black female emcees in terms of their agency and representation on a macro level? According to Ward (2015), “Whether intentionally or simply by default, reality television allows those who participate to influence the decisions, rationale, and race consciousness of the masses” (p. 20). Indeed, with *Love and Hip-Hop New York's* viewership averaging 2.7 million viewers according to Nielsen, the influence it possesses is undeniable (Mitchell, 2016). While Black captive bodies are no longer in chattel slavery, the “originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation” are so engrained in “dominant symbolic activity” that the “dynamics of naming and valuation” are simply disguised by modern notions of “liberation” (Spillers, 1987, p. 68) No matter how much autonomy we *think* we have, Black women in America are still operating within the allotted tropes granted to us by our captors, or in this case, television producers. Mona Scott-Young, creator and producer of, the *Love and Hip-Hop* franchise, has received flack for inciting negative portrayals of Black women on her reality television show. In an interview with Billboard, Young asserted that we all know what Hip-Hop videos look like. She contended that she is not making the women on the show dress or act a certain way for the sake of a storyline: “This is how they feel they want to look. We don't have stylists. We're not saying, ‘Hey, wear this, don't wear that, let's get a little bit more cleavage.’ We're casting women who navigate a specific subset of the Hip-Hop culture; this is what they subscribe to” (Mitchell, 2016, p. 17). The irony is that Scott-Young has managed Missy Elliot for over twenty years, so she is very well aware of the different images women can successfully portray in the entertainment industry, but she is not afraid to go where the easy money is either.

Additionally, on these reality shows like *Love and Hip-Hop* or *Sisterhood of Hip-Hop*, there is still the needed male support to cast words of wisdom onto their budding female prodigy or introduce them to the Hip-Hop scene altogether. Like DJ Kool Herc did with Sha-Rock in

1976, Chuck D. with Salt-N-Pepa in the 1980s, Biggie Smalls with Lil Kim in the 1990s, Lil Wayne and Nick Minaj in the 2010s, Cardi B was brought onto *Love and Hip-Hop* because of her relationship with DJ Self. Pharrell, Rick Ross, Timbaland, Lil Jon, and Tank all played the role of “mentor” on *Sisterhood*. In addition, T.I. is the show’s executive producer (Caramanica, 2014).

Cardi B has seemingly been able to manipulate the narrative, or the pigeon hole, that Black female Rappers are forced to fit into. She turned negative connotations surrounding the idea of stripping into a multi-million-dollar platform, got married and became a mother within three years of her debuting to the world via reality TV. She accomplished this while maintaining superstar status with number one hits and touring the country, as well as the world. While her rapid claim to fame is astonishing and it appears as though she has been able to avoid being forced into limiting herself to the mold, there is a false sense of agency that reality television has beckoned because it is now a major player in all aspects of her career, especially including and pertaining to her presence on social media: “Is the fact that Black women can call the shots on their bodies and make a profit from them the equality that was fought for, or is it still enslavement in a more complex cultural and financial system that still profits while giving reality characters the crumbs from their proceeds” (Ward, 2015, p. 17)? While Cardi has broken the mold in her personal life, she still adheres to the expected constructs in her rapping career through her raunchy lyrics and oversexualized presentation in her behavior and style of dressing. With the following that Cardi garnered on Instagram before it was boosted by reality television, she had the agency to perform Rap while ignoring the preexisting expectations created by the music industry. Her followers fell in love with her personality online and on television, so she was afforded an option that many other label signees did not have. However, it may be true that

she felt that is what people wanted to see and hear, which Cardi B expressed in a now-deleted Instagram video retrieved from Haffenden (2019) stating the following:

...I have seen a lot of people - right - that nowadays female rappers only talk about they pussy and shit. And now that Jermain Dupri brung it up - now Ima say something about it right. First of all, I rap about my pussy because she my best friend, you know what I'm sayin'. And second of all it's because it seem like that's what people wana hear... When I did "Be Careful" [one of her slower tempoed singles detailing a fractured relationship], people was talking mad shit in the beginning. Like 'What the fuck is this? This is not what I expected...' So it's like if that's what people ain't trying to hear then alright then Ima start rapping about my pussy again! And second of all, there's a lot of female rappers that be rapping they ass off and don't be talking about they pussy and don't be talking about, you know, getting down and dirty and... Y'all don't be supporting them and they be mad dope! These bloggers don't support them. They don't give them the recognition... So don't blame that shit on US, when Y'ALL not the ones that supporting THEM! (2019)

Ultimately Cardi B admits that the pressures of society constantly influence the content of the music she produces. She also holds consumers accountable for not supporting the femcees who are speaking on other subjects, even captioning the video "SUPPORT SUPPORT SUPPORT." As Morgan (2018) stated, "The culture only gets better if there are people willing to hold it accountable" (1:27). It is possible, then, that consumers are not really sure what they want to hear. For example, on one end, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* is praised for its content, which was opposite of what was presented two years earlier in Foxy and Lil Kim's *Ill Na Na* and *Hardcore* albums respectively. On the other end, Cardi is criticized when she is not explicitly rapping about her pussy. There may be many other factors other than content that contributed to consumers not liking the song, such as the melody, beat or overall likeness; however, consumers have more than likely become comfortable placing Cardi in the Gangsta Rap/Bitch category. It may now be difficult for her to expand out of that. Similarly, if Lauryn Hill released an album tomorrow rapping about her pussy, it more than likely would not go over well with consumers and longtime fans. Thus, the expectations from consumers are different for each artist, even

though these Black female rappers are “human” and therefore multifaceted, just like the consumers listening to their music (Morgan, 2018). If consumers acknowledged the fact that there are inconsistencies in their expectations of what Black female rappers produce - which is steeped in dated respectability politics - it could allow balance between misogyny and widening the limited space that Black women exist in.

This paradox offered by consumers is a reflective cycle of Hip-Hop’s duality, which is a phenomenon in and of itself. Bennett (2015) argued that Hip-Hop basically serves as the scapegoat for sexism and misogynistic content when those problems actually stem from larger global issues. hooks (1994) stated, “Without a doubt, Black males, young and old, must be held politically accountable for their sexism. Yet this critique must always be contextualized, or we risk making it appear that the problems of misogyny, sexism, and all the behaviors this thinking supports and condones, including rape, male violence against women, is a Black male thing” (p. 116). Sexism and misogyny are made to be the pillars upon which Hip-Hop culture stands, while cinema and literature are not stigmatized in the same manner for the same type of content (Bennett, 2015). For example, Lee & Hicken (2016) argue that respectability politics are dated because Black women’s sexuality has been dubbed taboo by religious doctrines, false familial structures, and stereotypes that are no longer relevant to what is projected in popular media in the 21st century. Higginbotham (1993) describes respectability politics as social constructions that were birthed by Black churches at the turn of the 20th century. The idea was to move away from the mammy and jezebel stereotypes by distancing “oneself as far as possible from images perpetuated by racist stereotypes.... There could be no laxity as far as sexual conduct, cleanliness, temperance, hard work, and politeness were concerned” (Higginbotham, 1993, p. 196). Lee & Hicken (2016) added that respectability politics are dangerous because it basically relinquishes

Black women of any agency concerning their sex, sexuality and sexual health. However, with the advent of Hip-Hop Feminism, women are now controlling the narratives surrounding their sexuality, sexual health and agency.

Hip-Hop Feminism was first introduced by Joan Morgan in 1999. And while there is no direct definition for Hip-Hop Feminism, the openness of the concept allows for the same multifacetedness that social media has opened up for the fourth generation of female emcees. As Morgan stated in Neal & Forman's (2004) publication, "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" (p. 28). Contrary to beliefs that Rap works against progress, Morgan states that, "Rap is essential to the struggle against sexism because it takes us straight to the battlefield" (Morgan, 1995, p. 153). Hip-Hop feminists then have a duty to love our disrespectful brothers at a distance and not harp on the sexism within the genre, instead address the issues in the community and "create a redemptive, healing space" (Morgan, 1995, p. 155). Ultimately, by taking ownership of the roles we choose to participate in like that of the sexual object, video vixen, sex symbol, etc., then Hip-Hop can truly grow. In this way, Hip-Hop is the largest promoter of feminist work, as opposed to the antithesis of respectability politics (Bennett, 2015). Because Hip-Hop stems from the duality of discussing thought-provoking, political activism to freestyle put-downs, Hip-Hop has created a space where those who typically would identify as feminists are able to remain "actively involved in assisting feminist critique of language and images through their critical engagement with Hip-Hop culture" (Bennett, 2015, p.1). This is evident in blogs hosted by female writers, as well as such events like the 2019 Hip-Hop Feminism lecture hosted by Adeerya Johnson at The University of British Columbia in

Vancouver, Canada. This is monumental because Hip-Hop Feminism is bridging the gap between Black women and the “F word” (Bennett, 2015).

Typically, women of color feel left out of feminism because their socioeconomic status, cultural experience, demographic and political affiliation, and age do not align with white middle-class female “struggles” (Jordan, 2018). “That’s the reason I don’t like calling myself a feminist,” Cardi B expressed in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2017. “People think they smart. Some people think being a feminist is having a degree, having a very high vocabulary, and it’s not – it’s a woman who thinks she has the same rights as men” (Macpherson, 2017, p.1). The previous white feminist agendas - first wave and second wave - were concerned with voting rights followed by reproductive rights and workplace inequalities (Jordan, 2018). On the other hand, third wave feminists are more concerned with the liberation of women of color, the eradication of homophobia, and “white feminist elitism and black sexism” (Johnson, 2003, p. 163). It is understandable that the women of the 80s would fall into this category of third wave feminism because they were coming off of the heels of the Civil Rights movement of the 60s and the Black Power movement of the 70s where there was a constant power struggle between men and women within these organizations (Jordan, 2018). There was no room for Afrocentricity and Feminism. Similarly, Alice Walker coined the term “womanist” in 1984, creating an option for a more inclusive term for Black feminists, as well as a need to recognize women in that space altogether. Now with Hip-Hop feminism, which could arguably be referred to as the fourth wave of feminism that includes social media’s influence, we see another shift in duality for women in Rap.

Today, with the popularization of social media, particularly Instagram, a Digital Jezebel has emerged. In 2010, developers Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger coined the term

“Instagram”, which is a combination of the words “instant camera” and “telegram” (Amaral, 2015). They incorporated filtering tools that upgrade photos with basic Photoshop techniques (Amaral, 2015). Today, Instagram has expanded to include the posting of one-minute videos, “Instagram Live” video feeds, IGTV which is a separate, but embedded application that allows videos to be posted that are up to ten minutes in length, and “Instagram Stories”, which capture multiple photos and videos and appear in a daily slideshow. The social aspect of Instagram comes in the form of “likes” and comments from followers. Studies have shown that due to the nature of Instagram’s protruding extrinsic motivation factor, “body image satisfaction was sequentially associated with increased Instagram selfie posting” (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton & Ridgway, 2017). These results indicate that users’ posts and the amount of “likes” they receive reaffirm evaluations of self-worth. In order to achieve the “likes”, women and young adults are going to extreme lengths to alter their bodies and photos to garner the attention and popularity that others have received (Warwick, 2015).

