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Sites of Women's Bodily and Sexual Empowerment

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1. Introduction

And nigga, down dawg
Nigga move back, take a seat, you were not involved
And hit the mute button
Let the vagina have a monologue
Mansplaining, I fold 'em like origami
What's a wave, baby? This a tsunami (Monáe, *Django* [2:23-2:36]).

Janelle Monáe's lyrics offer a powerful critique of the treatment women endure under patriarchal rule, calling for a feminist revolution that reclaims bodily autonomy and freedom. By bringing women's private parts into the conversation, Monáe underscores the deeply personal and sexual nature of this struggle, rendering it not just a political movement but a bodily one. This focus on the body is especially relevant in the context of ongoing societal challenges where women face persistent sexualization, objectification, and restrictions on their bodily and sexual autonomy.

In the United States, the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, thereby negating the federal constitutional right to an abortion (“*Roe v. Wade*”), demonstrates one of the latest severe infringements on women’s bodily agency. These incursions on women’s choice over their own bodies continue globally, such as Poland’ stringent limitations on abortion rights (Stawiska), forced sterilizations of Uighur women in China (Mahdawi), and the ongoing procedure of female genital mutilation in 30 countries despite legal prohibitions (Kimeu), to name just a few cases. Furthermore, in everyday life, women are constantly limited in their expression of bodily and sexual freedom, with discussions of female pleasure still being met with criticism or indignation (Litwack).

Interferences on the female body can also be observed within the music industry: female artists still face barriers and public backlash when expressing their sexual desires and experiences through their music. Doing so mostly results in a public controversy, as in the example of “WAP” (Cardi B, *Video*), a song by Cardi B and

Megan Thee Stallion, which contains highly explicit sexual lyrics and visuals. While the artists were indeed being celebrated for being so vocal about their desire (Holt), they were also criticized for being lewd and anti-feminist (Gara, Schlott). In my master's thesis, I will look at how Hip Hop¹ music videos advocate for Women's bodily and sexual empowerment, agency, as well as the celebration of female pleasure. I will further analyze these findings to determine the extent to which Hip Hop music videos by female artists and non-binary artists can function as a countermovement and protest against ongoing threats, assaults, and restrictions on women's bodies. This analysis will be conducted through the lens of Hip Hop feminism.

As in all spaces of life, the music industry is rife with sexism often helped along by contributions of male artists and masculinist traditions. A study by Bretthauer, Schindler-Zimmerman, and Banning showed that in 96% of the songs by male artists they analyzed, sexist themes could be detected, mainly "power over, objectification of, and violence against women" (29). Moreover, Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski confirmed that women were mostly objectified and used as attractive requisites in MTV music videos (941). A rather recent example of a sexist music video is Ye's (formerly known as Kanye West) "Famous" video that shows wax figures of the naked bodies of famous people, including the chests of female celebrities, such as pop artist Taylor Swift. Ye raps, "I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex / Why? / I made that bitch famous (Goddamn) / I made that bitch famous" (Kanye West [1:06-1:13]), without her consent to either use the slur "bitch" nor the depiction of her nude figure.

¹ Throughout this paper, "Hip Hop" will be capitalized and written without a hyphen. This stylistic choice is intended to emphasize its status as a cultural phenomenon, signifying its recognition as a proper noun. This spelling convention reflects the advocacy of individuals deeply embedded in Hip Hop culture (Iglesias and Harris 124-28). Therefore, only direct quotations will feature the hyphenated and/or uncapitalized form out of respect.

As the most popular genre in the US (Insanul), Hip Hop contains a lot of misogynistic contents (Khan 246) and even though black women were a vital part of the genre since its earliest movements, it is still male-dominated (Watkins and Emerson 159). However, women have not shied away from the Hip Hop genre and continue to pave the way for themselves and future generations. Numerous Hip Hop artists are using their music to address social injustices (Henry 143). Black women often subvert the sexist stereotypes imposed on them and use them as tools of empowerment (Watkins and Emerson 159); they fearlessly express their sexual desires and assert their bodily autonomy in their music. According to Henry, feminist Hip Hop artists realign this genre, a “male-dominated vehicle of expression”, to send their fellow black women messages of power and pride (147). Thus, I argue that they play a significant role in empowering girls and women to stand up for themselves and to assume full agency regarding their bodies and sexuality. Moreover, female Hip Hop artists critically engage with the controlling images (Collins 69) of the hypersexual Jezebel, hoochie, and Sapphire they were long subjected to and actively move against respectability politics by turning to ratchetness in their performances (Payne 27).

This thesis will answer how selected Hip Hop music videos lyrically, sonically, and visually act as sites of women’s sexual and bodily empowerment and how these findings may be promising for a countermovement and protest against restrictions on the female body that are laid upon women by society and law. I will go about this by first establishing a foundational framework on Hip Hop feminism (Morgan, Peoples, Keyes, Smith, Horsley, Henry, and so on), and define its key concepts which include intersectionality (Durham, Cooper, and Morris; Smith, Morgan), controlling images such as the Jezebel or the Sapphire (Collins, Jerald et al.), agency/empowerment (Bilge, Keyes), sexuality and body positivity (Cosimini, Keyes), and respectability politics vs. ratchetness (Durham, Cooper, and Morris; Payne). I will then undertake a

multimedia analysis of feminist Hip Hop songs and their respective music videos by applying a close reading of the lyrics, and a music video analysis (Roberts, Burns and Hawkins, Emerson, and so on) focusing on visuals and sounds. Visuals will include *mise-en-scène*, camera work, costuming, and performance, while sound comprises music, vocal performance, and background sound. My selected primary works are “Pussy Kills” by Rocky Rivera (2014), “WAP” by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion (2020), and “Water Slide” by Janelle Monáe (2023) as all three contain clear, strong, and powerful articulations of bodily and sexual agency.

By employing Hip Hop feminism, this thesis aims to explore how Hip Hop, which originally started out as a protest movement (Peoples 22-23), can be used to inspire and empower women and girls nowadays. Hip Hop feminism first appeared in 1999 as a field of Black feminism, coined by Joan Morgan (Horsley 103). Its primary objective was to highlight the inadequate representation of Black women in Hip Hop, which was made apparent through misogynistic lyrics and the rejection of Black female Hip Hop artists and producers (Horsley 103). Hip Hop feminism, since then, has attempted to “develop a radical self-politic of love, empowerment, gendered perspective and social consciousness for the historically underrepresented, hyper visualized, erased, and marginalized” (Horsley 103).

My thesis is that the articulation of bodily and sexual empowerment in these selected female Hip Hop music videos inspire women and young girls to stand up for their bodily and sexual autonomy and thus can contribute to creating a countermovement against the attacks on women’s bodies and desires by society and the state. With this thesis, I aim to build upon the substantial body of work established by Hip Hop feminists for decades, by focusing on how contemporary works by feminist Hip Hop artists can empower girls and women in the ongoing fight for bodily autonomy.

This thesis is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive overview of Hip Hop feminism, delving into its fundamental concepts, including intersectionality, controlling images, stereotypes, agency, empowerment, sexual and body positivity, and the dichotomy of respectability politics versus ratchetness. Section 3 outlines the methodology employed in this thesis, followed by a detailed analysis of the sonic, verbal, and visual elements of the chosen tracks. Section 4 presents the conclusion and addresses the limitations of this research.

2. “Baby dive in”² - Theory

This chapter aims to establish a comprehensive framework of Hip Hop feminism by exploring its various interconnected concepts. It begins with an overview of Hip Hop feminism, tracing its origins, and highlighting its potential for resistance and protest. The discussion then delves into key concepts relevant to this thesis, starting with intersectionality. Intersectionality is central to Hip Hop feminism as it allows for an analysis of complex, multiple identities within the genre. The chapter also examines Hip Hop feminism's capacity to critique controlling images and stereotypes, emphasizing agency and empowerment, as well as sexual and body positivity. Finally, it addresses feminist Hip Hop's critique of respectability politics, and outlines ratchetness. This theoretical discussion will lay the groundwork for a critical analysis of three feminist Hip Hop music videos, aiming to demonstrate the art form's potential for Women's sexual and bodily empowerment, and its protest against the severe restrictions placed on all bodies³ in our society except those of cis-het men.

2.1. “It's the power of the pussy”⁴ - Hip Hop Feminism

This master's thesis is theoretically grounded in Hip Hop feminism, an extension of Black feminism that emerged in 1999 when Joan Morgan called herself a Hip Hop feminist in her book *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks it Down* (Hobson and Bartlow 4). Scholars like Janell Hobson and R. Dianne Bartlow trace the intersection of Hip Hop and feminism back to the genre's emergence in 1970s New York City, highlighting women's significant roles despite the genre's predominantly masculinist orientation (4). Hip Hop feminism encompasses several dimensions: it functions as a musical practice, a form of activism, and a field of academic study.

² Lyric taken from “Water Slide” (Monáe [0:51-0:54]).

³ This includes female, non-binary, trans, and queer bodies.

⁴ Lyric taken from “Pussy Kills” (Rocky Rivera [0:29-0:31]).

As an academic field, Hip Hop feminism has been described as a fusion of Black feminist and Womanist thought with the cultural perspectives of Hip Hop⁵ (Horsley 103). Unlike conventional feminism, Hip Hop feminism centers on the experiences of Black women to tackle the various issues arising from the stereotypes and assumptions prevalent in a society characterized by racism, heteropatriarchy, and classism (Smith 233). According to Peoples, Hip Hop can serve as the contemporary and culturally resonant medium “through which hip-hop feminists can spread their message of critical analysis and empowerment” (25). This academic field of Hip Hop studies offers a lens through which to examine and engage with the culture, music, videos, and lyrics of Hip Hop, prompting reflections on themes such as gender, sexuality, class, bodies, and inclusivity (Horsley 104). Isoke suggests that properly executed Hip Hop feminism possesses the power to challenge and transform systems of power, social orders, and cultural customs, serving as an effective intersectional theoretical tool for understanding complex identities in Women’s Studies and other academic fields (qtd. in Durham 134). Influenced by Morgan and Collins, Durham perceives 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 a Hip Hop generation who is aware of the powerful political potential of culture to “challenge, resist, and mobilize” the community against exploitative structures (Durham qtd. in Durham, Cooper, and Morris 721).

In terms of activism, Hip Hop feminism tackles the sexist contents and glorification of violence still prevalent in mainstream Hip Hop (Hammouri-Davis). While rap has traditionally served as a medium for Black artists to challenge racism, feminist rappers

⁵ While Black feminism demonstrates a critical answer to the shortcomings of white mainstream feminism, adapting white feminist theories to the experiences of Black women (Hudson-Weems 25), womanism centers on African culture, addressing Black women’s challenges, aspirations, lives, and priorities (Hudson-Weems 17).

extend this resistance to include discussions on gender, thereby intensifying their critique of both issues (Roberts 141-42). Originally aimed at critiquing and responding to the underrepresentation and misinterpretation of Black women in Hip Hop, their exclusion from the genre, and the prevalent misogyny in rap lyrics, Hip Hop feminism seeks to challenge and break down established norms of gender and sexuality and the contradictions inherent in respectability politics within the genre (Horsley 103-104). Pough provides a definition for Hip Hop feminists, asserting that anyone opposing gendered exploitation in Hip Hop should be considered as one (80). Durham, Cooper, and Morris view Hip Hop feminism as an inclusive term encompassing all artistic and theoretical engagement "with girls and women in hip-hop culture and/or as part of the hip-hop generation" (721). Furthermore, Hip Hop feminism aspires to establish an empowering, self-governing space that provides a "gendered perspective and social consciousness for the historically underrepresented, hyper visualized, erased, and marginalized" (Horsley 103). These empowering, political, and resistant aspects of Hip Hop feminism constitute the primary focus of this thesis, to analyze whether the chosen music videos have a resistant and empowering potential.

As a musical practice, Black female artists within the Hip Hop genre are challenging the hegemonic position of male rappers by showcasing their lyrical skills and asserting their presence. Female MCs⁶ have fought for their rightful place in a genre dominated by men, successfully establishing themselves, by writing and producing their own work, and even forming their own labels (Keyes 265). Therefore, Hip Hop feminist music itself serves as a powerful form of resistance against patriarchal control. Through their efforts, they have created an environment from which they can effectively "deliver powerful messages from Black female and feminist perspectives" (Keyes 255). For

⁶ MC stands for "Master of Ceremony" and describes a rapper who improvises and/or writes their own texts ("MC").

example, many feminist Hip Hop artists have used their platforms to rap about safe-sex practices (Keyes 261). Thus, feminist Hip Hop music demonstrates a space where women and girls can get inspired and empowered to stand up for their bodily rights.

Having established a general understanding of Hip Hop feminism as an academic field, its role in activism, and its impact as a musical practice, it becomes clear that this framework proves to be the ideal lens for my analysis of Hip Hop music videos. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how music videos articulate themes of empowerment, resistance, and identity. The subsequent subsections will closely dissect and define the key components of this academic field and cultural movement relevant to this thesis.

2.2. “Birth a universe”⁷ - Intersectionality

Hip Hop feminism remains deeply committed to the intersectional methodologies advanced by earlier Black feminists (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 722). Originally introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality emerged as a response to the marginalization of women of color within both feminist and anti-racist scholarship, shedding light on the complexities of their experiences and struggles (Davis 68). Intersectionality examines the intricate interplay among gender, race, and various other categories of difference in personal life narratives, societal norms, institutional structures, and cultural beliefs, as well as the resulting power dynamics (Davis 68). It underscores how privilege and oppression intersect and exist simultaneously, emphasizing that addressing marginalization involves recognizing and deconstructing privilege, both within and across different groups. The dynamics of overprivilege and underprivilege are perpetuated by societal norms, philosophical beliefs, and structural disparities (May 23). Thus, intersectionality invites a nuanced understanding of power,

⁷ Lyric taken from “Pussy Kills” (Rocky Rivera [0:28-0:29]).

portraying it as multifaceted, operating concurrently across various contexts and levels. This underscores why Crenshaw emphasizes that individuals are invariably situated within matrices or networks of power, and everyone is socially embedded in multiple, intersecting ways (qtd. in May 23). In the forthcoming analysis, I aim to explore the intertwined power dynamics that my selected artists articulate, examining their portrayal and how the rappers subvert these dynamics to empower themselves and their listeners.

By using intersectionality as a fundamental analytical tool, Hip Hop feminism can be applied to examine intricate matters of gender and racial inequality, particularly in the context of popular culture (Smith 230). By adopting such a framework, it allows for the examination of Black cultural performance and emphasizes a feminist perspective within the Hip Hop genre as “critical, self-reflexive, and generative” (Smith 230). Durham, Cooper, and Morris stress the importance of placing women and girls of color at the forefront of Hip Hop feminist analyses. This emphasis becomes particularly significant in the context of critical gender approaches, which sometimes relegate Black women to a secondary position within the intersectional frameworks they have diligently developed (722). While I want to analyze the empowering potential of feminist Hip Hop music for girls and women of all colors, it is imperative to recognize and address this issue, ensuring the prevention of the marginalization of women and girls of color within the framework they themselves have actively established (Durham, Cooper and Morris 722). Therefore, I have chosen only Hip Hop tracks by PoC feminist artists. However, Hip Hop feminists are advocating (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 723), based on Morgan’s infamous words, for “a feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays” (59): Morgan thus advocates against clear-cut, divided feminisms suggesting that a more unified approach is necessary to achieve meaningful change (57-62). That means, Hip Hop feminists should reject simplistic and reductive views on what

constitutes correct or incorrect feminism, as well as who or what qualifies as feminist (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 723). Hip Hop feminists stress the importance of embracing contradictions for women in Hip Hop, such as their empowerment within a misogynist space, as neglecting to do so confines feminism to an academic pursuit that lacks political viability beyond the confines of academia (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 723).

Lastly, an aspect of intersectionality that I find particularly relevant to my thesis is that it is not a neutral concept, for it is deeply rooted in political and social interests, stemming from histories of political struggle, and dedicated to pursuing multifaceted forms of justice⁸ (May 28). By focusing on context and lived experiences, it unveils erasures in knowledge and identifies forms of resistance, be they individual or communal (May 28). Embracing this political vision entails acknowledging concurrent privilege and marginalization within diverse communities and reshaping the terms of justice and change. Rejecting limited definitions of identity and oppression and questioning common assumptions about domination, intersectional work confronts inequality and harm, striving for transformative social change (May 29). It recognizes that spaces alongside systems of power can be sites of knowledge and resistance (May 29). The aim of an intersectional analysis is to deconstruct oppressive systems from various angles and imagine a fairer society as well as unpacking and contesting the various workings of dominance, exposing how impartiality can mask partiality and erase experiences (May 32, 36). In the following analysis, I want to demonstrate how lyrics and visuals reveal and/or criticize intersecting systems of oppression women are subjected to and how the videos articulate intersectional critique and create a resistance movement to the status quo.

⁸ This following section is based on May (28-36).

2.3. “Your honor, I’m a freak bitch”⁹ - Controlling Images and Stereotypes

As mentioned above, Hip Hop feminism critically addresses misogyny and challenges stereotypical and misrepresentations of women within the genre. Unfortunately, stereotypes about women still prevail in Hip Hop¹⁰. Black women, especially, are affected by being subjected to so-called controlling images that misrepresent them greatly. Patricia Hill Collins coined this term for all negative images circulating about Black women, which are created to make racist, sexist, and class-based systematic oppression appear as “natural, normal, and inevitable” in our societies (69). Controlling images have been developed strategically to rationalize the unequal treatment of African American women within society and mitigate the perceived threat they posed to the established order when critiquing such conditions. A central aim of Black feminism is to contest and rebut controlling images (Collins 69). These stereotyped representations render Black women as an *Other* in US American society and their outsider status has often served as the reference point against which other groups have established their sense of normalcy (Collins 70).

The controlling images relevant for this thesis are the Jezebel, the hoochie, and the Sapphire, since they portray Black women as hypersexual, deviant, and/or aggressive, traits that are reflected in the three music videos under analysis. The Jezebel stereotype depicts Black women as promiscuous, depicting their sexuality as unrestrained, immoral, or hypersexual. This significantly curtails the sexual empowerment of Black women and contributes to justifying sexual assaults perpetrated against them (Smith 231). The Jezebel archetype and its modern day equivalent, the hoochie, are portrayed as embodying deviant female sexuality, often

⁹ Lyric taken from “WAP” (Cardi B, *Audio* [2:33-2:34]).

¹⁰ This subchapter is predominately based on Patricia Hill Collin’s work on controlling images (69-96).

depicted as “sexually aggressive” (Collins 81). The hoochie originated from the Jezebel stereotype, and there are various interpretations of the hoochie image in modern culture. (Collins 82). “[P]lain hoochies” describe all sexually dominant Black women who can be found in every social group. Then there is the stereotype of the “club hoochie” who wears revealing clothing and dances suggestively to entice wealthy men for a sexual fling. “[G]old-digging hoochies”, on the other hand, seek to attract rich partners for the purpose of establishing long-term relationships and financial support (Collins 82). Finally, there’s the “hoochie-mama,” often referred to as the “ghetto-hoochie”, which connects the image of a highly promiscuous woman and poverty, aimed at fulfilling men’s sexual desires (Collins 83). Since the Jezebel’s and the hoochie’s sexuality is seen as deviant, they hold a position between the binary of “normal” heterosexuality and “abnormal” homosexuality. Both, Black hoochies and Jezebels, are portrayed as being sexually insatiable and immoral, and thus they are often labeled as a “freak” (Collins 83). The Jezebel is stigmatized for her refusal to assume a passive role, prompting white men to assert control over Black female sexuality and fertility through the construction of this controlling image (Collins 84).

