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I'm a "Savage": Exploring Megan Thee Stallion's Use of the Politics of Articulation to Subvert the Androcentric Discourses of Women in Hip Hop Culture

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Abstract

Hip hop music is understood to be a tool that promotes equality for a group of people who were previously marginalised and discriminated against. However, misogyny and sexual exploitation of women remain dominant characteristics of hip hop culture. When exploring research on women in hip hop culture, scholars tend to focus on misogyny and the hypersexualising of women, thus disregarding the fact that women can express and enjoy their sexuality purely because it is their prerogative to do so. This article highlights how Fairclough's (1995) model of critical discourse analysis can be used as a lens and tool to introduce alternative perspectives on these discourses and ideologies. Specifically, this research interrogates how Megan Thee Stallion applies the politics of articulation through her rap lyrics to subvert the androcentric discourses of hip hop culture, which objectify and sexually exploit women—specifically, Black women who have been historically subjected to the politics of respectability that positions Black women in inferior position to White women.

Keywords: hip hop culture, gender studies, queer theory, subversion, transformation

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Introduction

Androcentrism refers to the centring of male/masculine perspectives, ideologies, and discourses, which then oppress and marginalise femininity in society or culture. Presently, patriarchy and oppression of Black women continue to exist despite numerous feminist movements. These include the #MeToo movement that has voiced and critiqued the issue of gender-based violence world wide.

Morgan (2015) noted that the agenda of Black feminist thought has been focussed on “holding the United States accountable for [its] sordid history of [both] legal[ly] and cultural[ly] sanctioned rape and gender violence against Black women” (p. 37). The #MeToo movement was begun in 2006 by Tarana Burke who is both an activist against, and a survivor of, gender-based violence. #MeToo, which went viral in October 2017, ushered in global conversations of sexual harassment and gender equality (van Rooij, 2018). Furthermore, the movement saw discourses of feminism and female representation being injected into the entertainment industry. The movement placed a critical focus on hip hop culture because of its “sexist representation of women,” influence, and accessibility (van Rooij, 2018, p. 9).

Hip hop culture consists of four elements: breakdancing, deejaying, emceeing, and graffiti. Presently, it is most identified with its marketable element—hip hop music (Kelly, 2015). Hip hop music is understood to be a tool that promotes equality for a group of people who were previously marginalised and discriminated against. Although hip hop began as a form of “protest songs reminiscent of songs [during] the civil rights movement” during the late 1980s, it also became synonymous with overtly misogynistic content (Gourdine & Lemmons, 2011, p. 58). Whilst promoting issues of racial oppression, in this genre, the traditional sexually overt nature of the music and its promotion of the male gaze objectify the image of women. According to Hobbson & Bartlow (2008), hip hop culture, as broadly construed, reflects dominant ideologies of gender, race, class, sexuality, and female identity interpellated through the male gaze. Mohammed-Baksh & Callison (2015) stated that hip hop music’s promotion of stereotyped ideologies of gender and objectification of women is part of how women are sexually exploited in hip hop culture.

Hip hop culture is widespread, easily accessible, and influential on various demographics in society. Given the reach and influence, representation of those who are oppressed and marginalised in society is important for promoting acceptance and cohesion among people. When analysing hip hop music by women and the representations of women through lyrics and music videos, scholars have tended to focus on arguing how women challenge hypersexuality or embrace it for capital gain. Hobbson & Bartlow (2008) argued that whilst some artists have embraced the stereotypical hypersexualising, others have problematised and challenged this lyrically and aesthetically. This tendency in scholarly research appears to create binaries that position women as either not expressing their sexuality or expressing it only for monetary gain—thus, disregarding the fact that women can express and enjoy their sexuality purely because it is their prerogative to do so.

