Who Got What it Takes to Rock the Mic Right?
Hip Hop Narratives and Rising Female Voices

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Acknowledgements

When I first started writing this thesis, I knew I was going to have a hard time being concise and keeping it simple. Despite the fact that I wanted to write about female rappers, I had no idea for how to frame the conversation or organize my thoughts in respect to the subject. Under the guidance of Professor Sarah Willie-Lebreton, my thesis advisor and extensive help from Professor Farha Ghannam, my second reader, this project slowly but surely started to take shape. I thank you, Professor Lebreton, for never letting me doubt myself. I thank you, Professor Ghannam, for always having your door open. I thank you, mom, for all your love and support. And of course, I thank you friends, because we all had to go through it and we chose to do it together.
CHAPTER 1:

HIP HOP AND HEGEMONY

Hip Hop is a way of life for many people. The rapping, dancing, dressing and acting part of it all come together to make up what we know to be Hip Hop. For the people who live Hip Hop, it is a culture that informs the way they think about the world. It carries the ideas of our societies and cultures, creates knowledge and our understandings of the world. Despite being a relatively new form of music, Hip Hop has been extensively analyzed and written about. Hip Hop America (2005) by Nelson George is an important book for my research. It details the growth of Hip Hop from its humble origins to its global presence. George walks readers through the entire history of Hip Hop with a critical eye towards the positive and negative aspects that allowed for expansion and a wide spread influence from something that started as a local hobby for many. In understanding the context for how Hip Hop grew, one comes to understand that the space for women has always been limited. Despite that, women have found ways of making their voices heard, reclaiming their agency in a male-dominated platform.

Hip Hop America also talks about the ways in which the social situations that plagued the black community created a need for a creative outlet. The social, economic, political, and geographical situations of the black population were and continue to be an important aspect of engaging in rap because it allows for an exploration of the individual characteristics of specific Hip Hop populations. Furthermore, this is expanded by taking into account how female MCs make sense of these differences and how they make sense of their social, economic, political and geographical situation in order to better connect to the segment of society they are speaking to and speaking for.
Hip Hop Revolution: Culture and Politics of Rap (2007) by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar talks about Hip Hop and explains the important concept of authenticity. Ogbar highlights the ways in which rappers go out of their ways to prove their authenticity. Usually, making outrageous claims, and creating a character that ceases to exist when they walk off the stage. Hip Hop can sometimes be seen as a contest for who can be the most authentic, and it usually turns out to be a contest for who can convince the most people that they belong to and epitomize this culture. Hip Hop is in a constant debate over which lifestyle is the most authentic for its population. The overachiever lifestyle, the gangster lifestyle and the community lifestyle are all a part of this ongoing debate.

Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement (2005) by S. Craig Watkins talks about Hip Hop and how it came to be a global powerhouse in the realm of music. Watkins explores some of the huge debates existing within Hip Hop, many of which were already mentioned by the authors I’ve talked about previously. One of those major debates is about whether Hip Hop still belongs to black people, despite being a global phenomenon. Now that Hip Hop has broken into the mainstream and is being appropriated, where does that leave the innovators, the core group of Hip Hop supporters and the population that struggled to keep that music alive when no one else saw anything useful in it? For almost as long as Hip Hop has existed, there have been questions about its essence. Nowadays one wonders if it has steered so far from its roots that it is no longer considered to be true Hip Hop. As all rappers and MCs struggle to reclaim and define Hip Hop for themselves, female rappers also have a lot to say about this.

Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (1994) by Tricia Rose “examines the complex and contradictory relationships between forces of racial and sexual
domination, black cultural priorities, and popular resistance in contemporary rap music.” The
question she is attempting to answer throughout the book is, “What are the terms of the
ideological, cultural, and sexual struggles that take place in rap? How are these struggles taken
up by black youth?” (xiv). Although many of the other books explore these questions, Rose also
sheds light on rap’s technological interventions. Although the other books mention technology in
the creation and the eventual proliferation of rap, there is no extended analysis about the effect of
technology on raps future and looking at rap through that particular lens will be important and
inspiring.

Hip Hop Revolution in the Flesh: Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil’ Kim’s
Lyricism (2009) by Greg Thomas is a very important book. It uses Lil Kim’s lyrics, interviews,
news/media coverage and public persona to make sense of the rap game and larger societal
issues pertaining to America. Thomas speaks about sexuality, matriarchy, violence in music by
analyzing Lil Kim. I used this book as a sort of blueprint for how to go about analyzing and
making connections from lyrics without jumping to conclusions. Lil’ Kim was a symbol of
power and desire in a male dominated rap game and investigating the ways in which she created
this persona for herself via her lyrics and other Hip Hop approved ways will be important in
drawing parallels to the way other female rappers establish themselves in the game.

Before getting into the argument of the paper, I’d like to give a little background on
where Hip Hop stands today as a music genre and a cultural force. Most of the information that
will be introduced is from www.statista.com and these statistics mostly pertain to Hip Hop,
although they may also be relevant to other music genres. In the chart, “The Most Successful
Music Tours in North America in 2014,” a bar graph details that the most successful tour was the
one launched by One Direction, producing 127.2 million dollars in gross revenue. Next in line
was the Beyoncé/Jay-Z tour, producing 96 million dollars in gross revenue. The difference between first and second place may seem significant, but taking into account that these artists are producing work with a platform made for critiquing the mainstream, second place is pretty good. Having a couple that embodies Hip Hop culture as one of the highest selling tours of the year of 2014 shows the strong following that the music has in North America. In the chart, “Distribution of World Wide Digital Music Consumption,” a bar graph details that Rap was the second most digitally consumed music genre in 2014. The consumption of Rap through digital means stands at 11% with Pop/Rock standing at 24%. Rap and Hip Hop account for 11% of all music consumption worldwide. From its humble beginnings in the Bronx, I would say that it certainly has expanded and made a name for itself all over the world. While it still lags behind Pop, with 11% consumption worldwide, Hip Hop is certainly here to stay.

Consumption of Hip Hop is high worldwide, making the most profitable artists wealthy and famous. In the chart, “World’s Richest Hip Hop Artists from June 2013 to June 2014 (by earnings),” a bar graph illustrates the pay that the highest earners received 2013-14. The highest earner, Dr. Dre cashed in at 620 million for the year, according to this chart, that may be an anomaly or an error. Jay-Z, cashed in at 60 million for the year. The lowest earner on the list Mac Miller, cashed in at 7 million. The only female on the list, Nicki Minaj, held the 11th spot, cashing in at 14 million. These charts not only show the popularity of Hip Hop, they show that the platform remains male-dominated and reveals that more white rappers are breaking in to the ranks of the high earners. Mac Miller, Macklemore, Eminem, and Drake all hold high places on the list. A list such as this ten years ago may have only had a white rapper or two. These numbers can give insight into the type of politics and issues our female rappers will have to deal with. Rappers such as Jay-Z and Dr. Dre are notorious for making songs that degrade women and
glorify negative actions, and they are the ones earning the highest. Plus, there is only one woman on the list, and many consider her to be an industry caricature for her use of overly sexual gesture and lyrics in addition to her desire to seem like a doll. These female rappers have to wrestle with the hegemonic narratives of Hip Hop and of the mainstream that these more popular artists are supporting. Although they may never make millions with their craft, they can still use the power of this platform to make a lasting impact on their communities.

ARGUMENT

In this paper I am arguing that female rappers have a distinct way of creating space for themselves in the rap game. Some of it consists of using the traditional ways of getting noticed, including being overly sexual, having an aggressive persona or playing to what mainstream audiences want to hear. However, there is a steady growing pool of hungry female rappers that refuse to compromise their identity in order to be fully accepted. I also want to emphasize that female rappers are never fully accepted into the rap game, but that is part of the reason for their large impact. Some one that completely blends in makes for an element of normal and commonplace that most rappers strive to surpass. By the mere fact of being female rappers, they are not commonplace or ordinary and this allows them to enter Hip Hop from a unique position. They are at once both insiders and outsiders. That is why I am here to analyze lyrics to see how they make sense of being spectators and performers in the same community.

METHODOLOGY

I plan on exploring these questions primarily through the lyrics of the female rappers. I will quote their lyrics, analyze and comment on the arguments they are making. I will mainly use content analysis, along with background the rappers I quote in order to give a full picture of their
message. I will also be using other literature about Hip Hop and rap in order to contextualize, expand on or critique what the female rappers are trying to express. I plan on using more general works about the effect of Hip Hop and rap to provide background and knowledge about the world these female rappers are emerging from. I will be using other works that generally talk about Hip Hop and rap to draw parallels to the effect that female rappers are having on Hip Hop culture and the new Hip Hop and rap generation as a whole. I will also use the works to draw comparisons and single out the influence of female rappers on trends, opinions, beliefs and actions of those who listen to them. I will also be analyzing social theories about the functions of narratives and hegemony as a lens for the conversations female rappers are having with their audience via their songs. I will make connections of these conversations to the larger conversations about how music influences culture, about how culture shapes people, and about how women’s voices are changing the way we perceive, use and are influenced by a specific genre of music.

LIMITATIONS

I was unable to interview the rappers whose lyrics I am quoting. That unfortunately, can lead to some misrepresentation and misinterpretation of what the artist meant. In order to combat this lack of understanding as much as possible, I have looked for interviews, magazine articles and blog posts about the rappers that may have information expanding on the verses. I’ve sought out more sources that directly talk to the artist involved and primarily used the sources which allow me to connect what the artist is saying to the larger discussions happening in Hip Hop. Despite this blind spot in my research, I feel that analysis of the lyrics is complete. On multiple occasions I compared my analysis of the lyrics to the analysis of similar lyrics by Hip Hop experts in order to have results rooted in a practical way of extracting meaning from words and
images. Many of the artists I write about are important to me and I am therefore partial to a positive representation of those artists. However, I do not shy away from giving their work a critical eye and exploring some of the ways in which their work may be troublesome and deleterious for the Hip Hop community. In the end, that is part of the contention in Hip Hop: what moves the crowd is not always what nurtures it. Still, the music has stayed alive through thick and thin and that is important to keep in mind when being overly critical of negative aspects in Hip Hop. Overall, Hip Hop has created a culture, a community and a platform for expression for anyone and everyone that is willing to share.

GRAMSCI AND HEGEMONY

Before talking about Hip Hop, I'd like to introduce the idea of hegemony, how its development occurred and its expansion by a few key thinkers. Antonio Gramsci, was a member of the communist party who wrote extensively on hegemony, counter-hegemony and power relationships that work on a basis of coercion and consent. Gramsci explored the ways in which societies established and kept power over their citizens. One way of establishing control is through the circulation of hegemonic narratives. The dominant group in society circulates narratives highlighting their superiority morally, intellectually and spiritually among other things. Despite the hegemonic narratives circulating, people who don’t subscribe to the ideals fight back by circulating counter-hegemonic narratives. Thus, while it may seem like the dominant power in society completely has their way, there is always a counter hegemonic narrative circulating that alerts them to the dissonance, resistance and power of those they attempt to dominate.

In Gramsci's Political Thought (1981), Joseph V. Femia explores Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony, consciousness and revolution among other things. According to Femia, "Gramsci
states that the supremacy of social group or class manifests itself in two different ways: 'domination' or a coercion and 'intellectual & moral leadership" (24). Femia elaborates stating that Gramsci's emphasis was on the intellectual and moral leadership. To clarify what Gramsci meant by the quote, Femia argues, "social control, in other words, takes two basic forms besides influencing behavior and choice externally through rewards and punishments, it also affects them internally, by molding personal convictions into a replica of prevailing norms" (24).

Through control of intellectual and moral leadership, society's dominant class is able to circulate narratives that reflect positively on them. The creation of those narratives reaffirms the position of the ruling class. However, wherever there is a hegemonic narrative, the sub-alternative class creates counter hegemonic narratives that are meant to stand in opposition. These counter narratives stand to resist the narratives of the ruling class, inspiring and encouraging resistance of hegemonic ideals and values. America's hegemonic narratives place white males atop the hierarchy, circulating justifications for why they should be there. Narratives such as the inferiority of women, the lesser intellectual power of people of color and the amorality of sexual deviance serve to uphold these beliefs.

In Marxism and Literature (1977), "Hegemony" by Raymond Williams clarifies Gramsci's concept of hegemony and its functions. Williams expanded on Gramsci's definition of hegemony by stating that hegemony is "a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values- constitutive and constituting- which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society” (110). Hegemony is an experience rather than an ideology or structure, making it possible to be molded from reinforcement within and dissent from without.
Williams continues explaining hegemony by stating that, “A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits….It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own” (112). Thus, while the ruling class seeks to enforce hegemony on others, the lived resistance of the sub-alternative class creates counter hegemonic actions and narratives that keep the ruling class from completely subordinating everyone else.