Another pertinent controlling image for the subsequent analysis is the Sapphire, which characterizes Black women as “overly aggressive, hostile, and nagging” (Warren-Gordon and McMillan 2). Moreover, the Sapphire is portrayed to be physically violent, able to take on any man (Windsor, Dunlap, and Golub 292). According to Dionne Stephens and Layli Philipps, the Sapphire is shown as bossy, and the one who “[wears] the pants”, thus this image also signals the subversion of traditional gender roles in Black relationships and families (40). This stereotype is especially emphasized in Black women’s interactions with Black men and can be found in the contemporary stereotype of the “angry black woman” (Warren-Gordon and McMillan 2). The Sapphire is seen as a threat to the status quo and current power dynamics because she is seen as

emasculating, particularly towards Black men (West 296). The Sapphire is outspoken, strong and resilient (Windsor, Dunlap, and Golub 294) but often not taken seriously, or even ridiculed. The exaggeration of Black women's anger in the Sapphire stereotype implies that their justified reaction and sentiment towards unjust treatment is either dangerous or simply comical (West 296). Thus, the distribution of this stereotype has the power to affect how Black women articulate and feel anger, which can lead to them suppressing anger in order to not seem intimidating (Jones Thomas, McCurtis Witherspoon, and Speight 437). However, according to Dionne Stephens and Layli Philipps, the reimagination of the Sapphire in Hip Hop culture as the "gangster bitch" is heralded by male Hip Hop artists, for her aggressiveness and willingness to fight violently, often in support of male rappers (27).

Research indicates that Black women who are consistently confronted with the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes through mass media may exhibit behaviors that reinforce perceptions of exaggerated sexuality and aggression, respectively, in their daily interactions (Jerald et al. 614). These stereotypes endanger their physical and emotional well-being (Jerald et al. 611-612). Thus, the contestation of such negative, controlling images is one of the central goals of Black feminist theorists (Collins 69). Female artists can emancipate themselves from the limitations these stereotypes create by challenging such oversimplified assumptions both through sound and visuals and by diversifying their identity (Smith 229). In my analysis, I intend to examine how these stereotypes and controlling images are applied, contested, and/or subverted in music videos and how they might be reclaimed for sexual and bodily empowerment.

2.4. “Splash, make a wave in it”¹¹ - Agency and Empowerment

The central goal of this thesis is to examine how Hip Hop can still be a space of bodily and sexual agency and empowerment despite its notoriously misogynistic reputation. Agency, a concept rooted in philosophy, is intricately tied to the notion of the rational, freely acting individual—the transcendental humanist subject (Bilge 12). Historically, specific groups such as women, non-whites, minors, and the mentally ill were deliberately omitted from this liberal depiction of agentic subjects (Bilge 12). Reframing agency from an intersectional perspective recognizes that individuals can possess agency even while experiencing systematic oppression in other aspects of their lives (May 46). According to Morgan, traditional feminism has placed such emphasis on portraying women as victims that it has overlooked women's agency and how they have successfully empowered themselves, leaving these aspects inadequately explored within feminist discourse (qtd. in Peoples 35). Black female Hip Hop artists utilize their performances as stages to challenge, dismantle, and reshape limiting conceptions of their identities. Hip Hop music serves as a tool with which Black female rappers pursue empowerment, exercise agency, and carve out spaces for themselves and their fellow women and girls (Keyes 265). According to Payne, Black women Hip Hop artists, like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B, are reshaping perceptions of Black womanhood by being outspoken, audacious, and authentic (28). Through their bold expressions, they are crafting empowering narratives within Hip Hop culture, redefining sexuality on their own terms, and amplifying these performances through social media channels (Payne 28).

¹¹ Lyric taken from “Water Slide” (Monáe [0:30-0:33]).

In Hip Hop feminist scholarship, attention has predominantly centered on misogynistic rap, with a focus on analyzing and critiquing male artists who oppress, sexualize, and objectify women (Peoples 28). As a result, the contributions of women in Hip Hop have often been relegated to the fringe of this academic field. In this thesis, I want to turn the spotlight on the agency displayed by female Hip Hop artists and how they actively challenge stereotypes and constraints within Hip Hop music, striving to reshape it in ways that are profitable and empowering for them. For this purpose, Hip Hop feminism, through its verbal expression and positive themes, empowers women to vocalize their resistance against the racist and sexist injustices perpetuated by mainstream Hip Hop (Henry 150).

A prominent strategy for female Hip Hop artists to empower themselves is through their use of lyrics, music, and performance to challenge negative portrayals in Hip Hop and reclaim their own stories (Keyes 265). Women are often pushed to the margins in medial discourse on Hip Hop, despite having been a part of the genre since its origin (Keyes 255). They have been involved majorly in rap culture, forming their own crews (for example Salt-N-Pepa) and their contributions to the scene have been equally impactful and energetic compared to their male counterparts (Pearlman qtd. in Keyes 255). As Black girls and women advocate for their inclusion in Hip Hop, they are simultaneously asserting control over the definition and reinterpretation of their identities and narratives. In doing so, they confront the scrutiny imposed on their bodies and attitudes, as well as the dichotomous categorization of Black womanhood into "good" and "bad" binaries (Payne 32). An example of this reclamation is female and non-binary Hip Hop artists' use of the slur "bitch" or "hoe": displaying a "bad bitch attitude" serves as a means of empowerment for many Hip Hop artists by using the term "bitch" in a positively connoted way for entertainment or to achieve catharsis. (Keyes 262). However, the reclaiming of such a derogatory term is seen as

controversial by other colleagues. Lauryn Hill, for example, expressed discomfort with this perspective and fully reject being labeled as “bitch” since such labels tarnish the images of young African American women (Hill qtd. in Keyes 262). Still other female rap artists adopt a moderate stance: They acknowledge that the term “bitch” can be problematic or empowering depending on the context, the user, and the recipient of the term (Keyes 262). In sum, many women in Hip Hop redefine the conventional meaning of “bitch,” transforming it from a description of a violent and angry woman who challenges male dominance (Penrice qtd. in Keyes 263) to a portrayal of an assertive woman who challenges patriarchal norms. In my analysis, I will closely dissect how female and non-binary artists use Hip Hop to advocate for agency and attain empowerment for themselves and their fellow women and girls.

2.5. “Yeah, you fucking with some wet ass pussy”¹² - Sexuality and Body Positivity

Within Hip Hop feminism, an essential focus revolves around embracing sexuality, fostering body positivity, challenging norms, and advocating for inclusive and diverse expressions and representations within the culture. To this day, female rappers get criticized and judged for freely expressing their sexuality (Hobson and Bartlow 8) and showing off their bodies and desires, whether in text, performance, or appearance. In this thesis, I aim to shift the focus of Hip Hop music video analysis featuring female and non-binary artists, from mere responses to male rappers and misogyny to a deeper exploration of women's sexual and body positivity as represented in the selected videos. Hip Hop has a strong influence on Black femininity; Payne, for example, stresses the significant role Hip Hop played in her own discovery of Black femininity,

¹² Lyric taken from “WAP” (Cardi B, *Audio* [0:32-0:35]).

dictating how she defined Blackness, performed her femininity, and practiced her sexuality (27).

However, female rappers and MCs are strongly reclaiming their sexuality, for example through the image of the Fly Girl. The term comes from the attribute “fly” which is used to characterize someone who wears stylish attire, has fashionable hairstyles and is adorned with jewelry and cosmetics (Keyes 259). Since the 1980s, female rappers such as Sha Rock, have claimed this image, by wearing short skirts, tight clothing, sequins, high-heels, and bold makeup (Keyes 259). The image of the Fly Girl in rap is significant because it accentuates features of Black women's bodies that are typically deemed undesirable by mainstream American beauty ideals (Keyes 260). Through their performances, Black feminist rappers, pioneered by Salt-N-Pepa, are deconstructing this dominant ideology by proudly showing off their full breasts, butts and thick thighs, all beauty ideals within the Black community. Moreover, they are seen as party girls but also as strong, independent women who assume the role of erotic agents rather than being objectified (Keyes 260). Black Fly Girls demonstrate a strong awareness of their erotic identities by crafting their own personae in appearance and performance. Keyes links this to Lawless’ presumption that they are actively “writing their own bodies” (Lawless 17) and play a significant role in their own eroticization (Keyes 260), which starkly contrasts with the sexualization they usually face from male rappers.

Throughout history, scientists have frequently characterized the Black female body as aberrant, often emphasizing African women's buttocks, vulvas, and clitorises (Cosimini 53). This perspective of the Black body as abnormal has labeled them as monstrous subjects, provoking both fear and fascination and fostering notions of Black individuals as hypersexual and animalistic. These racist portrayals perceive Black bodies as

excessively physical and thus in need of regulation and control (Cosimini 52). While rendering Black bodies as monstrous objectifies them, embracing this identity also serves as a potent form of resistance for Black women and girls, enabling them to embody various cultural anxieties (Cosimini 52). In the ongoing struggle for women's sexual and bodily autonomy amidst societal and state-imposed constraints, such as encroachments on reproductive rights, Hip Hop emerges as a potent and timely avenue for empowerment. In my thesis, I aim to analyze how women in Hip Hop use music videos to empower themselves by reclaiming their bodies and sexual identities through performance and lyrics. Yet, it is imperative not to focus solely on the sexuality and hypersexual performances of female Hip Hop artists, as this perpetuates the longstanding issue of viewing Black women only through a sexual lens, disregarding their intellect, humor, maternity, creativity, and other qualities (Lordi). Female Hip Hop artists embody a rich complexity of identities, thereby challenging negative biases against them (Lordi). Unfortunately, though, the enduring influence of respectability politics frequently hinders the efforts of Hip Hop feminism to articulate an unabashedly pro-sex stance (Durham, Cooper and Morris 724), limiting the empowerment female rappers seek to reclaim through personas like the Fly Girl.

2.6. "There's some whores in this house"¹³ - Respectability Politics vs. Ratchetness

Black Women's bodily and sexual autonomy is heavily restricted by respectability politics. The notion of a "Politics of respectability" was introduced by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (185) and encompasses a variety of tactics, such as "surveillance, control, and repression", primarily centered on ensuring that Black women embody qualities of morality, self-worth, virtue, and propriety (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 724).

¹³ Lyric taken from "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video* [0:15-0:16]).

These strategies were employed by forward-thinking Black women to advocate for racial advancement, women's rights, and to attain greater inclusion in the public domain (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 724). However, due to a strong reliance on propriety, respectability politics are oppressive and hinder Black and brown women and girls from freely acting out their sexuality and experiencing pleasure (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 725).

In contrast to the restrictive nature of respectability politics, ratchetness emerges as the extreme opposite. The term characterizes Black people, particularly women, as being outspoken, having a quick temper, and displaying promiscuous behavior (Love 539). It is frequently perceived negatively and aligns with stereotypes of the “loud Black girl” who is set apart and Othered from conventional notions of proper femininity (Payne 34). Due to the exaggerated focus on sexuality and misogyny prevalent in mainstream Hip Hop (Payne 33), Black women are often labeled as loud, aggressive, and temperamental, thus being characterized as “ratchet” (Payne 31-32). Moreover, Stallings states that ratchetness “is the performance of the failure to be respectable, uplifting, and a credit to the race” (136). However, women within Hip Hop are adeptly employing a ratchet persona to attain sexual liberation, showcasing their sexuality and bodies on their own terms (Payne 28). Hip Hop acts as an empowering tool for women to embrace their ratchetness, so Payne: it “allowed [her] to be unapologetically loud and ratchet, giving [her] space and voice to be loud and free to move/manipulate [her] body in ways that were not deemed respectable” (27). She further suggests that ratchetness redefines Black Women’s adolescence and adulthood by encouraging and teaching them to reject the domineering constraints of respectability (Payne 34). Cooper emphasizes that the adoption of ratchetness is both a rejection of respectability and an acknowledgement that respectability has fallen short in providing Black women with the access and opportunities it promised (122). Female rappers have reshaped

perceptions of ratchetness and respectability, embracing their outspoken, fiery, assertive, and sexually confident identities (Payne 35). Payne highlights one of my chosen artists, Cardi B, as an “anti-respectability icon” as she contests traditional notions of femininity through her style, specific cadence, and her performance of sexuality. Despite negative critique, Cardi B has continuously championed a ratchet persona, advocating for acceptance and challenging sexism in how women are perceived and expected to behave in the Hip Hop industry (Payne 35).

3. “Give me everything you got”¹⁴ – Methodology and Analysis

Many feminist Hip Hop music videos stand as powerful expressions of resistance, empowerment, and cultural critique within popular culture. Since feminist rap videos inherently demonstrate the interconnectedness and interdependence of oppressive systems, “they are always, already radical” (Roberts 142). Moreover, in feminist Hip Hop videos, “the female rappers are always vindicated” which generates a hopeful energy (Roberts 149). Thus, Hip Hop music videos serve as an ideal cultural text for examining themes of bodily autonomy, sexual empowerment, and liberation for women by dissecting and interpreting the nuanced portrayals of gender, identity, sexuality, and socio-political commentary embedded within these audiovisual texts. In this section, I begin by summarizing my selection process for my primary text samples, followed by an overview on the methodology I will use for my thesis. I will start by discussing how other scholars have conducted feminist hip-hop music video analysis, before outlining how I will incorporate these approaches into my own research. By embracing a Hip Hop feminist lens and employing a multimedia approach that intertwines close readings of lyrics and music video analysis of sound and visuals with feminist theoretical frameworks, this study endeavors to unveil the complexities and contradictions inherent in the representation of feminism, bodily and sexual empowerment, intersectional identities, as well as the protest potential within Hip Hop music videos.

3.1. “Word to the Queen”¹⁵ - Selection of Primary Works

To stay within the scope of a master’s thesis, I selected a small set of primary works, focusing on just three tracks. This allows for an in-depth analysis of the music video medium thoroughly examining its visual, verbal, and sonic aspects. Yet, the process of

¹⁴ Lyric taken from “WAP” (Cardi B, *Video* [0:38-0:40]).

¹⁵ Lyric taken from “Pussy Kills” (Rocky Rivera [0:54-0:56]).

selecting these videos was far from simple, given the vast number of empowering, feminist Hip Hop songs spanning five decades. While the influences of iconic figures like Lauryn Hill and Salt 'n' Pepa were palpable during my research, I was keen to incorporate more contemporary works to explore their protest potential against current societal and governmental constraints on female bodily expression. Narrowing it down to the past decade, however, posed its own challenges. The protest against societal restrictions manifests in myriad forms, reflecting the diverse spectrum of feminist empowerment in music, which I wanted to encompass with my selection process. Thus, I have chosen the videos according to subject matter. Firstly, "WAP" by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion was chosen for its unapologetic celebration of female sexuality and desire, presenting a bold statement of empowerment. Secondly, "Water Slide" by Janelle Monáe resonated for its poignant portrayal of female pleasure and joy, contributing meaningfully to discussions around sexual liberation in popular culture. Lastly, "Pussy Kills" by Rocky Rivera was included for its powerful and explicit articulation of resistance against restrictions imposed on women's bodies by the government and society. These selections, each representing a unique facet of feminist expression within the realm of Hip Hop, offer a nuanced exploration of empowerment, protest, and liberation in contemporary music. Moreover, I wanted to analyze songs by artists at differing levels of commercial success. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, with around 30.2M and 34.5M monthly Spotify listeners¹⁶ respectively, are two of the most successful and well-known female Hip Hop artists of our time. Their smashing single "WAP" is probably the most talked-about female Hip Hop song in recent years, garnering widespread acclaim from music critics for its articulation of sex positivity and counting far over a billion Spotify streams since its release in 2020, with the video being

¹⁶ The following Spotify and Youtube streaming numbers have been taken from the artists' Spotify pages and their official music videos on Youtube. The data was extracted on 15 August 2024.

viewed over 533M times on YouTube. Janelle Monáe¹⁷ is a rising artist, gaining attention through her music and her acting. She currently has 2.1M monthly Spotify listeners, with her song “Water Slide” amassing over 4.5M Spotify streams and 3.1M of YouTube video streams. Lastly, I chose a rather unknown musician, as I wanted to research the protest potential of smaller artists who do not have to adhere to the standards of bigger labels. Thus, I selected Rocky Rivera, a Brown rapper who is one of numerous smaller artists who dare to raise their voice explicitly against the restrictions put on women’s bodies by the US American state. Criticizing abortion bans openly in her protest anthem “Pussy Kills”, she currently has around 3K monthly Spotify listeners, with “Pussy Kills” counting over 200K Spotify streams and around 61K YouTube music video streams.

In conclusion, by selecting “WAP” by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, “Water Slide” by Janelle Monáe, and “Pussy Kills” by Rocky Rivera, this analysis offers a nuanced view of feminist expression in Hip Hop. Despite the limited scope of this thesis, these videos collectively illustrate the diverse ways in which female sexuality, empowerment, pleasure, agency, and resistance are articulated. The inclusion of artists of varying commercial success, from globally renowned artists to independent voices, highlights the broad impact feminist Hip Hop can have on female empowerment. In the next chapter, I will outline my approach to music video analysis by discussing the significance of music videos today and providing an overview of established methods.

3.2. Out in public, make a scene”¹⁸ - Music Video Analysis

Popular music videos have become an omnipresent cultural phenomenon, reaching us through various platforms and contexts. They wield significant influence in mediating

¹⁷ Since Janelle Monáe uses she/her pronouns as well as they/them pronouns and identifies as non-binary (D’Zurilla), I will use these pronouns interchangeably when analyzing their music.