The Digital Jezebel then is a spinoff of Collins’ interpretation of the modern Jezebel. Though the Digital jezebel may not literally “fuck men for pleasure”, she is using her online presence to virtually dominate the minds of (young) men and women who aspire to have the same level of attention. This is important to note because Instagram is the most popular social network amongst young adults, who are highly impressionable (Anderson & Jiang, 2019). With, it is extremely imperative that celebrities create and maintain a digital presence in order to remain relevant in a world filled with neoliberal technology dominated by the consumption of today’s youth. Neoliberal technology, such as social media, is based on subjectivity “that teaches users how to succeed in postmodern American consumer capitalism” where “status is predicated on the

cultural logic of celebrity, according to which the highest value is given to mediation, visibility and attention” (Marwick, 2015, p. 14).

This is where the Digital Jezebel becomes relevant and pivotal. Gone are the days of artists performing and leaving the stage to retreat to (mostly) private lives. It is now a common fact that in order to become successful and remain relevant in today’s open market, most artists’ brands are built by acquiring a social media following of upwards of tens of thousands, otherwise known as digital branding. Mark Goldstein, former Senior Vice President of Business and Legal Affairs at Warner Bros. Records Inc stated, “We live in a world where artists are not artists, they’re brands” (Collard, 2012). This means that an artist’s digital brand must be appealing enough to stand out in a space that is heavily inundated with millions of people who have access to the same online marketing (Collard, 2012). If neoliberal technology functions as a means to communicating what is to be consumed, then artists must stand out and fit in to certain boxes at the same time by identifying the behaviors and self-presentation that draws viewers in order to obtain “status” (Marwick, 2015). For female artists, this means creating content so avant garde that consumers are intrigued, posting sexually suggestive photos in alliance with the “sex sells” mythology, or achieving a balance of both like Black female rappers Rico Nasty and Doja Cat have managed to procure.

Keyes (2002) contends that the majority of research on Black female rappers puts too much emphasis on sexual objectification with the notion that women in Hip-Hop are performing in response to men. According to Jordan (2018), Black female emcees have been placed into boxes where they are either bitches and hoes or an Afrocentric Queen. Keyes (2002) goes into more detail on these categories. The first category is the “Queen Mother.” These are Black female rappers who refer to themselves as African-centered icons, which is evident by the way they dress. Their rhymes

invoke Black female empowerment, as well as demanding respect for their own people and spirituality; identifying themselves as African, woman, queen, priestess and warrior. Keyes adds Queen Latifah to this category. Today, Rapsody may be categorized as a Queen Mother with songs such as “Black and Ugly.” When asked why she wrote the song, she stated, “I saw a tweet not too long ago, somebody was like, ‘Yo check Rapsody out,’ and a person was like, ‘What she look like?’ And it’s like what that got to do with the music? This was just on some personal stuff like just how hard it is for women to come up because it’s about our image and what we look like and how we shaped and not about the music” (Rapsody, n.d.).

The second category is the “Fly Girl” who candidly speaks her mind while drawing attention to her body. Keyes says that Salt-N-Pepa is the group that “canonized the ultimate fly girl posture of rap” (2002, p. 194). The Fly Girl’s image is political because it celebrates non-conventional American standards of beauty. Megan Thee Stallion immediately comes to mind as a modern Fly Girl - or “Hot Girl” as she self-identifies. Megan’s image is political because she has single-handedly reclaimed the torch for women whose bodies have not been surgically altered, while embodying the persona of OG (original gangsta) pimps that she grew up listening to in Houston such as Pimp C. Like Salt-N-Pepa’s girl power image, Megan transformed the summer of 2019 with her campaign #HotGirlSummer which Megan explained in a tweet: “Real hotgirl shit= being free and unapologetically you, showing off your confidence, hyping up your friends, not taking shit from NOBODY etc” (theestallion, 2018).

Lastly, the third category is the “Sistas with an Attitude.” For example, rappers like Roxanne Shante and MC Lyte used the B-word in order to subvert patriarchal rule. In this way, they “value attitude as a means of empowerment and present themselves accordingly” (Keyes, 2002, p. 200). While Megan Thee Stallion was recruiting Hotties, Yung Miami and JT - known as

the rap duo “City Girls” - were asking “Where the Bag At?” Since their inception, City Girls have shamelessly rapped about “that season where niggas cut a check for no reason” and how acting up could get you snatched up. They have embodied the “Sistas with an Attitude” persona by bypassing a man’s needs in order to get what they want out of him, while ending each statement matter-of-factly with “Periodt”, a word that has taken on a new cultural meaning of a Black woman essentially saying “case closed”. Similarly, in the 90s, when Black female rappers like Lil Kim and Foxy Brown were embracing the drugs, money, and partying image that men were performing in Gangsta Rap, they would have also been considered “Sistas with an Attitude”. It is important to note that although these women were sometimes criticized for their lyrics and appearance, they were also celebrated for their rhyming abilities.

Although it is easier to place these women in categories, Jordan (2018) warns labeling because it leads to accusing women of falling victim to Eurocentric oppression, instead of allowing these women to be who they are and what makes them comfortable. When women are not comfortable, they are not living in their true erotic power (Lorde, 1984). Instead, they are oppressed and living according to sociological constructs that create gender performances for them (Lorde, 1984). This perspective, according to Keyes, ignores issues that are related to choice, empowerment and women creating space for themselves in solidarity with others. As of 2020, consumers are forced to challenge boxing Black female rappers into the “ho” or “queen” binaries. For instance, even though Megan Thee Stallion’s on-stage persona fits into Keyes’ “Fly Girl” category, she is a college student, avid anime watcher and a twerking, health conscious “Big Ole Freak.” While Megan’s physique is natural, it does ascribe to the aforementioned “ideal body type” within Hip-Hop, and Perry (2003) cautions us that any power given to Black female rappers based on being labeled attractive in conventional ways undermines the feminist potential

of their music. Collins (2004) stated that many Black female rappers “identify female sexuality as part of women’s freedom and independence” (p. 127). Further: “Female hip-hop artists are not just industry pawns. Some are controlling their own narratives and images that they present in front of the camera and behind the mic. They have chosen to sexualize themselves as a focal point of empowerment, not oppression” (Jordan, 2018, p. 58). Acknowledging this would push for a more multifaceted examination of Black women’s identity and sexuality within rap music that is necessary (Rose, 1994). This is especially true with the advent of social media where consumers are buying artists’ brands which includes on and off-stage performance. To confirm, Kim (2011) stated:

I don’t think digital changes who you are as a brand, it just means there are more conversations going on, which actually puts the pressure on you to further define who you are as a brand, what your core values are, what you offer, what you stand for... I mean that should be something that is staple. Like being an individual - you don’t change, you can evolve, but people are friends with you because of who you are and what you stand for. So it just means that more people are exposed to you, and more people interact with you, but you still remain who you are, and I don’t think you should let go of that (p. 1).

Compared to previous Hip-Hop generations, digital branding has afforded Black female emcees the ability to acquire a following on their own terms, doing what makes them most comfortable. Whether that be car raps like Saweetie and That Girl Lay Lay or viral dance videos like Za Za, this newfound freedom and independence opens the door to new discussions of what agency looks like for Black women in Hip-Hop, as they are now at the forefront of their global influence.

Exploring scholarship of the contextual and elemental origins, as well as how race, gender and agency are all a part of Hip-Hop has transformed the ways in which the researcher understands the genre. The racial melting pot that became the South Bronx in the 1970s was due to the building of the Cross Bronx Expressway, which moved 600,000 jobs out of the city and

into the suburbs. Social programs, like welfare, were cut as African American, and Latino and Caribbean immigrants were moved into projects in this area. The deplorable conditions created by the government left room for an “Outlaw Culture” to emerge as a means to survive (Rose, 1994). Graffiti, break dancing, DJing and later emceeing comprised this new outlaw culture called Hip-Hop. Women were granted entrance to the genre once they proved that they could keep up with and out-rhyme their male counterparts. Women evolved with the genre, preaching messages of consciousness in the 1980s and Gangsta Rap in the 1990s and beyond. Today, with the advent of social media or digital branding, Black female rappers can bypass industry expectations of their performance on and off stage. This is because social media encourages artists to garner their own following before record labels even take any interest in their craft. Digital branding has afforded artists the agency to push a brand they are most comfortable with. In the following chapter, the researcher uses scholarly information from the literature review to detail the ways in which she explored her own personal truths surrounding her brand compared to traditional expectations of the Black women in the music industry.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study explores an autoethnographic reflection about resisting and acquiescing to the presumed expectations of Black female rappers’ role in the music industry. The process for data collection and analyzation is discussed in this chapter. Additionally, for quality assurance, reliability and validity, limitations and ethical considerations have been included as well.

The research question for this study is: How does a Black female rapper experience the duality between selfhood and traditional expectations of women in the music industry?

3.1 Autoethnography

This study uses an autoethnographical qualitative design with roots in phenomenology. Phenomenology reduces “individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). With that being said, Autoethnography is the ideal method for this study because the researcher is comparing and contrasting personal experiences with larger social constructs. McIlveen (2008) states that “autoethnography entails the scientist or practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon” (p. 3). Autoethnography stems from a creative qualitative autobiographical approach, where the researcher looks “in (at themselves) and out (at the world)” in order to draw social, cultural and political connections to one’s own personal experiences (Boylorn, 2008, p. 413). This methodological process is written in first person and can be executed in various formats to include: short stories, photographic essays, poetry, reflective journals, or music compositions (Ellis & Bartleet, 2009).

As an emerging scholar of African American studies and a double minority (African American woman), the researcher finds it imperative to create a personal intellectual voice in a musical genre that is heavily predicated on the approval of white men. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) detail the crisis of representation in qualitative research as a major concern because researchers are unable to accurately represent marginalized communities, thus marginalizing them even further. The researcher believes the best way to further avoid marginalization of Black female rappers is to conduct and produce research via first-hand experiences.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher began by first exploring the history of Hip-Hop and the evolution of Rap as it pertained to race and class disparities in the South Bronx in the 1970s. Next, she examined how and when Black female rappers became an integral aspect of the genre. That timeline was

used as a basis to incorporate scholarly themes that expand the understanding of Black females' gender roles and how that impacted their agency in Rap culture. This served as the literature review. Once the literature review was completed, the researcher wrote songs paying homage to the women she considered pioneers in the genre, as well as themes that stood out as potential answers to the research question. Next, songs for the accompanying mixtape were recorded in a studio in East Atlanta.