Hip Hop culture was created to make an intervention in the mainstream discourse. Many of these narratives were explored through the music, but many continued to circulate and expand at the expense of certain groups. Women, non hetero-normative people and people of other nationalities were not always afforded shelter under the counter hegemonic space Hip Hop created. These young women have more opportunities in the workplace, and in higher education, contrasted with the environment of limited support and career options for their racial background or orientation. Therefore, they attempt to challenge both narratives in an attempt to carve out more spaces where people like them can coexist without having to constantly explain themselves. These female rappers show that with Hip Hop there exists a platform to challenge power dynamics, along with voice resistance. Those counter hegemonic narratives then become survival guides for the people who refuse to submit to the main narratives of their society.

NARRATIVES IN HIP HOP

Far from its humble origins in the South Bronx, as a music form that grew out of isolation and oppression, it is now a worldwide phenomenon that only seems to be getting bigger as the
years go by. Hip Hop also has narratives that don’t aim to be a blueprint for how to live or interact. However, I will be focusing on those narratives that do move people to live by them because those narratives capture the minds and hearts of the audiences, which transcends Hip Hop beyond the borders of music and genre, moving it into the territory of culture. Hip Hop America reveals the history of Hip Hop and its growth since its birth in the South Bronx. It walks us through the cultural shifts that it has endured, the primary factors for its expansion, and how it influences listeners, not only as music, but as a culture with its own rules apart from the rest of society.

Hip Hop is a home to narratives about struggle, self-respect, money and community to name a few. All of these narratives weaved together, constructed, taken apart and re-created in daily life tell people how they should live. Again, these narratives are shaped by the local communities and cultures. Hip Hop is also filled with other narratives, but the ones I have detailed above are the most influential amongst the Hip Hop crowd. These narratives are also very important to a gendered understanding of Hip Hop and will come in handy particularly for the analysis on the lyrics of female rappers. Taking into account their race, sexuality, politics will bring us a unique understanding of the way these narratives operate because all of those traits will be explored through a female lens. This analysis will examine the way these female rappers alter narratives to make space for themselves within the Hip Hop community, showing that they have what it takes to rock the mic right.

The lyrics, experiences and attitudes of these rappers are formed in a context where limited opportunities and obstacles are the norm. In a time where we are seeing increased police violence of black and brown bodies, neglect and rejection from the education system, high social inequality and are under the constant threat of danger, their voices are necessary. The
combination of all those factors along with the progressive narratives around women’s rights and abilities open up the platform for female rappers to engage with Hip Hop, the audience and larger societal problems in a way they wouldn’t have been able to do before. At first glance, it may seem that these three female rappers have nothing to do with each other, and are emerging in their own cultural and geographical contexts as unique voices that challenge Hip Hop to be more positive and inclusive. However, these female rappers have been shaped by similar experiences living in the United States as people conscious of the inequality that prevails and the desperation of people in situations such as theirs or worst. These female rappers have not stepped to the plate as individual voices, unbeknownst to themselves, they are the beginning of a movement empowering the female, queer and anti-establishment persons and they are doing it by challenging the main narratives of Hip Hop in order to push them towards something that every marginalized person can feel a part of.
CHAPTER 2:
KEEPING IT REAL

One of the major narratives of Hip Hop is the idea of “keeping it real.” For many rappers, this means being truthful about the obstacles they have faced, other artists that they like or dislike and sentiments about the industry and the state of Hip Hop music in general. Hip Hop culture is also very much about “keeping it real.” The Hip Hop crowd thrives on battles and challenges of authenticity. For some people, keeping it real embodies the gangster narrative where one talks about violence and criminality. For some people, it is quite the opposite. As a culture created by young people, Hip Hop has a strong narrative about staying true to yourself, goals, and ambitions, no matter what that may be. Sometimes understanding this narrative gets tricky, especially when it overlaps with other narratives that do not hold such a positive message. Ideally, being real and being yourself is up to your own interpretation, but in reality, the idea of what is real is shaped by the community and the local context. How well an artist embodies that idea of realness within the community proves how real they are to themselves and the audience.

Hip Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap (2007) by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar explains that, “The desire to affirm authenticity and skills is a ubiquitous artistic quality in the ‘rap game’” (42). In asserting one’s authenticity and keeping it real, one can talk about their struggles and successes. MC’s also use this narrative as an excuse to challenge opponents and display their skills as “realest,” which is always a highly sought after title in Hip Hop crowds.

Rap music, as a part of Hip Hop culture is made to inspire feelings and can also be a call to action. For the narrative of “keeping it real,” rappers strive to make the audience, other artists and themselves feel the level of their authenticity, elevating their status and making them prominent voices within Hip Hop. There are several artists that can be said to be keeping it real.
In Hip Hop culture, women who try to claim realness when not talking about their sexual prowess are often overlooked and misunderstood, getting less credibility for their assertions about “keeping it real.” However, the female rappers that I will analyze have displayed their realness by giving vivid accounts of their past struggles, deviating from Hip Hop’s gendered narrative of “keeping it real.”

Angel Haze is a rapper from Detroit, Michigan who uses her fast flowing rhythmic lyrics to tell stories of hardship and success. She uses clever metaphors and wordplay to help listeners understand her experience. Her delivery can be fast-paced and intense; she can also deliver her rhymes with a softer sound for storytelling and lessons learned. In discussing the narrative of “keeping it real”, I will be analyzing Angel Haze’s “Suffering First,” and her take on “Say What’s real.” Dessa is a rapper and poet from Minneapolis, Minnesota who uses a more abstract approach to music and rapping. She uses elaborate metaphors that span entire songs in order to expand on the subject at hand. Her songs are poems written to a beat with cryptic, abstract messages. For Dessa, her multi-layered lyrics are open to a spectrum of analysis. Not only is she a witty lyricist but her vocals often complement the chorus, adding to her unique sound. In discussing the narrative of keeping it real, I will be analyzing Dessa’s “Mineshaft.”

These female rappers play a balancing act with Hip Hop and are cautious of being too sexual, like rappers such as Lil’ Kim and Nicki Minaj. They also don’t leave any topics off-limits, giving listeners a full view of their world through their lyrics. They also have to make sure that they are keeping it real enough to maintain credibility, while also having to create their space within an environment where their work and story is constantly challenged. Despite the difficulties of doing what they love, these female rappers are persistent and creative with their approaches to claiming a space and making a name within Hip Hop.
Surpassing childhood pain and making it a motivator for future success is one way to win an audience’s heart over because many people can relate to hardship and perseverance. Angel Haze gives listeners hope of a better life by telling the story of survival, showing her realness and gaining credibility within the rap game. Haze grew up in a reservation and was not allowed to listen to rap and Hip Hop. She did, however, have a penchant for expressing herself through poetry and art. According to several of her songs and poems, when Haze was a young girl, she was sexually abused by authority figures. These childhood experiences gave her a great deal to write about. Haze did not tell her mother, so expression through writing was a much needed outlet. When she was 16, her mother had a falling out with the religious leader and her family left the reservation. All did not go as planned and they ended up in a homeless shelter for a while. Once off the reservation, Haze was exposed to all types of music. She started listening to
Hip Hop and writing raps alongside her well-worn friend, poetry. Haze’s willingness to share the experience of those hardships through rap, proves that success is possible despite troubled beginnings. Her honesty gives her a loyal audience of listeners and really big role within Hip Hop.

In Haze’s “Suffering First,” she tells the story of her younger self searching for success and encountering many hardships along the way. Haze attributed her friend’s attitude changes to her artistic growth. She realizes that they don’t carry the same burdens she does, but questions why they didn’t understand that one must evolve as a person to make a greater impact. In these four bars, Haze details the specific problems that caused a failure in the relationship, giving her more realness points. While many rappers will talk about their problems and failed relationships, they are usually vague. It signals that they are not up to the task of fully dissecting their situation the way Haze does. It makes them inferior within the discourse of Hip Hop. Haze does not lack the ability to be completely open, thus engaging her in the narrative of authenticity. Although her delivery can be aggressive and fast, in this song, she opts to use a slower, more sentimental delivery that matches the content of the song. In the introductory lines to her verse, Haze begins:

I’m staring’ at the view from the height of my past pain;
Ironic, I’m trying come in first if it’s the last thing
They trying throw me off, but I won’t let ‘em pass me
They kill me with the hating, but I ain’t in the casket

Within the narrative of authenticity, being yourself despite having people who dislike you, is a feat worthy of bragging. In many situations, people fold under pressure, allowing ‘haters’ to dictate their lives. It shows that she has learned something from the experience and is now a wiser person because of it. Thus, her sharing of this wisdom allows for others that are in her situation to deal with the issue adequately, making her a reliable source of advice. As a reliable source of advice, she feels more like a real person to the audience and less like a rap
caricature, a fate which unfortunately many rappers are unable to escape. She appears to be reliving those negative moments when she speaks about them in her verse, making her an emotionally accessible rapper. The audience doesn’t have to dig to feel what she is saying, encouraging her audience to let their guard down too. With these first four bars, Haze has already started to build on the realness narrative that is so prominent within Hip Hop.

Pushed ‘em out of my life, my friends say that I changed
But, how the fuck you make a difference and still stay the same?
They don’t carry the weight; they can’t handle the pressure
So they can see me evolve, but they can’t capture my essence

In these four bars, Haze details the specific problems that caused failure in her relationships. She is establishing credibility and authenticity. While many rappers will talk about their problems and failed relationships, they are usually vague. It signals that they are not up to the task of fully dissecting their situation the way Haze does. It makes them inferior artists. Haze does not lack the ability to be completely open, thus engaging the narrative of authenticity.

In Haze’s “Say What’s Real,” she expresses the hardships of trying to break into the rap game as a female. Haze talks about the struggles of trying to be honest with her music while being overlooked and disrespected. This song is a remix of a song by Drake, a popular Canadian rapper. In this song he details his disappointments about the politics of the rap game and his place in them. With the same premise for the song, Haze also rants about the issues with the rap game. She is engaging with the narrative of authenticity because she is willing to critique the very institution that is feeding her. Haze’s willingness to speak about the negative parts of the music business and critique her own place within that structure despite possible consequences gives listeners a reason to her. Being honest and having strong will-power are signifiers of authenticity in the rap game. With the above lines and many bars from other songs, Haze proves that she is not only keeping it real, but that she is the standard for real.
I have to let my ego go
My profit coming heavy as it grows and
I'm almost near the point where I'm about to lose control
And If he never burdens us with more than we can hold
Then why do I implode like a fucking overload?

In “Say What’s Real,” Haze digs deeper into the narrative of keeping it real by highlighting her struggles with adjusting to industry life. While she acknowledges that she was making money, she admits that she was losing control and even questioned if she was strong enough to handle it. Her critique of the rap game in those few lines is already enough to make her a few enemies, but she is also gaining the trust of her listeners. They audience has come to expect the full picture when it comes to Haze. However, she admits that it may be too much for her to deal with. Questioning her ability to be strong enough to make it through a hardship humanizes her in the eyes of the audience and reaffirms her art as a safe haven for her most troubled times, rather than a money making tool. With those bars, she keeps her integrity as an artist and maintains rap as her conscience: an entity that she can admit anything to. Haze’s words encourage introspection and reflection, leading by example, making her the epitome of realness.

In this instance Haze uses Hip Hop as a counter hegemonic platform to talk about hardships and celebrate her success. Deeply held beliefs of the ruling class hold women and people of color to be inferior and less hard working. Haze combats these negative narratives by detailing her experiences of fighting for her success despite the lack of support. Haze also challenges Hip Hop’s version of the “keeping it real” narrative that focuses more on money and status than what people are going through. While upholding the narrative by admitting that she has gotten caught up in the politics of the rap game, she deviates from it by asserting that her reasons for continuing are not based on material goods and status. Haze wrestles with narratives of female inferiority and failure along with rap’s narratives of material, superficial gain over
truth. She has received these hegemonic narratives from society and in her lived hegemony has chosen to further counter them by using a platform that offers alternative narratives for who she is. Williams explained that hegemony has to continually be recreated and defended, while being challenged with pressures of its own, and some of that pressure comes from artists such as Haze who refuses to be spoken for by her oppressors.

DESSA

Dessa’s unique abstract writing is a way of keeping it real within Hip Hop. While not everyone grows up in a dangerous neighborhood, everyone does have their own struggles. When it comes to writing about hers, Dessa leaves everything on the stage. Her stories about past mistakes and rough times connect her to her audience and allow her to demonstrate her authenticity in a different way that most rappers would.
Dessa was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota a city known for its love of Hip Hop culture and its close-knit communities. According to “Emcee | Writer,” a biography of Dessa written by Zack Rosen, Dessa always had a passion for words and lyrics. Verbal argumentation skills were encouraged in her household. Dessa argued for later curfews and her parents would allow her to stay outside longer. Dessa graduated as the valedictorian of her high school, and went on to earn a B.A. in Philosophy at the University of Minnesota. On top of having a deep love for words, Dessa was always surrounded by Hip Hop culture, as well as other forms of music. All of these elements came together to make for a unique sound that Dessa has created with help from various musician friends from over the years. While keeping it real may look different for Dessa than it looks for Haze, the basic components of authenticity are present in her music: Honesty, admission of wrongdoing, and talking about past hardships.