¹⁸ Lyric taken from “WAP” (Cardi B, *Video* [1:06-1:07]).

music and musicians, shaping social, political, and cultural dynamics over the years (Burns and Hawkins 1). As mentioned before, women have been subject to sexist portrayals in contemporary music videos, depicted as “decorative, fetishistic, manipulative, fragile, or in need of rescuing” (Hobson and Bartlow 3). Many videos by male artists continue to depict women negatively, by including themes of objectifying, dominating, and violating them (Bretthauer, Schindler Zimmermann, and Banning 29). Hip Hop music videos are most often criticized for portraying women, regardless of race or ethnicity, in objectifying and exploitative ways (Emerson 117). Further, Turner’s research revealed that in music videos, Black women were more often depicted wearing revealing attire and portrayed as overly sexualized in contrast to their white counterparts (173). Hip Hop music videos thus demonstrate a contractionary place for Black women and girls, with some women expressing concerns about how Hip Hop music videos affect their perception of womanhood while simultaneously and paradoxically remaining captivated by Hip Hop culture and actively consuming its many offerings, such as music, fashion, and cultural values (Henry 142). In more recent years, scholars of Hip Hop Studies have been analyzing Hip Hop music videos through a diverse range of approaches. Durham proposes exploring the Hip Hop music video as a form of virtual exploitation akin to sex tourism, where rap music and its portrayal of Black sexuality act as prominent cultural exports from the United States (Durham qtd. in Peoples 46). With Hip Hop fully arriving in the mainstream, the Hip Hop video is no longer just contained within the genre, but the videos are getting spread around the globe, arriving in the public imaginary (Pough 83). While this is predominately referring to the misogynistic music videos of male rappers, it is vital to acknowledge that pro-sex music videos by feminist Hip Hop artists, while being empowering and reclaiming for women, also partake in the distribution of sexual images. However, Pough for example, does not suggest that women should abandon Hip Hop due to its sexist

contents, for value lies in critiquing these negative images (qtd. in Peoples 47), which is also done in feminist Hip Hop music videos by showing agency and sexual content from the women's point of view. Moreover, it is important to focus no longer only on what gets done to the women in the music videos but "adding *their* voices" and analyzing their agency and power within the music video (Pough 83). Therefore, I have chosen three music videos that put women and non-binary people in focus, highlighting their power and their unrestricted desires and wants. As an example of an agency focused approach, artist Ayanah Moor captured images of "video vixens," highly sexualized women in Hip Hop music videos, and assigned action-oriented words to these images (Peoples 10). This approach encourages viewers to perceive the female body not solely as a sexual object but as actively engaged and performing bodies. Moor thus strategically distills moments from music video narratives, enabling a feminist reevaluation of traditional portrayals of women (Peoples 10). This approach emphasizes women's significance in Hip Hop culture, within the broader context of popular culture and in today's society (Hobson and Bartlow 10). I will apply this technique in my analysis to center women and non-binary bodies in the music videos. However, I will predominately analyze full sequences to emphasize the importance of women's bodies in movement, with women's bodies, especially Black bodies continually being restricted and limited. The performance and movements in these music videos are in themselves an open protest against a society that seeks to actively constrain the freedom of women's movements.

Most analyses of Hip Hop music focus on the verbal aspect: the lyrics (Seth 427). While the lyrics also demonstrate a crucial aspect, especially regarding their potential as a tool for protest, every single component of a Hip Hop music video needs to be analyzed in order to effectively assess how the videos articulate female empowerment or a critique on the restrictions on women's bodily and sexual autonomy. Seth argues that

to understand Hip Hop music as a cultural movement, and not just reduce it to rap music, it is crucial to look at the “word, image, rhythm, sound, color, corporeal orature” (427). Viewing music exclusively as a verbal object disconnects Black voices from their origins, increasing the likelihood of recontextualization, re-embodiment, and appropriation (Weheliye 37). While Black artists may occasionally benefit from such appropriations through financial gain or increased status, these instances are generally quite problematic. Additionally, Lester Spence and various other academics also advocate for an approach that goes beyond mere verbal analysis. Broadening Hip Hop music analysis to include visual and sound elements would help reduce the overly individualistic, androcentric, and elitist biases often found in scholarly work. (Spence 565). Therefore, my analysis is based on the concept of intermediality according to Irina Rajewsky, with a particular focus on media combination. Media combination, also known as multimediality, involves the fusion and interplay of at least two media that are conventionally perceived as distinct, such as the combination of visuals and sound in an opera (Rajewsky 15). A music video exemplifies this multimedia format by combining music, performance, visuals, and text. Thus, I will conduct a close reading of the lyrics as well as an analysis of the sonic and visual elements of the three selected videos, to closely examine the music videos for common themes and patterns in sound, performance, mise-en-scene, camera work, costuming, theme/mood of the video, in addition to the lyrics. I thus want to focus on both implicit and explicit layers of meaning in this music videos, to study the protest and empowering potential of feminist Hip Hop music videos. In terms of my analytical process, I will follow the procedure Carol Vernallis suggests for students not versed in musical theory: I will first watch the video numerous times, then listen to just the sound, then only the visuals without sound, listen to just the sound, and lastly, I will closely read the lyrics (255). The following

subchapters provide a methodological background on each element of music videos, laying the groundwork for the subsequent analysis.

3.3. “Make me scream”¹⁹ - Sound

Hip Hop music is characterized by its distinctive sound, powerful and recurring beats, and energetic rap verses. In my examination of sound within Hip Hop, I draw heavily from the insights of Seth, Adams and Wallmark. Pyar Seth proposes that sound encompasses our daily surroundings and is thus intricately woven into our existence on this planet (427). He suggests that the lasting impression a piece of music leaves on you, the “vibe” it imparts, is what truly defines it — how it resonates with your emotions and experiences after listening (Seth 435). According to Kyle Adams, who has highlighted the challenges in analyzing Hip Hop, there is still no “universal analytical method” for Hip Hop music (121). Since this thesis is not in musicology, my analysis of the music will concentrate on the surface level. Therefore, I will examine how the sound creates expressive meaning through evocative themes and patterns and how it contributes to the protest potential of the whole music video. I will focus on identifying impactful sounds rather than going too deeply into the intricacies of the musical arrangement.

Adams argues that Hip Hop music, in contrast to other genres, is cyclical rather than goal oriented (119). Cyclical here means, that the music contains a foundational (drum) beat that consistently repeats every bar, remaining constant and thus quite monotonous, which is typical for a Hip Hop track (Adams 119, 132). Goal-oriented music in contrast works towards a strong finish, through applying crescendos and progressions, a progression meaning a sequence of chords (Adams 118, 132). Hip Hop music is built-on with “scratches, sampled sound, synthesizers” and so on, but

¹⁹ Lyric taken from “WAP” (Cardi B, *Audio* [0:51]).

those elements come infrequently and are expendable and thus, Hip Hop songs rarely include progressions (Adams 119). In terms of the music itself, Hip Hop's music has been entirely sampled from pre-existing recordings in the past, but this has given way to studio-produced sounds. Samples still have an important role in current Hip Hop (Adams 120), thus creating an intertextual element. Often, the music can take on a starkly dissimilar expressive state than the text provides, since Hip Hop lyrics are often written separately from the beat. Thus, imagining a Hip Hop track as a "unified artwork" can prove to be futile, as music and lyrics as well as articulation can all have entirely different expressive meanings (Adams 120). In my analysis, I will also closely dissect the songs for any disparities between those categories and separately define their expressive meanings to compare and contrast them with each other. Furthermore, I will establish the sonic components by focusing on any relevant repeating themes and patterns that evoke a feeling of empowerment in its listeners. Moreover, I will also analyze any possible background and ambient sounds for expressive meanings within the music video.

Vocally, Hip Hop music is characterized by rap, a rhymed, rhythmically spoken prose (Komaniecki 25). However, rappers are still using pitch to create expressive meanings (Adams 121) and Robert Komaniecki argues that pitch plays an important role in the structure and delivery of rap flows (25). Nowadays, rap can no longer be reduced only to its traditional image since numerous rap artists make strong use of melody such as in the sub-genre melodic Hip Hop/rap, which gathered more and more traction in recent years (Vance). The Recording Academy defines melodic rap as a blend of rap's rhythmic flow with melodic elements, underscored by a contemporary production (Aswad). This style entails a clear, prominent melody intertwined with rap cadence and often features influences, lyrics, or performance techniques from other genres such as R&B, rock, country, or electronic music (Aswad). The production may include traditional

rap components and/or integrate characteristics typical of these non-rap genres (Aswad). “Water Slide” by Janelle Monáe is an example of this specific style in my thesis. However, not only the voice and beat express meaning in a Hip Hop song. To get the full impact of a rap, it is vital to analyze and listen to the non-verbal aspects of a work such as breathing, whispering, voice creaks, pitch, articulation, and so on. For example, groans can convey a feeling of closeness and desire (Seth 428). Zachary Wallmark stresses the importance of analyzing and recognizing the merit of these non-verbal elements, instead of reducing expressive meaning solely to rhythm and poetry in the rap artist’s voice. The latter would eschew the potential of nonverbal elements as “semiotic forces of Hip Hop expression and politics” (Wallmark). Another important sound element is the addition of ad-libs. Ad-libs in general stand for improvised and unprepared additions to a musical piece (“Ad-lib”). In Hip Hop ad-libs demonstrate a tool that establishes the artist’s identity. Examples are words like ‘yeah’, ‘facts’, as well as moans, screams or groans (Staubus). Thus, in the following analysis of the sonic aspects of the chosen music videos, I will examine the music, the rapping, ad-libs as well as all non-verbal elements to assess its role in underlining themes of sexual and bodily empowerment, liberation, and joy, and the sound’s potential to contribute an articulation of protest and resistance.

Additionally, Vernallis emphasizes audiovisual synchronicity, which occurs when the visuals align with the ebbs and flows of the music or the theme conveyed by the lyrics (266). This synchronization enhances the impact of the music video by effectively blending auditory and visual elements (Vernallis 268). In other words, when the imagery harmonizes with the music or lyrics, it creates a more powerful and immersive experience for the viewer, amplifying the overall emotional and artistic impact of the piece.

3.3.1. Analysis of Sound

The soundscapes of the three selected music videos, "Pussy Kills," "Water Slide," and "WAP," demonstrate a compelling range of auditory elements succeeding in captivating the listener from the outset. "Pussy Kills" and "Water Slide" primarily rely on their musical and vocal components, using music and rap/singing to drive their narratives. In contrast, "WAP" stands out with its rich ambient sound, incorporating meaningful layers that enhance the overall audio-visual experience. This analysis explores how each video's unique auditory elements engage the audience and convey empowerment.

3.3.1.1. Beat

All three music videos are having a distinct and highly diverse beat that carries the song's narrative throughout the video. The beat in "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) is infectious and assertive, featuring a heavy bassline at its core that commands authority, and thereby underscores the track's articulation of confidence and sexual empowerment. Thus, the beat lays a powerful groundwork for the song. The sharp and precise drum patterns, create an animated rhythm that drives the song persistently forward, thus creating a sense of urgency, which reflects the assertive and bold lyrics. This minimalist production, centered primarily on bass and drums, highlights each element of the beat, allowing the intricate layers of percussion and bass to shine without overstimulating. By applying strategic shifts and breaks, it creates tension as well as release, thus keeping the listener engaged and adding a dynamic quality to the song. The breaks especially create anticipation and emphasize critical lyrical moments, thereby making the articulation of empowerment and sexual freedom even more pronounced. The recurring hooks are catchy and memorable, yet the simplicity of the track allows the powerful vocal performances to shine. Overall, the beat compliments the provocative

and bold tone of the song, by being simple and intense at the same time. All elements of the beat, as outlined above, manage to highlight themes of confidence, empowerment, and bold self-expression.

The beat in “Water Slide” (Monáe) is in stark contrast, as it offers a vibrancy and playfulness, highlighting the carefree and joyful themes of the track. At its basis, the beat is comprised of a smooth blend of electronic sounds, layered on top with crisp drum patterns that provide a strong but animated rhythm which adds an infectious, danceable vibe to the song underlining the theme of sexual joy. Throughout the song the beat is enhanced by various instrumental additions such as funky guitar riffs and infectious synths that add depth and texture. Like in “WAP”, the beat shifts, alternating between moments of intensity and more subdued passages. This, once again, grabs the listener’s attention and increases the track’s emotional significance. The playful beat and reggae-like sound perfectly matches Monáe’s light and steady vocal delivery and underscores the articulation of queer sexual joy.

Lastly, the beat of “Pussy Kills” (Rocky Rivera) offers a potent blend of hard-hitting, raw, and sultry Hip Hop sounds that underscore the track’s powerful contents. The rather gritty sound evokes assertiveness and thus aligns with the track’s premises of empowerment and resistance. Moreover, it conveys a feeling of being haunted and is dark in tone, adding to the witchy visuals. It has a deep, echoing bassline that gives the track a sense of depth and urgency and a hard-hitting drum pattern, that moves the song forward and adds a confrontational tone, once again underscoring Rocky Rivera’s critique on bodily restrictions and her breaking down of sexist stereotypes. Once again, the beat is effective but simple, therefore letting Rocky Rivera’s vocal performance shine. The beat’s rhythmic variations reflect the intensity and fervor of the lyrics, therefore strengthening the themes of empowerment and defiance. In summary,

the distinct and diverse beats in each of these music videos not only carry the narratives forward but also enhance and reflect the core themes of empowerment, joy, and defiance, making each track a powerful auditory experience.

3.3.1.2. Samples

Since the samples significantly influence the sound and music in these music videos, I chose to also analyze them in the sound section rather than exclusively in the lyrics section as they certainly relate to both aspects of the song. Rocky Rivera's track omits the use of a sample, contrasting sharply with "WAP" and "Water Slide", which heavily incorporate sampled elements. "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) features a sample of Frank Ski's 1992 track "Whores in This House". The repeated chant of "there's some whores in this house" adds a catchy and memorable hook that stays with listeners. Its bold and provocative nature aligns with the song's unabashedly explicit themes. The sample's rhythm and energetic delivery further enhances the overall energy of the track. While it mainly stays in the background of the music, it ties the overall track together, by being the sole focus of the song at the beginning [0:14-0:20] and at the end [3:35-4:03]. "Water Slide" (Monáe) utilizes a sample of Patra's 1993 track "Whining Skill". The vocal samples "all of dem girls whine" and "if you're up to [...] whine" are notably sped up, which adds to the song's carefree and playful vibe. The sample is woven skillfully throughout the song, often blending into the background of the beat while occasionally taking center stage. The breathy articulation of the word "whine" by both male and female voices, resembling a moan (for example at Monáe [1:17-1:18] and [2:06-2:07]), enhances the track's theme of sexual joy. Thus, the strategic use of samples in these music videos not only enhances their soundscapes but also reinforces their themes, blending seamlessly with both the beat and the lyrical content to create a cohesive and impactful sonic experience.

3.3.1.3. Vocal Performance

While the beats and samples lay a distinctive foundation for each track, the vocal performances offer an additional layer of sonic depth. Each artist's delivery, marked by individual tones, pitch variations, and the incorporation of harmonies, further differentiate the songs, thus enriching their individual narratives and emotional impact. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion boast powerful voices in “WAP” (Cardi B, *Video*), strongly following a traditional Hip Hop style and thereby matching the bold expression of sexual empowerment. Cardi B opens the song with a clear and forceful delivery that immediately catches the attention of the listener, conveys self-assuredness and commands authority. She emphasizes particularly provocative and empowering lyrics, thus ensuring that their content is heard loud and clear. Megan Thee Stallion brings a more rapid performance which adds intensity and follows the track’s relentless rhythm. Her articulation is very sharp and exact, which increases the track’s impact. Megan’s vocal delivery exudes confidence and sexual empowerment, which complements the themes of the song perfectly. Moreover, Cardi B and Megan incorporate various ad-libs into the track, adding layers of expressive meaning. Interspersed between their lines, exclamations such as “yeah!”, “woo!”, “ahhh!” (for example at [2:19-2:22]) are included that can be interpreted with a double meaning. On the one hand, these ad-libs reinforce the assertions made about their desires within the text, thus acting as affirmations. On the other hand, they contribute to the theme of sexual pleasure, clearly representing exclamations of sexual enjoyment and contentment, and thus serve successfully as placeholders for the more explicit words of the original lyrics. The inclusion of moaning and heavy breathing [0:28, 1:17, 1:20-1:21] by both artists further emphasizes this theme, leaving no ambiguity in the listener’s mind about their pleasure and desires. This vividly underscores the theme of sexual joy, reinforcing the track’s overarching narrative. Additionally, their articulation of words enhances this effect. The

text reads like an instruction manual on how to sexually please the rappers, as they assert their desires by clearly emphasizing what they want to do and have done to them during sexual intercourse (see chapter 3.4.1.1. for a detailed analysis of this aspect of the lyrics). The directives are underscored through the stressing of specific words through strong articulation and inflection. Both artists make it abundantly clear that they are in control in their sexual relations by emphasizing certain words that diminish the dominance of their male partners. An example of such an instant is the emphasis on *weak* in “make that pullout game weak” [0:25-0:27], which is also rapped in higher pitch to add another layer of importance. In conclusion, in “WAP,” Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion showcase powerful, assertive voices that deliver lyrics with clear self-assuredness and commanding authority. Their vocal styles, marked by individual tones, pitch variations, and expressive ad-libs, contribute to a vivid portrayal of sexual empowerment and pleasure, effectively reinforcing the song's overarching narrative.

Janelle Monáe’s vocal performance presents a notably lighter and more carefree approach to expressing sexual pleasure and joy in “Water Slide” (Monáe), creating a stark contrast to the hard-hitting rap style of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion’s joint performance. Monáe employs melodic rap and given the song's heavy genre blend of Hip Hop, R&B, and Reggae, the song features greater pitch variety and heavier use of melody compared to the other two tracks. Her vocal performance promotes sexual joy through its playful and melodic nature. By seamlessly moving between singing and rapping, Monáe's emotional expression is much stronger than the traditional rap style exemplified in “WAP” which is limited by its monotony in tone. Monáe conveys a range of emotions and sensations associated with sexual pleasure by varying her pitch throughout the track. Higher pitches express joy, excitement, and passion (see at [0:30-0:36]), while lower pitches add a more sensual and intimate quality to the track (see at [0:14-0:18]). This pitch range enhances the lyrical narrative of sexual liberation and joy.

Her light and playful delivery contributes significantly to promoting joy, creating an atmosphere of carefree pleasure, through lively intonations and rhythmic variations. The background harmonies sung by multiple women further enhance the impact of the track. They convey a sense of unity and togetherness, as multiple voices celebrate the same experience of sexual joy and pleasure. Through frequent repetition of Monáe's lyrics, they affirm her declarations of sexual joy. By adding these background vocals, Monáe invites the listener to partake in the experience, thereby creating an opportunity for communal enjoyment. As the song progresses, the background voices become louder, evoking a sense of climax, joy, and satisfaction (for example at [1:43, 2:21-2:26]). This build-up mirrors the song's thematic exploration of sexual consummation and pleasure. In contrast to the assertive rap styles of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, Janelle Monáe's vocal performance in "Water Slide" is a light, carefree expression of sexual pleasure and joy, reinforced by her melodic versatility and the communal harmony of background vocals celebrating collective experiences.