The researcher was also working on additional music and business projects simultaneously. The projects consisted of finding beats, writing and recording songs, performing at various venues in Atlanta, researching how to create an independent record label, obtaining royalties, as well as establishing and promoting a social media presence. The researcher kept a journal of what she was feeling and experiencing throughout these processes. The journal also included the progress she was making in order to relate to the agency of the women she was researching on her own journey of becoming a successful Black female emcee. The journal entries served as the findings to answer the research question.

3.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, it was imperative that the researcher use her vulnerability as a basis for connecting her experiences with the phenomenon. Ellis (2007) explains that “doing autoethnography involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience” (p. 14). In order to achieve this back-and-forth, the researcher was constantly blending research with personal experiences and the song writing that accompanied this project.

Coding Cycle 1 (Process)

Affective Methods was utilized when coding the journal entries. According to Saldaña (2009), “affective coding methods investigate subjective qualities of human experience by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences.” It is then best to use the journal entries to assess judgments, values, emotions, etc. by exploring the researchers’ values, attitudes and belief systems. This is an integral part of Values Coding, which is a subtopic of Affective Methods and will be used in the first process of coding for this study.

Coding Cycle 2 (Analytic)

Saldaña refers to the second level of coding as analytic. Researchers are to use the first cycle of coding to condense themes found and create another set of codes that are useful to the synthesis. For this project, the researcher chose Focused Coding. Focused Coding identifies the most frequent or significant codes and categorizes them based on conceptual/thematic similarities (Salma Patel, Victor, Lara, & Julia, 2015). Focused Coding was selected for the second cycle because the research question sought to explore selfhood experienced by the researcher; therefore, focused coding enabled the values identified in the first coding cycle to be grouped into core themes of selfhood.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Autoethnographer’s reliability refers to the author’s credibility (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). Does the reader believe that the information that the researcher provided is “factual evidence” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010, p. 1)? Pertaining to this study, the researcher has no incentive to be deceptive in sharing her experiences. This is a growing experience for the researcher, and she has a genuine interest in the subject being researched because this is a serious career path that she is embarking upon. The researcher has a passion for music and neither she, nor the readers earn anything from her embellishing experiences or withholding information.

To select the Black female rappers that were highlighted as part of the first generation of emcees, the researcher referred to Lommel's (1989) account of the women who were instrumental in the emergence of Hip-Hop. The researcher also asked her mother about the Black female rappers of the 1980s. The researcher trusted her mother's opinion about which Black female rappers had a global impact because she grew up in South Africa, meaning their visibility had to really stand out to garner worldwide attention. Her mother spoke highly of Queen Latifah, MC Lyte and Salt-N-Pepa. The researcher was familiar with Roxanne Shanté because her father mentioned her growing up. Upon doing further research, the researcher felt as though Roxanne Shanté and Sha-Rock deserved recognition as a major influencers of Hip-Hop today because they were two of the first women to enter the genre altogether.

For the second and third generation of Black female emcees, the researcher relied on the women that were highlighted in Ava Duvernay's documentary, *My Mic Sounds Nice*. The documentary provided highly detailed and rare information concerning the timeline of Black female rappers' involvement in the genre during this time. The third and fourth generation of Black female rappers that were highlighted were selected solely by the researcher. By this point, the researcher felt as though she was of age to identify which Black female rappers had the most impact on her career. There was also a limited amount of Black female rappers during this time, so it was easier to pinpoint those who had the most influence.

For autoethnographies, "what matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not 'match reality'" (Plummer, 2001, p. 401). Keeping that in mind, validity for autoethnographies entails how well the researcher connects with their reader. Is the experience being described believable, lifelike and possible (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010)? The aim of

conducting an autoethnography was to make sure readers understood that the experiences and interactions of the researcher were genuine. The researcher specifically chose journal entries as a form of discussion because she believed it would help the reader relate to her as an individual with goals and dreams, and not just a spectator of culture. The researcher also found it imperative to include dialogue in order to bring the reader into those conversations that often lead to personal reflective moments.

3.5 Verification

Morse et al (2002) details the verification process for qualitative studies. Verification addresses the systems used during the process of research that ensure reliability and validity, which is ultimately the basis for the rigor of a study. A thorough qualitative researcher “moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis” (p. 17). There are several options for verification including: methodological coherence, having an appropriate sample, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, thinking theoretically and theory development.

Methodological coherence states that the research question must align with the methodology, which should in turn complement the data and analytic processes. Qualitative research is not linear; therefore, ideas, methods and research questions are tentative. The researcher has assured methodological coherence by actively communicating with her thesis chair and committee to reformulate the research question, as well as how the data is collected and analyzed multiple times until coherence was achieved.

Considering this study is autoethnographic, the sample size was one. Morse et al (2002) states that the participants of a study should best represent or have a sound knowledge of the

research topic. As an aspiring Black female rapper, the researcher represents Black women, and encompass knowledge and depth on the subject of Hip-Hop/Rap.

Collecting and analyzing data concurrently is the “essence of attaining reliability and validity” (p. 18). While researching scholarly information for the literature review, journaling coinciding experiences of marketing her brand and music, as well as selfhood development, and writing songs for personal projects and to accompany this research, there was never any isolation between those processes. There was constant mutual interaction between “what one knows and what one needs to know” (p. 18).

All of that information was constantly analyzed by thinking theoretically. This thought process includes identifying ideas in data that are reconfirmed in new data. The new data was then verified against the data already collected. Selfhood was explored in this study via journal entries. Often, the researcher would reread previous entries, compound those experiences, judgments and values with new experiences in order to create newer journal entries. Each entry was focused on building new layers of selfhood which built on the previous entry, just as the researcher experienced spiritual, mental, emotional and physical growth.

Lastly, theory development should be developed from the new research and serve “as a template for comparison and further development of the theory” (p. 19). Moving from a micro to macro level of conceptualizing the data is how theory is developed. Autoethnography allowed the researcher to literally develop concepts based on a personal, or micro, perspective. For this study, micro ideas such as personal judgments and experiences in the journal entries were combined with significant themes in the literature review. Together, they articulated general - macro - themes in the accompanying original songs included in the mixtape entitled *The Thesis*.

3.6 Limitations

When conducting an autoethnography, researchers must be aware that the feelings evoked in readers may be unpleasant since the connections readers make to narratives, or in this case - journal entries - cannot be predicted (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Secondly, the exposure of the researcher's inner feelings and thoughts require honesty and willingness to self-disclose, which may create biases and/or false accounts in order to favor the narrator (Méndez, 2013). This limitation is crucial because it raises many ethical questions which may be difficult for the researcher to address, making autoethnographies possibly convoluted (Méndez, 2013).

3.7 Empirical Conversation

This study involves a conversation with the researcher about who she wants to be as a Black female Rap artist based on what she has learned researching the women who have paved the way for her. Through evocative journaling, the researcher is able to bring the reader into her thoughts. Simultaneously, this research provides a foundation for a formula that has been successful in this field and what will be successful for her. As the researcher pairs research with personal development, she is asking herself, “What sticks out about the ‘successful’ women? What are the reoccurring themes? Why do these themes matter to me? Should they matter? What will I do differently in order to leave a legacy?”

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Autoethnographical accounts require transparency and honesty; therefore, “autoethnography itself is an ethical practice” (Ellis, 2007, p. 26). The researcher stands by the research method wholeheartedly. However, one can never be too cautious when making ethical considerations. Wyatt (2006) lists two ethical principles to consider. First, determine how close we (the researcher) choose to be to our readers (Wyatt, 2006). Autoethnographies can be written in first or third person at the discretion of the researcher. This allows a certain amount of distance

from the research – particularly if the subject matter is sensitive. The researcher chose to write in first person in order to emphasize closeness to the subject matter and use her vulnerability as credibility. The second principle is whether or not to obtain consent from those involved in your autobiographical recollection (Wyatt, 2006). The researcher did not obtain consent from any of the people referenced in the journals or song lyrics. Instead, pseudonyms were used to protect their thoughts, input, feelings and image.

4 AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC LYRICAL DISCUSSION

This chapter includes an introduction of each song, lyrics from the accompanying original mixtape created by the researcher, for this specific project, journal entries and reflections on those journal entries as they relate to the primary research question: How does a Black female rapper experience the duality between selfhood and traditional expectations of women in the music industry? Spanning from August 2018 to July 2019, each song and journal entry was written at a different moment in the researcher’s life. These songs truly illustrate the ways in which her selfhood was constantly tested, challenged, and forced to grow during a very spiritually driven transformative evolution.

The idea to create a mixtape was inspired by Brown’s (2013) exploration of how Black girls use music as a means of expression. Brown (2013) writes, “To advocate for self in relation to community means that the ways Black girls, in particular, make music informs and is informed by hip-hop feminism and challenges the erasure of Black girls’ creative music-making process in girls’ studies” (p. 193). By comparing and contrasting the researcher’s personal experiences to what is observed of Black female rappers already prominent in the music industry, she is able to use her music making (thought) processes as a basis to move forward in her craft while comfortably existing in her selfhood. To delve into how her selfhood was

influenced, at the beginning of this chapter, the researcher coded standout lyrics and lines from journal entries that provided insight into how she navigated selfhood and traditional music expectations.

The title of the mixtape is *The Thesis*. The tracklist is as follows:

1. Intro (The Thesis)
2. Homage
3. Oh Sylvia (La Madre)
4. The Product
5. Sexual Object
6. Ms. Lauryn Hill
7. Mirror Mirror
8. Pressure
9. So Right

4.1 Coding Cycle 1

Before the songs and journal entries are explored, the coding cycles are introduced to give the reader a basis for what to expect in the forthcoming autoethnographical lyrical discussion. Note the themes, constructs, attitudes and beliefs that the researcher identifies with as she moves through this transformative experience.