In “Mineshaft,” Dessa talks about her life as a series of non-affirmative identities and being less than she used to be, which is not to be equated with being a lesser person. Dessa no longer subscribes to those identities and that gives her a different outlook on life.

The list of things I used to be is longer than the list of things I am
Ex-lover, ex-friend
Ex-communicated atheist and an ex-patriot
Living in the heartland
Living on the small chance
Luck would save the last dance

Part of what makes Dessa a rapper who people listen to is her wit and her boldness. It is pretty bold to admit that she is an ex-communicated atheist and an ex-patriot. Not only would that alienate many possible listeners, but it would also make many question the credibility of the identities she does subscribe to. However, admitting that she once believed in something that no longer represents her shows strength of character. The fact that Dessa is rapping bars of identities that could be considered past failures, but that are not considered mistakes by her shows that she
can keep it real. It is difficult to admit that things change, especially when you display a certain identity publicly. Those statements exhibit a level of honesty that is rare amongst rappers and this gives her more credibility that is takes away from her, affirming her status as an authentic rapper.

Them rum soaked in sad jokes at rap shows
Some folks know how slow that trap closes
Prose is closest I've ever been to feeling like I found it
I'm not a writer I just drink a lot about it

In the lines above, Dessa explains the irony of how music and art influence people.

“Them rum soaked” suggest that people need to be numbed to really appreciate art at its highest levels, pointing out a deficiency in the way people operate. Dessa hints to feeling like the audience is missing the essence of art, her included, which makes it particularly hard to admit. Then with a little word play, she flips the message to say that she’s not even a writer, she is just like the rest of them. She also numbs herself in order to get closer to art and perhaps understand life a little better.

You're inside of the lie
It's a brilliant design
It's like, "Just act surprised"
I lost some money on the weighted dice
I lost an octave to the Camel Lights
And when I lost you, I lost some good love and a hand to bite
I lost a friend to my wit
and my pride would rather sit while you drive

For a popular rapper with a deal or a fan base to lose, making political statements that can offend is often not an option. Dessa however, is an underground rapper who does not compromise the integrity of her art and work, much less her opinions, to satisfy others. Her bars about moving further from the origin, but not quite to the solution can be seen as a statement that would offend intellectuals, who can be considered the core of her fan base. Still, she shows no
fear in alienating people, or making her listeners think critically about themselves, which exhibits a level of authenticity that many rappers lack. Dessa extends this lyrical fearlessness by admitting her faults and her wrong-doings. While Dessa understands that it is too late for an apology, she admits that she is suffering the punishment either way. Her verse helps her cope with these losses, and also shows her that she can move on through the process of introspection. This process allows her to relive her past mistakes with the understanding that she will do better the next time. Admitting wrong-doing is difficult for everyone. The fact that she does it so seamlessly makes her listeners feel like she is keeping it real.

Dessa is using this narrative in a similar fashion. Despite being a platform for counter hegemonic action, Hip Hop has its own hegemonic narratives: one being that authenticity is directly linked to money, violence and sexual drive. Dessa is challenging a hegemonic narrative within a counter hegemonic space in order to create a space where people can be authentic without having to pretend to be someone else. She challenges Hip Hop’s hegemonic narrative of authenticity by describing herself in her own terms, offering honesty in the place of a façade. She does not bring guns or violence, just her female experience disrupting that narrative, also challenging narratives of female docility in mainstream culture. Without the resistance to these narratives from Haze, Dessa and other female rappers, Hip Hop would just be another platform for subordinating and demeaning women. While at times it does serve that purpose, it is a counter hegemonic platform and encourages those with alternative views to voice their opinions about mainstream society. Despite the possibility for subordination, the opportunities to be heard are greater than usual, making Hip Hop a great tool for resistance to hegemony in spite of its hegemonic tendencies.
It is important to keep in mind the context that has made this situation possible. Haze and Dessa can opt to show their authenticity through their honesty because Hip Hop is at a point where it is saturated with rappers trying to show their authenticity through stories of violence. The moment is perfect for someone who has a different perspective because the audience demands diversity and stories that are more reflective of their own experiences. While there is still a huge market for those who want to establish their credibility by talking about being violent, there is a growing audience looking to hear stories of relationships, complex situations and lessons learned. With Haze and Dessa, their honesty makes them role models. Audience members can feel proud to be who they are because that is what Haze and Dessa express with their music. It is reassuring and creates a space for discussion of black and brown identity away from the violence, guns and police force, an identity that helps them uphold a counter-narrative of who they are, which is what Hip Hop was created to do in the first place.
CHAPTER 3:
FOLLOWING THE POLITICS

Hip Hop culture and rap has always had a political element. Some of the earliest rap songs were made in response to pitiful living conditions. Rappers depicted their situations to others, and the songs became popular by virtue of being relatable to youth, poor people and people of color. Rap music and Hip Hop culture also grew out of the exclusion from mainstream culture. It grew out of a need to create counter-narratives to uphold those living in the margins of society.

People of color started experimenting with equipment, making different sounds and playing records in unconventional ways, creating the art of DJing. Artists were already experimenting with different sounds, especially drawing from jazz and blues sounds, but now they had added electronic feel of disco music. These sounds were also fused with sounds from the Caribbean and Africa, drawing on all types of artist in order to make something that sounded unique and different. DJs would play their mixes out of doors instigating impromptu parties in the neighborhoods, on playgrounds, on sidewalks, and in parks. As opposed to disco and mainstream culture, where one had to go to a club or a certain venue, Hip Hop culture was public and anyone around could partake in it. Anyone who could scrap the tools together could also take part in the growing and expansion of a new art form. This allowed the youth, the poor, and the people of color to feel like they were a part of something, even if the mainstream did not want to recognize or appreciate them. White America’s stamp of approval became less and less important as they immersed themselves in their new culture.

With the new beats, spontaneous parties, moves to go with the new music, there was also a group of people that spoke while the beats played. Some of the people did it to hype the crowd
for the music they were listening to, many took on mic responsibilities to shout out the DJ and ensure that everyone was having a good time. Soon, a new style emerged in which artists displayed their skills on the mic by rhyming their phrases and talking their talk with clever puns and metaphors. Most of the time, the rhyming was free-styled meaning that it was not written prior to being performed, which made it all the more interesting. Neither the artist, nor the crowd knew what was going to happen next.

With the huge potential to attract people of all ages, and backgrounds, rap and Hip Hop culture was starting to catch on. Instead of simply doing freestyles at parties, artists started putting demos of their work together and selling them. They also sought to express their discontent, tell their life stories and relive their triumphs. This new culture had found a voice and it didn’t need mainstream approval to get louder and make some impact. The fact that people felt like Hip Hop and rap were a sort of rebellion against white America, allowed for people to express their honest feelings about the state of their economic situation, the social situation and allowed them to place blame appropriately. Music criticizing the government, white people, and black people was being created, distributed and consumed wildly. People felt like they didn’t need the permission of anyone to tell their stories and so tell their stories they did. And always following the politics, they had a lot to say.

GIA MEDLEY
Gia Medley is a rapper from Los Angeles with an Eminem-like ability to rhyme words, entire sentences, and use sound/syllable repetition within her verses with an aggressive delivery. It also gives listeners the experience of her overwhelming lyrical agility and her verbal power. This style of delivery forces the audience to listen intently and try to keep up as she places them in her world. In discussing narrative of political consciousness within Hip Hop, I will be analyzing Gia Medley’s “The Revolution,” and “Say You Will,” which is a remix of a Drake song.

Medley is no stranger to hardship, living in a poor neighborhood has placed her in situations that have deeply shaped her outlook on life. Although she can spit bars about clothes and money, she also crafts stories that inspire hope and urge action by criticizing the current state of affairs. She talks about everything from individual accountability to the ineffectiveness of the government, corporations and how they are poisoning society with consumer culture. More importantly, she talks about the need to completely revolutionize the way we think about living and existing.

Maybe we were ill advised
We were taught to stack chips for these dainty nights
We were taught to get rich until our demise
Believe the lies
And maybe 9 to 5 is the slavery guys
Maybe we I was ill advised
Until I opened my eyes I felt the vibe of a spiritual time
I want to leave the world better than when I arrived
The revolution will not be televised

In the lines above, Medley questions the lessons and morals that she was brought up with, claiming that she was “ill-advised,” as was possibly the rest of her family, friends and neighborhood, in terms of how to survive bad times and low funds. As with any good political and social critique, challenging the narratives that instruct people’s morals and growth is a centerpiece that allows them to talk about several different topics. As we saw before, Medley already called out greed for being an ineffective way to nurture society. Medley is also attacking the narratives and messages given from parents, family, society that inform greed and create a motivation to seek money and riches rather than happiness and truth.

Medley hands her audience the truth in the form of a sarcastic hypothesis stating, “and maybe 9 to 5 is the slavery guys.” People are left to ponder the messages of economic stability that come with having a “9 to 5” and analyze the way it is similar to slavery because someone owns their time for most of the day. Medley goes deeper into the narrative of political reasoning, giving listeners many reasons to question why they work, spend and interact with their jobs and money the ways they do. Thus she disrupts the foundation many people build their lives on. Although it may not be cause for revolution, it can make them question their work life and values enough to feel like there may be another, saner way to live life.

We kings and queens
Eating chicken wings
While the pot is thickening
From the very beginning I’m witnessing
I’m trying to find an answer in a journal scribbling
If the kids are feeling ill
Its ‘cuz the feel is sickening
Beg for what you want
But die for what you need
And watch how people grieve
While we’re dropping to our knees
From the bottom
From the very core
From the dirt poor
From the dirt on the shelves
Of these second hand stores

Medley alludes to the power the people hold and the responsibility to make change. Rather than being passive bystanders, one is walked to the open door of opportunity to impact issues they are passionate about. She goes on to rail against consumer culture, as if it creates a huge fog around everyone that covers eyes, forcing them to only go for the superficial. Medley unleashes her inner Eminem to vividly describe the sick situation in which our morals are clouded by consumption culture. She adds that people are actually getting physically sick due to these systems of oppression, particularly kids that have very little influence on it, explaining that if they feel sick it is because this is a harmful situation all around. Medley concludes that the only way out is through revolution. The quick pace and rhyming sounds of “sick” “wit” “ill” and “feel” reverberates inside the mind of the listener long after the words are said, leaving a lasting impact that can also be connected to how this entire “sickness” works. Meaning, people have few chances to interact with it and directly counteract. Plus they feel the effects for years to come regardless.

With the song “The Revolution,” Medley brings rap and Hip Hop back to its roots of rebellion and political criticism, using the art form and a platform to express her political views. Medley uses rap’s tendency for open discourse and open criticism to cite examples of failings by the government, by our political system and by corporations. Most importantly, she uses rap as a way to move others to action and create an informed state of accountability where others will
understand that if they do not take action, they consequences will continue to be subjected to the injustices and inequalities of a system only made to benefit a few. She says all this eloquently and without patronizing her listeners. This is because she too has been in the place of seeking riches, lost in the folds of consumer culture and in a state of oblivion about the economic system and how it directly impacts her situation. Thus, her quest is to enlighten and not scold people who are in her situation. Medley’s engagement with political narratives within Hip Hop creates a world where there is hope for everyone, they just have to go get it.

Medley targets her very own home, art form, and life’s work in rap music and Hip Hop culture for continuing and even exacerbating society’s ills and systems of oppression. In the song “Say You will,” Medley comes clean about the issues she has as a female in the industry with a lot of talent, but with very little will to compromise the integrity of the work. Medley refuses to put on a persona of a female sex symbol and change her rapping style in order to make more money, making her a black sheep in the industry. More importantly it has forced her to stay below the radar, remaining unsigned despite her verbal ability.

Labels coming at me  
They quoting me on their letterheads  
A and R's keep saying show skin  
And then you'll get more ahead  
Making me sweat for a check  
I've gotten better head

Medley doesn’t hold back in explaining the reasons for her run of unsuccessful years in the industry. Her stubbornness is costing her big bucks, but she remains fixed in her opinions and intentions, highlighting the politics in the music business. Medley makes it obvious that she refuses to show more skin in order to make more money, claiming that they are making her work even harder for the money she does earn, equating the work to a weak orgasm stating she’s
“gotten better head” in an attempt to illustrate the extent to which the industry leaves her frustrated and unsatisfied.

You need to have more of that fucking sex appealing flow
And then maybe they'll say baby she's sexy beautiful
They say the masses are loving those empty syllables
But they don't know, they don't know that shit will kill me though
They don't hear me though
It’s like their ears are fucking closed

Medley continues with her tirade against the music industry citing reasons for her lack of a profitable career on refusing to adopt a “sex-appealing flow.” Although Medley does talk about sex in her songs, she talks about it in a lewd manner, not in a sensual manner that men would like. Therefore, anyone listening to Medley talking about anything would have to be there to listen for the bars, the creativity, the story and the truth, not for the sex or for the image of an industry manufactured puppet. Again, Medley signals the audience as another faulty part in the equation of the creation of terrible music. The industry believes the audience wants a pretty face that raps “empty syllables” at them. Medley is accusing the audience of not correcting the industry, stating that both sides are death to her talent and to her need for survival through music with the phrases, “but they don’t know, they don’t know, that shit will kill me though/ but they don’t hear me though/ it’s like their ears are fucking closed.” Medley assumes that either they can’t hear her or they don’t want to. Despite the intention, the effects on her career and her artistry are noticeable. While she does have a buzz, there is no deal, and she doesn’t do many shows outside of her local area. And, while she has ghost written songs for other artists, those artists and producers have not offered her the opportunity to be herself and make the music that she wants as a part of their team.
As far as engaging with the narrative of politics within the world of Hip Hop goes, Angel Haze is no stranger to it. In one of her most politically charged songs, Haze gives her take on the song “No Church in the Wild,” originally written by Kanye West. In the song, Haze explores themes of distrust in the government, the questioning of morals and messages that society has circulated to her, and the reclaiming of a history that is often negated if not completely disregarded.