Background

The Politics of Respectability and the Politics of Articulation

Historically, Black women have always been placed in binary opposition to White women who were de-sexed and viewed as pure. According to Chepp (2015), “Black feminist theory has shown how respectability politics shape cultural discourses about African American women’s sexuality” (p. 211). During the 19th and 20th centuries, the “discourses around Black female sexuality were shaped by racist, sexist stereotypes about the primitive, exotic and animalistic hyper-sexuality of African Americans” (Chepp, 2015, p. 211). Challenging the politics of respectability, Black women began to participate in the politics of silence. Although the many ways in which women’s sexualities have been compromised have been theorised, there has been less success in moving past that discourse to claim pleasure and a healthy erotic as fundamental rights (Chepp, 2015; Hammonds 1999; Morgan, 2015). Thus, it is argued that Black feminist thought needs to engage in the politics of articulation of Black women’s sexuality to promote Black women’s pleasure and sexuality (Hammonds, 1999; Morgan, 2015). The idea behind the politics of articulation is that women express their sexuality and identities to problematise the ideologies and discourses of being a woman—specifically, ideologies and

discourses that suggest women should act or portray themselves in a certain way (e.g., as “a lady”) for social acceptance in various spaces.

Megan Thee Stallion

Born Megan Pete in 1995, Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion is known for her “sexually explicit lyrics” and “effortless flow” (Thomas, n.d). Since signing with the popular record label, 300 Entertainment in 2018, she has produced numerous albums and songs that have achieved various rankings on the US Billboard Charts (Thomas, n.d). Her sexually charged lyrics and confidence are a part of her signature style, which has been recognised by men and women of all demographics. Through her identity and music, Megan has taken authorship of her sexuality, problematised gender binaries, and disrupted hip hop’s tradition of sexually exploiting women.

Megan also refers to herself as a “stallion.” One way of analysing this is by reading stallion as a reference to a studly male horse. Focusing on this interpretation, Megan promotes her sexuality and position whilst transcending fixed gender binaries and scripts. A stallion generally describes a studly male horse but here, she assumes this title not only in her name but also in the bedroom, which is an intimate space—one where a man would generally assume and perform the identity of being a stallion in bed. She deliberately contests the idea of the term having a fixed gender binary and in doing so, she challenges and subverts the position, power dynamics and hierarchy of women sexually. A second interpretation of stallion refers to “a tall woman with a curvy body” (Stewart, 2020, para. 9). In an article in [Houstonia](#) magazine in 2017, Megan stated that when she was around the age of 15, boys told her: “Ooh [she’s] a stallion” (as quoted in Stewart, 2020, para.10). She then asked her uncle, “what’s a stallion?” and he responded that it meant that she is “tall and fine” (Stewart, 2020, para 11). By claiming this definition of a stallion, Megan assumed authorship and ownership of her identity and sexuality.

Megan Thee Stallion’s “Savage”

“Savage” was released on 6 March 2020 and featured on Megan Thee Stallion’s (2020a) extended play record, *Suga*. The song was Megan Thee Stallion’s seventh hit to reach the Billboard Hot 100 and ranked among the top 20 on the chart (Powell, 2020). Shortly after the release, Megan Thee Stallion was contacted by feminist hip hop icon and fellow artist originating from Houston, Beyoncé, to remix “Savage” (Haffenden, 2020). Beyoncé and Megan Thee Stallion’s (2020b) “Savage (Remix)” was released on 29 April 2020. On 26 May 2020, this version became Megan Thee Stallion’s first #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. The song peaked on 30 May 2020 and spent a total of 28 weeks on the chart. The song also earned Megan Thee Stallion her first #1 on Billboard Digital Song Sales (Trust, 2020). On 13 June 2020, Megan Thee Stallion shared a screen capture on her Instagram account of a tweet by Chart Data (2020), which tweeted that Megan Thee Stallion and Beyoncé’s “‘Savage’ has now sold over 2 million units in the US (combined).” In addition, Megan Thee Stallion’s “Savage” (2020a, 2020b) and its TikTok challenges were embraced world wide by audiences of different races, sexes, and ages, invoking the activist and “#hotgirl” in individuals across various spaces around the world. This highlights the consumerism of the song and its reach to various demographics, globally.