Lastly, "Pussy Kills" (Rocky Rivera) showcases a distinct vocal performance by Rocky Rivera which significantly enhances the themes of empowerment and resistance within the song. Her tone is authoritative and aggressive throughout the track, emphasizing her position of power and reinforcing the notion that she should not be underestimated. This bold yet collected delivery conveys the strength, resistance, and resilience that the track advocates for. Moreover, at numerous moments of the track, her voice carries an intensity that reflects the passion and urgency behind her lyrics [0:54-1:04]. Through her clear and powerful enunciation, Rocky Rivera's lyrics are imbued with a sense of indisputable authority, presenting them as incontrovertible truths and leaving little room for dissent. Her vocals are in perfect harmony with the beat, thus creating a cohesive sound that can symbolize unity and collective strength. This musical synergy mirrors the song's call for communal action against oppression and injustice. Similar to "Water

Slide," the sense of solidarity in "Pussy Kills" is amplified through the inclusion of background vocals. These additional vocal layers bolster the chorus, enhancing the song's witchy visuals and its dark, sultry beat, creating an almost incantatory effect [1:18-1:30]. By harmonizing "Here Pussy Pussy" alongside Rocky Rivera, the background vocals evoke a collective summoning of female power. These harmonies not only strengthen the song's feminist tenor but also intensify its mystical and commanding atmosphere, thus engaging the listener. To conclude, in "Pussy Kills," Rocky Rivera's authoritative vocal performance, paired with harmonized background vocals, amplifies the song's themes of empowerment and resistance, creating a compelling articulation of female strength and solidarity.

Overall, the vocal performances in "WAP" by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, Janelle Monáe's "Water Slide," and Rocky Rivera's "Pussy Kills" each contribute uniquely to their respective songs. From the assertive and commanding delivery in "WAP," to Janelle Monáe's melodic and carefree approach in "Water Slide," and Rocky Rivera's authoritative and defiant tone in "Pussy Kills," these performances enrich the songs' themes of sexual empowerment, joy, and resistance with their individual styles and expressions.

3.3.1.4. Ambient Sound

Lastly, the ambient sound in these music videos is instrumental in conveying the tracks' themes and reinforcing the overall impact of the visuals. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion notably include more background sounds than Janelle Monáe and Rocky Rivera. "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) begins with the sound of gates opening [0:00-0:01], serving as a symbolic introduction that signifies Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's unapologetic openness about their most intimate desires and pleasures throughout the track. In a cultural landscape where female sexuality often remains a taboo, both

artists' contribute to challenging societal norms by openly examining and asserting their sexual autonomy. This act not only confronts traditional taboos but also promotes a broader cultural dialogue on women's empowerment and sexual agency. Following the initial sound of gates opening, an interplay of various sounds unfolds. Calming birdsong is heard while a muted beat subtly begins and dogs bark in the distance [0:02-0:05]. This auditory arrangement represents the calm before the storm. It symbolizes the societal expectation for women to appear sexually closed-off, as suggested by the closed house. The barking of dogs can be read as a warning of impending events. This is followed by the sound of water splashing from a well [0:06-0:09], foreshadowing the song's central focus: the "wet-ass pussy." The water audibly cascades down the stairs, bursting out the house through a gap underneath the main door, which could symbolize women's refusal to remain silent about their desires and the breaking free from societal constraints that have long suppressed their sexual autonomy [0:10-0:13]. Thunder rolling in the background further amplifies the sense of impending chaos [0:06-0:12]. As the door opens, the sample "there's some whores in this house" begins to play and the beat drops, shattering the calm tone of the music video and starting their explicit discussion of their sexual desires [0:13]. Inside the house, the dominance and control exercised by the women are underscored by a variety of background sounds. Numerous animal sounds emphasize the women's power by being subdued, while both artists are prominently vocal. First, the hissing of numerous snakes [0:42] can be heard, accentuating the rappers' dominance over these wild creatures as they comfortably position themselves around and on the two women. This auditory imagery reinforces their control and command they hold in this room. The growling of tigers and jaguars further adds to this impact, being directed outwards rather than towards the rappers and the supporting women in the video, highlighting their strength and dominance [1:52, 1:59, 2:04]. Moreover, the music and rap pause entirely, leaving only

the sound of Kylie Jenner's (a supporting actress) heels clicking on the floor [1:40-2:00]. This sound, typically associated with femininity, commands the center of the scene, perfectly showcasing women's power and authority in the video. The sound is briefly interrupted by the hissing of snakes [1:58] and a low warning growl of a jaguar [2:00], both occurring before and while Kylie opens the door back to Cardi B, who is surrounded by jaguars. The beat then returns in full force, now accompanied by the growl of a jaguar, symbolizing that the main power is held by Cardi B, even as she allows other women to take the spotlight [2:04]. Finally, there are also moments of audio-verbal synchronicity in this music video. First, when Cardi B raps about "I want you to park that big Mack truck right in this little garage" [1:00-1:04] the sound of a loud honk of a horn can be heard [1:03], which can also underline the ferocity with which Cardi B wants to be pleased. Megan Thee Stallion's line "Never lost a fight, but I'm lookin' for a beatin'" [2:38-2:40], a demand to get spanked, is followed immediately with the sound of a fighting bell ringing, a signal of the end of a round in boxing, indicating that the man followed suit and satisfied her [2:39-2:41]. This strategic use of ambient sounds in "WAP" not only enhances the themes and visuals but also serves to emphasize Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's assertion of sexual autonomy and female empowerment. From the symbolic gates opening to the animal sounds and the synchronized audio cues that align with the lyrics, these sounds reinforce the artists' bold declaration of sexual control and dominance.

Janelle Monáe forgoes the inclusion of ambient sounds almost entirely in "Water Slide" (Monáe). However, the two sounds she does incorporate have a strong impact on the song's narrative. They both appear at the end, effectively tying together the playful vibe of the song. The first is the sound of water splashing as a man jumps into the pool and swims towards Monáe [2:37-2:41]. This sound can be interpreted in multiple ways. Firstly, it suggests that the man has accepted Monáe's invitation, "Baby, dive in / 'Cause

the water feels fine,” to sexually please her. Additionally, the water splashing after several sexually charged metaphors involving a water slide can be seen as symbolizing the climax or even the act of female ejaculation, underlined by the quick repetition of the word “stroke.” Lastly, it highlights the joyful approach to sex, as jumping into water at a pool party is usually done for fun. The song then ends with the sound of a film reel reaching its end [2:43-2:45], a sound that historically indicated it was time to rewind the tape to play it again. This closing sound can signify that Janelle Monáe desires to repeat the experience, either because she is not yet satisfied or because she is so pleased that she wants to do it again. This clever use of ambient sounds not only reinforces the song's themes but also adds a layer of depth to Monáe's playful and empowered narrative.

Similar to “Water Slide,” “Pussy Kills” (Rocky Rivera) features ambient sounds primarily toward the end, enhancing the witch coven aesthetic of the music video. The sounds of candle flames flickering [2:55] and smoke evaporating [3:09] can symbolize a multitude of meanings. Firstly, akin to the animal sounds in “WAP,” they can be interpreted as warning signs, indicating danger or the presence of something powerful and potentially destructive. This aligns with the song's themes of challenging male dominance and highlighting the potent impact of female empowerment. The fire symbolizes rebellion against the status quo, representing the spark that ignites a movement. Additionally, the sound of Rocky Rivera blowing out a flame brings the music to a halt, effectively ending the music video [3:22]. This act serves as a modern-day mic drop, a powerful gesture originating in hip-hop and stand-up comedy (Wickman), typically used at the end of a performance to signify something indisputable or unsurpassable (“mic drop”). By concluding her performance this way, Rocky Rivera underscores the arguments made throughout the music video and signifies that the time for talk is over, issuing a call to action. The use of ambient sounds in “Pussy Kills”

by Rocky Rivera not only reinforces the witch coven aesthetic but also symbolizes danger, rebellion, and a powerful call to action, effectively highlighting the song's themes of female empowerment and resistance.

The strategic use of ambient sounds in "WAP," "Water Slide," and "Pussy Kills" enhances the thematic complexity and visual impact of each track. "WAP" by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion employs a vast array of background sounds to emphasize the artists' assertion of sexual autonomy and power. Janelle Monáe's "Water Slide" uses minimal but impactful ambient sounds to reinforce the song's playful and joyous exploration of sexual pleasure. Rocky Rivera's "Pussy Kills" incorporates background noises symbolizing rebellion and danger, and culminating in a powerful mic drop moment that underscores the song's call to action. Together, these ambient elements not only complement the lyrical and visual narratives but also amplify the overarching themes of empowerment, pleasure, and resistance.

3.4. "Put my pussy in a rhyme"²⁰ - Lyrics

Song lyrics, particularly those with feminist themes, offer an excellent avenue for in-depth analysis of their expressive meaning. Varum et al. stress that popular song lyrics can be applied "as an index of culture's shifting norms, affect, and values" (1). Hip Hop has started as an expression of resistance and defiance, offering critiques on dominant views (Lavoulle 21). Scholars suggest that women's rap lyrics are part of a broader tradition in Black feminist music, where issues of race, gender, and sexuality are explored in ways that empower and affirm identity (Chepp 545). Crystal Lavoulle argues non-misogynistic Hip Hop lyrics frequently aim to inspire social change and self-reflection, often incorporating a political component (Lavoulle 24). Rappers often process and share their lived experiences in their lyrics, openly addressing the

²⁰ Lyric taken from "Pussy Kills" by Rocky Rivera

marginalization they face in their communities and personal lives (Baquero 20). Thus, Hip Hop lyrics prove to be an ideal medium for analyzing protest potential. In their texts, female rappers create diverse depictions of womanhood, expand the perspectives of Black women in the Hip Hop generation, and amplify the voices of Black feminists (Henry 148). They confront negative and sexist stereotypes in mainstream Hip Hop, and “add a critical voice to issues often glorified in patriarchal Hip Hop” (Henry 148).

In terms of bodily agency and sexual liberation, feminist Hip Hop lyrics emerge as a salient avenue for analysis, for female rappers express and assert female empowerment and independence explicitly through their lyrics (Roberts 142). By rapping about their bodies, women challenge the widespread objectification and violation against women in both rap and popular culture through their lyrics (Baquero 146). Moreover, Female Hip Hop artists do not deter from aggressively asserting their sexual prowess and desirability (Eberhardt 24), often positioning themselves as the empowered subject in control of their own sexuality and pleasure (Esposito and Love 27). By using sexually charged lyrics, female rappers break “society’s expectation of women as passive objects of men’s desire” (Esposito and Love 28). Therefore, through their lyrical narratives, feminist rappers assert their discontent with societal and legal constraints imposed upon their bodies and sexualities, thus engaging in a form of protest and resistance.

Moreover, these artists use their verses to articulate their sexual desires (Eberhardt 24) and Esposito and Love argue that such explicit articulations of sexual desires and experiences can act as a sex education, especially since sex education in school often still teaches abstinence to young women (28) and omits discussions on female sexual pleasure (31). Eberhardt suggests closely analyzing active verbs in lyrics to assess feminist agency and autonomy within Hip Hop (29). Additionally, analyzing the

imperatives — in lyrics where artists command or express desires — can highlight themes of sexual and bodily agency (Eberhardt 30). Given the historical struggles of women in Hip Hop to assert their presence in a male-dominated industry, Perry notes the appropriation of "the language of violence, power, and subversive tricksterism" as a means of reclaiming power within this misogynistic environment (156).

For my analysis, I will conduct a close reading of the lyrics with a specific emphasis on themes of sexual and bodily liberation, empowerment, joy, and protest. Active verbs, imperatives, and directives will be particularly scrutinized, as they hold potential for conveying resistance and protest.

3.4.1. Analysis of Lyrics

Analyzing the lyrics of "WAP," "Pussy Kills," and "Water Slide" highlights themes of sexual empowerment, pleasure, agency, and societal norms. These tracks, though distinct in their musical styles and vocal delivery, share a common thread of confronting traditional taboos and stereotypes surrounding female sexuality. Through explicit expressions, clever wordplay, and powerful imagery, each song offers a distinct perspective on women's empowerment and the celebration of sexual and bodily freedom. This analysis examines the textual nuances of each track, exploring the ways in which the artists articulate and amplify the narratives around female desire, joy, and power verbally.

3.4.1.1. "WAP"

Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*; Cardi B, *Audio*) is a bold and unapologetic anthem that shuns euphemisms in favor of explicit and recurrent imagery to express their sexual desires. This song's title acronym, "WAP," stands for "Wet-Ass Pussy," setting the tone from the start. However, in the music video (Cardi B,

Video), they had to use the lyrics of the clean/PG-13 version²¹, turning “wet-ass pussy” into “wet and gushy” [0:35], a modification Cardi B openly despises (Ivie). Other censored lyric changes include “cookie” [2:13] for “pussy,” “ah” [2:43] for “ass,” and “dealing” [0:32] for “fuckin’”. This censorship majorly diminishes the empowerment women could derive from the original version. Therefore, in this analysis on the lyrics of “WAP”, the video’s lyrics are often contrasted with the original ones where it is relevant to capture the song’s full potential. Despite the clean edits, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion still effectively emphasize and imply the original imagery of the “wet-ass pussy” throughout the song. Cardi B begins by rapping, “Bring a bucket and a mop for this wet and gushy” [0:35-0:38], highlighting her immense and almost insatiable lust by alluding to female ejaculation. The wetness is further accentuated by her invitation to her partner to “come take a dive” [0:55-0:56] signaling her arousal and readiness for oral sex or penetration. Her eagerness is also shown through the lyric “make it stream” [1:04] referring to the natural lubrication of a woman during sex, emphasizing her intense sexual desire, which is even more accentuated in the original lyrics “make it cream” [Cardi B, *Audio* 0:50]. Cardi B also namedrops a brand, Dasani water [0:27], to further stress her wetness. However, the point is driven home by the line “Macaroni in a pot, that’s some wet and gushy” [3:20-3:23] in the final verse. This is assumed to be an intertextual reference to a viral Vine from 2014, where a young man comments on his mom’s stirring of mac and cheese with, “That’s what good pussy sounds like. Lmao,” with his mom reacting in shock (Whyte). Cardi B has referenced this image before; on “Drip” she raps, “Go down, eat it up, don’t drown / Mac n’ cheese in the bowl, how it sound? / I got that gushy” [1:03-1:08]. The artists achieve multiple effects with this sensory imagery. First, they use a trivial sound that every American can recall

²¹ In this section of the thesis, the lyrics are taken from the official music video, unless explicitly stated otherwise by referring to the original/explicit version [Cardi B, *Audio*].

describing the state of her vulva. Secondly, by describing her vagina as a meal, she invites her partner to “eat her out” — which means performing oral sex on her — and enjoy it. Moreover, through the callback to this Vine that is deeply rooted in pop culture, they evoke the same shock and provocation that the man in the Vine elicited from his mother. Overall, "WAP" incorporates these explicit imagery and cultural references to create a powerful expression of sexual freedom and an unapologetic articulation of female desire.

Furthermore, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP" is an ode to sex from the female gaze, centering on themes of sexual empowerment and female agency. This exploration of women's liberation, achieved through their lyrics and imagery, challenges societal norms, redefines female desire, and celebrates the unapologetic expression of sexuality. The themes of sexual empowerment and sex positivity are firmly established as Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion both play with the Jezebel and hoochie stereotypes and fully embrace a ratchet persona, through the reclamation of derogatory words traditionally aimed at sexually assertive women. By describing themselves as "whores" and "freaks," Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion are reclaiming and redefining these terms within a feminist narrative. The song starts with a sample of Frank Ski repeating the lyrics "there's some whores in this house" [0:13-0:19]. The artists appropriate this pejorative term, turning it into something they embrace and own with pride. Originally meant to degrade women, this phrase is redefined in the song as a source of empowerment and strength. Through this repetition, the insult is transformed into a declaration of their sexual agency and confidence, effectively challenging and reshaping societal perceptions. Both artists also challenge the Jezebel stereotype in "WAP," emphasizing aspects like an animalistic and insatiable libido, while rejecting misogynistic connotations such as slut-shaming. They proudly take on the label of "freak," with Cardi B proclaiming, "I said certified freak, seven days a week"

[0:20-0:22] and Megan Thee Stallion asserting, "Your honor, I'm a freak, handcuffs, leashes" [2:32-2:34]. Through affirming epithets, Cardi claiming certification and Megan invoking legal authority, they reinforce their statements with confidence and conviction. They portray themselves as sexually insatiable and reveling in pleasure, thus underscoring the theme of sex positivity and rejecting respectability politics. Cardi B's line underscores her fearless confidence and ratchet sexual prowess. Describing herself as "certified," she asserts her undeniable sexual abilities. The phrase "seven days a week" reinforces the notion of her unwavering sexual appetite, playing into the Jezebel stereotype of being sexually insatiable. Cardi B embraces her sexuality without hesitation, embodying a ratchet identity that aligns with the song's themes of sexual empowerment and liberation. Through the line "Your honor, I'm a freak," Megan is playfully and provocatively asserting her confidence and sexual power with the use of legal terminology. The lyrics suggest that she proudly owns her sexual identity and does not shy away from expressing herself boldly and without shame. In the explicit version she adds the word "bitch" ("Your honor, I'm a freak bitch" [Cardi B, *Audio* 1:55]) and by reclaiming this derogatory term as a badge of empowerment, she turns an insult into a powerful statement of self-assurance and autonomy. Overall, this line acts as a declaration of her sexual freedom and agency, positioning herself as someone who is in control of her own desires and identity. Ultimately, "WAP" serves as a fierce proclamation of sexual autonomy and ratchet empowerment, with Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion breaking stereotypes, redefining derogatory terms, and leaning into ratchetness to unapologetically celebrate their sexual confidence and liberation.

Another expressive element of "WAP" is the excessive use of imperatives throughout the track. As aforementioned, these lyrics read like a play-by-play instruction manual on how to sexually please them, with both artists being very explicit and open about what they want and need. Through incorporating imperatives, Cardi B and Megan Thee

Stallion assert their dominance and maintain control over their sexual encounters throughout "WAP", thereby emasculating men in the process. In the explicit version they leave nothing to interpretation, explicitly detailing their sexual preferences and setting clear boundaries. In the clean version, some of the more provocative sexual acts and desires are just alluded to via sexually connotated ad-libs (see chapter 3.3.1.3. for a detailed analysis). Megan's opening lines exemplify this assertiveness: "Gobble me, swallow me, drip down the side of me (Yeah) / Quick, jump out 'fore you let it get inside of me (Yeah)" [1:11-1:15]. Here, Megan employs intense verbs like "gobble" and "swallow" to vividly describe oral sex, portraying an eager and insatiable sexual appetite. Megan's imagery not only emphasizes desire but also control. While she expresses a willingness for her partner to consume her arousal ("swallow me"), she limits the intimacy by only allowing the semen to "drip down the side" [1:11-1:12] and insisting on withdrawal before ejaculation. This establishes clear boundaries and asserts her authority in the sexual encounter. The imperatives she uses, coupled with the rapid flow of her rap, convey a sense of urgency and command. By instructing their partners on what to do and how to please them, both artists reinforce their agency not only in the bedroom but also in broader social contexts. Thus, they play into the Jezebel stereotype, by refusing to take on a passive role in sexual intercourse. Moreover, beyond their personal desires, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion use imperatives to impart advice to women, encouraging them to know their worth and dictate how they are treated by men, for example "Talk your sh-, bite your lip / Ask for a car while you ride that (ah) / You really ain't never gotta (mwah) him for a thing" (Cardi B, *Video* [1:19-1:24]). The explicit version once again offers a more explicit direction: "Talk your *shit*, bite your lip / Ask for a car while you ride that *dick* / You really ain't never gotta *fuck* him for a thang" (Cardi B, *Audio* [1:04-1:10]; emphasis added). Thus, "WAP" serves as a bold declaration of sexual autonomy and female empowerment, where Cardi B and

Megan Thee Stallion assert control through explicit instruction and commanding language, confronting traditional gender roles and societal expectations and inspiring fellow women to do the same.

