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CHAPTER 4

Bad Bitches?

Rarely acknowledged in hip hop folklore, women played a prominent role in the formation of the culture. Key figures such as Sylvia Robinson, founder of Sugar Hill Records, brought rap music to the masses through the Sugar Hill Gang. Female groups such as Finesse and Synquis and solo artists such as Roxanne Shanté provided powerful female voices at rap's inception. Though much smaller in number compared to males in earlier decades, female rappers expressed their concerns and opinions on matters related to courtship, sexism, racism, as well as partying and having a good time.

In the 1990s, at the height of the genre's popularity, commercial female artists' lyrics thematically changed, becoming hyper-sexualized and raunchy. They graphically disclosed their sexual exploits. One view frames these "unladylike" verses as a refutation of strict white, patriarchal constructions of womanhood.[1] Artists such as Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown displayed female empowerment through pro-sex lyrics. Another perspective questions this characterization suggesting that these artists reinforced and perpetuated depictions of women as hypersexual objects for heterosexual male pleasure. They mimicked a pornographic male gaze that undermined the potentially feminist and liberatory messages in their music. At their worst, they promoted misogyny and sexism. Even more disheartening was the fact that these lyricists were primarily black, discomfiting second wave feminists of color.[2] Younger feminists claim that previous generations' "respectability politics" impede women's sexual liberty. In the end, drawing on the latter argument, a *hip hop feminist*

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approach best helps the reader understand contemporary female rap artists' music.

Using hip hop feminism as a framework for the analysis of commercial millennial women lyricists over the last decade (from 2005 to 2015), female emcees deploy black male hegemonic rap tropes—violence and bragging—but simultaneously carve out space for their needs, wants, and desires as women. Female artists accept and present themselves as sexual subjects. They staunchly reject male dominance, but lament lost or broken love from men. This approach provides a roadmap for discovering how many heterosexual female artists claim and balance presentations of "respectable" and subversive womanhood. Such a strategy allows for the inclusion of "gray areas" that traditional feminist and black feminist discourses question or reject. However, similarly to their male counterparts, the role of large record labels in shaping female performers' music warrants discussion. The music industry fosters the hyper-sexualization and objectification of women emcees, which in turn produces artists who highlight these aspects.[3] Women may own their sexuality, but their collective oppression persists.

Feminist Approaches

At its most basic level, feminism espouses fairness and equality for women and men.[4] Beginning in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention held in New York, white suffragists demanded equality for women in social, political, and economic spheres. This first wave focused on the enfranchisement of women; specifically, achieving the right to vote. Second wave feminist movements occurred in the 1960s promoting the platforms of equal pay for equal work, reproductive rights, and adequate representation of women in companies and government offices, among other demands. Feminist scholars have addressed gender disparities in public and private spheres, such as highlighting unequal pay between men and women in the workforce and revealing unrecognized female housework.[5] Scholars of color argued that white first and second wave feminist movements disregarded women of color's oppression that resulted from race-based discrimination. In essence, white women refused to fully recognize the intersection of race and gender (and class) and how it shaped and muted black women's voices. Feminism primarily addressed white, middle-class heterosexual women's concerns up until the 1960s, even though feminists of color and queer women participated

in the movement.[6] The emergence of a third-wave opened up feminism to minorities, lesbians, and the poor.[7] For example, in the 1970s and 1980s black feminist intellectual frameworks developed. These approaches addressed the concerns of black women from a social justice and activist perspective, moving their lived experiences and perspectives from the margins to the center of analysis.[8]

Black feminists also combatted male bias in black social and political organizations. For instance, they critiqued the lack of women in high-ranking leadership roles in civil rights groups such as the Southern Leadership Christian Conference (SCLC). Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins quotes civil rights activist Septima Clark's criticism of SCLC: "I found all over the South that whatever the [black] man said had to be right. They had the whole say. The [black] women couldn't say a thing."[9] Clark went on to state: "…those men didn't have any faith in women…They just thought that women were sex symbols and had no contribution to make."[10] Black feminists challenged their second-class status in such organizations.

In addition to defying male supremacy and racism another third wave group, hip hop feminists, turned a critical eye towards their black feminist predecessors.[11] Although aligned on many issues, they drew attention to the previous generation's subjugation of women's sexual agency in the public sphere. Younger feminists argued that older ones engaged in a politics of respectability in an effort to combat racism and sexism.[12] This strategy emphasized notions of honor, self-respect, sexual purity, and morality. Older progressive middle-class black women used this approach to foster racial uplift and women's rights. Albeit noble, the above tactics resulted in creating tension between some second and third-wave black feminists, producing a generational divide. Referring to third wave feminist movements, women's studies scholar Jennifer Nash writes, "The development of sex-positivity within [third wave] black feminism has productively bracketed older black feminist conversations about respectability and sexual conservatism, instead attempting to place black sexual agency at the heart of black feminist conversations."[13] Moreover, according to younger feminists, respectability politics reinforced white, patriarchal, and heteronormative ideals of piety and propriety among the very population it was intended to liberate. It undermined black women's expression of their sexuality.[14]

Many hip hop generation women viewed rap as a revelatory space where black women could reclaim their agency on their terms.[15] This

assertion followed the belief that rap served as a cultural site of resistance against racial and gender oppression. In the music's early decades, female artists such as Queen Latifah and MC Lyte articulated the feminist principles of empowerment and independence.[16] They voiced women's concerns with sexist overtones in men's music.[17] For example, responding to male rappers calling women "bitches," Queen Latifah ("U.N.I.T.Y." 1993) rhymes: "But don't be calling me out my name/I bring wrath to those who disrespect me like a dame." In the chorus of the song she angrily shouts, "Who you callin' a bitch?" Female rappers' lyrics can inspire women to speak out against sexism and talk back to men.[18] It also engenders female empowerment in sexual relationships with men. For instance, MC Lyte ("Paper Thin" 1988) sets boundaries with her companion, "I do not touch until the third or fourth date/Then maybe we'll kiss on the fifth or sixth." Both individuals received praise from civil rights and post-civil rights feminists for their pro-woman lyrics.[19] Hip hop scholar Tracy Sharpley-Whiting writes: "…Salt-N-Pepa, MC Lyte, Latifah, and Monie Love presented young women with an alternative worldview, a female perspective on the underclass, urban youth, and sexual politics."[20]

The corporate takeover of rap introduced profoundly racist, misogynistic and sexist songs starting in the late 1980s and became normalized throughout the entire music industry by the 1990s.[21] When rap music thematically turned towards pimp tales, it began to sell the lifestyle of the gangsta rapper, which included sex, drugs, and violence. High profile emcees such as 50 Cent made deals with adult entertainment companies producing adult videos with hip hop soundtracks. Other rappers, such as Snoop Dogg and Mystikal coordinated with the porn industry producing pornographic films.[22] The alliance between popular male rap artists and adult entertainment increased the fetishized and oversexualized portrayal of women, especially black women, in hip hop (see Chapter 3).[23] Not only did males degrade women in their music and videos, presenting them as sex objects, but commercial female emcees sexualized and self-objectified themselves on their album covers and in their media appearances.[24]

Older black feminists rejected male misogyny and expressed disappointment with the presentation of sexuality and crude sex talk by newer female artists. In her book, *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins writes: "the difficulty lies in telling the difference between representations of black women who are sexually liberated and those who are

sexual objects, their bodies on sale for male enjoyment."[25] Second wave black feminists did not understand how the emancipation of women could emerge from a genre that denigrated them—with the complicity of female lyricists.[26] Cultural critic Whitney Peoples writes that "the images of sexually available black women that pervade rap music are marketable because of the already existing ideologies that designated black women as hypersexual and morally obtuse."[27] To many second -wave feminists, contemporary female rappers embraced a regressive form of race and gender politics. For them, the younger generation's stance reinforces racist and sexist beliefs about women, especially women of color.