In *Imagined Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson talks about how the idea of a "nation" was constructed and evolved to become as real and as tangible as people's languages and geographical locations. According to Anderson, a nation is, "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson argues that nations are imagined because members of a nation don't all know each other, therefore
channeling an imagined comradeship with other members, as a fraternity, commands emotional legitimacy from its followers.

Haze alludes to this idea of an imagined community when calling out politicians that don't have the people's best interest at heart. Haze tried to clarify the ways in which the government circulates narratives of a shared history, upholding mainstream discourse surrounding American pride. Haze shows that when the government talks of community, it is not thinking about Haze, Medley, Dessa, and the people those rappers represent or the people they are speaking for. But to allow those ideas to enter the discourse would collapse the fallacy that the United States is a nation with a government that has its people’s interest at heart. Therefore they are cautious of spreading narratives that can split an already very culturally, economically and socially segmented nation.

The Hip Hop community is also an imagined community. For, all rappers, dancers, artists and fans do not intimately know each other. However, the sense of comradeship is there. While mainstream political discourse seeks to reassure marginalized Americans that they are still part of the nation - the narratives circulating are highlighting their inferiority and shortcomings. But Hip Hop, as another imagined community is also using the power of an imagined connection to spread some positive narratives of having a beautiful, rich, deep history outside of the mainstream discourse. And as leaders in the creation of more positive narratives, Haze, Dessa, and Medley use their craft to strengthen that attachment to this community over the mainstream community.

See this world has been designed for the guppies
And niggas in highest power are really the biggest puppets
And know that I don't believe in the curse of a generation
Just know that the fucking past is only intimidation
Know that it's only a reminder that only hinders your greatness
And know that the fucking devil is in the form of these haters

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Who are in the form of these majors and
Know that your fucking speech is the biggest form of betrayal
And Since life is merely a conversation
Pay attention to the words and the lyrics they be saying
Pay attention to them saying the realest is what they claiming
The look behind all their words and see what they all displaying

Haze breaks down the functions of our political system in case the arguments of a lost history and rigged odds didn’t rattle our consciences. Haze aims at the most important players in government, in our political system, labeling them as puppets. This argument is dangerous for maintaining order in society because if the people highest in office cannot maintain their own autonomy and make decisions that are for the good of the people, regular citizens of the world have little to no chance of doing the same. Despite the dark prognosis, Haze lightens the tone by saying that she does not “believe in the curse of a generation, and know that the fucking past is only intimidation.” Haze is saying that despite the fact that we have been effectively disconnected from our histories, the political system will only use it as intimidation against us when we try to make significant strides. She understands that people in power write other people’s history as a way to intimidate the marginalized into thinking they have no history to be proud of. She is alluding to the maxim of lions and hunters throughout this verse. Haze encourages listeners to keep the past present, but not to base future success on the fact that there have been limited odds and a significant erasure of culture and knowledge. For she probably believes that the only way to keep some sort of autonomy in the political system is to hold on to the mementos that we do have and strive for achievement instead of wallowing in the sadness of what was lost.

Hello Mr. Obama, Comma Mrs. Obama
Comma future elections, hello Hillary Rodham
Tell me what are the stakes boiling pot to the plate
We can kill something steal something what the fuck does it take
Then tell ’em you're just a face that represents the choices they make
And tell 'em they don't make changes only bigger mistakes
And tell 'em I said fuck 'em
Thanks for bunches of nothing land of the fucking free
And home of the shortcomings

With these last few bars, Haze specifically signals out certain highly regarded political players. She calls out the Obamas and Hillary Clinton. The fact that she calls out the Obamas is important because as far as progressive goes, they are a couple that signifies progress for many of the American people. Hillary Clinton is also singled out as another puppet, making a mockery out of the heavy hitters in the Democratic Party, which is believed to be the more progressive side by many Americans. Haze is showing her understanding of politics and has no illusions about actually being represented by the Obamas and Hillary Clinton. She understands that even if people in office are part of certain demographic, it doesn’t necessarily mean they are representing that demographic in office.

Haze and Medley dissect the harmful narratives of freedom, capitalism and democracy circulated by society. Those are the hegemonic narratives that allow the government to remain in power and like Gramsci wrote, there is always a counter hegemonic narrative. According to Williams, “It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture” (114). Because the political platform is not the most welcoming to the women of color, these female rappers are using Hip Hop culture as a platform to elevate and circulate counter hegemonic narratives. They are bringing Hip Hop back to the roots of making political change and challenging the status quo, opening up a larger space in rap for political discussions where women can contribute as much as they want.
Medley attacks the politics of the ruling class, highlighting that many of the values are harmful to those who live without the status or resources it has. In regards to hegemony, Williams also said, “The reality of any hegemony, in the extended political and cultural sense, is that while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society” (113). Medley is highlighting the oppositional politics in order to create bigger cracks within these hegemonic narratives that are already hard to maintain. With challenging the ruling class’ politics, Medley opens her audience to a different way of living that can cost the ruling class its status, if it were to be realized. This counter hegemonic narrative of alternative politics exists hand in hand with the hegemonic ones. Medley is simply applying pressure to tip the balance in her favor so that the sub-alternative class may exist without the burden of unfair politics.

Haze attacks everything from incorrect accounts of historical events to major political players in an attempt to define a space where those politics have a less negative impact on her. For most of her verses, Haze is exposing the ways in which hegemonic narratives destroy the truth about the sub-alternative class. In revealing her alternative histories and attitudes, the hegemonic narratives her audience has lived by can become nothing more than a myth, losing all power to retain believers and influence their actions. Breaking free from the influence of the hegemonic narratives becomes the only way to ensure that there will be freedom to exist completely as they are, thus giving their message urgency and priority in the face of social unrest and economic despair.
CHAPTER 4:

ALL ABOUT THE FUN

Hip Hop and rap culture is also about having a good time. An essential aspect in Hip Hop is the flaunting of skills, good looks, style, intelligence, and strength. Basically anything that can be seen as a positive characteristic that can be bragged about. Gia Medley, Angel Haze and Dessa display their skills on the mic by crafting images of how they enjoy themselves.

The very music and culture of Hip Hop grew out of a need for an outlet from a community that was under tremendous stress because of the hostile attitudes and actions against them. There was always time to stress, be angry, rage against the powers that be. However, there was also a need to just let the stress go and have a good time. For having fun, many young people would turn to music, Disco music in particular. But for many poor black youth, the discos were not a place where they could find an outlet. Discrimination and a lack of funds limited black youth access to disco and nightlife. In the midst of all that, black youth start making their own music. This music was joyful; it captured the sound of the urban experience, and was speaking for a crowd of people that felt unappreciated. Without being about the fun, Hip Hop would not be where it is today. Plus, having fun and enjoying life is one of the most important messages it can give its listeners.

Part of Hip Hops allure is that you pay your dues and make your name with your creativity. Using words in imaginative and unusual ways to make a statement or paint a picture can easily elevate artists to the status of the greats. People of all ages, races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds participate because it is open to them. This makes survival and relevance within a Hip Hop a challenge, a game that is hard to play but fun nonetheless.
In these past few years these female rappers have been showing off their wits and engaging in a battle of creativity and wordsmithship that breathes new energy into a Hip Hop culture that seems crowded by the lyrics and tired stories of rappers. Because while Hip Hop does encourage creativity, that makes the bar for entry very low. Anyone with something to say that can rhyme words may fancy themselves an artist, but true creativity and verbal genius will distinguish the posers from the real deal. Skillful rappers such as Haze, Dessa and Medley use clichés too. But they often put a creative spin or a place them in an unexpected place, making their stories accessible and innovative at the same time. It allows them to reach wider audiences, where people at all levels of intellectual thought can find something in their music.

Hip Hop style is loud, colorful, energetic and unapologetic. The female rappers that I have analyzed display several of these characteristics in their work, making them stand out from a crowd of generic rappers and Hip Hop artists that reuse the same messages and tropes in order to make a quick buck. Some of the most popular topics are partying, women, and sex. While there is nothing wrong with talking about those subjects (Hip Hop wouldn’t be much fun without the party element), there is a saturation of those messages within Hip Hop music, making it difficult to embrace and explore different messages. Haze, Dessa and Medley’s stories are competing with club songs and tales of masculine superiority, positioning themselves as a new perspective in a genre that creates too many songs that sound the same in style and content. This allows them to make an intervention in the narrative of having fun, slowly but surely shifting the narrative into something more inclusive and community friendly.

Rather than stick to the “club” element of Hip Hop, these female rappers talk about their verbal prowess and their lyrical abilities. For them, the element of competition and survival is fun. They talk about chasing their dreams and overcoming hurdles because the chase as an
essential part of the journey becomes a game for them. The chase is also fun - and becomes more fun if one is catching up or winning. For Dessa, Gia Medley, and Angel Haze, the element of fun in Hip Hop is as important as talking about politics or keeping it real. Without the entertainment part of Hip Hop, the culture wouldn't be as widespread or as powerful as it has become.

DESSA

When people interact with each other, they are putting on a performance that implies who they are, what they do and how others should react to them. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Erving Goffman explains that people are always performing identities in order to be received and interacted with in a certain way. Everything from people's manners to their appearances influence the way others see them. In addition to putting on a performance, Goffman makes distinctions between the functions of the front and back stage, explaining that the font stage is the outward performance given to the audience and that the backstage is a place where the actor can be themselves. The three female rappers are no different in that they want to be received by their audience in a certain way. Everything from the way they look, talk, walk, rap and move are part of the front stage performances created for the purposes of convincing the audience that the actors are authentic Hip Hop artists. Without convincing the audience of this, their credibility would not stand up to scrutiny severely diminishing their power to influence the culture.

Dessa’s song “Bullpen” is about a china doll that somehow finds her way into the bullpen. This song is a twist on a saying, “There’s a bull in the china shop.” The maxim can be said to explain the arrival of a destructive force into a place that is relatively structured, rigid or peaceful. It can be said to mean excitement, the bull being a random element entered into the context of a boring situation, giving everything else a spark. It can also be said to forecast
trouble, the bull being a negative force that has come to ruin the orderliness and the natural flow of things. Dessa’s spin on this saying captures her view of herself in the game as a female rapper. By labeling herself as the china doll, she is admitting that she is not native to the bullpen, but the fact that she is in there means that she can rumble with the best of them. This gives her an elevated status over the other china dolls and possibly the entire china shop. She reverses the roles, she becomes the disruptive force that brings change and impacts everything. The bulls are reacting to her, confirming her status as a possible threat to the bulls but also confirming her status as a go getter to the china shop and to herself.

Forget the bull in the china shop
There’s a china doll in the bullpen
Walk with a switch, fire in her fist
Biting at the bit
Swing at every pitch
Coach put me in like

Dessa’s sense of fun comes from the thrill of outwitting and beating her competition, making her entrance into the bullpen an action taken for her own entertainment and as a bold statement about her abilities on the mic. Dessa often uses extensive metaphors that span entire songs, and even entire albums, this “bullpen” can be read as the music industry or the rap game. The “bulls” can be understood to be the other rappers, and Dessa is of course, the “China doll” making the picture complete.

With the chorus, she illustrates her attitude upon entering the bullpen, showing excitement rather than fear. Despite looking fragile for being a china doll, she has abilities and powers that allow her to protect herself against the bulls, making their mere presence a non-threat, which would be unfathomable in the china shop. Now instead of having their mere presence understood as a threat, they have to work to earn their status in the presence of someone who wasn’t even supposed to be there. With this metaphor, Dessa illustrates the fun and
competitive element in rap. She explores how the changing of one element can shift roles and change power dynamics. Of course, the ones who catch on to the changes and make do first, successfully play the game. In this case, it would be the china doll who seems unphased at the changes, while the bulls seem disoriented and flustered in their newfound smallness.

It's been assumed I'm soft or irrelevant
Cause I refuse to downplay my intelligence
But in a room of thugs and rap veterans
Why am I the only one?
Who's acting like a gentleman
Good form bad taste
Pity, what a waste
All that style
Not a thing to say

The lines above can be seen as an attack on the anti-nerd culture aspect of Hip Hop that often overshadows rappers who want to show their knowledge. It can also be read as a criticism to the music industry shunning certain types of uniqueness in order to preserve the generic sound of it. Either way, Dessa lets the rest of the bulls know that she can do what they do better, without having to compromise her artistic integrity. Thus, it solidifies her as a threat in their eyes and makes her presence in the bullpen one worth noting.