Table 1 Themes

Constructs	Songs	Journal Entries
Selfhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And now you witnessing my growth <i>(Intro)</i> • “Pick a side, pick a side / Tell me what’s wrong, what’s right / No such thing / It’s all perspective, right? / So don’t give me no pressure... <i>(Pressure)</i> • Sitting real pretty cause I’m full of confidence / And I don’t need a man – I leave ‘em all past tense / I look to the sky for my validation / And I was born with a crown so I already won / I never hate on a woman cause we all the same / We all see imperfections in our brain / If we stick together, man the world could change / Just like Joan Little’s case <i>(Mirror Mirror)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t judge me, but I’ve been watching a lot of tarot readings on YouTube and they’re quite inspiring... (Tuesday, August 27, 2019) • Just because I rap and sing about Black queendom doesn’t make me a feminist. (Tuesday, February 26, 2019) • I'm a lil’ shallow. And I’m not gon lie, that’s why I get it. I get wanting to be a star. (Thursday, November 7, 2019) • Me and my bestie were talking about sex appeal and how that’s hard for us... I knew I was cute and I could dress up and get my grown woman on, but that was also when I was promiscuous. I was much more comfortable in my body. (Thursday, November 7, 2019)
Acknowledging Black women who contributed to Hip-Hop’s legacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But before that could happen you had to battle a man/ Just to prove that you were legit and could hold your own <i>(Homage)</i> • And that genre today is the most consumed / It’s only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For instance, Missy Elliot just received an honorary doctorate from Berkeley in Music. (Friday, August 2, 2019) • ...so I purchased a ticket to see Ms. Lauryn Hill

	<p>right to thank Mrs. Robinson for making room <i>(Oh Sylvia (La Madre))</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The queen of Hip-Hop & R&B - Ms. L-Boogie / One of the dopest emcees to ever grace this planet <i>(Ms. Lauryn Hill)</i> 	<p>live in action in just a couple of days...</p> <p>(Tuesday, February 18, 2020)</p>
Relationship with music and writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You feel so right to me <i>(So Right)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe as artists we share our experiences through our music. And I've written love songs, but music is therapeutic for me so it is a place I go to when I am happy, and I am hurt. (Wednesday, June 26, 2019)
Observing other Black female rappers' performances on and off stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They imposed upon you and me a female rapper that's sexy <i>(Sexual Object)</i> And won't have to sell my body to make hits/ But to each his own/ It takes a lot of confidence to put your body on a throne <i>(Pressure)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When ppl see Cardi, they see her personality before they see her as a stripper or sex symbol. -Ms. Angie -Missy Elliot gets away with saying raunchy things - Biggie told Kim to be more sexy... would she have been like that if it weren't for Big? (Sunday, November 24, 2019) One thing that Megan Thee Stallion has taught me is that we are all multifaceted.

		<p>(Monday, February 17, 2020)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Yo! You just said something very important! In order for an artist to reach iconoticy status, one must start getting deeper.” <p>(Saturday, June 29, 2019)</p>
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Table 2 Values Coding

Values Coding	Researcher
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Respect • Agency • Individualism • Not feeling pressured to look or act like others • Paying homage to other Black female rappers with no judgment • My relationship with my music • My personal spiritual development
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lot of societal pressure to perform in an overly sexualized way
Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to be transparent in my own music and image • It is important to observe, but not judge others for their performance on and off stage • Selfhood is about doing what “feels right” as we learn and grow from life’s experiences. In doing this, everything else will fall into place.

4.2 Coding Cycle 2

Focused Coding

Based on the above themes, constructs, values, attitudes and beliefs, the researcher has concluded the following: “It is important to be transparent in my own music and image, It is important to observe, but not judge others for their performance on and off stage; and lastly,

selfhood is about doing what ‘feels right’ as we learn and grow from life’s experiences. In doing this, everything else will fall into place.” Considering what the researcher has deemed significant when navigating selfhood and traditional expectations of Black women in the music industry, the Focused Code for this study is Selfhood.

4.3 “Intro (The Thesis)”

The Thesis was actually named by my crazy, abusive ex, but I found the title to be so befitting that I did not change it, even though just about every other memory of him and our relationship made me gag up until literally last week (February 2020). A thesis has multiple definitions: *a statement or a theory that is put forth as a premise, or an extra-long document with research never ending, or simply put, an introduction sentence for a topic worth exploring in depth and detail...* So that is what this tape is all about. I am exploring the topic of what it means to be a Black woman in the music industry. In my case, I am in the underground scene (not for long), and I have been at this music thing all my life, but *I wasn't even close*. I had no idea at the time that I wrote this - which was early August 2018 - of the life altering spiritual transformation that I was in the midst of and would be later catapulted into like a rock out of a slingshot, when the crazy boy and I would break up eight months later in April 2019. But like the magician that I am, I waved my wand and casted an irreversible spell that would break generational curses and begin the real dynasty that is CMC a.k.a. Chinwe Maponya-Cook... *The Thesis* is available for download on all music streaming platforms, including YouTube. I encourage you to listen to the songs as you embark upon this journey of entering my deepest thoughts. Enjoy!

Pacing / My mind is racing

Can't never get complacent / That's the opposite of greatness
This world is for the taking - it's my oyster
My husband told me, "Let go of the fear. It'll destroy ya."
The formula - I been cookin' up for veinte cinco años
But I wasn't even close, so me and God got close
And now you witnessing my growth
This is the thesis: a statement or a theory that is put forth as a premise
Or an extra long document with research never ending
Or simply put, an introduction sentence for a topic worth exploring in depth and detail
Like why Black women aren't signed as rappers and labels think they won't sell
But we'll get into that a little later
This is only the beginning paper
What we're leaving is a dynasty like silk, pearls and finer things
And wrap it in a time capsule for my great grandbabies
The thesis - oh this is only the beginning of greatness never ending
I'm here to share my story and give God the glory
I know this is for me - know this is for me...

Monday August 5, 2019

11:12 PM

I'm just so thrilled because today I was able to log into my copyright account and it turns out that my father copyrighted a lot of my music from 10 years ago. That means that I have projects that I can release on all platforms. And of course, the songs are mixed and

mastered so they're ready to go. That is a blessing. That is encouraging. And it gives me a starting point for sharing my music which is what really matters right about now. Thank you God!

Tuesday, August 27, 2019

11:37 PM

So last week I was in a total slump. I didn't realize it during the time, but I was low-key depressed. The situation with "Director" Folkes really took a toll on me. I was in a very bad place mentally. He was supposed to be helping us put on a show, but at the last minute he sabotaged the performances. It was selfish and disheartening. I kept thinking about the past and how I had given up my opportunity ten years ago. I spent the whole week watching TV and doing nothing too creative. I thought that my dreams were a lost cause.

But as of Sunday, God rose me from out of those ashes. Of course the healing process will take a little more time; however, I will keep on pushing creatively as well. I promised myself and God that I would continue manifesting the reality that I wanted. I got back on my grind today – well actually yesterday. But today I put into action all of the ideas that the ancestors and spirit guides laid up on me the last couple of days. Don't judge me, but I've been watching a lot of tarot readings on YouTube and they're quite inspiring. There's a lot of hope for this new moon this September and a lot of promising abundance for Virgos overall. That's in the love department, as well as the finance and health department. I've been instructed to call on the ancestors because they want to help me. Apparently they want to help all of us, but we forget to call on them.

I managed to find the perfect articles for the questions I needed concerning starting a record label, as well as more competitions to display my talent. I love the idea of performing and possibly winning something. It shows me that opportunities are being presented to me where I can make money for my craft. Of course I would do it for free, but prizes are great too.

I'm going to do what I was born to do and chase that vision I saw when I was three years old. I thank God for the lessons, the blessings and the endless possibilities ahead of me. Sometimes I feel old. But then I remember that 30 for a Black woman and 40 and 50 are all prime ages. I'm just going to make each decade better and better. I'm going to look better, know better, feel better and give better. So I'm not concerned about feeling "old" for this business anymore. The way I see it, if it hasn't been done, it's not because it's not favorable, I'm just going to be the first to do it.

Journal Entry Reflection: This first journal entry is a testament to how long I have been recording and dealing with music. I have songs written and recorded from when I was fifteen and sixteen years old, when I knew not what I know today. These songs reassure me that I am on the right path when it comes to finally embracing my music. Although I have been recording for over ten years (and writing all of my life), I have had a hard time actually sharing it with people. I always cared so much about what people would think. *I* thought I was good, but I just couldn't get out of my own way long enough to believe in myself. Being able to put these songs on all platforms is a giant step in my selfhood because it indicates confidence, growth, and it pays respect to the confused teenager I tried to lock away for so many years. When I listen to the lyrics of songs such as "International Superstar" or "Top of the World" (from EP's *Nothing New Vol. I & Nothing New Vol. II* - also available on all streaming platforms), I realize that I have

always gone against the grain and spoke about what mattered to me, which is my selfhood. Even though I didn't really understand what I was saying at the time, the message still applies all these years later, and I am grateful that my dad had the wherewithal to copyright these songs, even if they wouldn't see the light of day until my self was good and ready.

Even though I'd made this copyright discovery in August of 2019, I didn't know that actually releasing the music was not going to be an easy road. Over the next few months, I would go through spells of fatigue, underwhelm and isolation as I shed the old me that allowed others to dictate how I was supposed to live my life. There was always a bright side to these depressive bouts. I would come out on the other side feeling like a brand new woman with brand new ideas and more assertion that I knew what to do with. But I was continuously being tested to see if I had learned my lesson in respecting what my self needed the first time. These months were more crucial to my spiritual, mental, emotional and artistic development than I knew...

4.4 "Homage"

It was important to me that I learned my Black female rapper herstory. So much so that the first draft of the literature review that I turned in, in the summer of 2018, was so wrong that Dr. Gayles told me he was highly disappointed in me. He said that I was a great writer, but wanted to know why my lit review was a history lesson on Black female rappers. I hadn't noted any scholarly sources and I basically had to start over. I was so discouraged that I didn't look at that document for another few months. But in that error, I'd developed two things: an already written book about the history of Black female rappers and a deep appreciation for the women that paved the way for us when it was a brand new predominately male sport - the women that

don't get much recognition alongside the likes of DJ Kool Herc or Grandmaster Flash. No one tells their stories and no one asks, so I HAD to do a song just for them. This is how it goes:

In 1976 the world got to see how the luminary icon came to be

Also known as the mother of the mic

Her name is Sha-Rock and her rhymes was really tight

First female emcee of the digital age

With an all male crew, man they rocked the stage

Funky 4 + 1 more went into overdrive

In '81 they debuted on Saturday Night Live

As rap moved into the 80s, the ladies came with it

Queens rapped about agency and go gettin' it

At this time it was all about the message, positivity and doing what best fits

Yourself and provoking thought in your clan

But before that could happen you had to battle a man just to prove that you were legit

And could hold your own

And that's when Roxanne came and took the throne

Roxanne Shante was the baddest around

Only 12 years old disrespectin' these clowns

She would spit for 40 minutes, take your money and laugh

Everybody knew she was the battle rap champ

Salt-N-Pepa's here in particular - they had influence on women's hair

Clothing and confidence

With sexy, yet powerful lyrics

In '89, they got they shine - Grammy nominees for the first time

And first female rap group with platinum sells

It's amazing what can happen when you just be yourself

MC Lyte came on the scene just right

Putting rap in story form - her rhymes was out of sight

Telling stories of the ghetto that was socially conscious

She was tryna save her people - telling 'em to be cautious

UNITYYYY

Queen Latifah ain't play that ish and you know why?

Cause even back then, labels thought that women were a waste of record space

So she brought a different sound - threw it all in ya face

Yo I wanna pay homage to all of the great female emcees and the groups that paved the way for us today. I'm sorry if I leave anybody out.