Hip Hop Feminism

Hip hop feminism emerged from this apparent generational divide. Black feminists and hip hop feminists share the goals of intersectional analysis, examining the linkages between gender, class, race, and sexuality. Each challenges misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy. However, hip hop feminists "fuck with the grays,"[28] or account for contradictions among individuals from the hip hop generation. Some hip hop feminists argued that second-wave black feminists were too concerned with misogyny in hip hop and not focused on how rap can inform current gender relations between men and women. A member of this group, theorist Aisha Durham, defines hip hop feminism as "a cultural, intellectual, and political movement grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color from the post-civil rights or hip hop generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for political intervention to challenge, resist, and mobilize collectives…"[29] Hip hop feminism centers the experiences, beliefs, and worldviews of young women of color. At times, personal tastes may misalign with political views. For example, individuals who are anti-sexist, anti-patriarchal, and pro-gay rights may also follow misogynistic and homophobic rap. Women lyricists who reject male dominance may promote the degradation of women. In the end, hip hop feminists comprehend the messiness of contemporary women's lives.[30] Indeed, cultural critic Joan Morgan poignantly claims "[young] women love—hip hop—as sexist as it is—'cuz all that in-yo-face testosterone makes our nipples hard."[31]

A strand of hip hop feminism entails political activism. We Are the 44%, a group of sexual assault survivors, launched a successful campaign to fire the editor of a hip hop magazine for publishing a video of

old-school rapper Too Short "educating" adolescent boys on how to sexually violate young girls. The rapper apologized, and a larger conversation regarding sexual assault in the hip hop community ensued.[32] In 2006, Moya Bailey and members of the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance at Spelman College in Atlanta held a panel discussion questioning Nelly's misogynistic portrayal of women of color in his video "Tip Drill."[33] This event sparked the "Take Back the Music" campaign with *Essence Magazine* where scholars, writers, and students highlighted and rebuked the sexist portrayals of women in rap music. Female hip-hoppers in Seattle created women-centered networks that called attention to their invisibleness in the culture. The group B-Girl Bench hosted deejay and break-dancing practice sessions for women. Female-led organizations provided writing circles for women and concerts devoted to raising money for anti-rape and domestic violence programs.[34] Feminists of all stripes praise such efforts, but they diverge when debating women's expression of their sexuality in rap music.

Some hip hop feminists contend that notions of propriety impede a pro-sex stance by black and Latina women. Women should be able to discuss their pleasure (and displeasure) with sex unapologetically. They reject the policing of female bodies by men and other women. Furthermore, some praise the direct and explicit expression of a black female sexuality among 1990s female artists. For example, Lil' Kim openly discusses sexual intercourse in her song "Not Tonight" (1996) rhyming, "I know a dude named Jimmy used to run up in me/I didn't mind it when he fucked me from behind/It felt fine." She frames the dalliance as pleasurable on her own terms. She does not submit to the sex act for her mate's gratification.[35] Arguably considered indecent by critics, expressing her erotic power, Kim inverts dominance in heterosexual relationships—men sexually satisfy women. Such artists may embolden their female listeners. Converging with the commodification of rap, many 1990s female performers exploit their sexuality to obtain more airplay, media attention, and record sales. They use supposed sexual power to control their destinies.[36] However, cultural commentators and older generation feminists argued that women's rap music had taken an even more misogynistic turn in the late 1990s and 2000s.

Rejecting a binary approach to addressing women's sexuality in rap, sociologist Valerie Chepp contends that a symbiotic relationship exists between respectability and expressions of carnal desire.[37] Rather than pitting puritanical notions of womanhood against profane ones, Chepp

suggests that both approaches blur in contemporary women's rap music. For instance, Lil' Kim demands respect as a *sexual* being. In her song "How Many Licks" (2000), she rhymes, "Designer pussy, my shit come in flavors/High-class taste niggas got to spend paper." She goes on to add: "Lick it right the first time or you gotta do it over." Kim self-objectifies but presents her genitalia as high-status and therefore worthy of appropriate treatment. She is not a "whore."[38] She demands sexual gratification and rejects an unskilled lover who does not meet her needs. Kim also valorizes the black female physique, bragging about her body parts throughout her songs. White mainstream beauty culture devalues the black female form.[39] Thus, she potentially fosters a positive body image for black women.[40] Indeed, in interviews, Kim stated she felt unattractive when she was younger. Thus some of her songs may be attempts to address these feelings of inadequacy from her youth.[41] She may not only affirm her own beauty but does the same for other women listening to her.

Female emcees articulate hip hop feminism in the 1990s. This type of feminism manifests itself as a hegemonic *black female masculinity* that embraces the contradiction of propriety and vulgarity.[42] Paralleling the badman trope of male rap artists (see Chapter 3), hip hop scholar Imani Perry writes that women rappers morph into "badman women" or "badwomen." These badwomen included masculinist conventions in their lyrics (that is, violence, bragging, and misogyny), but also incorporate "certain elements of black female culture…[using] traditionally black female expressions of 'badness' in the form of assertiveness, attitude, and independence in their lyrics."[43] Here, the badwoman rapper represents the idealized performer for potential chart-topping, successful female artists. This model borrows from mainstream black male rapper aesthetics, but also presents female "attitude." This disposition conveys a "hyper-femininity," which is sexualized.[44] In the same way that commercial male artists include the tropes of violence, braggadocio, and misogyny in their music (see Chapter 3), famous female artists deploy these masculine themes for their own use. As a result, chart-topping female artists of all races—for example, white rapper Iggy Azalea—follow this model.

Clear examples of this approach appear in the lyrics of artists in the 1990s. Rappers such Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim classify themselves as "nasty," "hard," "classy," "gritty," "hood," "cute," "feminine," and "sophisticated," ostensibly masculine and feminine traits.[45] They offer an alternative conception of womanhood that embodies hegemonic notions of manliness and overt female sexuality. Drawing on the motif

of the supposedly potent phallus, Lil' Kim ("Can You Hear Me Now?" 2003) rhymes that she "Got a big dick; I'll bone you out." She uses her metaphorical male penis to assault her opponents. These types of verses illustrate an "authentic" hypermasculinity that predominates rap (see Chapter 3). However, they simultaneously depict a sexualized femininity in their songs. Foxy Brown ("Hot Spot" 1999) brags that emcees "wanna eat [her]," a reference to cunnilingus. These songs allow an alternative way of understanding black female expression.[46] They also allude to or blatantly address race in provocative ways (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of race in rap music). Cultural critic Tracy Sharpley-Whiting contends that hip hop feminism "has room" for Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown.[47] Additionally, it moves away from bifurcated and limiting constructions of womanhood based on a whore/Madonna paradigm.[48]

Based on this discussion, hip hop feminism provides a more precise framework for unpacking millennial commercial women's songs from 2005 to 2015. Here, I examine how artists blend notions of decency and sexuality in their music.[49] Similarly to previous female performers, I find that artists in my sample deploy braggadocios and violent lyrics in order to dominate other men and women. They also use eroticism for self-empowerment, creating a hegemonic black female masculinity that challenges male dominance. This identity adamantly resists male impropriety and infidelity when warranted and expresses sorrow or loss when romantic relationships fail.[50] Throughout, women convey their sensual selves, demanding that their desires remain front and center. They are not victims of male control. However, their needs align with patriarchal visions of women as sex toys. Individual female sexual empowerment may come at a cost to women as a group. This dilemma provides a more nuanced approach to understanding women lyricists over the last decade.

Female Rap Hegemony

I performed a content analysis examining how popular millennial female artists present womanhood and sexuality in their music for 173 songs.[51] I use music from the *Billboard Hot Rap Songs* charts from 2005 to 2015 and *Billboard Top Streaming Songs* from 2013 to 2015.[52] I selected tunes listed on the charts at the end of December for every year. The sample includes any single in the top 25, and artists with Gold and Platinum-selling compact discs, according to the Recording Industry Association of America. Unlike male artists, there are significantly fewer women

listed on the charts who sell at least 500,000 records. Nicki Minaj and Iggy Azalea each sold over one million records.[53] Their songs were also the most streamed. However, over half of my sample ends up being from just these two individuals. Therefore, I decided to include entire albums of women with at least one single on the charts over the ten year period.[54] I also include lesser known artists' albums.[55] Due to the nature of the music industry, I analyze fewer commercial women artists' songs in comparison to men. The lack of representation speaks to the limitations they face in this predominately male genre and may indicate the kinds of music they can produce.[56]

Women appropriate male rappers' language in their songs, but from a female's perspective. Table 4.1 presents the percentages of male hegemonic subjects in their music.[57] Overall, of the 173 songs, 52% of women rappers' lyrics include bravado, 31% reference violent imagery, and 52% are misogynistic or sexist. Around 30% of the songs made more than one reference to braggadocios and misogynous themes.[58] Nineteen percent of the rappers' lyrics express some form of resistance, challenging male dominance, while 13% convey love for or loss of a male romantic partner.[59] Finally, although in lower percentages, women lyricists paid tribute to or detailed how they helped their friends and family.