She goes on to taunt the bulls by saying that they seem to have a lot going on looking in from the outside, but once inside, getting a deeper look, there isn’t much to what a bull claims to be. Her bar “all that style/ not a thing to say” alludes to the fact that their display of skills are actually for show and not something that they truly contain. This line can make listeners question the significance of the entire bullpen as a place of smoke and mirrors, hidden in mystery but with very little to actually show for it, thus having “not a thing to say” when confronted with someone whose reality is all about the art and the display of skills.
In two short verses, Dessa not only explores the fun and experiments with bold sounds and rhythms of Hip Hop and other music styles, she also challenges the entire understanding of the rap game and the way it functions. She does this by narrating her journey through the industry and drawing importance to her presence as a disruptive force that made others think and react to their own positionality. In addition to that, Dessa makes the competition seem more like a game than an intense battle for the crown, the way it is usually portrayed. Flipping the vision of the rap game as a friendlier environment exposes the fun more, and she does it without referring to the “club” scene. This re-creates and revives the narrative of open community and open exploration of artistic and musical ventures that catapulted Hip Hop into world-renowned status in the first place.

ANGEL HAZE

Angel Haze is no stranger to fusing witty lyrics with interesting beats. One of her interesting covers is from the song “Gossip Folks,” a song originally by Missy Elliot, one of Hip Hop’s female rap legends. In Haze’s version of gossip folks, she is having fun with the beats and the lyrics, making statements about her ability to lyrically debilitate other artists. She makes jokes about how easy it is for her when it is clearly not as easy for the other rappers who are trying to rise to her skill level. The whole point of the song is just her having fun with metaphors and wordplay, showing how entertainment can be about the art itself.

Yeah I hold the power, ho, that remote control shit
Fucking bandwagon, that them bitches jumping on it
Bet I rap circles on them bitches like an orbit
Bet I rap circles till they dizzy like a full twist
Bet I kill bitches till I’m digging up they mortgage
Yo till I’m digging up they mortgage
In explaining her lyrical prowess, Haze resorts to a series of back to back metaphors that have nothing to do with each other, but all serve the same purpose of upholding the basic premise of her song, which is that she can rap better than everyone. She proceeds make claims about her lyrical ability in the way of bets, claiming that she can “rap circles on them bitches like an orbit,” suggesting that her ability is out of this world, but also painting a celestial picture of her lyrics surrounding and perhaps even suffocating her competition. The next claim, “rap circles till they dizzy like a full twist” follows the same reasoning, except making her enemies feel disoriented rather than suffocated or overwhelmed at her ability. She closes the ongoing metaphors by saying that she does this until she’s “digging up their mortgage,” implying that she raps so well that she inspires feelings of disorientation, suffocation to the point that rappers either go crazy or drop dead from the pressure of competing. With the series of clever metaphors that seem clearly unrelated, but turn out to amount to a fatal combo, Haze has not only bragged about what she can do, but she has also displayed how she can do it. With this, Haze proves that talking the talk and walking the walk are one in the same for her, and she can do it all in one breath.

Bitch my flow wild, like it’s been cut loose
And I’m running every lane like a wild car
And I still kill bitches when I’m Subpar
Yo it wasn’t never really easy though
But I never let them think that they could see me though

In these last few lines, Haze continues describing the potentness of her rapping ability, with a particular focus on her flow. When rappers talk about their flow, they are usually speaking of the rhythmical pattern that they use to deliver their rhymes. Haze states that the way she delivers her rhymes is unpredictable and wild, perhaps like an animal that was being held hostage and then gets set loose. An animal under those circumstances would probably be looking to make serious damage, characterizing her flow as an entity that only knows how to bring
destruction fueled by anger. Haze also adds a layer of individuality, making her more dangerous because her potential for destruction can be multiplied tenfold when she is attempting to make her own path, disregarding the rules and the limitations that others before her have set or succumbed to.

This brings it back to the element of having fun. Breaking rules and disregarding authority is a form of fun that people usually engage in when they are in their rebellious years, particularly adolescence. For rappers, they are supposed to be eternally rebellious, making their quest for originality and expression all the more captivating. It is almost guaranteed that rappers will break many rules before completing their journey. This makes Hip Hop a spectator sport on top of a music style because people are listening and following the action, waiting to see what happens next.

GIAMEDLEY

When it comes to rapping and having fun, Gia Medley is one of the first names that come to mind. Her desire and ability to incessantly rhyme the ending of certain words and rhyme entire sentences reveal a deep love of the craft and a high level of dedication that places her on the same plane with a few highly regarded rappers. Medley like Haze has done remixes of popular songs by other artists in attempts to get noticed by the rap industry. With Medley, her competitive drive is revealed in the way she pieces a verse together. Her verses are air tight when it comes to rhyming expanding past the possibilities of using basic rhyming patterns; Medley goes above and beyond in creativity and vision to use rhyming patterns in creative ways. When presented with a rhyming pattern that has been used to exhaustion, she challenges herself to make it her own and take it in a direction that has never been heard before. This makes her a scientist of rap because she is mixing and fusing elements, experimenting with the possibilities
just to see what results of it. If that does not prove her love of the game, then I don’t know what can.

“Mercy” was a song written and recorded by Kanye West; it became instantly popular as it was about cars and women, coming from a notable rapper with a catchy beat. Rather than follow in West’s footsteps, Medley takes the song in a different direction and uses the beat to unleash her lyrical tornado of hard hitting end rhymes and persistent in-rhymes.

Track suits when I’m sprinting
On the track like a villain
On a crack epidemic
Smack fools when I’m spitting
Like a roach full of venom
They approach me I’m hitting
People poke me I’m shitting
On their Facebook
If they probe me I’m killing
I’m staged crook
In a robe like I’m chillin’
I’m a stay shook
Feed them whole penicillin
Cuz I’m ill in its fitting that Im here done revealing
All the bodies I’m sealing in a casket I’m wheeling
Towards the pastures
Cuz their flow ain’t appealing
Silly bastards don’t you know I’m the illest?!”

Medley starts the song off by making halfway comparisons that force the listener to make the connections for themselves, giving them the feeling that they are falling behind or caught in a verbal whirlwind. She says “tracksuits when I’m sprinting,” and although the connection between a track suit and a sprinter is an obvious one, she prompts listeners to make the connection that she is the sprinter and that she sprints like a professional athlete, thus needing a track suit. Thus the sprinting and the track suit become a metaphor for rhyming skills because she does it like a professional, leaving others behind in the dust, and all that in only one bar.
Medley goes on to rhyme sprinting with spitting, hitting, shitting, killing, chilln’, penicillin, revealing, wheeling, appealing and finally illest. Not only does she rhyme the ends of words cleverly, she slowly makes the transition to rhyme with other end words. She also rhymes the ends of lines, and entire lines when she can. For instance, “track suits when I’m sprinting,” almost entirely rhymes with a bar a couple of lines down, “smack fools when I’m spitting” and both of those lines achieve the effect of showing that she is difficult opponent. While the rhymes are not perfect (fool doesn’t exactly rhyme with suits), they are similar sounding. They sound so much alike to the point that to distinguish what is being said, ears have to be alert and anticipating the slight changes that create the words of a new phrase. Medley continues her murderous rhyming spree by rhyming the lines in between her couplets, giving the entire verse the feel of an A/B/A/B rhyme scheme.

Similarly to how the rhymes flow with a reasonable progression, the metaphors and messages within the lines also flow with a reasonable progression. Medley goes from being a track star, to being “on the track like a villain,” to being a stage crook to being penicillin because she is ill, thus also being a killer of rappers, and discarding rappers because of their unappealing flows. While these metaphors do not seem to have a reasonable progression, they do. Part of Medley’s genius is her seamless switch from words to ideas in order to craft a coherent verse. The idea that she is a super athlete when she sprints, needing a track suit, is an idea that connects to the word “track.” This gives her space to use the word track in which ever capacity she wants. She chooses being “on the track like a villain” which does not have anything to do with the previous idea, but is connected by virtue of using the same word. She flips it for her next line, connecting the ideas of villainy and crook, rather than connecting the word villain to a rhyming word, claiming that she is a stage crook. Being a stage crook adds to the idea of villainy, but it
also marks her as dangerous competition because she can steal the show from another rapper as a stage crook. A few lines later she goes back to the word villain, this time to connect it to the verse by rhyming it with penicillin. The idea of being sick then opens her up to talk about how sick she is on the mic, allowing her to talk about how she can murder other rappers because she is sick on the mic, making her verse a reasonable sequence of ideas and words that link together to make a coherent verse about how much of a lyrical beast she is.

Gia Medley, Dessa and Haze employ their lyrical abilities in an attempt to resist mainstream images of communities of color as places where there is little creativity and inspiration to be found. These female rappers are engaging the narratives of having fun – which are typically focused on the club scene, drinking, smoking and dancing. What they are doing is drawing elements from those narratives to open the audience up to more ways of having fun with rap. They have fun by outperforming, competing, winning and shining in the rap game. With their introduction of other ways the community can engage with Hip Hop, they diversify the narrative of having fun, making it possible for everyone to find something that suits them. In this way, Medley, Dessa and Haze create a counter narrative about the creativity inspiration that communities of color draw from their music art and culture.

These three female rappers go about engaging the narrative in many different ways. For starters, the idea of fun already counters hegemonic stereotypes of Hip Hop’s violence, hyper-sexuality and masculinity. They do this by crossing the line between front stage and backstage, showing their true personas at times and performing their idea of fun for the sake of the crowd at times. In the same way hegemony creates counter hegemonic narratives, it also aids people in the creation of public personas that are in line with those narratives and private personas that may not be. These female rappers navigate the luminal space between these personas because they
cannot create an entirely false persona and risk losing authenticity. Still, they cannot completely rebel against society because their message has to resonate with people that are still willing to live by those hegemonic narratives. By having a narrative that highlights the fun elements of this music force, the ruling class’ hegemony is already being resisted. However, within Hip Hop, there is hegemony as well and when it comes to fun, stories often focus on the club or partying. These rappers further expand the fun narrative to include competition, bragging, and showing passion. This is how a lived hegemony forces cracks in the system: these female rappers just by being themselves, are casting doubts on the main narratives of the system.

They cast doubt on narratives that say that there’s nothing inventive about Hip Hop. Medley’s engineering of sentences with ideas and verses that flow seamlessly disrupt that idea. Many arts looked down upon by the ruling class are innovative, artistic and a real threat to their status. These rappers also cast doubts on the hegemonic narratives that generally place women as inferior to men, with Haze flashing her competitive drive, disrupting the image of an alpha male, and making Hip Hop and society a place where women can win. Dessa engages hegemonic images of women’s fragility and men’s roughness with china doll and bull symbols, twisting them into a story of how the roles become reversed when a dynamic element such as herself enters the scene. Dessa resists with a counter hegemonic narrative about china dolls that can intimidate bulls in gendered terms. All of the hegemonic narratives are in some ways extended as lyrics are violent, misogynistic and display male and female gender dichotomies. But all of them are extended and stretched to their limits to make room for these rappers who will not be watered down to a single purpose or identity to fit the mold that the ruling class hegemony has made for them.
CHAPTER 5:
CHALLENGING THE PATRIARCHY

Another narrative in Hip Hop is the narrative supporting patriarchy, asserting that males are the dominant gender, granting them more power and status. About this narrative, Ogbar explains, “An essential part of this hyper-machismo is the conspicuous value placed on power and status in urban folkloric tales and sayings. Many of these songs celebrate the sexual prowess of the male storyteller while simultaneously reducing women to mere props to men’s sexual and material exploits” (76). Being white America’s alpha male is an unachievable dream for many black and brown men, leading them to attempt to imitate their dream and play the dominant with what little power they do have. With the harsh reality being that these males are often neglected by the education system, underpaid, working dangerous jobs, and usually under supervision and mercy of white males, being the alpha male comes in the form of showing how masculine they can be. This over-exaggeration of masculinity often leads to injury, death and or entry into the criminal justice system. While the dream is always a step away from them, in the attempt of black and brown males to achieve white heterosexual masculinity, they often get caught up and are made symbols of the mainstream narrative, highlighting the inferiority and dangerousness of men of color.

With white males as the dominant class in American society, they had to figure out a way to ensure subordination from all other classes. Among other things, they aimed to protect the patriarchy and create narratives of the inferiority for all other classes. In order to ensure subordination from Black women, controlling images were circulated throughout mainstream discourse. These images were made to cast women of color in negative roles that made the taking of their autonomy seem reasonable to society.
In Patricia Collins' *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consequences and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), she explains five main controlling images that were circulated through narratives, media, art, and science. The main controlling images are the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, the black lady, and the Jezebel. The mammy is an asexual motherly figure who puts her white family's needs before her own family's needs. She is compliant and submissive. The matriarch is the head of the household, but is represented as a bad mother for working too much and not spending enough time with the children. She is also aggressive unlike the mammy. The welfare mother is lazy. She collects welfare checks instead of working and doesn't even bother passing positive values to her children. The black lady is hard working and successful. However, she is too aggressive and intelligent to keep a man. With all the affirmative action policies, she is seen as a person that is taking opportunities away from more qualified and deserving white males. The last of the main controlling images is the Jezebel or the "hoochie" image. Jezebel is the sexually aggressive woman. She is the symbol for deviant sexuality and was also used to justify white men's regulation of black women's fertility along with justifying the sexual abuse of black women.