Lady B, Antoinette, JJ Fad, She Rockers, Sweet Tee, Monie Love, Cookie Crew, Nikki D, Neneh Cherry, MC Luscious, Yo Yo, Dimples D, Sister Souljah, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopez, Suga T, Mia X, Ladybug Mecca, Lauryn Hill, Charli Baltimore, Jean Gray, Nonchalant, Queen Pen, Eve, Lady of Rage, Rah Digga, Trina, Nicki Minaj, Missy Elliot, Lil Kim, Foxy!

I'm sorry if I left anybody out, but I just want to say thank you.

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

3:08 PM

Gender dynamics in music?

Women make a lot of music about bashing men, but men also make a lot of music about bashing women. Well this is particularly true in rap. I don't think R&B songs tend to paint women in negative or distasteful lights.

But there is a fine line between bashing and telling the truth. I believe as artists we share our experiences through our music. And I've written love songs, but music is therapeutic for me, so it is a place I go to when I am happy, and I am hurt. And even when I rap, I'm telling the men to get on their shit. I'm telling them to step up to the plate. And I'm telling women they are queens and they don't have to be disrespected by men. I feel as though I also acknowledge the hoodrats and the difficult women who give men a hard time, as well as their fellow sistas...

Journal Entry Reflection: August was a rough time for me. I had successfully put on a showcase with best friends and a few newfound acquaintances, but it came at a huge cost. I had just come out of this terribly abusive relationship and I was drawn back into another one. This time with a sixty-something year old man who was looking for validation in young people's dreams. I ignored the warning signs and my friends who thought the old man was crazy. But I was able to get out of there before things got too bad and I did learn a few valuable lessons.

First, I can put on a show all by myself and it's actually not that hard. Second, people who have nothing to offer will take advantage of you in this music industry if they think they can get something out of it. During this time, I felt myself changing my writing process, looking down on my friends and sacrificing sleep all to stroke someone else's sad little ego. I had given up a part of myself because I was being sold a dream - a dream from thirty years ago. Shame. Now I know to speak up when things don't look or feel right, especially when it comes to the presentation of *my* art, which is a direct reflection of who I am, or my selfhood.

In hindsight, I know now misogynistic ass “Director” Folkes influenced the above journal entry. He told me that my music had too much male bashing going on, and I actually felt bad. I felt bad for the ways in which I told my truth. Tuh! Never again. I'm so glad I know better now. Not only did he try to control how I presented my music - which he was moderately successful at - he also tried to control my actual music too. I almost fell for it, y'all. I almost did. Once again I was apologizing for who I was. Smh. I know my foremothers would have been ashamed cause they didn't give no fucks. They told their most unapologetic, erotic, womanist truths in their music and demeanors. They didn't explain themselves. It was what it was. “Supersonic,” “Ladies First,” “Roxanne’s Revenge” - they were all about girl power and telling niggas to step it up. So here's a tip: if you're a dude and you're offended, *whispers* maybe YOU ain't shit. And that’s on selfhood!

4.5 “Oh Sylvia (La Madre)”

My favorite person in Hip-Hop history is Sylvia Robinson. We wouldn't even know about Hip-Hop if it weren't for her. Hip-Hop and Rap wouldn't be the most consumed genre today if it weren't for her. I wouldn't have found my voice, my calling, if it weren't for her. It really shows how the vision of Black women - Mother Earth - sets the precedent for generations and generations. Her hushed legacy also shows how Black women’s contributions remain buried underneath their male counterparts, much like all of the Black women who galvanized young students during the Civil Rights Movement. I found it imperative that I #SayHerName. I felt it was my duty to dedicate a song just to her, so that when young people hear this tape, they will know her name too.

To have a little baby it takes two

We always talk about the fathers, but what about you?

Sylvia, oh Sylvia

Singer/songwriter/executive - a true visionary in our midst

You saved your record label in financial crisis

Heard Rap at a party and laid it on a disc

You said to yourself, "Man the world gotta hear this!"

Hopped in your whip and handpicked all your talent

Wonder Mike, Big Bank Hank and Master G - you looked at them and said, "The three of you are married."

They made "Rapper's Delight" as the Sugar Hill Gang

And from that moment Rap was never the same

Produced the first Rap record to make it to Top 40

Man I gotta say that you a bad lil shorty

Not to mention you co-produced "The Message" - arguably the most respected Hip-Hop record

And that genre today is the most consumed

It's only right to thank Mrs. Robinson for making room

Thursday, September 5, 2019

2:19 AM

Thanks to a handbook by Dae Bogan of Tune Registry, I was able to register for all except one type of royalty. I also uploaded the songs that were made with TK when I was 16 years old to CD baby to be distributed to the world.

I keep seeing horoscope posts and tarot readings about a big change that is coming... This week has been kind of rough. I'm doing my best to handle it with grace and look at life from a new perspective. I know that I am building an empire. All of the different avenues that I want to invest in are making themselves known to me. I only have God to thank for that. So if everything else could lineup perfectly, why wouldn't my dream? I've got to have faith in order to get this done. That's pretty much it.

Wednesday, July 24, 2019

5:14 PM

*Artist

*Producer

*Employer

Saturday, August 3, 2019

2:12 AM

God is so good. I feel so accomplished this evening. I took about an hour to make a chart for all of my songs and make categories on whether or not the songs were published, if I own the music exclusively, whether or not they were copy written, amongst other things. I also registered all of the songs that I own complete rights to with ASCAP publishing under my publishing company, Lioness Den Publishing. The next step is to copyright all of these items and mix and master them and get some videos. I have to select which ones will require videos and whether or not they'll be released as singles or on projects. It's really fascinating to me

that I am doing everything from the ground up. I've been blessed to have a lawyer who is learning and working in entertainment law who is one call away. And what's even more amazing is that I can trust her. How many lawyers can you actually trust? Furthermore, can you trust them with your precious original art? Now that's the real question. God is just so good; constantly giving me all of the ingredients to bake this perfect cake... Sho Sho said that often times we focus on the lime and not the honey. It's important to take time out to acknowledge the honey, or the sweet moments/things, in your life. It'll remind you that it's not that bad after all.

Journal Entry Reflection: Megan Thee Stallion was *just* on a live feed talking about how her independent label is not allowing her to release any new music because she wants to change some things in her contract. A few weeks ago, there was another article floating around about Kelis being taken advantage of by Pharrell back in the day. TLC, Tinashe, even Taylor Swift - same old story. At the time of these journal entries I didn't know why it was important to me to establish my own label. I just thought it was cute like Disturbing Tha Peace or "Young Money Records taking over for the 99 and the 2000". I thought it would be cool to have my own stuff too. But after hearing so many stories about women being taken advantage of, even in 2020, I know it was my Higher Self that led me to think like a boss, even if I still don't fully comprehend the intricacies of royalties and marketing. She also knew that my brand would grow to encompass more than just music. CMC Productions Worldwide is now a brand that includes Chinwé the artist, Chinwe the podcast host, tarot readings, the CMC Clothing Brand and much more. In order to promote myself how I feel most comfortable to the world, I have to be on all

sides of the production equation. In this way, I won't have to live up to anyone's expectations, especially the music industry's.

I also now know that it's easy to be taken advantage of when you have no idea what's going on and you don't read your contract. So I can't be totally mad at Megan's label. But her situation did make me think twice about the people I have around me. We all can't be young, dumb and naive signing contracts together without proper representation. Ignorance is not above the law. So when I had a conversation with my former best friend about making sure she had her copyright in order back in August of 2019 (Megan's label also dropped the copyright ball) she responded, "See, I wish I had a label to do all of these things." To which I replied, "I mean it's actually cool that we get to build our stuff from the ground up and be a part of every little detail." Again, my Higher Self knew that we would have to part ways a few months later because she insisted on living a life surrounded by bare minimum, low-vibrational dysfunction: something that became too much for my selfhood to bear and an infringement on my boss-minded disposition.

4.6 "The Product"

While conducting research, I noticed that as the baggy, oversized look of the 1980s faded and sex appeal and video vixens became a part of rap, Black female rappers also began incorporating more sex into their look... The Hip-Hop genre was changing. Instead of discussing social and racial issues, male rappers were bragging about how much money they had and exploiting the opposite sex, so the women did too. Like the women in the 1980s, the second generation of Black female rappers were only mirroring their counterparts. So as much as I wanted to judge them for being too raunchy, and admittedly I did judge them at first, I now know

they were only doing what they thought was expected of them, and they actually did it quite well.

With the 90s came bad lil shorties like Kim and Foxy

Had women everywhere feelin' like "Who gon stop me?"

Posin' in underwear – hangin' with the hardest posse

Kim with Bad Boy - Foxy and Def Jam

Brought the sex appeal – made the fellas say damn

Cause Kim was hard yet submissive, and Foxy was the opposite

But both their rhymes real aggressive

Drugs, sex, dirt - taking fellas money and leaving 'em feeling hurt

This was all a first for Hip Hop

But as the genre became more pop, labels needed women to garner

More attention for the all male cliques

So they had to make 'em sexy

But who knew that it would stick?

These ladies sold millions – execs ecstatic

But at the cost of individuality and self-respect

The formula had changed from the message to sex

And you know this is all...(true)

I'm just tryna tell the truth

So what we gonna do?

I guess you gotta stay tuned...

Friday, August 2, 2019

1:03 PM

I saw a tweet today where someone commented on Megan Thee Stallion's vagina. No one would ever say something like that about Beyoncé or any of the 1980s female emcees. And while Lil Kim's contribution to Hip-Hop is recognized in the appropriate spaces, her legacy does not outshine the likes of Missy Elliot and Lauryn Hill who are both still relevant in today's Hip-Hop culture. For instance, Missy Elliot just received an honorary doctorate from Berkeley College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts. She's working with new artists. She also has new music premiering. Lauryn Hill is sampled and still referenced as one of the greatest female emcees.

What will happen to all of those whose brands are based off sex? Will they be able to stand? Or are we really in a time where women are able to break barriers because of the internet, and still maintain their legacy? If we look at Nicki Minaj, she keeps getting more and more endorsement deals it seems like, but she's been in the rap game for ten years. Will her sex appeal expire?

Sunday, November 24, 2019

12:01 AM

Random Thoughts...

-When ppl see Cardi, they see her personality before they see her as a stripper or sex symbol.

-Ms. Angie

-Missy Elliot gets away with saying raunchy things

-Salt came from a religious background, so that's why they had to downplay "Push It"

-Biggie told Kim to be more sexy... would she have been like that if it weren't for Big?

Journal Entry Reflection: In the previous journal entries, I'm trying my hardest to literally navigate traditional music expectations, which have become the expectations of consumers, and my selfhood, or what makes me comfortable as far as my image is concerned. I'm watching Black female rappers have longevity and be able to respect their bodies and I just find it highly unacceptable the ways in which some of the other women are discussed. But then there's Cardi. She has been able to transcend all stripper stereotypes and claim the love of people from all walks of life no matter their age, race or socioeconomic status. The lines are really getting blurred for me. I can only hope to be myself just like Cardi and hope that everyone buys into my personality as well, because sexy is just not going to work for me.