Table 4.1 Percentages of themes in female rap, 2005–2015 (Total = 173)

	Braggadocio	*Violence*	*Misogyny/sexism*	*Male resistance*	*Gained/lost love*
2005–2015	52% (90)	31% (54)	52% (90)	19% (33)	13% (23)

Note Numbers in parentheses are the total number of songs for each theme

Braggadocio

Women artists draw on the themes of black male hegemonic masculinity as discussed in Chapter 3. Specifically, they include braggadocio and violence in their lyrics. A cornerstone of rap, women brag about themselves. They boast about their expensive attire or accessories, their inherent beauty, and how other women want to copy them. Two types of braggadocio emerge: "materialist bravado" and "narcissistic bravado." "Materialist bravado" includes lyrics that address a woman's wealth, expensive purses (Chanel handbags), foreign or high-end

cars (Mercedes-Benz), and name-brand clothing and shoes (Versace or Giuseppe). "Narcissistic bravado" incorporates self-aggrandized lyrics ("I am the best rapper" and "I'm the baddest bitch"). A woman who references her attractiveness ("I am so pretty") also captures this category.

Materialist Bravado

Women brag about their supposed material possessions and their wealth. Dej Loaf ("Desire" 2015) "pull[s] up with [a] Benz" with her "left wrist" full of "diamonds" ("Been On My Grind" 2015). Nicki Minaj ("Feeling Myself" 2014) owns a "black card" and shops at high-end boutiques such as Saks Fifth Avenue. She laments purchasing too many expensive purses—"These Chanel bags is a bad habit." Iggy Azalea ("Rolex" 2014) has so much money she "paid twenty for the Rolly," or $20,000 for a Rolex watch. Indeed, she states that what individuals put down for a car payment she "dropped that on a Birkin," an expensive handbag. She goes on to state that her critics earn in a year what she "can make in a week" ("Iggy SZN" 2014). Even upstart Azealia Banks ("1991" 2012) "get[s] the grands and the hundreds." Her competitors are "broke," but she is called "Banks, cause [she] can loan money" ("Ice Princess" 2014). Trina ("I Gotta Bottle" 2008) tells the listener she owns "rocks [and] diamonds" with people "admirin'…the ten karat ring." In another verse, Trina boasts: "I'm so stinky rich, my damn dog drive a Benz." Her wealth provides luxurious cars for her pets, a level of affluence beyond any other female or male rap artist. Although seemingly not as well-off as her peers, M.I.A. ("XR2" 2007) still manages to wear "Versace jeans, shades, and chains." In rap, money conveys status and power; these artists project these attributes based on their apparent riches.

Narcissistic Bravado

Women speak highly of themselves. In her song "Back Up" (2015), Dej Loaf begins by telling her imagined competitor: "You don't know me, I'm too clean, I'm too holy, bitch I'm godly." Dej presents herself as a goddess unknown to her opponents. In her only song in the sample, 1990s rapper, Missy Elliot ("WTF" 2015) claims, "I'm so far ahead of ya'll/Man I'm on top of the stars." Both Missy and Dej describe themselves as individuals beyond human comprehension. Iggy

Azalea ("Fancy" 2014) contends that she is "the realest." Her rhymes invite attention and curiosity: "Got the whole world asking how I does that." Far from humble in her rhymes, Dej Loaf ("Ayo" 2014) proclaims: "…I'm fly, and I feel like I'm the shit." Further along in the song, she asserts "I'ma represent, all I make is hits." Referring to a fan, Kreayshawn ("Blasé Blasé" 2012) says, "She told me I'm the flyest she ever met." Kreayshawn's superstar status is biological—"I got the swag, and it's pumping out my ovaries" ("Gucci Gucci" 2012). Female artists follow the rap playbook, self-flattery is required. Women demonstrate communications scholar Kembrew Mcleod's notion of rap authenticity, which entails self-praise.[60]

A majority of women called themselves "bitch" or "bad bitch." The words have multiple meanings and connotations for women, but all point to superiority as skilled lyricists and individuals in control of their circumstances. Iggy Azalea ("100" 2014) announces: "I'm a fancy bitch, but I'm ratchet," suggesting her high esteem, but someone who can also get "ratchet" or ill-mannered if disrespected.[61] In "Pound the Alarm" (2010), Nicki Minaj says, "I'm a bad bitch, no muzzle." A subversive critique of gender expectations of women, Nicki cannot be contained or stifled in her actions or speech. Even more emphatically in "Roman's Revenge" (2012), she proclaims, "I'm a bad bitch, I'm a cunt." Just like other female rappers, Nicki attempts to re-define "bitch" as a positive character trait. She tries to do the same with the word "cunt," a pejorative term usually aimed at women. She deploys the words on her terms. Kreayshawn ("K234ys0nixz" 2014) tells the listener, "You ain't gonna find a bitch that goes as hard as me." Here, "bitch" is associated with the amount of effort an artist expends, Kreayshawn seemingly goes the extra mile. In "BBD" (2012a) Azealia states, "It's that boss—the bitch, the caker." In this line "bitch" refers to status and control. Not to be outdone by her peers, Trina refers to herself as the "Baddest Bitch" in many of her songs. In all, women attempt to reclaim "bitch" as a form of empowerment,[62] although, as I discuss later, they also use the word as a put down against their competitors.

Lyricists also brag about their physical attractiveness. In her song, "Feeling Myself" (2014), Nicki Minaj states that her "pretty on fleek." In the post-verse of "Trini Dem Girls" (2014), she insists "You know that I am sexy." Azealia Banks ("Van Vogue" 2012) repeats, "Pretty AB, Pretty AB." Kreayshawn ("Blasé Blasé" 2012) asserts, "Yes, I'm beautiful and gorgeous," and Iggy Azalea ("Heavy Crown" 2014) states that

her "pretty ass" ascended to the very top of the music charts. In "Phone Sexx" (2008), Trina describes herself as "5'2, 125 pounds, 34-26-36, beautiful light gray eyes, [and] long black curly hair that hangs down to the middle of my back." The artist insinuates an approximation to the white standard of beauty for women, especially when describing her hair. Black women's natural hair length is 4–6 inches, well above the middle of the back.[63] Also, the typical black woman does not possess light gray eyes. Trina affirms her beauty, but may unknowingly distance herself from blackness. Whereas Rapsody ("Celebrate" 2012) embraces a culturally affirming understanding of allure insisting "…we beautiful and we black y'all."

It should come as no surprise that female lyricists brag, in this regard, they are no different than men. Furthermore, bravado is central to the rap enterprise—lyricists boast about their wealth, fame, and status. Women flaunt their material possessions from expensive purses to their good looks. Similarly to males, they boast about the amount of money they possess. To a large degree, these lyrics represent the capitalist society in which these individuals exist. The listener believes these people are well-to-do and beautiful, paralleling depictions of women in the media. Artists call themselves "bitch" as a form of empowerment and control. Possibly, they attempt to (re)appropriate sexist and misogynistic language from males, especially male rap artists who use these words to denigrate women. This strategy is not unique to individuals in this sample. Lyricists from the 1990s such as Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown, Eve, and Mia X also referred to themselves in this way.[64] Surprisingly, in my sample, M.I.A. and Rapsody do not claim these monikers. Why not, especially given that their peers and artists in previous decades have ostensibly redefined the term? Furthermore, M.I.A. and Rapsody are around the same age as Nicki and Iggy, thus aware of its allegedly subversive and politically-oriented usage. Again, why not use the phrase?