Haze, Dessa, and Medley are competing with these images when they set out to challenge the patriarchy or any other discrediting narrative. In being aware of these controlling images, these female rappers are cautious about the ways they present themselves. In speaking out, they are already disrupting the controlling image of the mammy and the welfare queen. In trying to challenge the patriarchy and the double standards, these female rappers are complicating the images and trying to raise new ones in their place. Dessa, Medley, and Haze interrupt dominant narratives of women's inferiority by showing the ways in which women are more complicated. The stories of themselves and other women show partial resemblance to the images, but they also
show several levels of complexity in the situations. Those levels expose breaks in the
dichotomies of superiority and inferiority, giving rise to an alternative narrative. While the
alternative narratives do not do away with the controlling images, they do serve to dilute them
and place some of the focus on more positive images of womanhood.

A successful approach to dealing with less status as a female rapper is to embrace the
controlling images. For example, there is no dearth of female rappers willing to rap about how
they will have sex with anyone they want, in a manner degrading to themselves and other
women. Many female rappers go this route because it is easy and there is a readily available
audience. Another successful approach to dealing with the double standard is to talk about their
sexual lives, finances, education, and personal philosophies in a way that is not demeaning. With
this approach, the female rappers conscious that the way they represent themselves has
repercussions that reverberate throughout society. Thus, they explore issues with artistic integrity
and complexity, allowing everyone to see a full picture, rather than a caricature created out of the
tropes for females in society. In this way, they try to earn their fan base through honesty and
skill, rather than through relying on the easiest path to success, which does not always ensure it.

ANGEL HAZE

Angel Haze is not one to keep her mouth closed when she senses injustice or
mistreatment, especially when it comes to issues concerning women. The song “Bitch Bad,”
originally by Lupe Fiasco: a rapper who is considered conscious and well-educated, often
commenting on political and social issues. The song tells the story of a woman who thinks of
herself as a bad bitch, a typical trope for women in the rap industry. A bad bitch is a woman who
is considered beautiful and exploits men for their money and material gains. In Fiasco’s story,
the bad bitch has a son who takes in all the hints about her behavior and grows up to treat women
poorly. The lesson of the story points to the woman as the source of men’s negative perception of them and places the women at the center, leaving them all the responsibility for changing the mind and actions of society towards them. Fiasco’s conclusion at the end of the story implies that had she acted different, her son would have grown up to appreciate women more.

In Haze’s take on the song “Bitch Bad,” she tells the story of a woman who is abused by a partner and develops a lack of self-worth. As a child, the woman had very limited options, coming from an abusive household as a child, and ends up in an abusive relationship with a man who is also the primary provider. Thus her possibilities of leaving become very slim. In this story, the woman also has two small children who are negatively affected as spectators of frequent abuse: a daughter and a son. Haze focuses the story on the son, as Fiasco focused the story on the little boy that learned how to mistreat women from watching his mother. As a feminist, Haze definitely has a different take on this story. Haze challenges the idea that women should shoulder the entire responsibility of deconstructing double standards, sexism and the patriarchy. Haze does this by giving the boy an example of a woman’s lack of self-worth. Unlike in Fiasco’s version of the story, the boy has the ultimate choice of how he will think about and treat women, rather than simply accepting what society has told him and further perpetuating it.

Ah the plot thickens
Little boy bystander gets infected with a sickness
See he grew up wishing his father would come and fix it
And wish mama away and show abuse is what a fist meant! Power!
But the abuser put his fist in all the little boys’ dreams
Till he sipped it and mixed his shit in
To be what he hated wasn’t the aim
But his hatred really made him exactly what he became

Haze begins the song by giving the story some background and in the second verse, moves the story along, exploring the factors in the boy’s life that led him to mistreat women. Haze points out that somewhere deep inside, the boy knew that the abuse happening to his
mother was wrong because he wanted to wish her away and fight the abuser back. However, he was never able to fight back; the available roles seem to be abuser and the abused. Stuck in that dichotomy with other options unknown to him, he chooses to be the abuser.

Haze also points out the lack of a strong male figure with a decent code for the treatment of women. The boy “grew up wishing his father would come and fix it,” and the fact that a male figure with a deeper sense of himself never showed up, left the little boy looking for his identity in the framework provided to him by the only other around: his mother’s abuser. Haze states that the boy’s hate made him something he never wanted to be: an abuser. Thus, Haze sets the story up for the possibility of choice for the boy’s future because there is a difference between what he believes and what he does. For the mother, it is too late to change.

Now as they grew up in the world
The little boy’s lost and has him a little girl
And his life changes -- again
He don’t ever wanna see her hurt by men
To protect her through everything on earth he can
And that moment he understands
Woman should never be hurt by words or hands
And just like that that little boy becomes a man

In the last verse of the story, Haze places the boy in a situation where he has to choose whether he will continue on his path of mistreating women or turn a new leaf. By the end of the song, the little boy has grown up and while he has not figured everything out, he finds himself with a baby, a little girl. Having this little girl makes him realize the error of his ways because he does not want the baby to be mistreated. For him, it becomes a moment of truth, and he decides to protect her rather than subject her to the same pain his mother had to deal with. Thus his decision to proactively fight violence against women for the sake of bettering the world his little girl will grow up in, shows that he finally becomes that hero he always wanted to be. He breaks
with the cycle of violence that destroyed his family and becomes that example of a strong male figure which he lacked his whole life.

With this optimistic ending to the story, Haze proves that sexism and the patriarchal system can be effectively challenged by everyone, especially men. From a symbolic standpoint, this can be seen as a discussion that encourages males to take steps towards ending sexism, violence against women, and challenges the patriarchy. Haze transfers all the responsibility from the women, to everyone, showing that we all have equal responsibility in the changing and challenging of the patriarchy. One can extend the message of the song to the rap industry, with Haze trying to move all rappers to be more conscious and reflective of their roles in being sexist and holding women back, whether it is intentional or not.

GIA MEDLEY

Gia Medley goes about challenging the patriarchy in a different fashion. Unlike Haze, Medley is not using a narrative about abuse and the opportunity to choose your own destiny under systems of male power and dominance. Medley challenges the patriarchy by highlighting particular powerful characteristics of her person and bragging about herself in a way that most rappers do. The difference is that in the song “She Will,” Medley is glorifying her genitals. Using references to the power of sexual organs is usually a strategy employed by male rappers to highlight their status as alpha dogs amongst their peers. Because Medley is a female and she is not rapping about having a penis, she reverses the importance placed on male genitals in the music industry. Medley is taking part in that narrative, but also challenging it by removing the importance from the male players in the game and making the topic of genitals in terms of power and status, less taboo for women.

Go on and let my pussy do the talking
Then watch me pussy pop it
Now empty out your pockets
Cuz my shit is out of this world…
And I be to this rap shit
What key be to a locksmith

Medley starts wastes no time in exerting the power of the female genitals over the male genitals, saying that her lady part speaks for itself. She understands that it is a tool for their entertainment and use, thus as part of show business, they will have to empty out their pockets in order to gain access. This is an interesting statement because it can be read in multiple ways. For one, it can be interpreted to mean that she is submitting to the patriarchy and giving male listeners and the music industry what they want by becoming just another woman who uses her sexuality to make money. However, I read this line as a statement of empowerment because of what was said in the previous lines. She has her pussy talk for itself and then makes the male audience pay up in order to get a glimpse. To me it seems less like submitting to the patriarchal system and more like making them pay for their own demise. Her “pussy popping” can be interpreted as her pussy talking for itself instead of performing for males, making it a defiant action rather than a compliant one.

My flow is bitchy
Like your mom when her herpes itching
See anger’s how I operate
Not squeezing peacocks or peanuts
Cuz I’m not looking for a flock today
I’m squeezing bars and rhythm
Making the beat cooperate

Medley continues with the metaphors and wordplay on genitals stating her flow is bitchy, with a harsh joke about someone’s mother’s herpes itching. She implies that she is a superior rapper because she has clean lady parts as opposed to someone who has an STD, making their part’s ability to speak for itself, lesser than hers. Medley continues this train of thought into the
land of dirty sex jokes by saying she is “not squeezing peacocks or peanuts/ cuz I’m not looking for a flock today.” Medley again references the private parts of her male competition. She says she is not squeezing peacocks or peanuts, meaning she is not there to give them a blow job, not there to play with their cocks and nuts. She also verbally emasculates them by saying peacocks and peanuts rather than cocks and nuts, implying that the sizes of their packages are small and thus unsatisfactory.

Medley goes on to explain that what she is actually trying to squeeze is bars and rhythms. She is so dedicated to the rap game and her craft, treating it as a lover that she performs these sexual favors for in order to hone her skills. Medley creates the image of her and the rap game being a match made in heaven; She presents the image of men being irrelevant to the rap game, having nothing to offer because they are literally replaceable by words and beats, further displacing the power of male genitals in the music industry.

DESSA

Dessa has a very unique style of rap fusing the poetic with the abstract to spark criticism about social issues. Being a female rapper demanding respect for the lyrics rather than for the looks leaves many females feeling jaded about the rap game. With the song, “Warsaw,” Dessa’s bitterness towards the unequal treatment of female rappers is explored through metaphors that are intertwined with short narratives about these negative experiences. Dessa in a way fuses the two main elements of Angel Haze’s work and Medley’s work. She sets her criticism with sharp metaphors and wordplay, but also has images and stories that detail the situations clearly.

A wick with no candle
A wheel with no axle
I ride with no saddle, no lift
Then I'm dragging the kite
A blade with no handle
A brick for your window
I'm fine but I'm single
A dime and I'm the same on both sides

Dessa starts her verse of with a series of images that are either contradictory or useless. This series of images is supposed to represent what women are to society, particularly those who are older, single, without kids, or a serious relationship. Her first line is “A wick with no candle/a wheel with no axle,” which are a list of things where one cannot function or simply does not make sense without the other. She is making a statement about women who do not rely on relationships with other males to keep them centered, the message being that those women are then given less importance in society, as they cannot be used by men as readily or frequently. Dessa is merely outlining the double standard that Haze and Medley also spoke of in their verses, showing that women who do not extend themselves to be used by the patriarchal system become less valuable outsiders, and get less respect than women who inhabit those roles.

She changes paths a little when she says “A brick for your window/ I’m fine but I’m single/ A dime and I’m the same on both sides.” With these lines, Dessa goes beyond just stating things that seem strange without an essential characteristic and connects the images to show what she is talking about. She is a brick for your window; she is fine, but single and a coin that can’t be tossed because she is the same on both sides. With these images, more rebellious and intense than the other images, she sets the stage for what she is actually talking about. She crafts images of women like her who disrupt the status quo and make waves in a sea of patriarchy, while trying to stay afloat and survive in their own way.

Yes, yes, naysayers got the wrong job
Best bet when you think they got the wrong odds
And I've done some living in a glass house
High note blew the motherfucking walls off
Dessa gives some hard-hitting images to express the contradictions she finds herself in. With the lines above, Dessa explains that despite all of the people who doubted her, she has been successful anyway. They thought they had the best bet, particularly because it is difficult for women that don’t show skin to make very much of themselves in the industry. However, by Dessa’s standards, she considers herself successful, and many of her naysayers might agree. She understands the allure of betting against her because she has done some living in the glass house, she has in fact, been limited in her career because she is a female rapper. However, she never let her gender be a determining factor in her level of success, stating that her “high note blew the motherfucking walls of”. Dessa is revealing that her artistry and her dedication to her craft have taken her so far as to shatter that glass ceiling that was imposed on her by the patriarchal system. The high note blew the walls off, not only did the ceiling shatter, but the walls collapsed as well, meaning that she was out of the box. This can mean that she was able to explore her creativity in more unconventional ways as she gained more success.

In the chorus below, Dessa continues to explain how she deals with the double standards of the music industry. She is proud that having her maiden name gives her a level of independence that many women her age do not know anymore, or perhaps never knew. Most importantly, the way people play up the inferiority of women is a masquerade that she decided she didn’t need to dress up for. This is a relevant image, because particularly in the age of technology, people hide behind anonymity to talk about sticky subjects such as women and how much power they should have. Dessa is saying that they hide behind their opinions and beliefs and are scared to show their true selves. She actively works to undermine the patriarchal system and is one of many who is outspoken about the inequality women deal with. Tackling these issues head on does take a toll on her, and so she filled up a flask before she came, detailing her
need to be numb or at least impaired in some way to fully deal with and challenge the system as it is.