Megan Thee Stallion promotes her advocacy for black feminist thought and the LGBTQI community whilst touching on various aspects of hip hop culture that promote the sexual exploitation of women. Her overt, explicit, and sexually charged rap lyrics align with Black feminist thought regarding the politics of articulation, which proposes that women² should express themselves to disrupt the notions

² The use of the word woman/women is not exclusive to cis-gendered women, but is inclusive of queer, transgendered women. The term is racially inclusive in most of this research. However, at times there is a distinction made between White women and women of colour.

of the politics of respectability. One of the modes through which Megan Thee Stallion has achieved this is by challenging the notion that women are one-dimensional and can only portray one type of identity. This article is important because it explores Megan Thee Stallion's contribution to hip hop culture, which tends to advocate against racism and oppression but promotes sexism, sexual exploitation, and misogyny.

Considering her multiple mediums of discourse, such as her provocative lyrics, this study applies Fairclough's (1995) model of critical discourse analysis as the overarching theoretical framework to examine how Megan Thee Stallion applies the politics of articulation through her rap lyrics in "Savage" (2020a) to subvert the androcentric discourses of women hip hop culture. The aims of this study are to:

- Demonstrate that critical discourse analysis as theoretical framework, with queer theory and subversion as theoretical lenses, is an educational tool that can be used to educate and critique gender binaries and androcentrism.
- Highlight how hip hop culture and its music can be used in education to disrupt the oppressive and stereotyped ideologies of gender, gender binaries, sexuality, and patriarchal norms.

Methodology

Qualitative Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design that explores and examines the "experiences, opinions, thoughts and frames of reference [that allow individuals] to gain a deep understanding of the research question" (Cassim, 2021, p. 44). Qualitative research designs aim to answer questions that quantitative research cannot answer. In this article, the qualitative research design is used to answer the question: "How does Megan Thee Stallion discuss her identity and sexuality to problematise the male perspective and ideologies of women?" To do so, the article addresses how Megan Thee Stallion (1) uses language to position herself and other females in hip hop culture and (2) subverts the androcentric discourses of women to problematise gender binaries and patriarchy.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs three frameworks for analysis: critical discourse analysis (CDA), subversion, and queer theory. Using CDA, the textual element (lyrics) of the song is analysed. Whilst applying techniques of CDA during the analysis, queer theory and subversion serve as lenses to guide the analysis of each component. Specific attention is paid to women and queer bodies to explore how sex, sexuality, and gender are narrated and discussed. Here, queer theory is used as a first lens. Subversion serves as a second lens to examine how these narratives or illustrations promote or subvert sexist and sexually exploitative narratives and visuals that have been, and continue to be, promoted in hip hop culture. As stated below, there cannot be a criterion for subversiveness. Subversion is a disruptive tool used by individuals working from within a society or institution to insert alternative perspectives by problematising and challenging the ideologies held by that society or institution. Thus, subversion is used as lens with queer theory to critically analyse the discourse that Megan Thee Stallion promotes on sex, sexuality, and gender in hip hop culture. The sections below further explore each framework in greater detail.

Fairclough's (1995) Model of CDA

CDA serves as the overarching framework of this article. CDA is a theoretical approach to studying the role of language in society. According to Janks (1997), "critical discourse analysis stems from a critical theory of language which [views] the use of language as a form of social practice" (p. 329). Various historical situations and backgrounds reproduce or contest existing social relations (Janks, 1997). Thus, to serve the interests of the audience, the text is written and presented in a specific manner. When applying CDA, questions such as: "How is the text positioned or positioning?" "Whose interests are served by this positioning?" "What are the consequences of this positioning?" guide one's interrogation of the text (Janks, 1997, p. 329). A linguist widely acknowledged for his model of CDA is Norman Fairclough. Fairclough's (1995) model consists of three interrelated dimensions of discourse. The first dimension is the object of analysis with the object being verbal and/or visual. The second dimension focuses on the processes by which the object is constructed (written, spoken, or designed) and received (read, heard, or viewed) by human subjects. The final dimension is the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes. Fairclough's (1995) model also consists of three interrelated processes of analysis. The first process is the analysis of the texts, otherwise referred to as the *description process*. The second process is known as the *interpretation process*; this is the processing analysis. The third, final process is the *explanation process*; this is the social analysis. To analyse any of the dimensions, one of the analysis processes must be applied. Thus, CDA is understood to be the process of analysing a text and interpreting the deeper socio-political and historical ideology being put forth by the text. Using CDA is both relevant and significant when analysing Megan Thee Stallion's lyrics and music videos. The description and interpretation processes in the "Analysis" section of this article will provide data to answer whether Megan Thee Stallion's music subverts sexism and sexual exploitation of women hip hop culture. However, the explanation process is used in the "Discussion" section of the article to discuss why it is significant whether Megan Thee Stallion's music subverts sexism and sexual exploitation, and how this relates to, and is important to, ongoing socio-political histories, discussions, and ideologies.