A further potent aspect of empowerment is their defiance of societal taboos. They explore taboo topics such as kinks, which are defined as “a sexual desire or practice regarded as unusual or unconventional” (“Kink”) by openly sharing their own preferences, thereby asserting the diversity of their sexual tastes. Generally, society often imposes strict norms on women’s sexuality, expecting them to exhibit more modesty and restraint in expressing their sexual desires than men. This discrepancy creates a double standard that often results in the stigmatization and shaming of women who openly discuss or participate in kinks. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion both ignore this possible consequences, opening up a dialogue on kinks, thus playing into the Jezebel and hoochie stereotypes that portray women as sexually deviant.. Cardi B raps about roleplay (“Let’s roleplay, I’ll wear a disguise” [0:58-1:00]), bondage (“Tie me up like I’m a surprise” [0:56-0:58]), exhibitionism (“Make me dream, make it stream / Out in public, make a scene” [1:04-1:07]) and in the explicit version even choking and gagging (“I wanna gag, I wanna choke” [Audio, 0:50-0:53]), which in the video is alluded to through the visual of a snake stuck in her throat [2:21]. Megan shows her penchant for bondage (“Your honor, I’m a freak, handcuffs, leashes” [2:33-2:34]), roleplay (“Switch my wig, make him feel like he cheatin” [2:34-2:36]), dominating her sexual partner (“Put him on his knees, give him somethin’ to believe in” [2:36-38]), and pain play (“Never lost a fight, but I’m lookin’ for a beatin’ (Ah)” [2:38-2:40], “You can’t hurt my feelings, but I like pain” [2:48-2:50]). Furthermore, she raps about anilingus (“If he ate my (ah), he’s a bottom feeder” [2:41-2:43]), an unconventional sexual style, especially for women. In conclusion, by publicly stating their kinks and sexual preferences, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion challenge outdated societal norms and

gender roles. By asserting their sexual desires, they help dismantle the shame associated with female sexual expression. Their lyrics empower women to own and articulate their sexual identities unapologetically. In doing so, they advocate for greater respect and equality in sexual relationships.

Lastly, both artists further assert their empowerment through their confidence and self-assuredness in their sexual prowess. They are sure that they are able to please a man, but they do not use it solely for the pleasure and satisfaction of a man but rather for what they can gain from it, which is respect, financial stability, and their own pleasure. Moreover, they are using the language of power and violence to subvert the misogyny in Hip Hop texts. By defining and emphasizing standards for men's sexual performance and physical stature, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion flip the script on societal expectations. This mirrors the longstanding scrutiny and objectification that women have endured. Their lyrics place them in a position of power, where they assert their freedom to choose partners who meet their criteria, such as desiring a partner with a large penis ("Extra large and extra hard" [0:44-0:45], "Not a garter snake, I need a king cobra" [2:08-2:09]), proficiency in intercourse ("Look, I need a hard hitter, need a deep (ah)²²/ Need a Henny drinker, need a weed smoker" [2:04-2:08]), and financial stability ("Cookie A1 just like his credit" [2:13-2:14], "Ask for a car while you ride that ah" [1:10-1:21], "I don't cook, I don't clean / But let me tell you how I got this ring" [1:07-1:10]). The latter plays into the controlling image of the "gold-digging hoochie," by enticing men to pay for them. In a society that often condones men objectifying and dominating women, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion challenge this dynamic by reclaiming their power and thus make men uncomfortable. This reversal could potentially catalyze a

²² The explicit version highlights this further by asking for a "deep stroker" (Cardi B, *Audio* [1:27-1:28]).

societal shift toward greater awareness and equality, where women's desires and autonomy are respected and valued equally to men's.

In summary, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP" serves as a powerful anthem for female sexual empowerment and autonomy. The track's explicit lyrics and bold imagery challenge traditional societal norms and redefine female desire. By reclaiming derogatory terms and embracing their ratchet personae, the artists assert control over their narratives and celebrate their sexuality without shame. The use of imperatives and explicit instructions not only empowers them within their sexual encounters but also encourages other women to articulate their desires and set clear boundaries. By addressing taboo topics like kinks, they dismantle stigmas surrounding female sexual expression and promote a more inclusive understanding of sexual and bodily freedom. Ultimately, the lyrics of "WAP" empower women by providing a platform for unapologetic self-expression and advocating for greater respect and equality in sexual relationships. Through their fearless and assertive lyricism, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion inspire women to embrace their sexual identities, demand autonomy, and seek respect in their intimate relationships.

3.4.1.2. "Water Slide"

Janelle Monáe's "Water Slide" presents a nuanced celebration of self-love, sensuality, sexual pleasure and freedom, emphasizing not only intimate connections with others but also the importance of self-pleasure and self-assurance. In contrast to the more outspoken expressions in "WAP", Monáe explores a softer yet equally impactful approach to celebrating sexual joy and sex positivity (Monáe, *Water*). Like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion with "WAP," Monáe has chosen a single imagery, the water slide, on which to base her articulation of sexual joy and pleasure. The setting of the water slide carries multiple expressive meanings. Firstly, it conveys a sense of playfulness,

underscoring that sex should be fun and joyful, both with oneself and with others. Moreover, it also emphasizes the slipperiness of the slide, serving as a metaphor for the aroused vulva. Overall, throughout the whole track, Monáe employs aquatic metaphors to describe sexual joy and liberation. By prioritizing self-pleasure (“Feelin’ myself, wanna play in it / Splash, make a wave in it / I could spend the whole day in it / And I’m a do that” [0:27-0:39]), Monáe highlights the importance of self-love and being content with oneself and one’s body before opening it up to others. She depicts masturbation as playful self-exploration, a carefree activity she thoroughly enjoys. The line “Splash, make a wave in it” suggests that she can achieve sexual pleasure on her own, hinting at having an orgasm. She does not need anyone else to fulfill her sexual desires. This joyous approach to self-pleasure is also evident in the second verse (“I’m holdin’ my breath with my eyes closed / I can swim solo / Feelin’ all around for the right spot / Playin’ Marco Polo” [1:18-1:29]). Here, she subtly revels in the personal exploration of her intimate zones, promoting a lighthearted, experimental approach to masturbation (“swim solo”). The first and last lines of the verse bring the playfulness in sex to the forefront with a reference to the water game Marco Polo. Usually, in the swimming pool game Marco Polo, one player is designated as “it”. This player, with their eyes closed, attempts to locate and tag any of the other players. This might, on the one hand, refer to Monáe discovering herself, but could also hint at an invitation to other players to participate, showcasing her openness to have sex with other people. Monáe further uses swimming styles (“Backstroke (Stroke), freestyle (Freestyle) / Surfin’ on that thang like it’s high tide (Let me see you) / Deep-stroke (Stroke), butterfly (Butterfly)” [1:06-1:15]) to refer to herself or somebody else touching her, thus declaring that she wants versatility in being pleased and effort put into it. The physical movement needed in this desired sexual intercourse is accentuated through the use of action verbs throughout the track: “surf” [0:43], “fuck” [0:13], “splash” [0:30], “stroke”

[2:34], “dive” [0:52], “play” [0:29], “swim” [1:20]. All of this work culminates in an orgasm (“Lazy river runnin' down the water slide” [1:15-1:17]), again referring to a high state of arousal and possible female ejaculation. The metaphorical exploration of swimming styles reaches its peak in the outro of the track, where Janelle Monáe employs an epizeuxis. Through the relentless repetition of “stroke,” escalating in tempo as the outro progresses [2:34-2:44], she constructs a crescendo of intensity. This crescendo evokes a sense of urgency and culmination, metaphorically mirroring the climax of an orgasm. This narrative device effectively unifies the overarching themes of the song, seamlessly integrating physical movement with emotional and sexual expression. Overall, Monáe uses the imagery of the water slide to celebrate sexual joy and (self-)pleasure and employs aquatic metaphors to emphasize the playfulness and freedom found in embracing one's body and desires.

A notable aspect of "Water Slide" is its emphasis on queer sex, a refreshing departure in a genre historically dominated by heteronormative narratives. As a queer artist who has openly identified as pansexual (Mier), Monáe uses their platform to advocate for same-sex relationships, thereby empowering queer women who engage with Hip Hop. With the line “All the girls wanna play in it / Boys wanna lay in it” [1:31-1:37], they showcase their confidence in being desired by and attractive to ‘both’ genders. This emphasis is further underscored by the album title, "The Age of Pleasure," from which this track is taken. Janelle Monáe is currently embracing an era characterized by a profound enjoyment of sex and a strong confidence in their own desirability. Through their vivid and inclusive imagery, they provide representation and affirmation for queer identities, fostering a sense of belonging and validation through their music.

Monáe establishes a space for a vibrant feminist community by sampling Patra's 1993 track “Whining Skill” in her song “Water Slide.” The track begins with the repeated

lyrics, "All the girls dem, whine" [0:01-0:07], inviting all women and girls who listen to participate in this celebration of pleasure. The "whine" is a highly sexualized dance form from the Caribbean, characterized by "the thrusting or rotating of the pelvic girdle in a rhythmic pattern" (Gill). This Black dance style celebrates the movement of all body shapes, both big and small (Gill). By invoking such a sexually charged dance, Monée underscores the joy of sex and body positivity, reinforcing themes of empowerment and liberation. Furthermore, the act of whining is deeply rooted in cultural expression, allowing women to reclaim their sexuality and bodies on their own terms (Gill). By incorporating this dance form, Monée connects her music to a broader tradition of Black feminist thought and practice, which values the sensuality and autonomy of women. This sample choice not only celebrates physical movement but also symbolizes the breaking free from societal constraints and embracing one's true self. Moreover, the dance once again highlights the playful nature of sex that Monée promotes. By framing sex as an enjoyable and liberating experience, she encourages listeners to view their bodies as sources of pleasure and empowerment. This perspective challenges conventional narratives that often shame or stigmatize sexual expression, particularly for women. In conclusion, through her reference of the whine, Monée amplifies articulations of body positivity, empowerment, and sexual liberation. By drawing on such a culturally significant dance form, Monée not only celebrates pleasure and autonomy but also links her work to Black feminist traditions. This connection makes "Water Slide" a powerful and inclusive feminist statement.

Furthermore, a significant aspect of "Water Slide" is its celebration of body positivity, and confidence. The artist exudes confidence throughout the track, inspiring women to fully appreciate their bodies. In the first verse, she raps: "If I could fuck me right here right now / I would do that" [0:14-0:18]. These lyrics convey a powerful expression of self-acceptance and -admiration, as she explicitly enjoys her own body and takes

pleasure in it. Moreover, she proudly declares that she finds herself stunning, “Lookin’ in the mirror at me, my God / Like who that?” [0:20-0:24], emphasizing that she does not seek or need the approval of others. This statement underscores her liberation from societal expectations and pressures. By championing her own beauty and worth, Mon   encourages listeners to cultivate a similar sense of self-assurance and independence, highlighting the importance of valuing oneself on one’s own terms. Through the lyric “And take a real cute photo” [1:41-1:43], Janelle Mon   addresses multiple societal issues. Firstly, she fearlessly embraces her body by advocating for self-expression through photography, challenging societal taboos around nudity and promoting body positivity by asserting the right to self-expression without shame. Secondly, Mon   confronts gender inequality by highlighting a double standard in how society perceives and reacts to nude photos sent by women versus men. While it’s often normalized for men to send unsolicited explicit photos (“dick pics”), women who do the same consensually face harsh judgment and scrutiny. Moreover, when private photos of women are leaked or misused, victim blaming frequently occurs. By openly acknowledging that she takes such photos, Mon   asserts her autonomy and ownership over her body. This action serves to reclaim power and dismantle societal expectations that dictate how women should express their sexuality. It underscores the importance of empowering women to make their own choices free from fear of judgment or exploitation. In essence, through this lyric, Mon   not only displays her self-confidence regarding her body but also advocates for a broader cultural shift towards respecting women’s agency and rejecting double standards regarding sexual expression.

In conclusion, Janelle Mon  ’s “Water Slide” successfully explores themes of self-love, sexual pleasure, and liberation through vibrant imagery and empowering narratives. Unlike the overtly explicit approach seen in “WAP,” Mon   opts for a nuanced

exploration of sexuality, using the metaphor of a water slide to convey joy and freedom. This imagery not only evokes playfulness and the tangible experience of pleasure but also symbolizes empowerment and the embrace of one's body and desires. Through references to aquatic metaphors and playful verses, they celebrate sexual (self-)pleasure as a form of self-discovery and empowerment, challenging societal norms and advocating for gender equality in sexual expression. By incorporating elements of queer sexuality and referring to Caribbean dance forms like the "whine," Monée broadens the song's inclusivity and reinforces themes of body positivity and cultural celebration. Ultimately, "Water Slide" is a powerful feminist statement that urges listeners to express their sexuality authentically and unapologetically, while championing autonomy and self-assurance in the search for pleasure.

3.4.1.3. "Pussy Kills"

In contrast to both "WAP" and "Water Slide", "Pussy Kills" (Rocky Rivera), foregoes to overly focus on sexuality and sexual expression to confront societal issues through a bold and unapologetic narrative. "Pussy Kills" stands as a potent anthem that demands attention, sparking discourse on gender (in)equality, female empowerment, and resistance.

In a manner reminiscent of "WAP", Rocky Rivera refers to the vulva as "pussy," symbolizing women's strength and empowerment. She emphasizes the profound power of childbirth with the lyric, "Birth a universe, it's the power of the pussy" [0:29-0:31] challenging society that often downplays the significance of motherhood: "They can never handle what it takes to give birth" [1:43-1:46]. She thus advocates for the respect and recognition due to women who bring forth life, highlighting their resilience and capability. Furthermore, Rocky Rivera highlights the formidable strength of women by metaphorically likening her vulva to a force capable of lethal action. Through

assertive lyrics such as “Kill pussy, pussy” [2:25-2:36] and “Cause my pussy trained to kill a motherfucker on sight” [2:06-2:09], she subverts derogatory associations typically attached to the term “pussy”. Rocky Rivera stresses the positivity she associates with this term in the chorus, rapping, “My pussy’s so nice, my pussy’s so strong / It sounds so good when I put it in a song” [1:30-1:36]. By emphasizing the niceness and strength of her ‘pussy’, Rivera transforms the term into a symbol of female resilience and force, challenging society’s dismissive assumptions of the female sex, as seen in phrases like “Don’t be such a pussy!”. Additionally, Rivera uses other derogatory terms like “cunt” and “slit,” portraying herself as a “cuntess with killer ammunition in the clip” and a “savage with a slit” [0:59-1:03]. These lyrical choices affirm her belief in the inherent strength and endurance of womanhood, challenging negative connotations historically associated with female anatomy. By reclaiming and reinforcing these terms, Rivera celebrates the power that comes from embracing her identity as a woman. Her lyrics defy our patriarchal society which seeks to oppress women, by reclaiming its problematic language to empower herself and her audience.

A further significant aspect of “Pussy Kills” is Rocky Rivera’s open critique on the objectification of women’s bodies and sexuality. In the first verse, she opposes misogynistic rappers that objectify women. Therefore, Rocky Rivera employs elements of a diss track [0:31-0:51]:

And even if they had a billion dollars, I would never
Give the pussy up to a misogynistic rapper
They was proly ugly as a kid, hella chubby
Only girl he ever took to prom was his cousin
Now they actin’ bitter and they writin’ in a song
Like they been waking up with two women all along

Diss tracks are a long-standing tradition in Hip Hop (Harper); the inclusion of diss track elements allows Rocky Rivera to assert her rightful place within the genre while

simultaneously critiquing it. She ridicules misogynistic rappers, suggesting their disdain for women stems from a lack of female attention in their past, prompting them to compensate by objectifying women in their lyrics. By adopting the diss track format, often utilized by male rappers, Rocky Rivera reclaims power, turning the tables on a historically male-dominated narrative and challenging the norms of the genre. Moreover, she reduces the rapper to his appearance ("They was prolly ugly as a kid, hella chubby" [0:38-0:41]), subjecting the rapper to a superficial judgement, mirroring the debasing treatment that women frequently have to endure. By commenting on the rapper's looks, she highlights the hypocrisy and shallow nature of their objectification of women. This tactic serves to expose and critique the double standards within the genre, illustrating how such judgments are demeaning and unjust, regardless of the target. Additionally, Rocky Rivera's adamant refusal to "give the pussy up to a misogynistic rapper" [0:35-0:38] despite his wealth highlights her rejection of the transactional view of sex commonly promoted by such artists, further challenging their perceptions of women's value and autonomy. This assertive stance not only critiques the attitudes of these rappers but also empowers women to reclaim their sexuality on their own terms.

Much like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion in "WAP," Rocky Rivera utilizes her platform to inspire women, urging them to recognize their value and assert control over how men treat them: "Cause pussy only power when you hold a tight grip / Never give the pussy up, 'til they bow in worship / He gon' want the pussy now, but he don't deserve shit / 'Til he put himself to work and he willing to commit" [1:04-1:17]. Rocky Rivera advises women to not offer themselves to someone who does not show them respect, commitment and effort. These lyrics stress that intimacy is a privilege men must earn through sincere dedication and work, rather than taking it for granted. Rocky Rivera advocates for self-respect and enforces the notion that a woman's worth is not

defined by her readiness to satisfy men's desires. This is underscored in the second verse, where she asserts her autonomy and challenges the attempts of men to assert ownership over her [1:47-2:09]:

Say my pussy's weak, try to claim it as they turf
Can never quantify what my pussy's truly worth
So I make a man beg on his knees in the dirt
Never disrespect a true God, yes, this
So he must repent to the sins he commits
If religion is the reason, you should pray between my thighs
'Cause my pussy trained to kill a motherfucker on sight

She confronts the notion that her worth can be defined or claimed by others, particularly men who underestimate her strength. Rocky Rivera emphasizes that she demands genuine respect, making it clear that any intimate connection with her requires recognition of her true value. She metaphorically compares this respect to a form of worship, implying that she holds the power in her sexual encounters. Thereby, Rocky Rivera plays with the Sapphire controlling image, showing her as a threat to current power structures of patriarchy. By asserting her agency in this way, she reclaims control over her body and relationships, and inspires other women to do the same, thus asserting herself as a figure of strength and self-determination, as well as a role model.

In her lyrical narrative, Rocky Rivera confidently places herself in a position of utmost power. Referring to herself as "the next supreme" [0:52], she stakes a claim to the highest rank or authority, underscoring her importance and self-worth. The line "Word to the queen, by any mean, murder scene" [0:54-0:57] emphasizes her determination to do whatever it takes, even metaphorically depicted as orchestrating a "murder scene," to maintain and secure her position. This assertive stance affirms her agency and underscores her willingness to assert dominance and authority. This, once again, plays into the Sapphire stereotype, that places her into the dominant position, while simultaneously emasculating men. She further reinforces her self-assuredness and

might by likening her sexuality to that of a deity ("Never disrespect a true God") or drawing parallels to historical figures like Cleopatra ("They sending ships to war for a pussy actin' ill / History repeatin', Cleopatra for the kill" [2:16-2:23]), who is renowned as one of the most powerful women in history.