The word bitch may not be detachable from its sexist, pejorative origins for M.I.A and Rapsody. Thus, they choose not to utter it. This thinking follows some feminists of color who doubt the ability to re-appropriate the word. Patricia Hill Collins writes: "whether Black women rappers [or women in general] who use the term bitch are participating in their subordination or whether they are resisting [oppressive] gender relations remains a subject of debate."[65] Whereas, Nicki Minaj and others tacitly make political statements describing themselves as a "bitch," M.I.A. and Rapsody may be doing the same—taking

a political stance—*not* using such language. An attempt to redefine the word may fail for some artists. Another explanation could lie in M.I.A and Rapsody's lack of commercial success on the record charts. M.I.A.'s only single, "Paper Planes," appeared on the *Billboard* charts in 2008. Rapsody is relatively new to the rap scene.[66] Possibly, signing with a major record label may lead some artists to identify themselves as "bitches," in an effort to promote record sales.[67] Women rappers may be redefining the word as a form of empowerment, but such "bad words" may entice consumers to purchase their music. Fans may view such language as a form of entertainment.[68]

Violence

Similarly to males, women include violent imagery in their music. Violence is the intentional harm and act of aggression against another person. Using a weapon to hurt someone falls into this category. This classification also comprises bullying and intimidation of another individual. In her track "Desire" (2015), Dej Loaf says she will "Crack a nigga head like a fortune cookie" and "Cut a nigga's face like Seal's." Seal is a black male pop singer with scars on his face. In "Bird Call" (2014) Dej raps, "Put a hammer to your head, got some shit that would shock you." "Hammer" refers to a type of firearm. Of those who would disrespect her, she announces they will "get smacked." She warns ("On My Own" 2014) opponents to "Watch how you're speaking on me" because they will "get hit with this shotty"—a gun.

In a violent interaction with her lover, Nicki Minaj ("The Crying Game" 2014) says, "Another slap to the face, another uppercut/I'm just abusive by nature, not cause I hate ya." Continuing, she concedes, "I know it's hard, I know I intimidate ya." While men are the perpetrators of abuse in most domestic violence cases, Nicki plays this role in her tale. She is the abuser and intimidator, not the victimized. In another example of aggression, Nicki ("Bed of Lies" 2014) states, "I could tell you lying, get the fuck out, don't yell at me/I ain't mean to cut you, I ain't wanna catch a felony." Kreayshawn imitates Nicki in her homage to late hip hop artist Lisa "left eye" Lopez. Lopez burned down her philander's house in Atlanta. In "Left Ey3" (2012), Kreayshawn describes her response to her lover's infidelity: "When you fall asleep I'm 'bout to cut your fuckin' dick off." Addressing his deception, she says, "You tell a lot of lies, but I let my bullets talk." Even more provocative than her fellow

emcees, Kreayshawn mentions assaulting her cheater's mother: "I should key your car, but I'd rather slap your mom/Only a bitch can give birth to such a fucking dog." Similarly to Kreayshawn, Iggy Azalea destroys her confidante's possessions. In "100" (2014) she claims she will "throw this brick" through her man's "windshield" and "knife [his] nice new Rover whip."

Just shy of a third of all women's songs include violent references. Women used weapons against fictional rivals, similarly to male artists. However, a spousal or significant lover's infidelity drew a fiery form of hostility, one not appearing in men's lyrics (see Chapter 3).[69] Women tended to slap, punch, cut, and burn cheaters, plus destroy male property. This response may speak to a deep pain resulting from cheating, or borrow from a larger gendered narrative regarding how women might proactively respond to such behavior. Some women may express a level of pain that results in an assault against men.[70] They attempt to reassert control in damaged relationships. In turn, women become empowered. The aggrieved gender shows strength. They portray triumph in moments of turmoil. Kreayshawn's allusion to Left Eye serves as the perfect metaphor for the supposed belligerent responses of some female rappers. These women will not sit idly when emotionally and psychically violated, they are not voiceless "trophies" in a Kanye West song (see Chapter 3). They do not drown in self-pity, as portrayed by male rappers. Women retaliate.

Here, we see parallels with female blues artists. Addressing her lover's unfaithfulness, Bessie Smith ("Sinful Blues" 2011) sings, "I got my opinion, and my man won't act right/Gonna get me a gun long as my right arm/Shoot that man because he done me wrong." Both blues women and female rappers punish male cheaters. In her analysis of the violence women blues singers impose upon men, Angela Davis writes these individuals "…challenge in [their] own way the imposition of gender-based inferiority. When [Bessie] paints blues portraits of tough women, she offers psychic defenses and interrupts and discredits the routine internalization of male dominance."[71] In rap music, these depictions of strong-willed women may inspire female fans and other women who rap but may send the wrong message regarding conflict resolution. Domestic violence, literal or metaphorical, from men or women is problematic for some scholars.[72] In their assessment, women's studies scholars Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens contend that women "push the envelope on feminist discourse…when they

advocate violence in their own right."[73] However, cultural critic, Imani Perry argues women's violent rap lyrics convey "hip hop feminist symbolism."[74] Moreover, she reads violence in women's lyrics as asserting black female nationhood, resisting victimization, and providing a space for black female rage and frustration. Each of these interpretations can apply to the artists discussed. Nevertheless, debate continues regarding the role of aggressive physical force in women's songs.

Misogyny

Misogyny and sexism are rampant in women's music. These themes require a nuanced examination, though. There is sexism-for-self-affirmation with two sub-categories and misogyny-for-dissing. The two categories within sexism-for-self-affirmation are self-objectification and sexualization. Self-objectification entails a rapper graphically describing her body parts. Sexualization occurs when women boast about their "sex game," or their skills in the bedroom. These two sub-categories affirm the artist's sexuality, presenting her as desirable to men. From this perspective, sexiness reflects power. Artists also deploy misogyny-for-dissing, which entails demeaning and degrading female competitors.

Sexism-for-Self Affirmation

Under self-affirmation, women objectify their physiques in order to convey their desirability. For instance, in "Beg For It" (2014) Iggy Azalea raps: "Now my waist slim, ass fat you gotta have it." Nicki Minaj ("Only" 2014) states, "Hut one, hut two, big titties, big butt too." In "I Am Your Leader" (2012), Nicki refers to her "big fat pussy, with an icy watch." In this line, she presents her genitalia as a commodity on par with an expensive material object. Missy Elliot ("WTF" 2015) references her "junk in the trunk" and her "big hips." In "Van Vogue" (2012), Azealia Banks describes her backside: "Oh, it's so supple—the ass so round." While in "Wallace" (2012) she depicts her genitalia as "the wet pum-poom." Trina ("Killing You Hoes" 2008) states her "ass swoll," short for swollen, or large. In the same song, she implores the listener-turned-viewer to "Look at how my ass poke out when I walk." Finally, in her song "Look Back At Me" (2008), Trina claims "I got an ass so big like the sun" and that her "pussy smell like a rose." These artists ostensibly take pleasure in presenting the self as erotic and sought-after.

Yet, the sexualization of their body parts fit within the expectations and depictions of women's physiques in hip hop. In industry rap, self-objectification sells records.[75] Iggy Azalea understands this point declaring that her "pussy power, pay [her] by the hour" ("Beg For It" 2014). Thus, these artists affirm, play with and feed into the objectification of women's bodies.

Women rappers also exalt their sexual prowess. Nicki Minaj's proclaims her "pussy put his ass to sleep" ("Anaconda" 2014). In "Right By My Side" (2012) she brags, "My-my pussy game's so cold that he always seem to come back/Cause he know that it be a wrap when I'm ridin' it from the back." Praising her sex organ, Trina ("Hot Commodity" 2008) rhymes, "Cause up in this pussy feel better than the lottery." Obvious parallels exist between these women and male counterparts who discuss their sex skills. For men, sexual potency emerges from a "hard" penis that "beats up" female genitalia. Women's sexual power derives from cunnilingus, paralleling women lyricists from the 1990s. In her song "Problem" (2014), Dej Loaf states that she is "so wet, I make them gargle this pussy." Furthermore, she says on the track "Easy Love" (2014): "No games, foreplay, shut up, do what I say/Open up your mouth, put this pussy on your face." From "Look Back At Me" (2008), Trina tells her lover he "better get your face down here. Eat this pussy." Nicki Minaj ("Big Daddy" 2014) states her unwillingness to satisfy her paramour: "Yo nigga calls me big mama/Let him eat the pussy then I dip on him." Post-cunnilingus she exits the scene. From a hip hop feminist perspective, artists tell tales that demonstrate their sexual agency. They elaborate and express female sexual expectations and share stories where men bend to their will.