Queer Theory

Queer theory presents new understandings of sex, gender, and sexual identities that problematise the idea of fixed gender and sexual identities (Piantato, 2016). During the 1980s, queer theory arose and developed as the theoretical interest in sexuality grew, most noticeably through the work of Michel Foucault (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). The term "queer" was adopted by LGBTQ "activist groups such as Queer Nation, ACTUP and OutRage in the USA and Europe" and historically, was always used "pejoratively and homophobically" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 129). Thus, it was appropriate that the term adapted to signify more radical declarations of queer visibility and assert deviance. Presently, queer is used to interrogate "the privileges of heterosexuality" as it openly questions "normalcy and appropriate behaviour" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 129). Queer theory emphasises the notion of identity, specifically the gendered and sexual aspects of it, as being fluid and in doing so, challenges the basis for a unitary identity politics (Beemyn & Eliason, 1996, p. 5 as cited in Piantato, 2016). According to Piantato (2016), queer is an umbrella term that does not specifically reference a particular identity category; it rejects stereotypes by refusing labels. Thus, transgressing the boundaries established by dominant norms by including all those subjectivities that do not conform to traditional definitions of gender and sexuality.

According to Pilcher & Whelehan (2004) the adoption of queer as a position actively denies any meanings attached to sexual identity and is "a celebration of continuing marginality which then holds the 'centre' (heterosexuality) up for scrutiny" (p. 129). In queer theory, the concept of gender performativity is explored. According to Butler & Phelan (1997; as quoted in Pilcher & Whelehan (2004, p. 130), performativity is "not a radical fabrication of a gendered self . . . [but instead,] it is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted." Queer theory has increasingly become

associated with theories of individual sexual identity and has been especially popular in popular culture, introducing terms such as “‘genderfuck’ which dramatises the liberat[ing] potential of playing with gender categories through pastiche and exaggeration” (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 131). Within the realms of popular culture and hip hop culture, it has been embodied by artists such as Madonna, Lady Gaga, Ciara, and Missy Elliot.

Queer theory is commonly used as a lens for literary analysis. It problematises the notions of gender binaries and heteronormative sexual identities by centring them and scrutinising them.

Theory on Subversion

Subversion focuses on those working from within a society or institution to problematise and challenge the ideologies held by that society or institution. Subversion therefore refers to an attempt to insert an alternate perspective, or change the dominant discourses produced by the society or institution. According to Butler (1999, p. xxi), there cannot be a criterion for subversiveness and, when attempted, “will always fail.” Thus, in this article, the characteristics of subversion or rather, a criterion for it, will not be defined. However, the engagement with the theory will explore the tool as a disruptive technique. When attempting to understand if a particular aspect or entity subverts a narrative, one must question: “How does this disrupt/problematise what has previously been said?” and “How is this different from what is being promoted?” Research and literature that can explicitly define what subversion is, or what the “methods” of subversion are, are virtually nonexistent. This reflects the complexity of attempting to name the very characteristic/aspect that proposes that one considers the modes of problematising the dominant ideologies and discourses. The use of subversion also allows one to relate and situate this research in larger social, political, and cultural discussions of gender in hip hop culture.

Analysis

CDA Description Process

The first process of CDA is the description process, which involves an analysis of the lyrics. To do so, the audio of the song was transcribed so that the audio has a textual component to analyse. Keeping in mind that the aim of this study is to explore how the androcentric discourses of women are subverted, this analysis focused on identifying words that discuss and describe women, sex, sexuality, and characteristics that are associated with hip hop’s discourse and social construct of women.