What distinguishes Rocky Rivera from other, bigger Hip Hop artists is her explicit critique on societal issues and restrictions imposed on women's bodies by society and the government as well as her firm pro-choice stance [1:40-1:53]:

Politicians pass law with my pussy on they mind
They can never handle what it takes to give birth
Say my pussy's weak, try to claim it as they turf
Can never quantify what my pussy's truly worth

Rocky Rivera is one of the few feminist rappers that openly addresses US America's abortion bans, criticizing the presumption of politicians who believe they have the right to legislate female bodies. She highlights that those making these laws, predominantly men, lack understanding of the realities of childbirth and thus should not have a say in matters like abortion. In her lyrics, Rivera confronts the harsh reality that women in the USA, a country often touted as the land of freedom, can no longer freely make decisions about their bodies: "say my pussy's weak, try to claim it as their turf" [1:48-1:49]. This line underscores the irony and injustice of claiming control over women's bodies while simultaneously demeaning them. This outspokenness once more aligns her with the Sapphire category. Furthermore, Rivera challenges the religious motivations behind the pro-life stance [1:53-2:06]:

So I make a man beg on his knees in the dirt
Never disrespect a true God, yes, this
So he must repent to the sins he commits
If religion is the reason, you should pray between my thighs

She suggests that if religion is the justification for these laws, then the reverence should be directed towards the woman who has the capability to bear life, rather than solely focusing on the unborn. This perspective flips the script on traditional religious views, advocating for the elevation and respect of women's roles and choices. The final lines of her lyrics present a powerful metaphor. By asserting that a man must "repent for the sins he commits" [2:00-2:02] and that "if religion is the reason, you should pray between my thighs" [2:03-2:06], Rivera repositions the woman as a deity deserving of worship. This imagery elevates the woman to a divine status, suggesting that true reverence and respect should be directed at the source of life – the woman herself. This statement is a call for recognizing the intrinsic value and autonomy of women, demanding a societal shift in how women are perceived and treated. Through her lyrics, Rocky Rivera delivers a compelling critique of political and religious control over women's bodies, asserting the need for respect, autonomy, and reverence for women's choices and lives. However, she acknowledges the harsh reality that this shift in thinking will not happen quickly, a sentiment underscored by the line "They sending ships to war for a pussy actin' ill" [2:16-2:19]. This line reflects her awareness that significant consequences arise when women challenge or defy laws imposed on their bodies, such as seeking abortions despite bans. Rivera poignantly highlights the lengths to which those in power will go to maintain control, drawing parallels to historical conflicts. Despite recognizing these challenges, Rivera emphasizes the strength and resilience that women display, as captured in the line, "History repeatin', Cleopatra for the kill" [2:19-2:23]. By referencing Cleopatra, a powerful female figure whose influence shaped historical events, Rivera reminds us of the enduring legacy of women's perseverance and their ability to incite change. This line serves as a powerful reminder that women have consistently fought through hardships and have often been at the center of significant societal shifts. Rivera's lyrics are a rallying cry, letting

politicians and those in power know that women will not give up their fight for autonomy and respect, emphasized by the constant repetition of “Here Pussy, Pussy / Kill Pussy, Pussy” [1:18-1:30]. She draws strength from historical examples, asserting that, just like Cleopatra, women today will continue to challenge and resist oppressive structures. She underscores that the battle for women's rights is ongoing, and women's determination and resilience will ensure that their voices are heard, and their rights are upheld.

In conclusion, Rocky Rivera's “Pussy Kills” stands out as a powerful anthem that confronts societal issues head-on, challenging political, religious, and cultural control over women's bodies. Unlike the other two chosen tracks that focus primarily on sexuality, Rivera uses her lyrics to emphasize women's strength and resilience, symbolizing empowerment through the term “pussy.” She highlights the profound strength in childbirth and calls for the necessary respect for women who bring forth life, countering society's tendency to downplay motherhood. Rivera subverts derogatory connotations of female anatomy by reclaiming terms like “pussy,” “cunt,” and “slit,” transforming them into symbols of resilience and defiance. She critiques misogynistic rap culture, using the diss track format to assert her position and challenge the superficial objectification of women. Moreover, Rivera openly critiques the political and religious control over women's reproductive rights, which is especially relevant these days, considering the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in the US, and abortion bans in other countries. By positioning women as deities deserving reverence, she calls for a societal shift in the perception and treatment of women. Rivera highlights the ongoing struggle for women's rights through historical references and powerful metaphors, emphasizing that women's determination and resilience will ensure their voices are heard and their autonomy respected.

3.5. “Lookin' in the mirror at me”²³ - Visuals

The visuals of music videos are rich with layers of meaning and deepen the music's impact. They encompass multimedia such as setting, costuming, performance, mise-en-scène, and filming techniques. These elements are crucial for analyzing power dynamics, identity constructions, resistance, body image, and feminist perspectives within the context of the music video.

Symbolism in music videos is a powerful tool, allowing for the expression of intricate emotions, concepts and themes through visual markers²⁴. Interpretations of symbols can be diverse, opening avenues for nuanced meanings and encouraging viewers to engage deeper with the video (Sloos). The emphasis on a specific color, for example, can set the tone and mood of a video, for each color is associated with specific emotions and meanings. A blue color scheme can convey a sad, dreary mood, while yellow often expresses joy and pleasure (Sloos). Moreover, animals frequently serve as potent symbols in music videos, embodying notions of power, strength, elegance, or threat. Employing animals in such a way contributes to the establishment of metaphorical layers and symbolism within the visual narrative where the characteristics or actions of the chosen animal often mirror the themes of the song. Lastly, other nature related symbols add meaning, for example depictions of plants, scenery, and weather evoke specific feelings and tones. To illustrate, a strong storm might be shown to evoke feelings of suspense or tragedy, whereas a serene forest could symbolize tranquility or the want for freedom (Sloos). In this analysis, I will focus on identifying significant symbolic markers, exploring how they foster resistance and empowerment as well as delving into the tone, mood, and emotions they evoke.

²³ Lyric taken from “Water Slide” (Monáe [0:20-0:22]).

²⁴ This paragraph is based on an article by Kody Sloos (Sloos).

The mise-en-scène of the music videos encompasses a plethora of visual cues, thus holding the capacity to convey meaning that transcends the contents and limitations of the lyrics. I will use definitions of film techniques brought forward by various film and television studies scholars (Bignell and Woods; Sikov; Vernallis; Danielian and Donnely). I will look at how the videos' setting, lighting, performance and movement, costuming, as well as camera work (subject-camera distance, shot choice, and camera angle) create meaning and showcase power dynamics, as well as bodily and sexual freedom and pleasure.

One highly expressive component of music videos is the choice of garments as female artists often show their feminist views via their clothing (Li, Wang, and Xie 579)²⁵. According to Sitian Li, Yaxuan Wang, and Muiyi Xie, outfits in Hip Hop are also used to instill self-reflection in viewers and shatter the stereotypes they face (579). In rap culture that champions freedom but often fails to treat female performers equally, clothing has transformed into a means of advocating for women's rights in the pursuit of gender equality. The costuming by female Hip Hop artists is mostly done in either one of two ways: slouchy, rather unisex, or hypersexual. Gender-neutral baggy clothing, concealing feminine curves visually differentiates women less from their male counterparts. Gradually, this style has come to represent female rappers as "rebellious and cynical" (Li, Wang, and Xie 580). In stark contrast, a hypersexual style of female Hip Hop performers evolved which emphasizes women taking on the role of sexual agents. Women's empowerment increases when they have the courage to articulate themselves through their appearance, disregarding taboos and restrictions imposed on them through society (Li, Wang, and Xie 581). Li, Wang, and Xie stress that both clothing styles "have been used by female rappers to express their defiance and

²⁵ This paragraph is based on an article by Li, Wang, and Xie.

resistance against patriarchy” (582). In this analysis, I aim to explore the extent to which attire or nakedness of selected female and non-binary Hip Hop artists contributes to challenging prevailing restrictions on women's bodily and sexual autonomy. Additionally, I will examine how these clothing choices serve to empower viewers who identify as non-male.

Another significant element is the portrayal of the artist and other performers in the video. Typically, the music video puts the rapper(s) center stage, which empowers the artist, and the choreography is carefully chosen to convey a clear theme (Roberts 143). Feminist Hip Hop videos often show women taking pleasure in performing and sharing their sexual joy. Moreover, through their acts in the video, they usually establish their rightful claim to power within the Hip Hop community and society (Roberts 145). The female appropriation of the music video form can thus be read as a confrontation of current and male-centric power dynamics (Roberts 144). Spillers notes that Black female artists have a rich heritage to draw from, where the singer's sexuality serves as a powerful display of utmost self-respect and frequently embodies the joy she finds in her own abilities (88). An example of such a significant influence, is Nina Simone's “Ain't Got No / I Got Life,” which emphasizes the joy and empowerment women can achieve through their bodies, sexuality, and their movement. Furthermore, dance is an aspect of performance that strongly asserts the depicted women's independence, sexual joy and liberation, and bodily autonomy (Roberts 149). In my analysis, I will examine how the artists articulate empowerment through movement, dance, and acting within the video's narrative and how these visuals create a sense of sexual liberation and bodily agency.

3.5.1. Analysis of Visuals

Analyzing the visuals of "WAP," "Water Slide," and "Pussy Kills" reveals how each music video employs imagery and symbolism to strengthen the themes of the tracks. From contrasting settings and vibrant colors to energetic performances and symbolic props and costuming, these visuals highlight themes of empowerment, sexual liberation and joy, and resistance. This analysis reveals how the visual elements complement the lyrics to amplify themes of autonomy and self-expression, providing a deeper insight into how each artist communicates their distinct narrative through their visual choices.

3.5.1.1. Symbolism in Setting, Coloring, and Props

First, I want to analyze on how visual metaphors and symbolic representations in music videos create layers of meaning that engage audiences and amplify the impact of the music itself. All three selected music videos contain strong symbolism conveyed through setting, colors and props that underscores the themes of the tracks.

The settings in all three music videos adeptly accentuate the themes articulated by the lyrics, adding nuanced layers of meaning. "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) features a variety of diverse backgrounds, starting on a sunny day in a blooming garden before a magnificent mansion [0:01-0:13]. This initial setting evokes tranquility, peace, calm, and innocence, reminiscent of a wedding entrance with flower petals cascading from an arch and the light and pastel coloring. The idyllic scene suggests an image of respectability that will soon be subverted by the ensuing sequences inside the house. The serene and innocent atmosphere is disrupted by two striking elements. The first is a sexually suggestive fountain featuring statues of a naked Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, their legs spread wide and breasts squirting water [0:07-0:09]. The second disruption is water seeping from beneath the house door [0:09-0:13], foreshadowing

the impending chaos. The interior of the house serves as the primary setting of the music video. The door opens in sync with the music sample declaring "there's some whores in this house" [0:13]. The house is aptly dubbed the "whorehouse" in various reviews and analyses (for example in Meier), a term I will also adopt. This shift in setting marks the complete dismantling of the initially portrayed respectability, diving into the bold, ratchet, and provocative themes central to the song.

The "whorehouse" reveals a series of dramatically varied settings, each contributing to the complex narrative. The journey begins in a disorienting corridor, characterized by its irregular, lopsided walls and zigzagging floorboards [0:14-0:38]. This unsettling architecture disrupts the initial tranquility suggested by the pastel blue paint, soft golden accents, and warm lighting. The atmosphere is further charged by casts of naked buttocks and breasts [0:17, 0:21], once again squirting water, adding a sexually provocative element. Within the house lies an array of seemingly endless rooms, each creating a distinct ambiance. Some rooms remain unexplored, such as the jungle room, housing tigers [0:26], and another enveloped in darkness with flickering lights and a jaguar [1:51]. These uninviting spaces convey a sense of danger and unease, potentially symbolizing unfulfilled desires or repressed sexual urges that the characters have yet to confront. The eclectic and provocative design of the whorehouse thus serves as a visual metaphor for the song's themes, juxtaposing the orderly exterior with the chaotic and varied interior, the innermost desires. Trough explicit lyrics they openly express their desires which stands in stark contrast with the visuals suggesting they keep them hidden as everything happens behind a closed door in a secluded house. The rooms explored in the music video are distinctly different from each other, each reflecting different facets of desire. The first room they encounter is the "snake room" [0:38] marked by a menacing snake functioning as the door knocker, aggressively striking at the artists. In the following scene, however, the artists are

shown in harmony with a multitude of snakes, which coil around them and writhe across their bodies. Biblically, snakes symbolize women's sin and temptation (Rooke 9), thus highlighting the track's audacity and provocative essence. The sight of the snakes entwined around their barely covered bodies creates a potent sense of sensuality and eroticism. The room itself is filled with sand, interspersed with sunken golden columns, evoking a sense of wilderness and a departure from civility, embracing a more untamed and ratchet aesthetic. Next, they are shown in a room in the basement [0:56], characterized by bright neon green and dark purple color palette and different raised platforms showing moving bodies. The vivid colors and the room's design evoke the atmosphere of a carnival funhouse, introducing an element of playfulness and whimsy. This setting adds a fun and bold element to the open articulation of sexual desires in the lyrics. The bright colors infuse the space with high energy, vitality, and vibrancy, thus creating excitement and underscoring the boldness of the track. Each room, whether explored or left in shadow, represents different facets of desire, sexuality, and the tension between outward respectability and inner chaos. These three settings are first introduced separately, before being interspersed throughout the first part of the video, rapidly being switched out by each other. Next after, a quiet, calmed down sequence in the corridor, a new room is added [2:00]. Similar to the snake room, it is guarded by a jaguar head as a door knocker. The transition behind the door marks a striking departure from the playful and whimsical purple-green room. The color palette becomes significantly darker, with the walls adorned in a brown-black jaguar-patterned wallpaper. The subdued lighting contributes to an atmosphere of menace, accentuating Cardi B's dominance and the commanding presence of her lyrics in this scene. The jaguars, appearing either compliant to Cardi B's touch or indifferent, underscore her control, suggesting that even these formidable creatures pose no threat to her authority. The scene then shifts to Megan Thee Stallion in a starkly

contrasting environment; a room bathed in natural light and dressed in white tiger-patterned wallpaper [2:33]. Although this space lacks the ominous undertones of the previous room, Megan Thee Stallion's command remains unequivocal. The white tiger, lounging nonchalantly in the background showcases her dominance, symbolizing that it too poses no threat to her. This positioning of powerful women coexisting effortlessly with these majestic predators may represent their roles as "hunters" in sexual dynamics. They wield power and control over their "prey", the men they choose to engage with, emphasizing their autonomy and dominance in these relationships. Following the white tiger room is the "water room" [2:55] which adds multiple layers to the overarching narrative of the music video. The room is open and spacious, full of women who are reveling and dancing in the water, even as a storm rages outside the windows. This can be interpreted as the water room being a safe space, where women can freely express their sexual desires, shielded from external judgement. The symbolism of the water is multifaceted. It can be seen as a representation of the women's uninhibited embrace of their sexuality, with the water in the shallow pool mirroring the wetness of their arousal. Moreover, this environment of unrestrained expression underscores the themes of empowerment and liberation, suggesting that within this space, the women have fully accepted and celebrated their desires without fear or societal reproach. After sharing in this communal experience, the two artists find themselves once again wandering through a corridor, peeking into various new rooms, each occupied by a single woman [3:23-4:03]. These rooms are vividly distinct from each other: one is starkly black and white [3:35], a room bathed in red is sultry and intimate [3:31], while a third is vibrant with pink and blue hues and filled with playful balls [3:45]. As they move from one room to the next, we see women on their own enjoying themselves moving their bodies. This plenitude of rooms subtly alludes to the diverse spectrum of sexual desires women possess, emphasizing that despite our

individual differences in needs and wants, there should be a space for everyone. Ultimately, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion exit the corridor [4:03-4:10], which might symbolize their readiness to express their sexuality openly and unapologetically. This act could be interpreted as a rejection of societal norms and respectability politics, embracing their identities despite of constraints of external judgment. To sum up, the music video's distinct and provocative settings serve as a vivid representation for the song's themes, showcasing the diversity of female sexual desires and the liberation found in expressing them. On their path from the disorienting corridor through diverse and intimate rooms, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion embrace and celebrate their true sexual and bodily desires, thereby rejecting societal norms and powerfully asserting their autonomy.

While the setting of "WAP" is vast and elaborate, "Water Slide" (Monáe) confines all action to a single, intimate backyard with a pool [0:04]. This concentrated setting enhances the playful vibe and lyrics of the track. The constant sunshine signals joy, freedom, and unrestrained pleasure, with the bright and warm environment amplifying the sense of carefree fun and bodily liberation portrayed by the naked or barely dressed people in the video. The sunshine further emphasizes the idea of being fully seen and unapologetically visible, particularly highlighting Black naked bodies. This aligns with the artist's open celebration of their sexuality and pleasure. The vibrant coloring of the music video contributes to this joyous atmosphere, bursting with the light, bright colors of the rainbow. The lush, vivid greens of the plants merge with the crisp, sparkling blue of the pool water and the clear, cloudless sky. The plants add a sense of vibrancy and liveliness to the scene [0:22]. The glittering blue of the pool [0:31] underscores the happy and pleasurable atmosphere. Diving beneath the surface, however, reveals a darker blue, with the sun only slightly illuminating the water from above [0:53-0:55]. This could signal the intimacy and sensuality of a sexual encounter, whether with

oneself or others. The more subdued blue hues of the water also offer a sense of privacy in which to enjoy oneself. Moreover, once again, the water can also represent the arousal of women, adding a visual layer of sensuality to the video's narrative. This overall summery vibe enhances the carefree nature of the music and lyrics, creating an environment that celebrates liberation, happiness, and the exuberant enjoyment of life and sex. Numerous props emphasize this sunny atmosphere: deck chairs sprawling with women of all sizes [0:07, 0:10], a large blown-up water slide fostering youthful laughter and enjoyment [1:54-1:46], an abundance of colorful, blooming flowers [1:58], topless women on bounce balls [0:24-0:25], a mirror for self-exploration and -admiration [2:13], water floats and various tossing games [2:00, 1:35-1:36]. All these props highlight bodies of all sizes, unfiltered and unhidden. This underlies the song's themes of body positivity, self-confidence, and sexual joy. Ultimately, "Water Slide" crafts a vivid, celebratory depiction of summer, freedom, and self-expression. By situating the action within the intimate and colorful confines of a backyard pool, the video underscores themes of visibility and unapologetic self-acceptance, particularly for Black women. The interplay of light, color, props and setting evokes a sense of carefree exuberance, while also offering moments of deeper intimacy beneath the surface. In doing so, the music video offers a powerful visual statement on the joy of sexual liberation and the beauty of embracing one's true self in all its facets and out in the open.

