Gender and Sexuality Representations in Hip Hop

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1. Summary and rationale for assignment

When MTV aired in 1981, music videos took the stage in pop culture in a way that they had not prior to the channel’s inception. Since this time, music videos have become a staple in the music industry, and they provide the opportunity for record companies to promote new artists and songs. However, as a key part of pop culture, music videos, more specifically rap videos, have come under criticism, because they increasingly present often negative and controversial representations of women. Further, research shows youth learn about sexuality, gender roles, and relationship from them.

As rap music is an international medium that influences how Black women are viewed in the world, it is critical for us to investigate its lyrics and representations. How gender and sex are characterized is a contentious space in Hip Hop. However, the analyses of voice and representation are critical in any mass medium. With rap music historically dominated by men, what they say about and do with women is often studied and predominately couched as misogynistic. In the rare moments when women gain the stage, what women say and do is worthy of investigation and discussion.

This assignment is a critical examination of how rappers and consumers view gender and sexuality representations and messages in rap music, but it also forces students to understand how research paradigms shape what investigators uncover in their studies. What also makes this innovative is the classroom discussion is based on key readings, but students must come to classroom with the visual (videos or pictures) and audio to support or refute the messages and ideas within the readings. What happens is a not only a well-informed discussion, but a robust, symphonic experience where student presentations create what is a “classic battle” of visual and audio arguments based on actual rap images and sounds. With students’ lives entrenched in the Internet’s offerings, this assignment allows them to use digital resources to find texts that bring the ideas, concepts and discussions to life. It connects in a way that a traditional lecture cannot do.

The outcomes of the assignment are as follows:

1) Identify the research traditions (or paradigms) that framed a study and explain how it was beneficial,

2) To think critically of the ways in which gender, sexuality and race shape the foundation, results and conclusions of an article,

3) To lead a dynamic class discussion covering the main points of a reading,
4) To research and collect specific visual and audio texts that work to refute or substantiate findings, theories and/or conclusions within a study, and

5) To effectively present work orally and within a written scholarly format.

2. Assignment sheets and/or discussion prompts
Students should write a 5-7 page paper summarizing the reading. Depending on the number of students in the class, the professor can give each student a specific article or cluster articles based on appropriate topics and provide a group to students for review. With the former, students should not simply regurgitate the contents of the article. Instead, they should use it as the foundation to bring forth critical thoughts regarding race, gender and sexuality. Key linkages between milestones in rap, African American and women’s history, scholarly articles and pop culture should be included. With the latter, students should also be required to identify the commonalities among the articles, including findings, conclusions, methodologies and theories.

In addition to the paper, students should create a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation. The goal is to provide a brief summary of the readings and provide visual - video or pictorial - and audio representations within rap music or hip hop culture that refute or support key issues within the readings. For the rap songs, students should be encouraged to not just focus on the content of the lyrics, but the images within the videos. The goal is to provide the class with the opportunity to think critically along with the presenter by offering audio or visual texts that facilitate robust conversations and intriguing connections to findings, conclusions, and implications of the articles.

3. Full citations of readings


4. **Full citations and/or links to media used with assignment**

   Students can select from the list of videos below to prompt class discussions within their
presentations. Students can select videos that support or refute ideas, concepts, theories, conclusions or findings in the articles. It is not mandatory to select from the list. Students are encouraged to find other videos, pictures or audio files.

*WARNING: Some videos below have explicit lyrics and/or adult content. Students should have the option to excuse themselves from viewing any video or picture as well as viewing any photograph, and presenters should prompt the class, if any content has explicit lyrics and/or adult content.*

2pac - Dear Mama
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mb1ZvUDvLDY

2 Live Crew - Me So Horny
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6VTj7LhCtE

Azelia Banks - 212
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3Jv9fNPjgk

Jay-Z - Girls Girls Girls
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0yrm2el2bM

Juicy J - Bands A Maker Her Dance
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AI0gk2KJeho

Lauren Hill - Doo Wop (That Thang)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6QKqFPRZSA

Lil Jon & the Eastside Boyz - Get Low
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYH7_GzP4Tg

Lil Mama - Lip Gloss
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5ck6TJQ5Ow

Lupe Fiasco - Bitch Bad
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3m3t_PxiUI

Missy Eliot - We Run This
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2oIhJG7rXA

MC Lyte - I'm Not Having It
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2IZtD9gfzg

Nelly - Flap Your Wings
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_f8L6OYHZFo
Rah Digga - Imperial
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KdV6t78lHE

Salt-N-Pepa - Independent
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I8J7Q1ho-4

Salt-N-Pepa - Ain’t Nuthin’ But a She Thang
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=na3u8S9tF9o

Three 6 Mafia - Baby Mama
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tA-oNF17yJc

Trina - That's my attitude
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlKkTQ7zP6c

Queen Latifah - Unity
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8cHxydDb7o

Webbie ft. Lil Boosie and Lil Phat - Independent
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCUiGArhW2M

Yo Yo - You Can't Play With My Yo Yo
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZ-UEn11aDs

5. Reaction of students and teacher to assignment
Students appreciated the opportunity to see visual representations of the ideas and concepts within many of the articles. In addition, some artists within the scholarly articles are pioneers of rap and are not necessarily ones students know or see often. This assignment allows students to experience their work in a setting that facilitated in-depth conversations about the impact of their work when it was released and as it relates to current rap artists. Finally, after the first few presentations, students seemed challenged by the opportunity to bring forth their translations of the articles and the visual representations they deemed most appropriate.

6. Brief biography
Dr. Tia C. M. Tyree is the Interim Chair and Associate Professor at Howard University within the Department of Journalism. She is currently the Public Relations Sequence Coordinator for Department of Journalism, and she teaches several graduate and undergraduate courses, including Introduction to Public Relations; PR Writing II; PR Writing I; SR: Friends, Follower and Social Media; SR: Event Planning; CapComm Lab and Issues in Mass Communication Theory and Research. As an instructor, she primarily teaches students the history, theory, practices and issues of contemporary public relations; informs students about corporate communications, media and community relations, action and communication strategies; and teaches students how to create key public relations information products, including media advisories, press releases, promotional items, fact sheets and media packets. Her research interests include African American and female representations in the mass media, hip hop, rap,
reality television, film and social media. She has published articles in several journals, including *Women and Language, Howard Journal of Communications, Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* and *Journal of Black Studies*. She is also co-author of the upcoming book – The HBCU Experience.