And I sleep
With both eyes open
Standing up
Alone and holding
Off the rust
And I'm still living by my maiden name
The name I came with
The name I made
And I'm bare-faced at your masquerade
Filled a flask up before I came

Dessa explains that in order to be truly successful and break out of the systems of oppression that are holding people hostage, people have to stop confining themselves to their low standards. Dessa is saying that one can only win if they stop playing the game, which is ironic when taking into consideration the fact that she is still a player in the rap game. I take this to mean that Dessa, while still a player in the rap game, does not consider anyone her competition.

Angel Haze, Gia Medley and Dessa all have their own unique ways of challenging the patriarchy and other systems of oppression. Haze employs a strategic narrative that allows a character the choice of challenging the system that they were brought up in and harmed by. Medley takes more of a metaphorical approach, talking about the power of her lady part and implying superiority in skill and status because of it, disrupting the usual narrative of the importance of male genitals in rap. Dessa uses a mix of both approaches in order to explain her experience and connect to women who are subjected to injustices and harassment.

The fact that female rappers are working to challenge the patriarchy, influences the Hip Hop to shift in a direction that was not previously possible. First, a discussion about patriarchy with only male rappers is a very different to a discussion including all genders. While males can be advocates, not being placed in under the same microscope makes it harder to empathize with
female audience members. These female rappers are engaging with the subject in a way that no one but them can, and they make it very clear that people have a choice when perpetuating these narratives. Their stories are not exactly vilifying those who are a part of the system; they just show that situations in which women are made to feel inferior to men. It is never as simple as a right answer and a wrong answer. Thus the most important suggestion the rappers contribute to the discussion is that people have more power than they believe and should be more introspective about their positionality in these systems so. Whether it is with a hypothetical situation or a positive evaluation of a womanly feature, female rappers have found creative ways of bringing people into the conversation, most of who otherwise would have missed the memo.

With female rappers actively challenging patriarchy, they are adding power to a counter hegemonic narrative within Hip Hop that women are not inferior to men. Those positive narratives circulate and make an impression on the younger Hip Hop generation, and future rappers have access to that dialogue. They will be able to have these conversations and challenge their own understanding of the narratives more deeply than this generation of rappers has. By circulating the pro-women, feminist narratives in Hip Hop, they also circulate anywhere Hip Hop culture exists. Because it has been established that Hip Hop culture is deeply rooted in American culture, it gives Americans and other peoples the opportunity for exploring notions of patriarchy, sexism and masculinity. This conversation may not happen otherwise, or it may be a conversation where women and men don’t cooperate with each other. Dessa, Medley and Haze are pushing to widen the door that is slightly opened for conversations of this nature.

It is important to remember that sexism and the inferiority of women is prevalent in Hip Hop culture because it was born out of American culture. Western Society as a place with a superiority complex, the inferior status of women was long established before Hip Hop was born.
With a change in the narrative of women’s inferiority and status, the potential for these narratives to break back into the mainstream is huge. The counter narratives that uphold women and reject the ideas of their inferiority are already in the mainstream and are becoming more powerful. Haze, Dessa and Medley are children of this moment and they are simply using their craft to push further in the struggles to change people’s minds. They see that there are external factors guiding the changes in the mainstream such as more job opportunities for women in the workforce and in office and they want to use that momentum to advocate for women through their platforms.

It has already been established that hegemony is a process, a constant battle for the hearts and minds of the people. Because hegemonic narratives are under the threat of resistance, they must engage in constant reinforcement in order to maintain their status. Particularly when protecting the status of the patriarchy, this aspect of hegemony becomes apparent because without women, there is no patriarchy. Still, the threat that can undo the patriarchal system comes mainly from their resistance to it. These female rappers show that they understand that they are part of the patriarchal system and use it as a point of departure for how to move forward with challenging it anyway. Haze shows that women are manipulated to be subservient to the patriarchy and sometimes endure abuse. She puts forth the narrative that men also have a responsibility in challenging the patriarchy. Thus she does not negate the ways in which women are compliant with the system, allowing the hegemonic narrative to continue circulating. But her proposed solution opens up a space for males to engage with this hegemonic narrative and become a part of the process that resists it and ultimately changes it.

Medley casts doubt on societal narratives that say the penis is king because her vagina can speak the truth. The glorifying of her lady part makes it a symbol for the power and
outspokenness that is not usually attributed to women, forcing a shift in the power balance between genders. However, we cannot forget that in the process she is perpetuating the narrative of an over-sexualized female because the focus is only on her lady part. Dessa challenges the patriarchy in similar fashion to Haze, showing the ways in which the patriarchy affords men certain privileges and calls out how men think they are entitled to her time and attention. She refutes the narrative of supporting this action by refusing to give her time and energy, perpetuating another hegemonic narrative in the process, these narratives are challenged but they are also re-circulated by the rappers themselves. This proves that the counter culture created to resist hegemony can never completely undo it because it is part of that hegemony.
CHAPTER 6:

CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA IN HIP HOP

Hip Hop is about having fun, community building and displaying skills. It does this all in the spirit of building a positive environment that people rejected by the racist, sexist, and colonialist systems of oppression can celebrate in. Still, the rappers and audiences listening and creating are also a part of society. They cannot completely divorce themselves from these systems of oppression. With the inability to divorce oneself from the negative aspects of society, some members of the Hip Hop community use the same systems of oppression to build up their image and their status among the Hip Hop crowd. Many male rappers take up the space of being the alpha in the Hip Hop community by using oppressive lyrics against women that condone violence, disrespect, humiliation and exploitation. Part of being the alpha male is also expressing extreme heterosexuality and being intolerant with matters of different sexual orientation, making Hip Hop a homophobic environment.

As stated before, homophobia is a symptom of the views that larger society has on queer people. In recent times, there has been a higher level of acceptance for queer people in society in general, but there are still huge barriers that are a constant reminder that the situation could improve. In Hip Hop, the insults “faggot,” and “dyke” are still used regularly by rappers. It is a quick and easy way to demean the competition. The insult doesn’t always mean that they are actually queer. If the opponent is not actually queer, the insult can serve to highlight inadequacies in the rapper, perhaps a lack of authenticity or a lack of status. Whatever they counter attack with next is irrelevant because the source of their power has been questioned enough that no one will take them seriously. In “Post-Pomo Hip-Hop Homos: Hip-Hop Art, Gay Rappers, and Social Change,” Mark Wilson explains that his research tends to confuse people.
particularly because queer experiences and Hip Hop experiences seem to be contradictory. Wilson explains, “Even in research that finds within hip-hop culture a resistant strand among women who deconstruct sexism, challenge male patriarchy, and develop new generations of feminist activism, most research in this area of study has been hesitant to dialogue with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) artists, who develop "queer" consciousness in the local and global hip-hop communities” (117-118). As with many other dominant narratives in society, this narrative within the Hip Hop context has an added level of discomfort for participants, which makes it a subject hardly spoken about, enforcing its status as taboo and inappropriate.

In Thug Life (2011), Michael Jeffries explores the ways in which the narrative of black males as criminals, supports hegemonic narratives about them as dangerous, but also challenges those hegemonic narratives through re-affirmation of self-worth and of black bodies. In light of the discrimination, excessive use of force by police and limited economic opportunities, many have adapted by creating a defense mechanism that portrays a masculine exterior. It is usually portrayed through threats of violence, degradation of women and lack of respect for the law. In addition, black males go out of their way to prove their heterosexuality, which in turn proves their masculinity, shunning homosexuality. Jeffries argues that black males are extremely cautious to not seem homosexual because it is a “testament to the compulsory nature of this symptom of masculine anxiety” (103).

Within “thug” culture, reclaimed by black males as a shield to shelter themselves from limited options and society’s neglect, having one’s masculinity questioned can come with serious repercussions. However, the homophobia in Hip Hop is more about expressing hyper masculinity and asserting dominance than it is about singling people out for their sexual preferences.
American society has been intolerant of homosexuals for the most part, defining ideal masculinity against it. Homosexuality is seen as anti-masculine; therefore people who identify as such are given less privileges and social status. The loss of social status is magnified for men as the breadwinners, a loss of social status and privileges could translate to a financial loss, leaving men anxious about proving their masculinity and heterosexuality. Hip Hop, which many hegemonic narratives have permeated, has not been spared from adopting a homophobic atmosphere. Dreading the possibility of being even more oppressed and persecuted, black males cling to their displays of hyper masculinity, much of which takes the form of homophobia. Because the gangster thug narrative is prevalent and popular within Hip Hop, the homophobic atmosphere extends and seeps into other narratives, making all of Hip Hop feel homophobic.

In this chapter, I am going to analyze a song originally by Macklemore, “Same Love.” The song same love is from the perspective of a white straight male, speaking for queer people. Macklemore tried to advocate for a better understanding of queer people and for more support. While the intentions in making the song seem pure, many queer people saw issue with someone outside of their situation trying to speak for them and not doing the subject justice. One of the people that felt Macklemore was out of line in trying to speak for queer people and their experiences. Haze felt like his commentary wasn’t very useful because he didn’t actually touch on the experiences of queer people in daily life. Thus, she made her own take on the song explaining her story and how she feels about the issue.

“SAME LOVE, ANGEL HAZE”

Hi mom,
I'm really scared right now, but I have to...
At age thirteen, my mom knew I wasn't straight
She didn't understand, but she had so much to say
She sat me on the couch, looked me straight in my face
And said you'll burn in hell or probably die of AIDS
It's funny now, but at thirteen it was pain
To be almost sure of who you are and have it ripped away
And I'm sorry if it's too real for some of you to fathom
But hate for who you love is not exactly what you'd imagine
And I guess it was disastrous
Because everything that happened afterwards was just madness
Locked away for two years to keep me on the inside
Because she'd rather see a part of me die than me thrive
And it's tougher when it's something you can't deny
And ignorance teaches us it's something you decide
You're driven by your choices, an optical illusion
Here's to understanding it's not always confusion

Haze discusses her experiences with homophobia and explores the ways in which family, institutions and social practices perpetuate negative biases about queerness. Mid-verse Haze explains her mother’s reaction, stating “She’d rather see a part of me die than me thrive.” This line succinctly embodies the sentiment towards queer people in Hip Hop. They are seen as too different, so different that it is better to completely be rid of them than allow them to thrive in a space traditionally safe for marginalized peoples. With the last four lines, Haze shows people the difference between the way a society acts and how an individual can choose to act despite being influenced by that society’s view of things. She talks about the fact that they can’t deny their prejudices and that makes it increasingly difficult to come to terms with the issues that make them uncomfortable. It is difficult because they become ever-present as we opt to not talk about them. Haze closes with a couplet, “You’re driven by your choices, an optical illusion/ Here’s to understanding it’s not always confusion.” I believe Haze ended with these two lines to illustrate to people that they have choices, and that it’s an illusion to believe that everything has been decided. She is encouraging people to take control of their own understandings and prejudices and make peace with them. She is saying homophobic attitudes can be changed, and there being a point where understanding can be reached.
And I can't change
Even if I tried, even if I wanted to
And I can't change
Even if I tried, even if I wanted to
My love, my love, my love
She keeps me warm
She keeps me warm
She keeps me warm
She keeps me warm

The chorus of the song shows a different side to the message that Haze is trying to get across. The chorus of the song is sung by Mary Lambert, who is a queer artist. Haze is talking about the hardship of dealing with family and society. Lambert emphasizes the thoughts in the head of a queer person, singing that they can’t change even if they wanted to. I’m actually surprised that Haze kept this chorus because it argues that if a queer person could change, they would. Lambert implies that queers would re-integrate themselves into society, which is not necessarily representative of how the queer population feels. Haze may be deeply against that message, but the chorus is such an important part of the original song that it would not sound the same without it. And still, part of the message resonates with many listeners. It is a fact that they can’t change. Just that line alone was probably powerful enough to keep Haze’s attention and make it part of her song, despite the message being off in some way.

Here's a message to the people who just don't get it:
Love is love
There is no difference
Not a medication to fix it
There is no prescription
No rehab to visit
It is not an addiction
It's love and it's selfless
It's yours and everybody else's
So don't badger and abuse the solemnly defenseless
See us as yourself
There's no equality in difference
Until we all get it, we'll be drowning in the same blood
Despite orientation, we all feel the same love
We'll be drowning in the same blood
Despite orientation, we all feel the same love

In the last verse of “Same Love,” Haze directly addresses people who insist on being about queerness. She calls them “the people that just don’t get it” and that label is appropriate because while some may simply be ignorant of the situation, many choose to not understand or notice that other people are suffering of them. Haze breaks down and discards many of the misconceptions people have of queerness. First, she is clear about the fact that being queer doesn’t really make you that different from other people. Next, she emphasizes the fact that it is not a medical condition, something that can be cured. Queer people and the field of medicine have had an extremely rocky past where many people that openly identified as not straight, were considered to be sick. In explaining that being queer is not being sick, Haze hints at this destructive past and suggest that we not continue on the same path.