Lastly, the setting in "Pussy Kills" (Rocky Rivera) starkly contrasts with the urban backgrounds of the other two music videos by forgoing an urban setting entirely, to fully immerse the viewer into nature. The main setting is a sunlit forest [0:14], representing a calm and safe space for the coven of women, shown in the video. The woods look more like a space where the women are at home rather than a dangerous, threatening place forests are often depicted as. This reinforces that threats towards women and

their bodies comes from external forces. The setting in general underlines the witchy sound and tone of the video. Forests are often representative of secluded and mysterious places, far removed from the order and control of society (Jackson). It provides the perfect backdrop for the witch coven or simply women who are frequently rendered outsiders or figures who are pushed to the periphery of society. The forest also symbolizes the unknown, wild, and untamed aspects of the world, making it an ideal setting for the empowering lyrics that reject societal restrictions imposed by men on women's bodies. Therefore, the forest serves as a powerful symbol of freedom and resistance, highlighting the video's themes of empowerment, defiance, and the celebration of female strength and independence. The forest setting in "Pussy Kills" is further enhanced using symbolic props, particularly a knife [1:09], a decanter filled with wine [0:40], and a cup [2:14]. These props are employed in a ritualistic manner, adding depth to the visual narrative. The way they are carried to the meeting place [0:28-0:40] mirrors the Christian tradition of presenting the blood and body of Christ before Holy Communion, infusing the scene with a sense of sacredness and reverence. Those religious allusions in the video are later mirrored in the lyrics, linking women's sexuality to religion (see chapter 3.4.1.3. for a detailed analysis). This ritualistic presentation helps to establish a strong sense of sisterhood among the women. The ritual is further deepened by the act of swearing on the knife in a circle (for example at [1:09-1:12]), a powerful gesture that symbolizes solidarity and mutual commitment. This act of unity creates a communal and connected feeling, binding the women together in a shared purpose. It highlights their collective resistance and defiance against the external threats they face towards their bodies and sexualities. Thus, the knife and wine are not merely props; they are symbols of the women's shared struggle and resistance. The knife represents protection and the cutting away of societal constraints, while the wine simultaneously symbolizes celebration, and the (metaphoric) bloodshed in their

ongoing fight for autonomy. Together, these elements reinforce the themes of solidarity, strength, and defiance that permeate the video. This ritualistic use of props within the forest setting serves to underscore the video's themes of empowerment and resistance. The forest, with its natural beauty and untamed atmosphere, becomes a sacred and safe space where the women can connect, support each other, and reclaim their power. It vividly contrasts with the often oppressive and controlled urban environments, highlighting the natural and intrinsic strength of the women.

Interspersed between the serene forest scenes are jump cuts to a dark room [0:41], barely lit by the flickering glow of candlelight (for example at [1:00-1:03]). This juxtaposition creates a striking expressive counterpoint to the sunlit woods, contrasting light with darkness and serenity with foreboding. The room exudes a grim and haunted atmosphere, enhanced by its darkness and ritualistic props, such as crosses and a throne. This room houses only Rocky Rivera, 'the supreme' in the narrative. Seated on the throne [3:05], Rocky Rivera embodies the aura of royalty, establishing her dominance and control within the narrative. Her presence leaves no doubt in the viewer's mind about who holds the ultimate power in this narrative. This throne, though never being clearly visible behind Rocky Rivera, is the focal point of the room, signifying authority and power [0:41]. The room itself feels threatening and dangerous, with candles, smoke, bones, and eerie masks contributing to its witchy and haunted ambiance. Each element within the room is meticulously chosen to enhance the sense of dread and power. Among these props, one stands out in particular: the hourglass [0:59]. As the sand slowly shifts away over the course of the video, it serves as a poignant symbol that time is running out, creating a palpable sense of urgency and a call to action. The scenes in the forest gradually decrease, giving way to the dark room until only the latter remains, underscoring the need to act. This urgency is further emphasized by Rocky Rivera's impatient tapping on the armrest of her throne [1:36-

1:38], a gesture that underscores her anticipation and readiness. Another significant prop in the video is the knife, which has a history within the coven of women in the video. This knife was previously passed around to determine the supreme leader inside the sunlit woods, making it a powerful symbol of authority. Rocky Rivera wields it in this room, unsheathing it to signify that she should be taken seriously and is unafraid to fight for her rights [0:57-58]. The climax of the video is marked by a powerful and symbolic gesture: Rocky Rivera blowing out a candle [3:22]. This act plunges the room and subsequently the screen into complete darkness, symbolizing her ultimate power and control over the narrative. The sudden darkness serves as a final, potent indicator that the time for action is now. The extinguishing of the candlelight signifies the end of complacency and the beginning of decisive action, reinforcing Rocky Rivera's position as a formidable and authoritative figure. Overall, the contrasting settings of the sunlit woods and the dark, ritualistic room create a vivid narrative visual. The props and actions within the room add symbolism and meaning, culminating in a powerful articulation of authority, urgency, and the readiness to act.

In conclusion, the use of visual metaphors and symbolic representations in music videos significantly amplifies the themes and emotional impact of the tracks. Each setting, color, and prop is meticulously chosen to add layers of meaning that resonate deeply with audiences. "WAP" expertly uses contrasting settings to subvert expectations and articulate themes of sexuality and empowerment. The transition from a serene garden to the chaotic "whorehouse" visually mirrors the song's bold exploration of female desire and autonomy. Each room within the house represents different facets of desire, emphasizing the rejection of societal norms and the celebration of sexual liberation. In "Water Slide," the intimate backyard setting enhances the playful and carefree vibe of the track. The constant sunshine and vibrant colors underscore themes of joy, freedom, and body positivity. By highlighting Black

women's visibility and pleasure, the video celebrates self-confidence and sexual joy in an open and joyous manner. Lastly, "Pussy Kills" contrasts its sunlit forest with a dark, candlelit room to symbolize freedom, resistance, and the reclaiming of power. The forest serves as a safe space for the coven of women, while the dark room, with its ritualistic props, underscores the urgency for action and Rocky Rivera's dominance. The hourglass and knife symbolize the impending change and her readiness to fight for her rights, culminating in the powerful act of blowing out the candle. Together, these music videos illustrate how visual metaphors and symbolic elements, intricately woven into the settings, colors, and props, create expressive, multi-layered meanings that elevate the songs' impact.

3.5.1.2. Performances

While the settings, props, and colors play a crucial role in establishing the visual tone of the music videos, another important aspect of the visuals are the performances of the artists and background actors and actresses. The three chosen music videos contain a multitude of performances, playing with dance, promiscuity, ratchetness, movement, protest, and resistance. These performances bring the visuals to life, adding an expressive layer that enhances the overall narrative and emotional impact of the videos.

In "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) the performances by Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and the other featured actresses leave a lasting impression on viewers. Each performer exudes confidence and power, showcasing an authoritative control over their own space and how they are perceived. Central to their expression is dance, which serves as a potent medium for articulating their desires and autonomy. The choreography is deliberately sensual and provocative, characterized by grinding hips, spreading legs, and squirming movements on furniture and the floor [1:25-1:39, 2:50-2:54, 2:55-3:22].

This unapologetic display of physicality rejects traditional respectability politics, affirming the performers' right to move and express themselves on their own terms. Their movements are not just acts of personal pleasure but also statements of empowerment and resistance. In the green and purple room and the water room [1:25-1:39, 2:55-3:22], the group dance routines evoke the flair of showgirl performances, enhancing the communal experience of the video. These choreographed sequences emphasize the collective strength and solidarity among the performers. Through their energetic and erotic movements, they command the screen, harnessing the power of their bodies to make a statement about self-expression. The performers skillfully play with and subvert stereotypes, transforming them into tools of empowerment. They embody aspects of the Jezebel stereotype—promiscuity and insatiability—but reject its negative connotations, such as the notion that an excessive sex drive is immoral. They also engage with the animalistic side of this stereotype, interacting with animals and performing provocative movements under and with snakes [0:45], such as a snake emerging from Cardi B's mouth [2:21]. This visual element also ties into the "freak" aspect of the Jezebel stereotype, further emphasized by their use of vulgar gestures. Additionally, they invoke the Hoochie stereotype by unapologetically portraying themselves as sexually dominant. Their control over their desires and self-representation is evident not only through their lyrics but also through their powerful performances. This presentation affirms their autonomy and challenges traditional narratives as well as respectability politics, showcasing their authority and confidence in defining their own sexuality and presentation. The music video features predominantly Black women, with Kylie Jenner being the notable exception. Since Black women are affected by the constraints of respectability politics, this deliberate choice creates a space that is both empowering and liberating. It allows these women to express themselves, by embracing ratchetness, thereby breaking through

restrictions of societal expectations. The absence of men throughout the video is particularly noteworthy, as it underscores the video's focus on the female experience. By excluding male presence, the video centers itself on a female perspective, crafted by women for women, and highlights the power and authority of women in their own right. The female gaze is at the forefront, celebrating assertive and confident women who are both the performers and the objects of their own performance. In this context, the women retain full control over their representation, defining how they are observed and perceived. Overall, "WAP," Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and the other featured actresses create a powerful visual narrative centered on female empowerment and autonomy. Through provocative choreography and the deliberate subversion of stereotypes, they reject traditional respectability politics and assert control over their own representation. By focusing on a female perspective and excluding male presence, the video celebrates the strength, confidence, and authority of women, allowing them to define and express their own sexuality on their own terms.

The performance in "Water Slide" (Monáe) is a vibrant and joyous celebration of sexual pleasure and freedom, set against the backdrop of a lively backyard pool party, thereby playing into the fly girl image prevalent in rap. Janelle Monáe and the other performers radiate a sense of unbridled enjoyment, capturing the essence of a perfect summer day. The performance is also characterized by dance, but with a more playful and carefree approach compared to the intense sexual power and desire emphasized in "WAP." The dance styles in "Water Slide" are varied, often being very sensual and sexual with gyrating, grinding, and thrusting movements [0:14-0:16]. At times, the choreography becomes highly synchronized, imitating surf and swimming movements, which adds an element of audio-visual synchronicity [1:07-1:17]. This underpins the metaphor of swimming and water for sex visually, with the playful dance highlighting the pleasure aspect of sexuality. There are also instances where the performers dance

freely around Monáe, who remains the focus as she performs the song, emphasizing the individuality of each performer [1:17-1:19]. The carefree nature of their activities underscores a celebration of pleasure and happiness, free from any tension or conflict, and highlights the liberating and joyous aspects of their expressions of sexuality. This sense of joy is particularly accentuated through the bright smiles of the performers, clearly showing that they are enjoying themselves in the unrestricted movement of their bodies. They engage in dancing, making music, playing games, and swimming, creating an atmosphere of pure, unthreatened bliss. Janelle Monáe intentionally centers Black people in her music video, crafting a space where they can express themselves genuinely in all their facets without societal constraints. The video includes people of all sizes, as well as queer and trans individuals, promoting inclusivity and diversity. Women are prominently featured, always taking center stage [0:00-0:17], while bodies perceived as male are fewer and placed in the background [0:34] or even hidden [1:42], primarily serving the pleasure of the women. A trans man [1:34] is notably given full focus and allowed to join the celebration, emphasizing inclusivity and the celebration of queer sexual joy. Cisgender men are only spotlighted when they are seen trying to satisfy the women [1:28, 2:39], further highlighting the video's focus on female and non-binary pleasure and empowerment. In conclusion, the performance in "Water Slide" stands out as a lively and celebratory expression of sexual liberation and joyful self-expression. The playful and energetic dance styles emphasize pleasure and freedom, while the focus on inclusivity highlights a diverse range of identities and bodies. Janelle Monáe's emphasis on Black, queer, and trans individuals, combined with the carefree and exuberant performance, reinforces sexual empowerment and sex positivity.

Lastly, "Pussy Kills" (Rocky Rivera) diverges sharply from the other two videos in its performance. Rocky Rivera eschews dance entirely, opting instead to draw heavily on the evocative imagery of a witch coven. Her performance is defined by a resolute and confident demeanor that immediately establishes her as the supreme, the central figure of power. This is underscored by her commanding gait [0:23-0:25], which powerfully announces her presence. Unlike the other women who cast anxious glances behind them [0:15], Rocky Rivera maintains a steady, unflinching gaze forward, signifying her dominance and fearlessness within the narrative. The interactions among the women in the video are characterized by mutual respect and reverence, reflecting a deep sense of solidarity [1:10-1:13]. Together, they form a coven, a symbolic witch circle that visually represents their unity and collective strength [1:19-1:27]. This imagery serves as a potent symbol of resistance against contemporary restrictions on women's bodies. Historically, witches have been figures of both fear and empowerment, representing women who defied social orders and patriarchal control (Gerely). By reclaiming this image, Rocky Rivera draws on this rich history of defiance and resistance, turning the once-negative portrayal of witches into a symbol of empowerment and autonomy. The depiction of a coven emphasizes the collective power needed to resist external pressures and societal restrictions. Rivera visually represents this collective strength, underscoring the importance of solidarity among women in challenging restrictive laws and norms. The autonomy traditionally associated with witches, who live outside conventional societal bounds and reject traditional roles (Gerely), mirrors the assertion of control over one's own life and decisions. The visual of female solidarity is further strengthened by the total exclusion of men from Rocky Rivera's music video. Overall, the image of a witch coven in "Pussy Kills" stands as a symbol of defiance, collective strength, and empowerment. It offers a compelling narrative for resisting the constraints placed on women's bodies today.

This theme of resistance is further emphasized by Rocky Rivera's commanding presence on the throne, wielding a knife [1:05-1:06, 2:19]; a visual representation of her readiness to fight for her rights and to challenge societal restrictions, even through confrontational means, if necessary. She seems threatening, being composed but leaving no doubt she can spring into action at any given time. In conclusion, "Pussy Kills" stands out for its powerful use of witch imagery to symbolize resistance and empowerment. Through Rocky Rivera's commanding presence and the depiction of a unified coven, the video effectively channels historical resistance into a contemporary articulation of women's autonomy and strength. This compelling depiction emphasizes the necessity of solidarity and assertiveness in confronting and overcoming societal restrictions on women's bodies.

In summary, these music videos utilize diverse performance styles to effectively convey themes of empowerment, resistance, and autonomy. "WAP" showcases provocative choreography that challenges traditional respectability politics and highlights female strength through bold and sensual performances. "Water Slide" presents a joyful celebration of sexual liberation and inclusivity through dance, emphasizing carefree pleasure. "Pussy Kills" diverges with its focus on witch imagery, using the symbol of a coven to represent collective strength and resistance against societal restrictions on women's bodies. Each video uses its own performance style and visual storytelling, thereby reinforcing their respective articulations of empowerment and autonomy.

3.5.1.3. Costuming

In examining how performances in these music videos articulate themes of empowerment and resistance, it becomes clear that the costuming choices further amplify these narratives. The way artists dress not only complements their performances but also serves as a crucial element in expressing sexual and bodily

agency, underscoring their autonomy and empowerment. By exploring the costuming in detail, it gives deeper insight into how visual elements enhance and support the broader themes presented in the videos.

"WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) employs hypersexual and provocative clothing that perfectly aligns with the track's vibe and its lyrics. The outfits are figure-hugging and reveal more than they conceal, featuring deep cleavages and provocative cut-outs [0:27, 1:27]. The performers proudly display their naked skin and curves [0:43, 2:35], rejecting societal expectations of modesty, thereby perpetuating the image of the fly girl. The most striking example is Cardi B's jaguar bodysuit, which exposes her breasts with only bedazzled covers over the nipples [2:04-2:32]. The suit also features cut-outs accentuating other erogenous zones, like the inner thighs and buttocks. This choice of revealing clothing underscores their sexual agency, as they reject societal norms and respectability politics by choosing how they want to present their bodies. Despite their hypersexual appearance, they maintain control over who is allowed to touch them, asserting their power and agency through their bold fashion choices. Furthermore, the performers subvert the Jezebel stereotype by embracing its animalistic elements. Both Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion wear animal patterns; Cardi B dons the jaguar bodysuit, while Megan sports a white tiger bodysuit [2:33-2:44], with the pattern even extending to her hair. Their long, claw-like fingernails [0:23] further emphasize this untamable quality, symbolizing their uncontrollable sexuality. This portrayal challenges traditional, negative connotations associated with the Jezebel stereotype and transforms them into symbols of empowerment and self-determination. The other performers wear similar attire in the group scenes, often in latex or patent leather [3:03, 3:30, 3:35, 3:43, 3:45], both of which are highly sexually connoted. This consistent choice of revealing and provocative clothing empowers the women by allowing them to display their bodies on their own terms. It challenges the double standard that often

requires women to cover up while men face no scrutiny for being shirtless in similar contexts. By taking control of their sexual representation, the women in "WAP" assert their autonomy and redefine societal expectations around female sexuality, making a powerful statement about self-expression and empowerment. This deliberate use of provocative costuming not only enhances the video's visual impact but also serves as a declaration of their power and agency.

The costuming in "Water Slide" (Monáe) harmonizes seamlessly with the video's summery vibe and the music's playful tone. The performers are dressed in an array of tiny bikinis [0:05], swim trunks, or appear topless or fully nude [0:26, 0:00], reinforcing the video's core theme of sexual joy and liberation. The bikinis are creatively designed, taking the form of orange slices [0:21], white pearls [1:00], or crocheted flowers [0:11] that barely cover the nipples, and feature a rainbow of colors. These imaginative and unconventional designs add a layer of fun and whimsy to the video, enhancing its playful atmosphere. This choice of attire underscores Janelle Monáe's joyful approach to sex and bodily agency articulated in the track. The use of exaggeratedly large sun hats further underscores the video's whimsical and carefree vibe (see at [1:21]). Rather than hiding anything, these hats amplify the performers' exposed state, highlighting their confidence and ease with their bodies in a playful manner. This humorous touch enhances the video's lighthearted and exuberant atmosphere. The stark contrast between the oversized hats and the minimal coverage of the bikinis or even full nudity creates a visual irony that underscores the themes of body positivity and sexual liberation. By mocking the concepts of modesty and coverup, this visual contrast implies that genuine sexual and bodily freedom and joy arise from embracing one's natural self without shame or hesitation. "Water Slide" celebrates nudity, the nipples of Janelle Monáe and other actresses only slightly censored [0:17,0:25], while the naked body parts are shown in full movement, twerking causing butt cheeks to jiggle [0:06],

and bounce balls and energetic dancing letting their breasts bounce [0:25, 0:48]. This utter freedom and carefreeness in movement further helps to articulate the track's theme of sexual liberation and joy. Notably, the inclusion of plus-sized bodies on full display challenges mainstream beauty standards and promotes body positivity [0:10, 1:21, 2:20]. By featuring bigger people confidently and proudly showing off their bodies, the video promotes an articulation of self-love and acceptance, encouraging viewers to accept their own bodies regardless of societal expectations. This diversity in all body types is strengthened by a vast array of different Black hair styles — be it braided, buzzed, bald, afro, unruly, straightened [0:02, 0:18-0:19, 0:41] — Janelle Monáe holds a space for all, making her video an advocate for bodily liberation and agency. This act of inclusion is not merely a visual choice but demonstrates a political one, by challenging the stigmatization of different body types and promoting a culture of inclusivity and acceptance. Moreover, the video also prominently features trans and queer bodies, signaled through gender-affirming scars [1:34] and same-sex make-out sequences [1:27-1:28]. The presence of diverse bodies in a context that celebrates sexuality and joy is a radical act of defiance against the narrow definitions of beauty and sexual desirability that dominate popular culture. The revealing costuming and nude sequences celebrate a diverse range of body sizes and genders, reinforcing the video's articulation of inclusivity and the joyous expression of sexual freedom. In summary, the costuming in "Water Slide" is a crucial element that supports and enhances the video's themes of sexual joy and freedom, body positivity, and inclusivity. Through creative and unconventional swimwear designs, the inclusion of diverse body types, and the use of comical and exaggerated elements like oversized sun hats, the video delivers powerful visuals of acceptance and celebration of all bodies and sexual joy.