4.7 "Sexual Object"

Being in a relationship with a misogynistic pig will have you hating women and thinking you're better than everyone. When I went back and listened to this tape months after leaving my ex, I felt so bad for looking down upon these women. I expressed my concerns to Dr. Davis and she told me not to change anything. She told me to acknowledge how my feelings towards these women's images had changed. She encouraged me to be even more transparent and reflective, just like a Virgo. *wink. I do not think what I wrote in the lyrics is not true, I just think they are so harsh for some reason, particularly at the end where I'm asking about "couth." But I have to accept that these are my own projections about being judged that are coming into play, so I won't

be so hard on myself when it comes to who I was and who I am presently. I do still believe young girls and older women are being inundated with unrealistic images and expectations of beauty, but at the same time I know that each generation wakes up more and more, so we gon be alright...

As rap moved into the 2000s, we really start to see the selling of sex in music, particularly with women. From video vixens to female emcees. No matter what role you played, a Black woman was supposed to present herself according to the preferred patriarchal male gaze of being a sexual object and nothing more.

So let me ask you a question

How many Black female rappers be using their own discretion?

When it comes to their look, who decides their fate?

They just going by the book, but according to whose taste?

Glam squads, nails, wigs and make-up

Got little girls thinking that's how they wake up

To get your cake up it's all about what they see

Instead of focusing on talent and a message that's deep

But it's the powers that be that ironically

Take issue with paying for their own standards of beauty

They imposed upon you and me – a female rapper that's sexy

Then turned around and said it cost too much

10 times more than a male – well that's tough

Cause see y'all the ones that set this up

And then don't wana sign Black women

*Cause you don't wana deal with her attitude
 Or you can't keep your hands to yourself
 Ain't that right Rick Ross?!
 And God forbid that she come in and act like a boss
 Cause then she's a bitch that you can't deal with
 And then she's blacklisted, and this is evident...
 This is evident by the elimination
 Of female rap artists from awards shows
 They say it's a lack of submissions, but who knows the truth?
 So where do we go now? Reality television?
 Lord have mercy. Where is the couth? Where is the couth?*

Friday, August 2, 2019

4:00 PM

I want to adhere to the Black scholarly queens when they warned us against ascribing Eurocentric boxes or labels to Black female rappers; however, I can't help but shake the fact that Black female rappers are ascribing to these labels all by themselves. I was having a conversation with a coworker, MA, where she asked if Megan Thee Stallion likes the image she is portraying. Outside of her career, where she twerks and discusses her sexual prowess, she would actually be identified as a nerd. She discusses anime on her Twitter account, is currently earning her degree, organized a beach cleanup in California, and also encouraged Chance The Rapper to eat vegetables because he lost a bet.

So are these boxes (Keyes, 2002) describing the music only? At times it can be difficult to differentiate between the artist and person because reality television and social media appears

to have given us so much more of who these people are off stage. But when we also get into who is writing their music, it's hard not to ascribe these boxes onto the person who is writing the lyrics, not just the artist performing them. Sigh... Sometimes having so much "access" is problematic.

Journal Entry Reflection: In the above journal entry, I'm confronted with boxing in our Black female rappers. One thing that Megan Thee Stallion has taught me is that we are all multifaceted. We are all a little ghetto, educated, sexy, shy, creative, nerdy, or whatever we choose to be. That's the beauty of social media and podcasts and reality television: you can be all the different sides of yourself. And if a label doesn't want to sign you, that's okay. It's simply because you don't fit into any specific label and I think that's where I am with it. It doesn't mean I don't like to dress up, but I know that wigs and nails aren't really my thing. I hope that when I do have the means to be extra glammed up, I'll stay true to myself and remember what makes me comfortable. On the other hand, I do aspire to be that comfortable in my body. And even when I get there, I still may not have the courage to do what Meg does on stage and on Insta. Either way, I'm not sacrificing my selfhood because my music is a reflection of all the different parts of me that stems from those experiences. I want my music to grow right along with me. I mean look at Queen Bey. *The Gift* is an example of what growth looks like alongside an artist. Even that album in and of itself is diverse in its approach to Blackness. I'm living outside the confines of boxes. That's just a non-negotiable.

4.8 "Ms. Lauryn Hill"

Growing up, Ms. Lauryn Hill left a major imprint on my impressionable mind. I thought women could be spiritually and socially conscious rappers and singers, and still be highly revered. That is why I dedicated a song to her. After listening to Joan Morgan speak about her, I realized how much pressure I and others put on her to be the savior of Hip-Hop. But one thing is undeniable, her voice is velvet and heals, and “Ex-factor” carried me through a dark place in the 12th grade, and then again when I saw Beyoncé cover it live in 2013.

Don't be discouraged just yet cause you haven't met

The queen of Hip-Hop & R&B

Ms. L-Boogie – one of the dopest emcees

To ever grace this planet

Ask anybody – they'll cosign my stance

But I ain't gotta say it cause “Miseducation” speaks for itself

Highest first-week sales of any female artist in history

I'm talking 5 Grammy's and a legacy that spans far beyond only one album

Touching on spirituality, sexuality, the ghetto, you know

Sum us Black folks can relate to – sum real soulful

And raw – Cause raw talent makes superstar

But the industry was just way too bizarre

So Ms. Hill - she faded – faded into the background –

But we can still hear her sound telling us to reach for the sky

Stay true to yourself and never give your life to an industry

That treats you like an object or less

And you can be yourself and still be the best

Girl you know you better watch out

Some guys, some guys are only about that thing that thing that thing...

Care for me, care for me. You said you'd care for me

There for me, there for me. Said you'd be there for me

Cry for me, cry for me. You said you'd die for me.

Give to me, give to me. Why won't you live for me?

Strummin' my pain... Stop strummin' my pain...

Saturday, June 29, 2019

6:14 PM

I'm having a conversation with a long-time friend, AB. We were talking about our affection for Nicki Minaj.

“But I just want her to get a little deeper.”

“Ohhhh so people want deep now?” I inquired.

“Yeah. I like City Girls and it's a hot girl summer, but I just want more from Nicki.”

“Yo! You just said something very important! In order for an artist to reach iconoticy status, one must start getting deeper.”

We see it with Jay-Z in albums such as *Magna Carta Holy Grail* and *4:44*. As well as Beyoncé in her “Formation” video. Eventually, you must start talking about the community. I'm even starting to see it now with T.I. You HAVE to get deep. And maybe that's why Lauryn Hill did so well. She had the convergence of timing, talent and topics.

Right now, the atmosphere is fertile so I'm planting the SUPERSTAR SEED. That's the divine timing. Remember that. Divine timing is key. Then there's talent. The talent has already been there. It's a craft you've been working on for your entire life. It's your passion. And if it's

not your passion, per se, it's something that you appreciate because you've put so much work into it anyway. The love of your talent combined with overcoming tragedy will shift you into overdrive. You will always be working on your talent one way or another. This is important because practice is also key. Keys. Keys. Keys. Major key alert. Like for real. Then you have topics. You have to have humanity in your lyrics in order to captivate the world. That's why I'm dealing with Black issues. It's a human issue that needs to be addressed. Periodt. Okurr! Straight like that! Bratattattat!

Friday, November 8, 2019

10:01 AM

So ppl have been sending me articles about Lauryn Hill not writing her own music & being sued by writers and producers. I didn't know she didn't write her own stuff... damn I'm cramping like a mf.

Sunday, November 17, 2019

2:33 AM

When I listen to Ms. Lauryn Hill now, I feel cheated. Like how Michael Scott felt cheated when he held Jan's sperm donor baby. I get that. And the mood was kinda somber when I recorded it. I was tired. I had recorded like six songs in one session. That's a lot. Ugh. Anyway. This was the last song and it lacked so much energy. Did my inner spirit know that Ms. Lauryn Hill had writers? This needs to be addressed.

Journal Entry Reflection: In the previous journal entries, I literally watched as my heroes become human for myself and others. This was a tough lesson for my selfhood. After watching Joan Morgan's interview with the Breakfast Club about how Ms. Lauryn Hill was not the most pleasant person to be around, going to see Ms. Hill perform live and in the flesh, and leaving the show early in a state of underwhelmed confusion, my entire perspective shifted... On top of that, not only had Nicki let down one of her biggest fans by making "Hot Girl Summer" music, she also married a registered sex offender, which left many of us bewildered. And now people were sending me articles that said Ms. Lauryn Hill didn't even write her own music! So who was she really? What was happening?

Everything I thought I knew about music and my heroes was snatched from me and I had to rely on my own truths henceforth. I learned that I had to separate the music from the person because they were just that: people. People make mistakes. People marry people because they don't want to be lonely. People run from pressure. People do what people do, which is whatever they want to do. But that has nothing to do with how their music influenced me growing up. It was just a smack in the face because I know that music is so personal for me. So I felt robbed. I thought I knew who these people were because of their music. And I realized that as much as I thought I could connect with people in my music, they will never really know me. They will always draw their own conclusions. So I have to do what's best for me and tell my truth no matter what anyone else was doing in their music. For me that means being in control of my image, lyrics and artistic development no matter what.

4.9 "Mirror Mirror"

As I stated previously, I do believe young Black girls and older women of all ages are inundated with impossible beauty standards, so that is what this song is all about. When I make music like this - about how beautiful Blackness is - I feel it all in my bones. As much as I love to make some ignorant trap music, or sing about my feelings, nothing compares to empowerment. I just want all the brown skin girls out there to know how beautiful their crown is in all different textures, colors and lengths. I need them to know how special and precious they are and how these niggas ain't worth the headache, cause a good dude won't make your head hurt. Just like Joan Little, we can work together and we can save this Earth. I mean who else is gon do it?

This is a public service announcement for all the Black girls out there

Listen Black girls everywhere

You are not defined by the color of your hair

Don't give him any time even if he stares

Your presence is divine so just be aware

That your energy is precious – keep it locked in a box

Don't be afraid to ask questions, but don't pick that lock

Let popularity fade along with the flock

And don't be worried bout them wantin' what you got

Cause you ain't gotta prove that you're special

Just pray adamantly to protect your mental

And you ain't gotta wait for him to call or text

Real men don't wait to see who's next

Ain't no games – unless he's a dog
And you ain't a bitch, so you ain't gotta fall
For the trickery. It's slippery
You better than that
Keep victory in your periphery
God got yo back
Mirror mirror on the wall
Who's the flyest of them all?
I'm legit and don't you ever forget that I am such a doll
Mirror mirror on the wall
Who's the baddest of them all?
I'm legit and don't you ever forget that I am such a doll
Break it down now
Where my queens at?
Let me see that smile and don't hold back
Sitting real pretty cause I'm full of confidence
And I don't need a man – I leave em all past tense
I look to the sky for my validation
And I was born with a crown so I already won
I never hate on a woman cause we all the same
We all see imperfections in our brain
If we stick together, man the world could change
Just like Joan Little's case

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

9:15 PM

Am I A Feminist?