Misogyny-for-Dissing

Many women rappers call themselves "bitch" or "bad bitch" to symbolize strength and dominance; they call other women "bitch" and "hoe" as an insult. Iggy Azalea ("Change Your Life" 2014) tells her audience, "You used to dealing with basic bitches/Basic shit all the time." She uses "bitch" as a pejorative when mentioning rivals. Other women are "basic" or simple. Similarly, Kreayshawn ("Gucci Gucci" 2012) calls other women "basic ass hoes." In her song "Feeling Myself" (2014), Nicki Minaj claims, "Bitches ain't got punchlines or flow," and questions "Why these bitches don't never be learnin'." Again, other women

deserve contempt, and in comparison to Nicki, possess insufficient rap skill. In a particularly misogynistic allusion, Nicki ("Want Some More" 2014) concludes: "These bitches suck, so I nickname these bitches BJ." BJ is a euphemism for fellatio. In all, her opponents are less talented than her, thus deserving of derision. The obvious parallel is with men who identify themselves as "niggas" as a show of strength but also use the word as a term of endearment and a put-down in some cases. However, there are also women in my sample who refer to themselves as "nigga," but no men who affirmatively call themselves "bitch." For example, in her song "Shanghai" (2014), Nicki Minaj says, "On the real nigga, I'm a real nigga."

Among commercial female rap artists there is a level of harshness towards women comparable to males. Nicki repeatedly calls other women "stupid hoes" in the song of the same name (2012). Moreover, the line "You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe" appears eight times in the chorus. Dej Loaf ("Blood" 2014) belittles women asserting, "They are some hoes, hoes, let's talk about these hoes/Sellin' all that pussy, and you ain't got no prose." She suggests other female artists sell their sexuality in rap, as opposed to lyrical skill or creative wordplay. Loaf's assessment: weaker artists attempt to persuade record labels and consumers into thinking they can rap based on raunchy lyrics. Furthermore, she claims that her rivals "Moochin' off your niggas, you can't stand up on your own."

Dej Loaf appropriates the commercial male artist's perspective, depicting women as "gold diggers," and therefore deserving of the label "hoe." Again, paralleling some industry men, in "Killing You Hoes" (2008), Trina plainly states, "I don't care what a bitch think or how a hoe feel." She continues: "And all I can tell you hoes, get used to it bitch!" Finally, Tink ("UFO" 2015) accuses her confidante of cheating but denigrates his mistresses—"Four or five hoes." Blues women such as Bessie Smith expressed and embraced sisterhood according to Angela Davis.[76] Some cultural critics claim female artists such as Lauren Hill admonished or chided women in order to raise their consciousness of male oppression.[77] However, women in my sample primarily degrade other women. In the end, women identify themselves as "bitches" as a sign of strong womanhood, but use this same language to belittle others.[78]

Artists also refer to men as bitches and hoes, though to a lesser degree. In her song "Been on My Grind" (2015), Dej Loaf claims "A lot of these niggas, they was raised like hoes" adding, "you boys shaped

like hoes." Continuing in "Try Me" (2014) she asserts, "Niggas gossip like hoes, most of 'em bitches." Nicki Minaj ("Want Some More" 2014) describes unworthy men as "bitch niggas." Mimicking her peers, Azealia Banks ("1991") remarks, "cause you gonna be a bitch nigga." Male rappers deploy the pejorative bitch and hoe to emasculate other men, identifying all foes as females. Women differ slightly. For them, impotence translates as a *weak* woman, not *all* women. For instance, bad bitches are full-bodied, strong, and assertive women. Hence, for female emcees, weakness is not associated with sex or biology, but with gender—characterizations of femininity as feeble, frail, and submissive.

For commercial female lyricists, both men and women can be *weak* bitches and hoes. No matter the sex, fecklessness warrants disrespect. This rhetorical maneuver illustrates hegemonic black female masculinity. Women lyricists combine the dominant male themes of braggadocio, misogyny, sexism, and violence with heterosexual female sex acts via their lyrics. Black female masculinity creates a site where women blur, transform, and play with sex and gender identity. For example, in multiple songs, Nicki states "these bitches is my sons" ("Stupid Hoe" 2012). More often than not male rappers use "son" as an allusion to friendship, but in some cases, artists use it to demean male opponents. Nicki appropriates this language to refer to other women of lesser status than herself. In another verse, Nicki contends "I'm not a regular bitch, so when niggas see me, they jump on my dick" ("Shanghai" 2014). In "Come On a Cone" (2012), she states, "If you weren't so ugly, I'd put my dick in yo' face." The phallus is a metaphorical symbol of strength, not merely a biological appendage.[79] Thus, any strong-willed person, man or woman, can symbolically wield one.[80] Nicki moves in an out of gendered male and female positions through her lyrics.

An alternative reading of Nicki's lyrics suggests a queering of rap (a point I explore in Chapter 6 focusing on artists such as Young Thug and Young M.A). Nicki may be creating a space for homosexual engagement instead of fostering heterosexual male desire. She reveals a lesbian encounter between herself and another woman. Given her lyrics that mention her desire for females, for example, "I breeze through Queens to check out some bad bitches" ("I Am Your Leader" 2012) and "Cause I keep a bad bitch, booty big and the waist thin" ("Muny" 2010), it *is* possible that she alludes to homosexual encounters. In either case, Nicki demonstrates her ability to disrupt gender and sex categories, a point made more clearly in women's opposition to male control later in the chapter.[81]

Homage to Family and Friends

Along with men, women also incorporate lyrics that pay tribute to or help family and friends. For example, several rappers express gratitude for their mother or mention monetarily backing their families. They do this to a lesser degree for their buddies. Surprisingly, the percentage of "homage/help for family" and "homage/help for friends" is small at 12 and 4%, respectively. Given women rappers' resistance to male supremacy and embrace of their sexuality, these rhymes may challenge the expectation of women as primary caretakers. Gender roles construct them as maternal and prime custodians of friends and family. Thus they may push back against this perception. Perhaps, in an effort to reject these norms, women rappers include less of these references in their music. A successful artist presents herself as sexy, skilled, and potent, but not overly maternal or nurturing. A woman rapper potentially undercuts her authenticity if she aligns too closely with traditional constructions of womanhood. Rap is a man's world. Therefore, women must take care in their self-presentation. Nevertheless, a small percentage of their lyrics communicate a commitment to their family and friends.

Homage/Help Family

Women paid tribute to and financially supported their families, especially their mothers. They reference this category more than men, 12% versus 9% (see Table 4.2). Iggy Azalea ("Work" 2013) warmly proclaims that she would "Do anything for my mama, I love you/One day I'll pay you back for the sacrifice." Remembering her fallen family member, Nicki Minaj ("Champion" 2012) rhymes, "Cause they killed my little cousin

Table 4.2 Percentages of non-hegemonic themes in rap songs for women and men, 2005–2015

	Women		*Men*	
	Homage/help family	*Homage/help family*	*Homage/help family*	*Homage/help family*
2005–2015	12% (20)	4% (7)	9% (32)	9% (35)
Total	173		371	

Note Numbers in parentheses are the total number of songs for each theme

Nicholas but my memories only happy images." She goes on to dedicate the song to women and girls she knows: "This one is for Tee-Tee, Tweety, Viola, Sharika, Candace, Temby, Lauren, Iesha." Theresa White quotes Nicki—contradicting the findings in this research—saying "I made a conscious decision to try to tone down the sexiness…I want people—especially young girls—to know that in life nothing is going to be based on sex appeal. You've got to have something else to go with that."[82]

She ends the song praising her mother, "Momma taught me pride, yes she did it with the stamps." Even though her family enrolled in federal assistance programs for low-income individuals, Nicki's mother taught her dignity. Her mom's guidance led to Nicki's ("I'm the Best" 2010) monetary support: "I remember when I couldn't buy my mother a couch/Now I am sittin' at the close and bought my mother a house." Again, she makes it clear that her hard work as an emcee emerges from her loyalty to family members: "You could never understand why I grind like I do/Makiah and Jaloney, why I grind like I do." Dej Loaf ("Been On My Grind" 2015) supports her brother: "Lil' bro just came home he said 'he ain't going back'/So I gotta protect him…" Paying respect to her mother, Rapsody ("When I Have You" 2012) reveals: "She helped me buy a house and a brand new four-door." While Dej Loaf ("We Winnin'" 2015) admits: "My momma's my weakness/My mom is my witness." Although small in number, women show affection for loved ones. As with male artists, mothers receive the greatest reverence.