Intro

- [1] I'm that bitch.
- [2] Been that bitch, still that bitch.
- [3] Will forever be that bitch.
- [4] Yeah

Verse 1

- [5] I'm the hood Mona Lisa, break a nigga into pieces
- [6] Had to X some cheesy niggas out my circle like a pizza.
- [7] I'm way too exclusive, I don't shop on Insta' boutiques
- [8] All them lil' ass clothes only fit fake booties.
- [9] Bad bitch, still talking cash shit
- [10] Pussy like water, I'm unbothered and relaxing .
- [11] I would never trip on a nigga if I had him.
- [12] Bitch, that's my trash, you the maid, so you bagged him, ah

Chorus (x 2)

- [13] I'm a **savage**
 [14] **Classy, bougie, ratchet**
 [15] **Sassy, moody, nasty.**
 [16] Acting stupid, what's happening? **Bitch.**
 [17] What's happening? **Bitch.**

Verse 2

- [18] **Eat me and record it, but your edge-up all I'm showing**
 [19] **I keep my niggas private, so his AP all I'm showing**
 [20] Beefing with you **bitches** really getting kinda boring
 [21] If it ain't about the money, then you know I'm gon' ignore it
 [22] I'm the shit, ooh
 [23] **I need a mop to clean the floor, it's too much drip, ooh**
 [24] **I keep a knot, I keep a watch, I keep a whip, ooh.**
 [25] Let's play a game, Simon says I'm still that bitch, ayy.
 [26] I'm still that bitch, yeah (ah)

*Chorus (x 2)**Verse 3*

- [27] **Bitch**, I'm lit like a match, ooh
 [28] And **any nigga I let hit is still attached**, ooh
 [29] That body right, but **you know this pussy fat**, ooh
 [30] I drop a picture, now these bitches feel attacked, ayy
 [31] Don't let that nigga gas you up and get you whacked, ooh
 [32] I make a call and get a pussy nigga smacked, uh
 [33] These **bitches** talkin' 'bout pulling up, well, where you at? Ooh
 [34] I'm in a Lamb', **bitch**, catch me if you can, ooh
 [35] I'm kickin' bitches out they spot, Stalli' Chan, yeah.

Outro

- [36] Niggas say I taste like sugar, but ain't shit sweet, ah
 [37] Mwah
 [38] Ayy, ayy, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, mwa. (Megan Thee Stallion, 2020a)

The highlighted words represent the discourses chosen for the analysis.

CDA Interpretation Process

This process focuses on interpreting words and identifying the discursive practices of these words. During this process, the marked lyrics are analysed. This implies that the words noted during the descriptive process are then examined and interrogated to understand how Megan uses these words in discourse to convey her ideologies of women, their identity, and their sexuality. This process questions what a word or phrase means in this context, that is, what is being conveyed.

In "Savage" (2020a), Megan Thee Stallion explores the multiple identities that women can perform. Considering this, the analysis below will focus on how she subverts the sexual exploitation of women in hip hop culture—specifically the depiction and sexual scripting of women.

Semantics: What Is in a Name?

We have all, at some point come across Shakespeare's lines that interrogate what there is in a name. Following this pattern of interrogation, Megan challenges the social discourses and meanings attributed to the names that women are called and adjectives used to describe them.

Megan Thee Stallion begins by stating that she is "that bitch/been that bitch, still that bitch/will forever be that bitch" (2020a, lines 1–3). According to Collins (2005), the word "bitch," which refers to a female dog, not only sexualises women but dehumanises women by referring to them as animals and also portrays women as "baby making machines" (p. 123). Collins (2005) further stated that in hip hop culture, the term "bitch . . . constitutes [a] representation that depicts Black women as aggressive, loud, rude, and pushy" (p. 123). Megan has subverted this narrative by introducing a definition of bitch that asserts her dominance. In those opening lines, she uses the word to subvert the derogatory use and emphasis her status as an alpha. This is further seen that as the song progresses, she draws on her subversion to differentiate between her ownership of the term bitch (lines 1–3, 9 & 26) and the derogatory definition (lines 12, 16, 17, 20, 27, 30, 33, 34, 35).

The chorus of the song explores the different identities that women perform in hip hop culture. Megan Thee Stallion explores these different identities by stating that "[she is] a savage [who is] classy, bougie, ratchet,/sassy, moody [and] nasty" (2020a, lines 13–15). By stating that she is all of these, she contests the notion that women perform one identity that is bound to the environment she is situated in—that a woman can only be ratchet or bougie, as if the two are mutually exclusive. Instead, she encourages women to embrace their multifaceted identities and to freely express these identities.