I tried to fight this thing for so long. I would sit in class and listen to the women of a particular department (which shall not be named) go on and on about how unfair the world is. But I believed in my heart that some things are supposed to go the way they are supposed to go. Men and women have their roles and we shouldn't gripe about those who choose to adhere to them. If you want to be a progressive male, fine. If you want to live in a same-sex household, fine; but don't go bashing heteronormativity in the process.

"Why don't you look into feminism?" Dr. Gayles, chair of my thesis, asked me.

"You know I don't believe in that stuff."

"Yeah... Well I'm going to print out this article on third-wave feminism anyway. Give it a chance," he replied.

Still, I fought it. I mean isn't feminism just a bunch of bra-burning, middle-aged white women who are bored with their comfortable lives? I'm Black, I can't relate. Now Womanism - that makes me a little more comfortable. Truthfully, any terminology specifically made for Black people makes me more comfortable - makes me feel included...

I recalled a conversation between abusive, homophobic, misogynistic ex-boyfriend and I that almost made me label myself as a "feminist."

"Dang," the crazy boy sighed as he read through my literature review. "You sounding like a real feminist." I was shocked, appalled and offended.

"No. It's the truth," I responded referring to the seemingly obvious notion of the male gaze in Hip-Hop.

“Maybe you need stop running from it,” he continued, “Maybe you *are* a feminist.”

At the time, those words stung. Why did I have to be all that? Just because I was addressing patriarchy, the male gaze, labels not wanting to spend money on female emcees, etc., why did that have to make me a feminist? To me, it was just facts. I hadn't made a stance against men or taken to the streets to declare equal wages. To me, I was stating the obvious. In hindsight, now I realize that of course *he* would think I'm a feminist. Any woman with any sort of individual thought threatened his entire male-privileged existence.

What did make me feel better was my mom telling me that every woman has a little feminism in her. I think she meant that every woman is aware of the discrepancies between male and female treatment. It's sad that women are paid less and operate within the confines of what Dianne Herman called the rape schedule, which is the hyper-awareness of avoiding simple activities such as walking to your car at certain hours or going to the ATM when there is a lack of daylight (Herman, 1984). However, I always believed that I couldn't be paid what I was worth to do anything other than what I really loved anyway and that is music. In addition, don't they say that if you love what you do then you would do it for free?

So while I ascribe to the idea that Black people (not just Black women), deserve to share, study and analyze our world from our perspective (which aligns with Black Feminist Thought), I'm not quick to place a label on who I am. I don't believe anything is that black and white. Patriarchy exists, women earn less, Black men and woman are objectified and I plan on being a superstar boss. It all makes sense to me. Just because I rap and sing about Black queendom doesn't make me a feminist. I can be more realistic than that. I also like the idea of my man taking out the trash and earning more money than me. Men need their egos stroked, so if I can be an unapologetic

Black queen full of self love, I can also let my man *think* he runs our separate, but equal household.

Wednesday November 27, 2019

1:18 AM

I'm sorry, but I really can't be cursing in my music. I've seen two instances where children are looking up to me. My little cousin London sent me a freestyle and did a rap for her school. Another little Virgo, Mae Mae, was so excited to share with me a song that she and her older brother made for their dad. It was a battle rap so they were going back-and-forth. The hook was flames too. So how do I know I encouraged Mae Mae and her brother? Before he left, Solace said " Oh yeah. You should do themes for freestyle fridayz."

"Like topics?!" I asked

"Yeah. That will be cool."

"Oh my God Solace! Thank you for reminding me. I asked people last week what topics I should wrap the doubt, but I forgot for this week. I'll make sure I do that tonight or tomorrow."

You never know who is watching you and who is inspired by what you're doing. That was a part of my new moon ritual. I wish I could go back and read it, but I'm not supposed to. But when I think about it, that's who I do it for. So I'm flattered, honored & humbled that they believe in me and they're watching to see what I'm doing. It's bigger than me and what I want. That's why all of this is so uncomfortable.

Journal Entry Reflection: The above journal entries are a testament to what happens when you put labels on yourself and allow others to box you in as well. On one hand, I am a feminist in denial. I just ran from it because I didn't like the word. On the other hand, I care so much about what adults think of me. I know the music industry doesn't care about how much I curse and sometimes it feels good to scream "fuck you mean nigga" at the top of my lungs to a crowd of millennials. But when I'm performing in front of older folks, all I see is my dad, my martial arts instructor and all of the baby boomers out there shaking their heads at brothas with their pants hanging down. I see all of the Black women who didn't have the luxury of calling themselves feminists because they put their skin color first. And I see the children in elementary school who couldn't read out loud, but knew all the words to "Get Low" by the Ying Yang Twins. It's too much pressure. It's putting myself in boxes before I even finish developing who I am. And what's worse, it's caring about how others feel about the way I choose to express myself...

To be honest, cursing in my music made me uncomfortable because I hadn't done it growing up. Having a studio in the basement meant my dad would just be around, and he wasn't going for anything that wasn't about selfhood in a mostly positive light. He also expressed how he was strongly against cursing in music because "you want people of all ages to be able to enjoy your music in the company of one another." He was thinking global, but it was restrictive. And this was another test of selfhood that I would have to figure out on my own. Do I try something new or remain in the box of approval? And is it uncomfortable because I'm not used to it or because it's really not for me? I heard Beyonce say that she still hasn't played "Partition" for her mother, so having some risqué shit in your repertoire is normal I suppose. But is it *my* normal.

4.10 “Pressure”

This song was inspired by the pressure I was feeling from my dad at the time. I’ve always felt like I couldn’t do anything good enough growing up. It was like even though he allegedly bragged about my accomplishments to others, I never actually heard that he was proud of me directly from him, or if I did, there was some kind of underhanded tone about something that could be better. I don’t know. I don’t want to make it seem like he was a terrible person. He was just a wounded Virgo who had a hard time relating to his daughter, a starseed, a genius. Not for lack of trying though. I often feel underestimated by mother as well. She’s a practical capricorn, so sometimes it feels like she’s crushing my dreams by projecting “realistic” perspectives, as if I haven’t already spent countless hours researching, organizing and plotting and scheming. This song is about the pressure I also put on myself to pursue my dreams, as if God has made a mistake when He outlined my path. Lastly, there is so much pressure that we, as spectators, put on everyone else’s lives. We don’t why that woman is stripping, just like we don’t know why someone chooses not to attend college. At the end of the day, we have to trust the ones we love, trust ourselves and trust God’s plan. Nothing is done in vain and no one is perfect. We’re all just trying to figure this thing out. There’s no such thing as right and wrong.

I ain’t gon lie

It’s pressure to being great

But ima make sure everybody got a plate

So if I gotta take

A break

Don’t condemn me at all

*I won't never fall
Off my high horse
Ima stay my course
And don't worry bout me
I'm reckoned to be a
Force
That you can't never mess with
I handle my business
And still
Have time party and kick ish
I'm the trillest
No wait I'm the realist
And won't have to sell my body
To make hits
But to each is own
It takes a lot of confidence to put your body on a throne
Yeah you full grown
Let your inner light shine
Get it how you live
Shoutout to the dancers that's feeding their kids
I know that you misunderstood
Do it for yourself
Baby you good*

*To my brothers and sisters I'm human
And I apologize for making assumptions
I know you working hard just to be something
That degree don't add up to nothing
It's not fair - all the loans and shit
Murrica will play you like a bitch
If you not about the benjamins
But erase your conscious
I work harder than I look
And I read a lot of books
To the cause I'm hooked
And I rarely get shook
Cause my name is Weezy
And I do all the shakin
Haters is salty
They Crispy - bacon
You must be mistaken
No I'm not a catfish
I'm also not a genie
But I grant your every wish
Hire the commish
To calm me down
Jermaine said he wanted different*

*Well I'm the sound
Mark my words
I'm already wearing the crown
And I'm never off track
Cause I'm always around
Forever ever for ever ever, forever ever
Then I tell kronk to pull the damn lever
As the genius flows
But you can't get it for free
And your jealousy shows
But you'll never be me
So just let it go - baby I am the seed
I told you keep on plantin' and I will succeed
To my brothers and sisters I'm human
And I apologize for making assumptions
I know you working hard just to be something
That degree don't add up to nothing
It's not fair - all the loans and shit
Murrica will play you like a bitch
If you not about the benjamins
But erase your conscious
Pick a side, pick a side
Tell me what's wrong, what's right*

No such thing. It's all perspective, right?

So don't give me no pressure

Cause Ima live my life to the present

That means that everyday I'm here

I'm celebratin' life just like it's New Year

Thursday, November 7, 2019

9:10 AM

I'm a lil' shallow. And I'm not gon lie, that's why I get it. I get wanting to be a star. I get it. Now, I'm a lil' different. But I also like the glam. Who doesn't?

I don't think you *have* to use your body, but that's my own insecurities. But does that make someone insecure because they're uncomfortable and shy? I just want little girls to know you can show off if that's what makes you comfortable and you can cover it up if that makes you happy too.

Me and my bestie were talking about sex appeal and how that's hard for us. And I feel her. When I was working at Sports Jock Radio Show, the producer asked me, "Where's your sex appeal?" (She was kind of a bitch - now that I think about it. I'm so tired of ppl being jealous of me. I just don't know what to do with myself.) I had never considered it. I knew I was cute and I could dress up and get my grown woman on, but that was also when I was promiscuous. I was much more comfortable in my body.

Now I feel like I'm a shell of myself - just trying to find my happy medium. So I realize now I have to not be so hard on others. We don't know they're experiences. And I always say I admire strippers because they have so much confidence and courage to stand up there and put their

bodies on pedestals. But you know what, now that I think about it, even back then, I couldn't bring myself to strip... there's levels.

So anyway, we've got to live and let live. We can't be judgmental and place so much pressure around the conversation of sex.... *insert T.I. here* Anyway...

Monday January 27, 2020

8:34PM

I've been breaking out of my shell and - gasp - performing some music with cursing in it! I've found that as I sing "Pop that shit, bitch. Pop that shit" I find myself twerking more and more with each performance. It feels nice to be sexy and have some confidence for once. I'm not going to lie. Now when I record music that speaks on Black issues, I feel the passion welling up in my throat chakra, but when I perform and shake my ass a little bit, I feel it in my root chakra. There has to be a balance.