Homage/Help Friends

Assisting homies or friends is a staple in rap music. Both men and women acknowledge the support that they receive from others and feel an obligation to reciprocate when they become stars. In Rapsody's song, "Motivation" (2012), male artist Big Rube admits: "The fellowship of good friends even closer than blood kin." Female lyricists include fewer mentions of friends in comparison to men, 4% versus 9%. They convey similar feelings, though. Dej Loaf references this theme more than others. In her track "On My Own" (2014), she states that she "Feeling like a boss, so I employ my friends." On "Grinding" (2014) she claims: "I'm responsible for makin' sure that all my people on." Demonstrating a commitment to her pals, Dej hires her closest acquaintances to work with her. Paying respect to deceased friends, she says, "Every day I pop a bottle for my niggas in the sky" ("Ayo" 2014). In a twist, Rapsody

("When I Have You" 2012) mentions her friends caring for her: "…all my friends let me sleep on their sofas/Bought me kids meals cause pride wouldn't let me ask for more." She appreciates her "friends with a couch and a blanket that let me lay out/Showers that they let me come over and take at they house." The rapper divulges that she rhymes because of the support she receives from loved ones.

Male Resistance and Acceptance

Finally, women present a form of empowerment that directly challenges male systems of dominance. For example, some women reject and criticize men who denigrate and disrespect them. Others rebuff individuals who only view them as sex objects in need of care. Moreover, straight women respond in kind to infidelity, demonstrating their agency. But, they also include lyrics that praise male affection or mourn lost love. In some songs, women mention how affirmed they feel by the treatment and acceptance they receive from men. They also express sadness when relationships end. In all, these lyrics present women as complex and contradictory individuals who demand respect and convey pride in their sexuality.

Resistance

Women rappers challenge male authority. In "Back Up" (2015), Dej Loaf rhymes, "I told that nigga to stop it; he was talkin' out his necklace/See the difference with me, I never needed niggas, ever." In response to his disrespect, she "leave'em where [she] met'em." She stands her ground in "Desire" (2015) stating that "I rather feel on myself/than to let you feel on my ass"—a direct response to the sexual assault bragged about by some male rappers. Iggy Azalea ("Beg For It" 2014) stipulates that individuals "can look…but don't you touch." Critiquing the stereotype of male providers, Iggy ("100" 2014) proclaims: "I don't need your money, I can buy my shit." Nicki Minaj ("Want Some More" 2014) states that men "Ain't got nothing for me, these dudes is funny." Dej Loaf ("Been On My Grind" 2015) believes she "know[s] why niggas mad cause I never need they favors." She ostensibly upsets men because of her refusal to accept assistance from them, demonstrating her ability to stand on her own. Along with other lyricists, Trina ("Single Again" 2008) says, "I got my own money, there's

nobody I need." These women upend the pop culture narrative where they wait for chivalrous men to save and care for them. Rather, they provide for themselves. Similar comments appear in the songs of female rappers from previous decades such as Salt-N-Pepa and Queen Pen.[83] Such lyrics counter the narrative that women defer to men, even those woman who are part of male "crews."

Women also respond in kind to male infidelity. For example, Tink ("UFO" 2014) addresses her cheating confidante, "So I'ma get even, I never believed in you telling me a lie/I'ma get busy and find me a nigga to lay with tonight." Iggy ("100" 2014) echoes Tink: "Let's see how he likes seeing me out there/Don't try me man, you know I will." Azealia Banks ("Chasing Time" 2012) terminates her relationship for the sake of her freedom: "Say goodbye to your lover cause this is the end." Trina ("Wish I Never Met You" 2008) does the same, "But you can bounce, you know I don't need a man/I can't let you disrespect me, I'ma queen." Rapsody ("Celebrate" 2012) implores slighted women to rejoice "cause you kicked him to the curb/he was bad news to my sisters, I say word." Rather than present themselves as victims, women emcees take control of their circumstances, even when they experience unfaithfulness. They take men to task for their underhanded and deceitful behaviors. Women rappers create new meanings of respectability, sometimes overlapping with, but primarily contrasting from first and second wave feminists' notions of morality and piety.[84] Their lyrics align with hip hop feminists' sensibilities that vocally and unabashedly challenges male supremacy.[85]

Acceptance

Women rappers may kick significant others to the curb due to betrayal, but they also express sorrow for failing relationships and yearn for affection from men. In "Here We Go Again" (2005), Trina soberly asks: "What a chick gotta do to get with a real nigga/that know how to stay true like a man." She challenges infidelity, questioning male "players," but also wonders what she can do to draw the attention of faithful men. M.I.A.'s ("Jimmy" 2007) companion "keeps pushing [her] away" and she demands he "Start acting like [he] want[s] her." Usually defiant, Nicki Minaj says on "Right Thru Me" (2010): "Then you start dressin', and you start leavin'/And I start cryin', and I start screamin.'" She admits her significant other "got the peephole to her soul." Nicki expresses these same feelings in "Catch Me" (2010) pleading for her

boyfriend to "Please come back, I have given [you] my all." Dej Loaf ("Easy Love" 2014) rhymes, "I want this here forever, just me and you to the end." In a song about unrequited love, Iggy Azalea ("Black Widow" 2014) wails, "You used to be thirsty for me/But now you wanna be set free."

Female performers also express passion for their lovers. Graphically expressing her feelings, Dej Loaf ("Hey There" 2015) says, "You need a line of my love, put this pussy all on you." Nicki ("Favorite" 2014) admits: "…it's you I would change for, you always make sure." Because she shows affection towards her significant other, she believes "He could tell that I was wifey material" ("Buy A Heart" 2014). After reflecting on her separation, Rapsody ("Come Home" 2012) concludes: "I guess I'm comin' home to you/It's been too long…" because "that's real love when you can't exhale tomorrow." In their verses regarding romance, artists portray stereotypically female gender traits such as outward expressions of emotions. Lyricists copy their rhythm and blues female counterparts who communicate heartbreak and bliss in their songs. Indeed, on multiple tracks, woman rappers sing. In these moments, their femininity mirrors popular depictions of women in the media as dutiful and emotional. Arguably, they become even more appealing and consumable due to their acquiescence to men, not their overt sexual expression.

These verses provide a space for an alternative heteronormative male gaze based on caricatured notions of womanhood. In these moments women de-emphasize black female masculinity and perform stereotypical femininity by ceding their agency. Overall, they resist male control, but also submit to patriarchal orthodoxy regarding heterosexual norms in male-female relationships. They show their strength, but present a willingness to uphold heteronormative systems of courtship by figuratively becoming "wifey." In this case, women refuse to challenge male supremacy.[86]

Real Bad Bitches

The contradictions and messiness of hip hop feminism emerge in women's songs from 2005 to 2015. Commercial artists such as Nicki Minaj, Dej Loaf, Trina, and Iggy Azalea identify themselves as "bad bitches"—sexy, independent, and self-determined women. They articulate the cornerstones of rap: bravado and violence. Similarly to their male counterparts, they brag about their expensive clothing, jewelry, and automobiles.

