

How hip hop misogyny distorts our view of women

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Is the misogyny in hip hop and rap distorting how we see women?

Gangsta rap, a subgenre of hip hop, has birthed controversial contests between rappers commonly known as rap ‘beefs’ and ‘battles’. These have normalised, glorified, and even glamorised the abuse of women and girls.

Hip hop is a cultural movement that originated in the late 1970s. In its early days DJs like Kool Herc, one of the music genre’s pioneers, played hip hop to get people dancing. That’s how rap originated: with rhymes and party beats. But it has since become a breeding ground for disrespect and violence, particularly against women.

The lyrics in rap music became more explicit with the emergence of gangsta rap in the late 1980s. This subgenre focused on portraying the realities of street life, including themes of drug dealing, violence, and the exploitation of women. It is widely believed that the shift toward the hyper-sexualisation of women in hip hop culture began around this time.

Gangsta rap and diss tracks: normalising violence against women

One of the earliest gangsta rap songs to explicitly express the realities of that lifestyle was “6 ‘N the Mornin’” by Ice-T, in which he raps:

Posse to the corner where the fly girls chill
Threw action at some freaks until one bitch got ill
She started acting stupid, simply would not quit
Called us all punk puss*s, said we all weren’t sh!t
As we walked over to her, he continued to speak
So we beat the bitch down in the god*mn street.

These lyrics perpetuate violence against women, by glorifying and normalising physical assault as a response to perceived disrespect from a woman. The language used dehumanises and objectifies women, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and attitudes towards female autonomy and dignity.

Recently, we have seen rappers attack each other, a perfect example being the feud between Drake and Kendrick Lamar.

In the song 'Family Matters' Drake sings, 'your baby mama captions always screaming 'save me'' alleging that Kendrick is abusive, then proceeds to say, 'when you put your hands on your girl, is it self-defense 'cause she's bigger than you?' and 'they hired a crisis management team to clean up the fact that you beat your queen,' insinuating he is physically violent towards his wife.

While the claims by rapper Drake might be true or false, such remarks show the weaponisation of women's traumas, which unfortunately, are mostly perpetuated by the very same men.

Besides forcing survivors who are the subject of the rap battles to relive their traumas, these lyrics are also very detrimental to the audiences of these rappers: both the general public and, especially, those who are survivors of sexual violence. This is indicative of a subgenre that only uses women's traumas as battlegrounds for musical wins. These lyrics also validate the statistical estimates published by WHO indicating that globally, about [1 in 3 women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual violence](#) in their lifetime, most of which is intimate partner violence.

In retaliation to Drake, Lamar, in his diss track 'Not Like Us', raps: 'say Drake I hear you like them young' and proceeds to sing 'certified loverboy, certified pedophiles' and 'tryna strike a chord, and it's probably A-minor'.

These lyrics allude to Drake being intimate with minors and being attracted to young girls. Though allegations, this shows the extent to which rappers and sexual offenders are not held accountable for their actions and how paedophilia is not taken seriously.

While violence perpetrated by men against girls and women is the responsibility of men to deal with and not for women to change their own behavior, these lyrics insinuate otherwise. They encourage a victim-blaming culture; where the victims of sexual violence are often questioned, causing the conscious and unconscious re-affirmation of the perpetrators' acts.

Contempt for, dislike of, and ingrained prejudice against women and girls in rap music is very loud and evident; it spans from derogatory lyrics to common slurs like bitch, hoe, slut, and ratchet, which are thrown around casually. These slurs are also used to imply weakness and contempt. It is misogynistic that words that refer to women are also used to imply bad character or behaviour.

Female rappers and misogyny

Women are also responsible for perpetuating this narrative. A good example is when Nicki Minaj incessantly talked and posted about Megan Thee Stallion, releasing the diss track "Big Foot," that focused entirely on the Houston rapper after she dropped her song "Hiss".

Minaj claimed multiple times that Megan lied about being [shot in the foot by rapper Tory Lanez](#), saying she 'wanted a Rihanna moment so bad,' referring to Rihanna's experience of surviving domestic violence perpetrated by rapper and singer Chris Brown. Minaj went so far as to post photos of both her feet.



[Valerie Albert](#) / [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

Women are often assumed to be allies of other women in their struggle against violence, but when that isn't the case we have to hold these women accountable too.

Misogynistic lyrics perpetuate harmful stereotypes

There is continued negligence of the lived experience of women, especially when it is used to win 'rap battles' and gain views, streams and listens. The trauma is perpetuated and joked about, and no one in these 'battles' really cares about the state of women and girls. No comprehensive and substantial

investigations are done to grant justice to the victims of the alleged violence. Every day, there are new song uploads, premiers, and pre-saves and the cycle of violence continues.

With every comment that is not challenged, there is a reinforcement of the idea that treating a woman as lesser than or as a man's property is okay. The belief that a man is entitled to a woman's body is deepened.

We have seen rappers who have written songs that glorify and appreciate women. The very same artists who devalue and diminish women have sometimes written songs that uplift and appreciate the women and girls in their lives. What does this show? Is it far-fetched to conclude that these rappers are drenched in too much selective ignorance and privilege that they have the luxury to treat women however they please and get away with it?

During a 1993 protest against explicit rap lyrics outside the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, Rev. Calvin O. Butts said, "We're not against rap, we're not against rappers, but we are against those thugs who disgrace our community, our women who disgrace our culture, and who have absolutely nothing of redemptive value to offer, except the legacy of violence and sexual assault and foul language".

I agree that we should go back to the original purpose of the genre, which is to provide entertainment and expression. We need to understand that respect, dignity, and morality can coexist with hip hop, especially rap music. It doesn't always have to involve heavy slurs and insults. This is evident in many other genres that have originated from Black culture, such as rock, disco, and country music, which have achieved significant success without promoting violence against women or other vices.

As rap music celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, it's crucial to explore how the genre has both empowered and challenged the Black community. While rap has undeniably given voice to marginalised groups and brought important social issues to the forefront, it has also faced criticism for perpetuating harmful stereotypes and glorifying violence. Understanding the dual nature of rap's influence allows us to appreciate its cultural significance while holding space for a critical evaluation of its impact on society as a whole.