Journal Entry Reflection: The previous journal entries depict where my selfhood begins to take a turn. I decided to get real with myself and really make an effort to stop shaming the way other women feel comfortable living their lives. It's really all about balance. This realization was a precursor to the discussion about what my brand represented. This was a difficult question that would change severely over the course of the two months that I stayed with my mother in New York from January to March 2020. It worked out because while sex appeal is not my strong suit, spiritual teaching is. Researching information for my podcasts and rapping my ass off gives me the confidence to be myself.

I also realized that “being myself” was subject to change with each newfound development in my selfhood, but the overall message would always be the same... If that makes any sense. I just had to remain patient enough to give myself room to grow in my music. For some reason, I always put so much pressure on myself when it comes to music. That’s my baby. I can explain myself and my experiences in my podcast. But there’s something about music that feels so impossible to convey. There will always be that disconnect between me and others, and maybe that disconnect is a projection of what happens inside of my soul when I make music. Because it has stemmed from pain - some joy, but mostly pain - I may have always tried to prove myself in my music. It was supposed to be an outlet of what it feels like to be misunderstood, but instead I tried too hard to connect with others. At the end of the day, I have to remember that as much as I want to help others, ultimately I write music for my healing, not others. That’s how I protect myself from what other people think and that’s how I honor my selfhood.

4.11 “So Right”

Ever since I learned about Audre Lorde’s *Uses of the Erotic*, my life has not been the same. Who knew that doing what “feels right” would become the literal essence of my being? This song was originally for a project for Dr. King’s Diaspora class. We had to do a creative project centering on what our Erotic was for each individual. At first, I was going to write a song about Lamar, but after doing an activity in class where we partnered up with someone and answered some questions about erotic moments in our lives, I remembered being in my basement studio. I was about fifteen years old. It was dark, except for the strobe light hanging in the corner (to this day, I still love to record in the dark), and I was rapping. I was rapping my ass off and I felt a wave come over me. I still can't explain what it felt like. It was a combination of chills and overwhelming bliss. I knew in that moment that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my

life. I had never felt anything like that, and I haven't felt anything like that since. It felt so right to me...

I always find my way back to you

Just cant seem to stay away

What am I supposed to do

When the feeling is something that I crave

The more I try to run

The more I find release in your arms

Cant escape the beat

Your melody is the only thing keeping me warm

You feel so right to me (x8)

You always find your way back to me

No matter how I put you second to everything

That level of patience takes some skill

That I think I take for granted with every passing day

The more I try to run

The more the world is underwhelmin'

But you produce a lifeforce full of spiritual fulfillment

Cause I cant escape it, I cant escape it – I feel a tingling

I cant erase it, just gotta embrace it – it was meant for me

I pray that He's happy, pray that He's happy – this is bigger than me

It's people out there everywhere that need some self-discovery

Thank you for this gift – promise to uplift (ohhh)
Women everywhere using creative (song)
This empowerment ain't psychotic (noooo)
Just an experience seeking full satisfaction
Not just in the bedroom, but in all aspects
I won't rest until this prophecy is fulfilled
This is something that I've known for a long time
And before I met my husband, it was the only thing on my mind
But I aint in a rush cause great things take time
And I believe Audre's words about the erotic was a sign
Why settle for less
When God made you one of a kind?
Unapologetically – that's how I'll shine

Sunday, December, 1, 2019

8:24 PM

If it's not working, you're thinking too Small

-Paul

Friday, December 20, 2019

2:25 AM

Okay, you want to hear something crazy? So I'm moving to New York to pursue music and all of the actors and actresses are moving to Atlanta to act. I don't know man. I just feel like

New York is where I'm supposed to be. I want to step up my game. New York is on another level. I believe there will be some executives there who are visionary and can see and hear sound the way I do. I know I will fit in well with that industry. I am so grateful for the route that I took. The journey that I'm on... Leaves me speechless, anxious, ecstatic, afraid and ready. Let's do this, Chinwé! Let's do this!

Tuesday, February 18, 2020

10:45 PM

Today, my brother and I were walking home from running some errands and I saw that Ms. Lauryn Hill was performing at The Capitol Theatre right here in Port Chester. I instantly became excited. Despite all of the things I heard and felt about who she was or was not for Hip-Hop, I still got excited. When I got home, I checked my balance and low and behold, the government deposited my tax refund, so I purchased a ticket to see Ms. Lauryn Hill live in action in just a couple of days...

I also went back up to the theatre to see if they had any availability for opening acts. Jack wasn't very helpful, so if it feels right, I'm going back up there every day until I can talk to someone who actually has jurisdiction. I started thinking about that tarot reading I saw that said, "If you were led to move to a different city, then move. God needs you to be in a specific place at a specific time in order to raise the vibration of the planet." I thought, "What mission could I possibly be on in Port Chester of all places?" But maybe I do have an opportunity to perform at The Capitol Theatre (which turns out is pretty popular) in a little unknown town. Who knows? God knows.

Journal Entry Reflection: I never went back to the Capitol Theatre to inquire about performing. I never trekked to the city to perform at open mics either. I thought going to New York was about music, but it was about so much more than that. I finally understood my brand, which was a direct link to my purpose. And that was not what I expected it to be at all. All of these years I'd been trying to put my finger on an image. How was I supposed to sell myself when I couldn't be bought? Not to sound corny or anything, but I went to New York to ascend. Those bouts of depression I was experiencing in Atlanta were all preparation for the next cycle of this journey in my life where I live out my purpose as a Starseed to provide alternate views to lower-vibrational consciousness. It was more than just searching for the missing pieces in my music. It was about finding myself amongst the crowd. Even if I wanted to put the music industry's expectations first, it was impossible. It always has been. I've always done exactly what I wanted to do, which is honor my selfhood. It's just that this time I know that my experiences have helped and not hindered me, and I now know my purpose. Alas, I have nothing left to confess. For I have bore my soul into these pages. I say godspeed to my selfhood. May you continue to do what feels so right to me... Weezy Out!

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

This research sought to explore the following primary research question: How does a Black female rapper experience the duality between selfhood and traditional expectations of women in the music industry? In order to analyze the ways in which she observed and participated in Rap, the researcher conducted an autoethnographic study that comprised of journal entries and an accompanying mixtape entitled *The Theis*. The journal entries and songs were then coded for significant themes in order to answer the primary research question.

For the literature review, the researcher found it imperative to delve into the contextual origins and history of the House of Hip-Hop, which would later come to include Rap, race, gender dynamics and expectations, as well as social media. In this way, the researcher explored how traditional music expectations of women in this space evolved as Hip-Hop and Rap evolved. The researcher was also able to explore the various types of images that Black female rappers have embodied on and off stage in order to compare and contrast said images to what made her most comfortable in her selfhood and as an artist.

5.2 Findings

While conducting research on Black female Rappers and their herstory, two crucial items continuously resurfaced. Firstly, males were an instrumental in giving their female counterparts a voice, as DJ Kool Herc did with Sha-Rock in 1976, Chuck D. with Salt-N-Pepa in the 80's, Biggie Smalls with Lil Kim in the 90's, Lil Wayne and Nick Minaj in the 2000's, and DJ Self and Cardi B Secondly, her voice only mattered because she could keep up with the guys. Keeping up is not just referring to literal rhyming ability, but the content of the lyrics as well, which was influenced by what men deemed significant. Males were the primary DJ's who

popularized Hip-Hop's sound and culture, so it was ultimately at their discretion of who could be included and what that inclusion looked like. As Rap became more of a commodity in the early 90s, women were pressured to produce images and lyrics that were in line with what the labels wanted. This created an atmosphere of a lack of agency when it came to women choosing their images. In the 90s, there was a contrast between sexy and hardcore and conscious as seen with Lil' Kim and Lauryn Hill respectively. Both narratives were selling, but the "sex sells" model was able to stand the test of time as video vixens became prominent and the overall message of rap was rooted in Gangsta Rap. To this day, Black female rappers are oversexualized, even with the advent of social media, which has allowed for women to generate their own following before even being approached by a label, which would ideally afford women more agency of their images on and off stage.

By conducting research, the researcher found the importance of acknowledging all of the women that paved the way for current Black female emcees, regardless of their sexualized image. She also learned that just because someone is more comfortable performing in a sexualized way, it does not give others the right to judge how they express their craft. It takes a lot of courage to constantly be on a world platform, and have your art, your deepest form of expression, discussed, admired and/or critiqued. At the end of the day, the researcher found that when it came to experiencing the duality between selfhood and traditional music expectations, selfhood won the battle every time. As her mother told her, "Most people who are successful didn't accept those expectations. It's an internal struggle between who you are and who you're told to be. Society is about boxes and selfhood is about following your true nature and honoring who you are." She was also able to look to artists such as Missy Elliott and Lauryn Hill, who are still respected for their work decades later, as examples of what successful individuality and

preservation of selfhood looks like when it feels like no one is interested in a deeper message.

Lastly, she learned from Megan Thee Stallion that social media plays a vital role in how an artist shares their multifacetedness. This is critical because artists can slowly, over time begin to exist outside of the boxes imposed by society and the music industry.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

A major limitation of this study is that while autoethnography is a great tool for personal research and reflection, it also eliminates the experiences of others that could have been obtained through interviews, which reduces general phenomena to the limited perspective of one person. That perspective is based on specific experiences, beliefs, values and attitudes of the researcher that may not be easily applied to a larger population.

With that being said, possible future studies include conducting interviews with other Black female rappers who are underground and mainstream in order to compare and contrast how artists feel they navigate their selfhood, agency and traditional music industry expectations. Future studies could also include further analyzing how social media affects artists' mental health as they vie for consumers' attention. Lastly, it would be interesting to explore how morality plays into artists' images and whether or not they feel they sacrifice their dignity for fame.

5.4 Epilogue

All in all, this research changed my life. Technically, I graduated a year later than the program's intended two-year track, but a year ago, my research would have been outdated. In the summer of 2019, there was an emergence of Black female rappers that jumped on the scene and opened the world to the possibility of multiple Black female rappers existing at one time. I have learned so much from their music, social media presence, music videos and interviews.

They have shown me that individuality and authenticity come in many different shapes, sizes and types of music. As a rapper and consumer, it is my duty to respect what these women offer in their craft. I understand that like me, these women are human and have the right to present themselves on and off stage however they feel most comfortable. Just like them, I am evolving. And it has been a pleasure and a privilege to learn and grow alongside my craft. I hope that because of how Black female emcees have dominated the genre over the past year, they are no longer left out of the conversation. This is the Age of Aquarius and women are just getting started. What we feel and understand about ourselves does not HAVE to be explained, but we'll do you the courtesy of letting you in on the many layers of our deepest erotic truths, when we feel it is appropriate. As I figure myself out, there will be moments when even I do not understand why I feel the way I do, but "Very Well then... I contradict myself; I am large... I contain multitudes" (Whitman 1959, p. 85). And there ain't enough boxes for my soul's expression. You either try to keep up or get the hell out my way. Either way, this bus is gonna keep rolling. Until we meet again... Weezy out!

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