They reject second generation white feminists and some black feminists' notions of female respectability based on modesty.[87] Indeed, some scholars would argue these particular artists, similarly to their predecessors—Lil' Kim or Foxy Brown—reverse the male gaze, creating a female gaze.[88] They produce objectification for their benefit. However, I contend their racy lyrics echo patriarchal gender expectations that judge women according to their sexual proclivities, sex appeal, and deference to men. Moreover, the fact that there are so few commercial female artists and that many receive the backing from prominent male performers speaks to the constraints that women face in a male-based genre, with primarily male consumers, and large music companies run mainly by men.

Major labels, predominately male crews and sponsors, and the market may inhibit the freedom and agency women express in their music. On the one hand, based on their songs, these artists do not fit conventional white female standards of beauty. Their behinds protrude; they have curvy bodies. Hence, they carve out a space that validates voluptuous physiques, which expands and embraces new beauty aesthetics. On the other hand, they readily make their bodies available for heterosexual male consumption. As an example, Nicki Minaj says in "Anaconda" (2014), "Yeah, he love this fat ass, hahaha." She enjoys the male gaze on her terms. Nonetheless, the lens through which she sees herself comes from a heterosexual male point-of-view.

Eroticism may empower commercial female rappers emotionally and financially. Male consumers may purchase their music because sex sells—female artists understand this dynamic. But women may also believe their carnal desires hold sway over men; they attempt to regain agency in a male-dominated, androcentric space that routinely degrades women. The result is a synergistic relationship between heterosexual male fantasy (as manifested by consumers, male sponsors, and record companies) and female subjectivity.[89] Each relies on the other. Some women rappers continue to communicate their desires, both resisting male dominance, but pining for an imagined heterosexual male lover who upholds heteronormative constructions of male-female courtship—a standard trope of female performers in rhythm and blues, country, and pop music. Woman rap artists define beauty on their terms (which, at points, may align with heterosexual male constructions of beauty), but do not call for the dismantling of a system that judges them based on their looks.

By demanding that men meet their sexual needs, women articulate their supposed *personal* agency. While commercial male rap artists' dictate

women perform fellatio, mainstream female rappers require cunnilingus. Each woman presents herself as the sensual protagonist in her story, boldly and loudly. Furthermore, they demonstrate a hip hop feminist approach stating their views and individual insights. In this regard, these artists express a progressive form of gender politics. As mentioned by Tricia Rose and Cheryl Keyes, women talk back to men and women who attempt to hurt them emotionally or physically, often rejecting notions of victimhood.[90] In subverting male hegemony, they model resistance for other women. However, their erotic desires imitate pornographic images of women seen in hip hop culture. Commercial women lyricists' sexual fantasies appear in the softcore porn of rap videos and hardcore adult videos. *Their* sexual desires fit nicely within what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as controlling images of women in the media.[91] Thus, each rapper eloquently expresses her female sensibility—emboldening the self—but does little to undermine the corporate industry that subjugates women as a collective. Women rappers at once convey their freedoms and control of men, women, rivals, and fans, but remain confined by these same groups due to gender norms and expectations. They continue to experience the oppression of their gender in American society.

In the end, commercial female lyricists' songs illustrate the complexity of hip hop feminism, which affirms individual female voices. In many ways, these views undermine male hegemony; they rebuke conventions that demand women defer and rely on men for their livelihoods. However, they simultaneously undercut the power of women as a group, compromising a comprehensive hip hop feminist agenda. They do so by deploying misogynistic and sexist language towards other women (and men). Commercial artists epitomize hegemonic black female masculinity. These women follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. Lil' Kim, Eve, and Foxy Brown achieved mainstream success employing similar conventions. The millennials—Nicki Minaj, Iggy Azalea, and Dej Loaf—have not changed the rap game. They do not destabilize male systems of oppression.

Corporate titans continue to market women based on their looks. In industry rap, women are defiant "bad bitches" at best and vilified "hoes" at worst. Non-commercial artists such as M.I.A. and Rapsody did not self-objectify or sexualize themselves and include more socially conscious lyrics in their music (see Chapter 5). Indeed, in her song, "20 Dollar" (2007), M.I.A. claims, "People judge me so hard cause I don't floss my titties out." That is, she does not display her breasts for the pleasure

of others. However, her successful hypersexualized female counterparts overshadow her. Up until this analysis, M.I.A. and Rapsody achieved nominal success on the American charts. Major labels support and promote rappers such as Nicki Minaj and Iggy Azalea, but these individuals may possess short shelf lives. In 2017, Iggy Azalea did not release a chart-topping song. Undoubtedly, over the next ten years, commercial female rappers will likely be younger, prettier, sexier, challenge male control, but remain a commodity for sale (see the discussion of Cardi B in the final chapter). As a result, the idea of a post-feminist rap world seems highly unlikely.

Arguably, a viable trajectory for women artists involves starting in rap but moving beyond the music industry to exert more control over their images. Queen Latifah provides the perfect example of someone who initially made her mark in rap music, but expanded into acting, starring in movies and musicals such as *Bessie* and *Chicago*.[92] She produced her syndicated television series, *The Queen Latifah Show*. She is a spokeswoman for CoverGirl cosmetics. Missy Eliot created her clothing line with Adidas sportswear, appeared in GAP commercials, and also signed with MAC Cosmetics. Current artists such as Nicki Minaj have broadened their horizons as well. Nicki has endorsed products such as Casio, Nokia Lumia, Pepsi, and Adidas gym shoes, among other items. She also possesses fragrance and clothing lines. Albeit still commodified, artists possess greater latitude in representations of their images. Imani Perry argues that black female rap artists may have a modicum of control over their lyrical output, but little of their portrayal in rap videos.[93] Video directors and producers dictate women rappers' looks, which may contradict the empowering messages in their songs. In the bigger picture, involvement in the rap industry may facilitate access to other outlets that allow individual women control through choice, but major labels undermine and stereotype women as a collective—even in their own words.

Notes

1. Haugen (2003).
2. Chepp (2015a) and Collins (2005).
3. White (2013), and Sharpley-Whiting (2007).
4. There is not one distinct type of feminism. There is "radical feminism," "liberal feminism," "black feminism," "Third Wave feminism," and "Marxist feminism," among many others. I highlight black feminism and

hip hop feminism in this chapter because they directly apply to women rappers.

5. Hochschild (1989) found that women perform the majority of housework in addition to working outside the home. Often, this places a strain on women and their relationships.
6. Second wave feminists included women of color, but their concerns continued to be overshadowed by white women. In the academic world, one of the more prominent second wave black feminists was Beverly Guy-Sheftall.
7. Springer (2002).
8. Collins (1990).
9. Collins (1990, p. 8).
10. Guy-Sheftall (1995, p. 14) quotes Clark: "I had a great feeling that Dr. King didn't think much of women either." Clark challenged King on his style of leadership joining the National Organization for Women (NOW).
11. Nash (2014, pp. 15–16).
12. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) spoke of a politics of respectability wherein black female upward mobility depended on exhibited behaviors aligned with white middle class belief systems. Hip hop feminists were not the first to make such claims. Older generation feminists such as Angela Davis (1998) argued that female blues singers challenged white and black middle class women's sensibilities.
13. Nash (2014, pp. 15–16). Espousing a different view, Peoples (2008, pp. 46–47) contends that there are some differences but considerable overlap between hip hop feminism, black feminism, and second wave black feminism. She writes that the critiques and investigations of hip hop feminism "should also be read as critical and fundamental challenges to, reformulations of, and concurrences with the theories and principles of second-and first-wave black feminists that serve to strengthen the entire black feminist agenda…"
14. Nash (2014). Durham et al. (2013, p. 724) argue because of the flaws of respectability politics it was a "somewhat useful strategy for improving the conditions for blacks."
15. Chepp (2015b) draws on third-wave black feminism to analyze women's lyrics in the late 1990s and 2000s. Interestingly, some older generation feminists saw blues music in the 1920s and 1930s as a site that allowed black women to freely express their sexuality, see singers Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith (Davis 1998).
16. However these and other female artists do not identify themselves as feminists (Keyes 2004; Rose 1994). Surprisingly, Lil' Kim does identify as a feminist (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007, p. xviii).
17. Charnas (2010, p. 410) asserts that Queen Latifah and female journalists such as dream hampton raised their voices in response to what they

believe was a culture that increasingly oppressed women, especially women of color.