Haze finishes the verse with a statement that can be read as an inspirational sentence, but can also be read as a warning. To finish this verse off, Haze says, “until we all get it, we’ll be drowning in the same blood/ despite orientation, we all share the same love.” She has been talking about the implications of individual action throughout the entire song, but with this last part she revisits the topic from a societal view. Haze addresses the fact that institutions and structures have to become queer friendly. She alludes to the “It Gets Better” movement and suicides of queer people in general by saying that we’ll be drowning in the same blood. She is attempting to hold everyone accountable, from individuals to families to institutions. Haze argues that not enough is being done to prevent the deaths. Thus, everyone becomes responsible, drowning in the blood of those who could not find understanding without shedding their own. Haze wraps the verse up by saying we all share the same love. She added this line just to make a reference to the song title and to end with a message of positivity. Haze pushes society towards
taking positive action rather than being passive and allowing the amount of bloodshed to increase unnecessarily. She says we share the same love to emphasize that love is love regardless of who it comes from and to whom it’s given.

No, I'm not gay
No, I'm not straight
And I sure as hell am not bisexual
Damn it I am whoever I am when I am it
Loving whoever you are when the stars shine
And whoever you'll be when the sun rises

Finally, Haze has an outro where she speaks more about the subject. Here she highlights the fact that labels shouldn’t matter in society. This emphasis on de-emphasizing the power of labels calls into question the structures of society that forces everyone to categorize people in order to appropriately interact with them. Haze is challenging binary thinking by refusing to subscribe to an either/or mentality. She is breaking with the habit of living out dichotomies that don’t represent her identity to its full extent. Thus she is challenging Homophobia, but she is also again challenging the patriarchy, racism, sexism and ignorance. Without a queer female rapper to explore the hurt, pain and misunderstanding that comes with being queer, the general public would only have Macklemore’s version. There is nothing wrong with his version, but it does not have the depth to consider the full extent of the situation. In the end, it’s a lesson from an outsider’s point of view. Still, without Haze’s version, many people in the same situations would feel like they have no place to talk about these issues within the realm of Hip Hop. Haze cites specific experiences that allow people from all over the spectrum to enter the conversation and be productive in exploring the issue. Having those conversations repeatedly and in increasing numbers has the potential to dismantle the anti-queer narrative in Hip Hop. Again, a heterosexual male rapper would have trouble doing this because with the lack of experience, he wouldn’t know the intricacies of navigating the subject in the same way that queer rappers do. Thus, in
claiming a space and a voice for themselves, female rappers touch on subjects that give other marginalized peoples permission and encouragement to do so. This helps the narratives in Hip Hop so that they stay relevant, powerful and influential.

The hegemonic narrative circulated in this case is of homosexuality being amoral, unnatural, with no place in society. In mainstream culture and Hip Hop, the sentiment is the same. Therefore in challenging this hegemonic narrative, Haze is also challenging the platform that is giving her the space to voice this opinion, resisting hegemony on multiple levels. In describing her story and her experiences, Haze displays her lived hegemony as direct opposition to the mainstream narrative of homosexuality. This culture of exclusion has created a counter culture of inclusion for those who are homosexual. The narrative itself again created a home for the experience it wanted to disband. Haze uses those spaces to further challenge dichotomies that essentialize people to one characteristic extending the space to anyone who has a non-normative mainstream identity. In including people with no labels, different experiences in the conversation, Haze has used the counter culture hegemony created to further buffer pro-homosexuality and pro difference views that may eventually take the place of the current hegemonic narrative. Because the conversation is now open to anyone that has experienced the wrath of the ruling class for being different, barriers between people who didn’t think they were a part of the same community dissolve. The dichotomies on which their differences were based are no longer a source of division, leaving the hegemonic narrative to crumble, while the counter hegemonic narrative rises in its place.
CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

Hip Hop is a culture that is influenced, shaped, distorted and constructed by many narratives. I have touched on the main narratives that shape Hip Hop and are out to disrupt the way we think about our communities. The female rappers I have analyzed throughout the paper, involve all the narratives and challenge them with the same dedication they shape their craft. With their witty lyrics, and their sharp metaphors these female rappers are opening discussions within Hip Hop and rap that are making the community uncomfortable. At the same time the community is forced to deal with its insecurities surrounding difference. By wrestling with already established narratives and fighting their battles lyrically, these female rappers have gained the attention of people that are looking for a new sound and a unique perspective. While none of these females is exactly mainstream, all three have a loyal following and a group of people who rely on their lyrical ability to tell their stories in all its beauty and complexity.

The narrative of “Keeping it Real,” showed the ways in which these three female rappers went about showing their creativity and authenticity in a craft that limited their potential based on gender, where they came from, racial background and level of intelligence. Angel Haze, Gia Medley and Dessa create a space for themselves by influencing the “Keeping it Real” narrative, telling stories of their truth. More importantly, they talk about how their struggles are still not over, but that they have hope and a little more power to fight with. Male rappers do this too, but the way our female rappers do it brings a certain level of honesty. It is not flashy music that will be played on mainstream Hip Hop station. For that reason it wins the hearts of many and is represented as music from artists who are always true to themselves and are always keeping it real.
The narrative of “Following the Politics,” touched on the many ways in which the female rappers explored their political consciousness. They explored the way politics function to keep their people oppressed and at the bottom of society. One of the most important lessons to take away from their verses is to learn that the system hides its dirty deeds and all citizens should go out of their way to know more and make change. Through their narratives and their criticisms, the female rappers show the community that it has a larger stake in shaping the politics than they previously might have thought. The female rappers encourage people to be active to the point of dismantling the rigged system. They encourage the building something more durable and fair for all people involved. Male rappers talk about politics too, but these females are dropping knowledge from immigrant perspectives and native perspectives, none of which make up a big part of the narrative. Thus, they give listeners some unique and possibly mind-blowing revelations that they wouldn’t have come to otherwise.

The “It’s all about the fun,” narrative highlighted the ways in which these female rappers took joy in and had fun with their craft. For one of the rappers, her fun comes out of squeezing every possible rhyme out of a single word, making multi-syllabic rhymes and eargasms for listeners, killing two birds in one stone. Another one uses elaborate metaphors that last the entire song and sometimes seep into her other work making her albums feel like one long song. The other rapper uses witty metaphors and sharp wordplay to highlight her skill level and mock her opposition, thus having fun in displaying her superiority and array of skills. These female rappers are able to show the more positive parts of the game without resorting to talking about the club scene. Challenging the narrative of having fun shifts the Hip Hop narrative back to when it was about the community having fun, making Hip Hop feel like a safe fun place for creativity and artistic innovation.
The narrative of “Challenging the Patriarchy,” looked at the ways in which patriarchal forces were apparent within Hip Hop despite it being a culture built up for people of marginalized communities. The female rappers challenge the patriarchal system in society and in Hip Hop by showing the community that they are all victims of the patriarchy. For women, it makes them more vulnerable to the expectations of men and even limits their power. For men, it does the same even though the effects play out in different ways. The females tackle this problem in different ways. One of them shows that the system of patriarchy is in fact, not ready for her men who are too comfortable with their systems of oppression will get a rude awakening. Another female challenges the patriarchy by detailing a situation in which the system of patriarchy hurts those involved, but allows a young male to make the choice of breaking the cycle. Another female rapper challenges the patriarchy by glorifying her vagina and making it supreme in the place of the penis which is always the most glorified sexual body part in Hip Hop. These three female rappers open up conversations about patriarchy and make it easier to discuss these matters because they approach it from their experience, inviting others to reflect on the effects of their actions.

The last the narrative explored was of Hip Hop as a homophobic and sexually oppressive environment. I only used one female rapper for this part of the paper but all three of the female rappers have expressed the ways in which they seek more open mindedness for the Hip Hop community. The topic of homophobia is sensitive within Hip Hop. Having a rapper talk about her experience openly can be a death sentence for her career. However, it actually served to reaffirm what many people thought about her in terms of openness and authenticity. She opened up the discussion for other people to tell their stories of oppression at the hands of those who were scared of queer people. And, like in her other songs, she encouraged people to take more
power over the situation. She creates a learning space for bullies and queer people to heal from those experiences. Through her song, she opens up a community conversation about the way homophobia is acted out in general and offers a message of love in its place. There aren’t many male rappers that would talk about homophobia in the way she has. Thus she is shifting the attitude towards being more accepting in a way that male rappers just do not have the balls to do.

These narratives show how female rappers engage their audience in serious topics with their storytelling ability. Female rappers have crafted a space for themselves by being unique and truthful. But they have also done this by claiming a space that males have been fearful of stepping into. Thus, they have become the pioneers of progressive thought and action within the Hip Hop community. While some male rappers do strive to create a more positive image within Hip Hop, many of them are unwilling to talk about the ways in which Hip Hop oppresses women, or about how queer people are vilified. This allows female rappers who are willing to talk about the subjects to have more credibility, reception and audience participation when explaining these ideas. This makes female rappers a vital force for changing the direction of Hip Hop and pointing it towards a more positive role. Because Hip Hop is a global culture, it will in turn make female rappers pioneers to lead the world in a direction that is more accepting of all their differences and more celebratory of everyone’s uniqueness, building solidarity and connections across language, age, gender, sexual orientation, identity and geographical barriers.

The challenging of these narratives often resulted in the creation of a space where a person who didn’t fit into them could still be valuable to society. It is also often resulted in the perpetuation of the very narratives they set out to defeat. The fact that hegemony creates counter hegemony by existing means that alternative spaces for views we haven’t caught on to yet as a society already exist. Therefore, the work of challenging hegemony must continue. It is naturally
a process of exclusion but the more it gets challenged the more alternative ideas can take a space in that process. I believe that the end goal would be to make hegemony a lived process where narratives good and are were spread out and carry equal weight. This way each person can carry about their lives with the unnecessary burden living a disapproved lifestyle. However, this would also imply that there is no ruling class because that is where hegemony comes from. Without a ruling class, hegemony and counter hegemony may even completely disappear but harmful narratives that limit people may remain. However, as long as we have artist that go out of their way to create spaces for people like them, the stories, narratives and experiences they share will continue doing the work of resistance, even after they are long gone.

One interesting subject to think about is the future of Hip Hop. With this report on how female rappers are taking the stage and leading Hip Hop in a new direction, one may wonder where it may end up. Throughout this process of researching the lives and lyrics of these female rappers, I’ve learned that rappers of all kinds are forming their own communities and making space for their voices. There are many queer male rappers that are giving Hip Hop a shock by being explicit about their activities in the bedroom with other men. There are many politically conscious rappers that are not shy about challenging the status quo and the Hip Hop community simultaneously. There are nerd rappers that are showing off their knowledge for the pleasure and fun of knowing things, fearlessly and unapologetically geeky. All of these rap communities are forming within the community, but as subsets that are more specific and catered to listeners that want to hear that kind of content. Hip Hop as a genre seems to be fracturing into smaller sects of more specifically themed music. It is splitting up into niches with rappers that have smaller but dedicated followings. The idea of a single interconnected Hip Hop community will find itself challenged and artists along with record labels will have to be more creative about the way they
market their work. It may be difficult to maintain some of the more harmful narratives such as
the gangster thug life narratives because the audience’s attention is being split by various artists
with different presentations and understandings of society.

One of the most popular rappers today, Drake - a rapper from Canada who got his start on
a teen drama, Degrassi, is understood to be a sensitive rapper that cares about his family and
friends. He often raps about money and success, but does not shy away from talking about his
family issues and love for his mother, making his public persona as a rapper more complicated
than the thug persona a typical rapper would sport. One of the biggest female rappers is Nicki
Minaj. Her rapping style is quirky, often rapping in different voices, but definitely very
sexualized and aggressive. While she exhibits some characteristics of the typical female rapper,
she also paints a persona of a strong willed, independent woman that doesn't need men, showing
a more complicated version of women. These rappers have huge fan bases because they openly
appreciate their many identities and their music can be placed in many niche groups, but also
transcend the groups when being categorized. This opens the door for Hip Hop to blend with
other genres and possibly become diluted by more white artists and audiences that want to buy
into the 'culture'. Still, it opens up the floor for more artistic creativity and diversity, where artists
do not have to feel bound to represent the narratives that came before them.

With the resistance to the narratives that these female rappers are applying, they are
pushing Hip Hop to evolve. With other rappers from other niches also putting pressure on the
narratives to transform them, the culture will eventually take a different form. With different
sounds, added elements, new stories and unique ideologies, the sound may transform into music
that is no longer considered Hip Hop. The changes to the music may create a new genre and
culture tasked with addressing the issues of today's generation and the problems left unresolved.
from the last. With that said, I believe that Hip Hop will continue to thrive as long as there are rappers like Gia Medley, Dessa and Angel Haze who tell their stories to uplift other people along with reflecting on themselves. As a culture - a blueprint for how to live and coexist as a person living in the margins of society, Hip Hop will continue to be relevant and influential as long as there is social inequality, discrimination, and unequal distribution of resources. But because this is a thesis about female rappers, one of them should have the final word. In the song “A Tribe Called Red,” Haze relays an important message to the audience, encouraging them to be the change they want to see.

Look where I’m at and look where I’ve been  
Tell me that I am not destined to win  
Never give power  
to none of you cowards  
to tell me what you think my destiny is  
You gotta make the decision  
to be the one difference  
in your life and turn it around
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