In contrast to the hypersexualized attire featured in the previous videos, “Pussy Kills” (Rocky Rivera) adopts a more subdued and cohesive aesthetic in its costuming. Rocky Rivera and the other women in the video eschew provocative fashion in favor of a palette dominated by muted, dark colors. Their outfits — ranging from tailored trousers to figure-hugging, short dresses — are primarily black, contributing to a visual unity that ties the group together as a coven [0:14, 0:21, 0:24]. Despite the shared color scheme, each woman retains her individual identity through varied styles, highlighting both their collective strength and independence. The choice of dark tones — emerald green, deep red, and black [1:20-1:27] — evokes traditional associations with witchcraft, reinforcing the video's thematic elements. The limited exposure of skin, except for the cleavage [0:21] and Rocky Rivera's naked legs [0:29, 2:36]], emphasizes a commanding presence rather than overt sexuality. This restraint in revealing clothing serves to accentuate the inherent power and authority of the performers rather than their physical attributes. The makeup and manicures further enhance the video's sultry and assertive tone. The dark red lips [0:53], dramatic black cat eyes [0:15], and red and pink fingernails [0:54, 1.36] are emblematic of fierce femininity and self-assuredness, aligning seamlessly with the music's tone. These beauty elements contribute to a visual representation of strength and determination, suggesting that the women are in control of their own narrative. Ornamental jewelry, including Rocky Rivera's bone-shaped necklace [0:47], complements the ritualistic atmosphere of the video. This choice of accessories underscores the coven's ritualistic and mystical ambiance, reinforcing the video's narrative of empowerment through a ceremonial lens. Collectively, the subdued and coordinated costuming, alongside the carefully chosen makeup and jewelry, contribute to a powerful visual statement of unity, authority, and ritualistic significance. The uniformity conveyed through these garments

emphasizes the solidarity among women, which is crucial for challenging and resisting entrenched social norms and legal constraints imposed on women.

In conclusion, the costuming across the three music videos effectively amplifies their themes of empowerment, sexual joy and autonomy, self-expression, and resistance. In "WAP," the provocative and revealing outfits highlight the performers' defiance of societal norms and respectability politics, boldly asserting their sexual agency. Cardi B's and Megan Thee Stallion's hypersexual clothing, including animalistic patterns and strategic cut-outs, redefines traditional stereotypes, turning them into symbols of empowerment. "Water Slide" features playful and imaginative swimwear that underscores the video's celebration of sexual joy and body positivity. The creative designs and humorous elements like oversized sun hats enhance confidence and inclusivity, challenging conventional beauty standards and celebrating diverse body types and genders. Lastly, "Pussy Kills" adopts a more subdued aesthetic, with muted, dark clothing that conveys a sense of ritualistic unity and authority. The costumes, paired with striking makeup and ceremonial jewelry, reflect the video's focus on female empowerment through a ceremonial lens. Together, these clothing choices not only enhance the visual narratives but also strengthen the broader themes of autonomy, self-expression, and solidarity, illustrating how costuming and performance work together to challenge societal constraints and assert personal and collective power.

3.5.1.4. Camera work

While costuming is crucial in conveying themes of empowerment and agency, these themes are significantly enhanced through the deliberate use of camera work. The strategic use of camera-subject distance, shot composition, and angles plays a crucial role in shaping the viewer's perception and amplifying the power dynamics within the videos. Close-ups, medium shots, and long shots each serve a distinct purpose in

highlighting the artists and their song themes. Each of the three music videos employs close-ups of the primary artists, thereby placing them at the forefront and directing the audience's attention towards their expressions and performances, however, Monáe is only rarely filmed in close-ups (for example, Cardi B, *Video* [0:23]; Monáe, *Water* [0:24]; Rocky Rivera [1:06]). In contrast, supporting performers are often depicted through medium and long shots, underscoring the centrality of the main artists (for example, Cardi B, *Video* [3:06]; Monáe, *Water* [0:28]; Rocky Rivera [1:23]). This visual prioritization highlights the significance of the artists and ensures that their lyrical and thematic content are prominently featured and more readily absorbed by the audience. Through these close-up shots, the viewer can absorb every emotion playing across their faces, creating a direct and intimate connection. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion exude confidence and self-assuredness, their facial expressions often daring, as if challenging the viewer to act on their requests to be sexually pleased (Cardi B, *Video* [0:28, 1:20]). Janelle Monáe is constantly smiling, conveying satisfaction, enjoyment, and a sense of carefreeness (Monáe, *Water* [2:44]). Rocky Rivera, in stark contrast, fixes the viewer with a challenging glare (Rocky Rivera [1:59]), sometimes accompanied by a confrontational smirk during the diss parts of the track [0:46], remaining unyielding throughout the song. There are also several close-up shots of her hand(s) and the knife [0:57], underlining her determination to fight for her rights. Each artist also appears in medium and long shots, which show their full freedom of movement and underline their bodily and sexual agency. The shots place them center-stage each time they appear, leaving no doubt in the viewer who the main performers are and who commands the narrative. These shots provide context, showing the artists in relation to their environment and emphasizing their autonomy and control. In "WAP" (Cardi B, *Video*) these shots emphasize their roles as sexual agents rather than objects, moving on their own volition [0:48, 1:29]. Janelle Monáe is shown flourishing

in a carefree environment, dancing freely and enjoying life (Monáe, *Water* [0:13, 0:43]). Rocky Rivera is depicted in full body shots to emphasize her leading role, demonstrated through her confident stance and powerful posture on the throne (Rocky Rivera [2:36]). Lastly, the camera angle is crucial in displaying power structures within a music video. In “WAP” (Cardi B, *Video*) the camera often captures the performers at eye level [0:35], fostering a sense of connection between the viewer and the artists. However, in numerous sequences, the camera angles down at the performers from above [2:19]. Although high-angle shots are usually interpreted to diminish the subject's power, here in connection with the directives in the lyrics, they act as an invitation, encouraging viewers to “join them” and fulfill the artists’ sexual desires and needs. This is even more accentuated in a bird-eye shoot in the snake room [0:43]. Their agency is depicted through several low angle shots [2:07, 2:16]. In “Water Slide” (Monáe), the camera predominantly employs slightly low angles on the performers, both on Janelle Monáe, individually and in group settings [0:02, 0:30]. This technique underscores their sexual power and agency, highlighting their dominance within the narrative. By using the same angle on all performers, their sexual experiences and desires are equally valued. High-angle shots are reserved for the pool and game scenes, symbolizing the vulnerability inherent in opening oneself to shared sexual experiences [1:00, 1:28, 1:38]. Only in the final shot, Janelle Monáe is positioned from a pronounced low angle [2:41-2:44], clearly establishing her as the central figure with control over the narrative, while the man vying for her attention swims upwards toward her [2:39-2:41], emphasizing her authority. In “Pussy Kills,” Rocky Rivera is predominantly captured from a low angle (Rocky Rivera [1:35]), accentuating her authoritative presence within the video's narrative and thereby reinforcing her empowerment. Numerous shots depict her literally looking down at the viewer, further establishing her dominance and control [1:00]. However, at the outset, she is filmed

from above as she approaches the camera [0:09], while the other women in the coven are captured at eye level [0:33-0:37]. This contrast underscores her ascension to the role of supreme leader, highlighting the process of her selection and elevation as well as the respect she had to garner from her coven. In sum, the strategic use of camera angles in these music videos not only shapes the visual narrative but also enhances the portrayal of power dynamics and sexual agency, enriching the viewer's understanding and emotional engagement.

Overall, the varied camera work not only enhances the narrative but also visually reinforces the themes of empowerment and agency that are central to each video. Strategic usage of camera-subject distance, shot composition, and angles plays a crucial role in shaping the viewer's perception and strengthening power dynamics within the videos. Close-ups of primary artists Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, Janelle Monáe, and Rocky Rivera, direct attention to their expressions, fostering an intimate connection, conveying emotions, and emphasizing their lyrical content. In contrast, supporting performers are depicted through medium and long shots, underscoring the main artists' centrality. Camera angles also highlight power structures: in "WAP," eye-level and high-angle shots create a sense of connection and invitation; in "Water Slide," low angles highlight dominance and agency; in "Pussy Kills," low angles reinforce Rivera's authority. These camera techniques enhance the tracks' narratives, emphasizing the portrayal of power dynamics, sexual agency, and pleasure.

4. Conclusion

To conclude this thesis, I revisit the main findings from the analysis and provide a concise summary of the central arguments presented. I then address the research question that guided the analysis, offering a critical update to the thesis statement. By reflecting on the findings, I outline this thesis' contribution to the field of Hip Hop feminist studies. Lastly, I give the limitations of this paper and suggest avenues for future research.

The music video analyses done on "WAP," "Water Slide," and "Pussy Kills" center on sexual and bodily empowerment, agency, pleasure and resistance, and how those core themes are articulated sonically, verbally, and visually within this medium. First, my analysis on the varied sound elements of the music videos revealed how distinct and diverse beats, strategic use of samples, vocal performances, and ambient sounds collaboratively enhance the key themes of each song. In "WAP," the commanding beat and background sounds, as well as Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's assertive tone emphasize sexual autonomy and power. In "Water Slide," Monáe creates a carefree and playful soundscape — through their use of melodic rap and a reggae-like beat — that celebrates sexual joy and self-pleasure. In "Pussy Kills," Rocky Rivera's commanding tone, the hard-hitting beat, and rebellious ambient sounds underscore themes of resistance and protest. These sonic elements create a cohesive and impactful auditory experience, reinforcing themes of empowerment, agency, pleasure, and protest.

Secondly, my analysis on the lyrics of the three music videos showed a multifaceted portrayal of female empowerment. Through highly explicit and evocative lyrics and the subversion of stereotypes, "WAP" champions female sexual agency and ratchetness, challenges societal norms and advocates for unapologetic self-expression. "Water

Slide" explores self-love and sexual pleasure and promotes body positivity and intersectional inclusivity through vibrant and playful imagery, whimsical lyrics, and sexual metaphors. "Pussy Kills" challenges societal and political control over women's bodies by reclaiming derogatory terms as symbols of strength and resilience, while also offering a direct critique of the patriarchal control deeply-rooted in society through explicit lyrics. Additionally, she confronts misogynistic culture and Hip Hop, encouraging women to fight for their bodily rights. Together, these lyrics celebrate female empowerment and sexual pleasure, foster self-confidence and expression, and advocate for women's sexual and bodily autonomy.

Thirdly, an investigation of the visuals revealed that the music videos employ diverse settings, props, and colors, and symbolism therein to enhance their themes of empowerment, agency, pleasure, and resistance. "WAP" uses a provocative "whorehouse" setting, bold props and animals to symbolize sexual autonomy and the diversity of female sexual desires. "Water Slide" features a vibrant, playful backyard pool party to celebrate body positivity and sexual joy. "Pussy Kills," a sunlit forest symbolizes freedom and safety, contrasted with the darkness of a dim room, to showcase Rocky Rivera's power and the need for feminist resistance. The costuming in each video — from provocative, hypersexual outfits in "WAP" to imaginative, whimsy swimwear or nudity in "Water Slide", and witchy, ritualistic, and bossy attire in "Pussy Kills" — further reinforces these themes. Performances range from the provocative, sensual choreography of "WAP" to the carefree, energetic dancing and swimming in "Water Slide" as well as allusions to rebellious acts in "Pussy Kills"; each enhancing their respective core topics. Camera work, including strategic angles and shot compositions, emphasizes power dynamics and agency, contributing to the overall impact and narrative depth of each video.

The research question guiding my thesis examines how selected female Hip Hop music videos verbally, sonically, and visually act as sites of Women's sexual and bodily empowerment, and how these findings may support a countermovement against societal and legal restrictions on the female body. My analysis of "WAP," "Water Slide," and "Pussy Kills" revealed that the interplay of lyrical content, auditory elements, and visuals successfully reinforces themes of sexual liberation, physical and sexual agency, female pleasure, and resistance. These music videos advocate for sexual and bodily rights through explicit lyrics, hard-hitting rhythms, expressive sounds, and impactful visuals. While the three videos are highly distinct in their tone, vibe, and contents, they all offer an articulation of female and bodily empowerment. The artists challenge constraints on women's bodies and sexual freedom, providing a crucial voice of resistance, and creating spaces where women and non-binary people can feel empowered. Even if they get censored in their wording, like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion in "WAP", they manage to articulate female empowerment. The explicit discussion of sexual and bodily rights and desires constitutes an open protest against societal and legal restrictions on women's bodies. The videos illustrate that the artists are in control of their own sexuality and refuse to be restricted in their sexual freedom and choices. As such, these videos can inspire women and non-binary people to stand up for their rights and fight against patriarchal oppression. In an era where politicians increasingly impose restrictive laws on female, trans, and non-binary bodies and women's sexual desires and needs are still taboo topics, often leading to slut shaming, feminist Hip Hop demonstrates a powerful countermovement.

My analysis has clearly revealed that feminist Hip Hop music videos have significant potential as a form of protest. They challenge gender roles, by putting women in a position of power and authority. Moreover, they offer critique on societal issues, by addressing the objectification and sexualization of women. These videos also endorse

the artists as positive role models, giving women in Hip Hop a voice to spark change. Furthermore, they foster an open dialogue on women's sexual pleasure, with rappers explicitly stating their sexual desires without shame. They also inspire activism by verbally and visually articulating feminist themes, potentially leading viewers to engage in protest and advocate for their rights. Lastly, they offer a safe space, by evoking a sense of community in which people can feel seen and supported.

My thesis contributes a thorough investigation of the multimediality of feminist Hip Hop music videos to the academic field of Hip Hop feminism, emphasizing the importance of analyzing visuals and auditory elements in addition to lyrics to showcase the true impact of feminist Hip Hop. Such a multimedia analysis reinforces the arguments in the lyrics and adds nuances of meaning. This approach revealed the protest and resistance potential of feminist Hip Hop music videos, in women's current struggles and fights against political and societal restrictions on their bodies and sexual autonomy. It clearly showcases that all components of music videos can add to women's empowerment not just the lyrics previous scholarship often focused on and that it is vital to analyze more contemporary works by Hip Hop feminist artists to showcase its protest potential.

Given the limited scope of this thesis, only three music videos were analyzed. To fully understand the impact of feminist Hip Hop on female empowerment, a broader range of tracks and videos should be examined. Additionally, the analysis of Rocky Rivera's track showed her readiness to explicitly call out politicians. Therefore, examining music videos by smaller, less commercially successful artists could reveal an even stronger resistance potential within feminist Hip Hop. Lastly, comparing and contrasting earlier feminist Hip Hop videos with contemporary ones would be valuable to investigate how the articulation of female empowerment and resistance has evolved over the years.

Overall, this thesis makes it clear that it is indeed time to “let the vagina have a monologue”. It demonstrates that feminist Hip Hop videos can be far more than simple entertainment; they are a powerful form of resistance. This medium’s artistic expression can be transformative, sparking social change and inspiring women to stand up for their bodily and sexual rights with both conviction and confidence.

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Appendix

Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the role of feminist Hip Hop music videos as sites of women's sexual and bodily empowerment. In light of recent legal and societal restrictions on women's rights, I highlight the relevance of Hip Hop as a tool for feminist protest. By analyzing the lyrical content, auditory elements, and visuals in Janelle Monáe's "Water Slide," Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP," and Rocky Rivera's "Pussy Kills," I examine how these music videos articulate themes of sexual and bodily empowerment.

The findings reveal that these videos employ diverse sonic elements — such as the assertive beats of "WAP," the playful soundscape of "Water Slide," and the defiant tones of "Pussy Kills" — to articulate themes of empowerment and resistance. Lyrically, they confront and critique societal norms, with "WAP" and "Water Slide" advocating for unapologetic self-expression, sexual agency and pleasure, while "Pussy Kills" addresses political and societal control over women's bodies. Visually, the music videos employ vibrant settings, provocative costuming, and energetic performances to reinforce their feminist themes.

The study highlights the importance of analyzing the multimedia aspects of Hip Hop to fully grasp its impact on feminist discourse. I argue that feminist Hip Hop videos are more than entertainment; they are a powerful form of protest and tools for social change. By creating spaces of resistance and fostering open dialogues on female sexuality, these videos inspire activism and support for women's rights.

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Arbeit untersuche ich die Relevanz von feministischen Hip-Hop-Musikvideos als Orte der sexuellen und körperlichen Ermächtigung von Frauen. Angesichts der jüngsten rechtlichen und sozialen Einschränkungen der Frauenrechte, analysiere ich die Bedeutung von Hip-Hop als Mittel für feministischen Protest. Durch die Analyse von lyrischen Inhalten, klanglichen Elementen und visuelle Darstellungen in Janelle Monáes „Water Slide“, Cardi B und Megan Thee Stallions „WAP“ sowie Rocky Riveras „Pussy Kills“ untersuche ich, wie diese Musikvideos Themen der sexuellen und körperlichen Ermächtigung artikulieren.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass diese Videos verschiedene auditive Elemente verwenden — wie die harten Beats von „WAP“, die verspielte Klanglandschaft von „Water Slide“ und die aufsässigen Töne von „Pussy Kills“ — um Themen der Ermächtigung und des Widerstands zu artikulieren. Textlich setzen sie sich mit gesellschaftlichen Standards auseinander und kritisieren diese, wobei „WAP“ und „Water Slide“ für Selbstaussdruck, sexuelle Handlungsfreiheit und Vergnügen plädieren, während „Pussy Kills“ die politische und gesellschaftliche Kontrolle über die Körper von Frauen anspricht. Visuell nutzen die Musikvideos lebhaftes Settings, freizügige Kostüme und energetische Performances, um ihre feministischen Inhalte zu verstärken.

Die Arbeit hebt hervor, wie wichtig es ist, die multimedialen Aspekte des Hip-Hops zu analysieren, um seinen Einfluss auf den feministischen Diskurs umfassend zu begreifen. Ich argumentiere, dass feministische Hip-Hop Videos zu mehr als nur zur Unterhaltung dienen; sie sind eine kraftvolle Form des Protests und Werkzeuge für gesellschaftliche Veränderung. Indem sie Räume des Widerstands schaffen und offene Dialoge über weibliche Sexualität fördern, inspirieren diese Videos zu Aktivismus und Unterstützung von Frauenrechten.