18. Rose (1994) and Keyes (2004).
19. Rose (1994), Keyes (2004), Perry (2004), and Phillips et al. (2005).
20. Sharpley-Whiting (2007, p. xvi).
21. Here, I am referring to the pervasive representation of misogyny in songs and music videos. By the early 1990s, scantily-clad women appeared in most rap videos.
22. Sharpley-Whiting (2007).
23. Hunter (2011) and Sharpley-Whiting (2007).
24. Perry (2004), White (2013), and Rose (1994).
25. Collins (2005, p. 126).
26. Lindsey (2015, p. 56) suggests "black feminists [saw] anchoring a feminist praxis or theory in a cultural movement [rap] in which misogyny and sexism thrive [was] at best misguided and at worst, impossible."
27. Peoples (2008, p. 24).
28. Joan Morgan coined this term in her 1999 memoir, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. Hip hop scholars frequently cite this term as the central idea of hip hop feminism (White 2013; Chepp 2015a, b; Durham et al. 2013).
29. Durham et al. (2013, p. 721).
30. Durham et al. (2013).
31. Morgan (1999, p. 19).
32. Durham et al. (2013).
33. Rose (2008).
34. Gupta-Carlson (2010).
35. Haugen (2003) suggests that female gangsta rappers such as Lil' Kim used profanity and sexuality to create their own definitions of womanhood, an argument I take up in this chapter.
36. White (2013).
37. Chepp (2015a).
38. Chepp (2015b, p. 557) argues women like Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown view themselves as "sexual subjects and not 'whores' [who] disrupt binaristic discourses that associate outspoken female sexual desire with women's sexual availability…"
39. Skeggs (1993, p. 3) claims women rappers "talk back, talk Black to the colonialist civilizing system that attempt to contain the expression of women's sexuality."
40. Rose (1994).
41. Pough (2004, p. 184) quotes an interview with Kim stating her self-consciousness about her looks: "But, like Halle Berry, Salli Richardson, Stacey Dash, Jada Pinket Smith…I used to wish I looked like them motherfuckers!"

According to Pough, these are light-complected women; in effect, Kim wishes her skin tone was lighter. This is internalized racism, or a dislike of one's looks due to the devaluing of black features such as darker-skinned tones. In recent years, Kim has lightened her skin tone and had facial surgery.

42. This form of masculinity is one of many "alternative masculinities" as pointed out in Judith Halberstam's (1998) work, *Female Masculinity*. She argues that masculinity should not only be associated with male bodies; indeed, we have a greater sense of what masculinity entails by examining transgendered men, butch lesbians, and drag king performances, for example. My focus on black hegemonic female masculinity merges stereotypical notions of black manhood with stereotypical constructions of black femininity.
43. Perry (2004, p. 167).
44. Chepp (2015a, p. 220) writes that Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim perform an "authentic hip-hop masculinity" and a "black hyper-femininity" that challenges second wave white feminist discourses.
45. Chepp (2015a, b).
46. I argue white artists such as Iggy Azalea also draw on black female masculinity, understanding that they operate in a space where they must emulate black men and black women. I explore this point in greater detail in Chapter 5.
47. Sharpley-Whiting (2007, p. 152).
48. Whores are supposedly indecent, licentious women, whereas Madonna suggests a woman who is chaste and sexually pure.
49. Chepp (2015a) labels the racy and raunchy language women rappers articulate in their music as "irreverent."
50. Chepp (2015b) codes for similar themes in her work on women rappers: sexuality/desire, material success, violence, relationships with men and relationships with women.
51. Chepp (2015b) performed a content analysis on women rappers' lyrics from 1996 to 2003.
52. See the Appendix for a detailed breakdown of the methodology, including sample selection and performing a content analysis.
53. For a detailed discussion of how race frames and intersects with women's rap music see Chapter 5.
54. For example, M.I.A. only had one song on *Billboard* in 2008, "Paper Planes," however, I included her entire record. I did the same for Trina and Kreayshawn. Dej Loaf had several songs on the charts over a five-year period. Therefore, I included both of her records in my sample. New artist Azealia Banks' compact discs are part of the sample.
55. For example, Rapsody. Tink, a newcomer, did not have a compact disc at the time of this analysis.

56. Similarly to the analysis of men's lyrics, we perform line-by-line coding of every song. We code a "1" for the presence of a theme in a song and a "0" if it is not present.
57. Because of the small number of women artists, only one or two appear in a given year. There are four artists that appear on the charts or produced compact discs in 2012, but this is an outlier. Hence, it is misleading to break down the percentages by each year as I do for males (see Chapter 3). Therefore, I combine and present the results for the entire period of the sample.
58. This parallels men, although the percentages of misogyny and braggadocio are proportionately higher for males. See Table 3.1.
59. I do not measure the frequency of each theme in every song. I code based on the presence or absence of the category, not its rate of occurrence.
60. Mcleod (1999).
61. Artists such as Azealia Banks have criticized Iggy Azalea for her perceived appropriation of black culture, in this particular case appropriation of a black female rap artist aesthetic. I discuss this critique within a broader discussion of the role of race in rap music in Chapter 5.
62. I find a similar dynamic in the lyrics of women from 1992 to 2000 (Oware 2009).
63. Perry (2004).
64. See Oware (2009), Perry (2004), Haugen (2003), Rose (1994), and Keyes (2004).
65. Collins (2005, p. 130).
66. Lindsey (2015).
67. Another alternative, though not as likely, is record labels encouraging or forcing women to call themselves "bitches" in order to obtain contracts.
68. Rose (2008) identifies male artists who state that using such language is a form of entertainment. Perhaps some commercial female artists feel the same way.
69. Interestingly, male artists did not reference unfaithful female significant others in their songs, thus requiring no violent response. Indeed, in male hip hop narratives men are cheaters (as attested to by these female artists) and women experience infidelity.
70. In her analysis of women rappers, Chepp (2015b, p. 555) finds that artists such as Missy Elliot, who confronts a cheating male lover, "points to a shared experience among women who deal with unfaithful partners."
71. Davis (1998, p. 36).
72. In their analysis of women from earlier decades, Phillips, Reddick-Morgan, and Stephans (2005, p. 263) characterize such behavior as "retributive fantasies"—actions taken against males who physically or emotionally harm women.

73. Ibid.
74. Perry (2004, p. 162).
75. Oware (2009) and White (2013).
76. There are songs by women blues artists who criticize other women, however Davis (1998) writes that many more articulate notions of sisterhood between women.
77. Phillips et al. (2005) specifically point to Lauren Hill's "Doo Wop (That Thing)" song as an instance of female critique meant to empower women.
78. Chepp (2015b) finds 21 out of 169 songs in her sample of female rap artists depict "negative intra-gender relationships," or instances of violence, threats and expressions of distrust, suspicion, and jealousy among women.
79. Contrary to this finding, Chepp's (2015b) analysis of women rappers from 1996 to 2003 finds that artists such as Lil' Kim and Missy Elliott undermine myths of phallic power in a comedic manner with songs referring to "one minute" men.
80. Of course the phallus as a symbol of strength is a myth rooted in hegemonic constructions of masculinity.
81. Chepp (2015a, p. 557) argues that not only do women rappers play with gender identities, they also "challenge androcentric definitions of authenticity in rap music."
82. White (2013, p. 620).
83. Oware (2009).
84. Chepp (2015a).
85. In her work Chepp (2015b) argues that contemporary female rappers' songs illustrate what she calls "third wave black feminism."
86. Phillips et al. (2005) offer a different take regarding black female rappers. Based on their analysis of selected artists, they argue that black women lyricists engage in a politics of solidarity with black men. Black women rappers defend black males against a racist society in their songs.
87. They also mirror female blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s such as Bessie Smith and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey (see Davis 1998).
88. Chepp (2015b).
89. This parallels the recursive relationship between respectability and irreverence in women's lyrics (Chepp 2015a).
90. Rose (1994) and Keyes (2004).
91. Collins (1990).
92. Interestingly, Queen Latifah portrayed the blues singer Bessie Smith in a HBO special.
93. Perry (2004).

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