

BABY IT'S YOUR WORLD AIN'T IT?:

A Rhetorical Criticism of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality

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Black Culture in Music Industry

CEO's who shape the music industry, many of whom are white men, create narrow images for Black artists which they must conform to in order to enter mainstream; reinforcing "institutional racism and patriarchal capitalism" (Balaji, 2009. p. 34). Campbell writes "mainstream' black culture is pimping unrealistic black sexuality to white people" (Campbell, 2004. p. 505)

JUSTIFICATION

The choice to analyze this artist and song is because the award-winning, world-known Minaj has a large fan base and "High School" has garnered popularity. Minaj won BET's nominated award for 2012 best female hip hop artist and consecutively nominated for 2013 (BET, 2013). Moreover, in May 2013, Minaj performed "High School" at the Billboard Awards.

APPLICATION OF ANALYSIS

My research focuses on the understanding of how misogyny and colorism are demonstrated within popular culture. I will illustrate the nuance of the power dynamics that inform the viewer about constructions of race and gender.

Visual Depictions of Gender and Race

- The 'male gaze', a term coined by Laura Mulvey, describes the ways in which women's bodies are presented on film in a manner that makes it appear as though their bodies are sexual objects for the viewing pleasure of heterosexual men.
- Black female artists further face historically racial obstacles in defining their own sexuality. Michael Eric Dyson argues "isolating body parts like that [the testicles of men and the gluteus maximus of women] represents a sexualized fetish tied to the racial subjugation of black bodies by white supremacists" (Forman and Neal, 2012. p. 361)

Construction of Black Masculinity and the Desire to Obtain Wealth and Power

- bell hooks describes the attraction of criminal activity as an instant gratification to money, a sense of strength in a "survival of the fittest" environment, and an acknowledgement to avoiding a system of historical racism (hooks, 2004).
- Consequently, participants tend to become one of the outrageous numbers of intelligent and capable Black men in prison, a child or father in a relationship that does not exist, and/or dead.

Abuse in Black Relations

- Alice Walker states, "We are not only descendants of slaves, but we are also descendants of slave owners. And that just as we have had to struggle to rid ourselves of slavish behaviors we must as ruthlessly eradicate any desire to be mistress or 'master'" (Hill Collins, 1990. p. 186).

Sexual Orientations and Approval

- Historically Black lesbian relationships have been silenced. Lesbianism was viewed as the definitive "Other" in Eurocentric thought for European scientists believed these women, as well as prostitutes, had physical abnormalities (Hill Collins, 1990. p. 194).

"Baby, It's Your World, Ain't It?"

- "Give it to you whenever you want. Put it wherever you want. Baby, it's yours. Anywhere. Everywhere. Baby, it's your world, ain't it? Baby, it's your world, ain't it?" is the chorus to "High School"
- Perhaps Minaj is referring to the same world in which MacKinnon has acknowledged defined by men:

[White, heterosexual, middle class, Christian, able-bodied] "men's physiology defines most sports, their needs define auto and health insurance coverage, their socially designed biographies define workplace expectations and successful career patterns, their perspectives and concerns define quality in scholarship, their experiences and obsessions define merit, their objectification of life defines art, their military service defines citizenship, their presence defines family, their inability to get along with each other- their wars and rulerships- define history, their image defines god, and their genitals define sex"- (MacKinnon, 1987. p. 36)

– Not to mention educational and voting votes were once not accessible to women, reproductive rights are still not in the power of the woman, the legal system and philosophy theories are written from his point of view, slut-shaming and victim blaming against women who have been violated by men exists, as do the teachings to women that we belong for men sexually.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

Feminism is needed because, as Lowe states, "today's girl is the woman not yet determined" (Lowe, 2003. p. 140). And today's youth are the leaders not yet developed. A feminism that is empowering on spiritual, material, physical, and emotional levels is needed. Everyone in society participates, therefore is responsible, for communicating messages about racial relations and gender hierarchies to our youth. Whether as a rap artist or a movie producer, or a parent, a community member, an educator, or simply a caring human being, we must understand the system in which we, and our youth, live in order to criticize and change it. A feminism that can do that is needed.

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“GIVE IT TO YOU WHENEVER YOU WANT. PUT IT WHEREVER YOU WANT. WANT. BABY, IT'S YOURS. ANYWHERE. EVERYWHERE. BABY, IT'S YOUR WORLD, AIN'T IT? BABY, IT'S YOUR WORLD, AIN'T IT?”

—Nicki Minaj

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study's general objective is to explore sexuality, gender, class, and race within the lyrics and the correspondent video to the hip hop song "High School" by Nicki Minaj. The scholarship cited explores the experience of exposure to and identification with music to discover its historical content and affects. In applying this scholarship, I analyze the song using rhetorical criticism and feminist and gender theories. By doing so, I argue how the topics explored reinforce previously identified tropes within rap and hip hop music.

INTRODUCTION

Like most media, rap and hip hop songs display the social construction of both masculinity and femininity, along with the social construction of race, class, and sexuality. Each song, and if applicable, corresponding video, sends a public message which may affect audiences' views of sexuality, relations between genders, and provide a guideline for how men and women should or do act, according to the artist.

METHODOLOGY

To identify the tropes within race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, I will use a rhetorical criticism approach known as Fantasy-Theme Criticism while simultaneously utilizing feminist and gender theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tropes of Race and Gender throughout History

- Virgin/Whore dichotomy
 - Sexuality based on gender/race/class
 - Black women
 - Sexually intense/ abnormal
 - Butt and genitalia animal-like, primitive, uncontrollable
 - Dangerous/ "Other"
- (Railton and Watson, 2005)

- White women
 - Virtuous
 - Asexual/ regulated by males
 - Valuable property in need of protection
- Black men
 - Afrocentric features associated with crime and fear
 - Hyper masculine