Interestingly, Megan draws on adjectives that are traditionally used to describe women in different spaces and spheres—specifically, the public and private spheres. An example is the song "Yeah" (2004) by Usher in which artist Ludacris states that "[they] want a lady in the street but a freak in the bed" (Usher & Ludacris, 2015, 3:02–3:05). In this song, a clear distinction is drawn as to how a woman "should" act or portray herself in private and public spaces and should be mutually exclusive to these spaces. Ludacris mentions these spaces too: the street and the bed. Megan Thee Stallion asserts that she's "classy, bougie, ratchet,/sassy, moody, nasty" (2020, lines 14–15). She uses adjectives one after another to instantaneously demonstrate the paradox of these identities and demonstrate that an individual can be all of these. Secondly, she does not pause or offer these identities in different spaces. This ideology is challenged by Megan who promotes the notion that individuals (specifically women) are free to perform all these identities irrespective of the space they are in. By doing so, she challenges how women are described in different spaces, and promotes that these identities or performances can coexist in all spaces.

Ratchet: Oppression vs. Feminism

Megan Thee Stallion challenges the sociocultural stereotypes of being defined as ratchet. Love (2017) wrote:

The word ratchet has emerged in mainstream culture as a means of describing . . . Black women, as loud, hot-tempered, and promiscuous. This one-dimensional view of Black women has sparked outrage and debate [worldwide over various platforms]. (p. 539)

In 2012, Michaela Angela Davis, a cultural critic, launched a campaign against the use of the word "ratchet" because it portrays Black women as "mean [and] gold-digging women" (as quoted in Love, 2017, p. 539). However, in her blog post "Exhuming the Ratchet Before It's Buried," Black feminist scholar Heidi Lewis (2013) rejected Davis's argument and stated that although the term was used to exclusively describe Black women from a lower socioeconomic status and their behaviour, upper-class

and professional Black women also enjoyed letting loose, momentarily dropping respectability politics, and becoming ratchet (Lewis, 2013).

Jennings (2020) explored intracommunity discourses surrounding the word “ratchet” and drew on colloquialisms and memes to demonstrate how the misogynistic word has been evoked by hip hop feminists to create new aesthetics and ethos such as “clatchet”³ and “sophistiratchet.”⁴ Furthermore, Jennings (2020) noted that these memes and colloquialisms “reject all politics of respectability” which tend to “offer a singular static view and understanding of Black women . . . [and] reject binaries” by announcing multiple identities, interests, forms of pleasure and mediums of expression (p. 57). Jennings’ (2020) research supports Love’s (2017) claim that “in some cases ratchet has been used dutifully by women to combat its use as a divisive tool” (p. 539). Given that these discourses produced by women of various statures illustrate how they identify and express themselves as being partially ratchet, the word is no longer exclusively used to describe Black women from a lower socioeconomic class. It is evident that, as a Black woman from a higher socioeconomic class, Megan Thee Stallion’s reiteration of the word “ratchet” during each chorus supports Lewis’s (2013) argument. Megan Thee Stallion subverts the ideological connotations of the word by stating that she is ratchet.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, shortly after Megan Thee Stallion released “Savage” as part of her extended play album *Suga*, individuals around the globe (irrespective of race, sex, or gender orientation) took to social media and partook in the #SavageChallenge. The dance challenge choreographed by fan, Keara Willson, challenged women to show off their savageness as they performed a combination of hot, savage, and boss-like moves to the chorus of Megan’s song. Through song and dance, women embraced being “classy, bougie, ratchet,/sassy, moody, nasty” (Mega Thee Stallion, 2020a, lines 14–15), illustrating the multiple identities of women. Jennings (2020) noted how women have used the word “ratchet” in various word forming processes to subvert its definition and express the multiple identities of women. Megan Thee Stallion too, uses a combination of words to describe and emphasise the multifaceted identities of women being performed in both public and private spaces. Thus, essentially disrupting the notion that women should portray different identities in different spaces. This also problematises the politics of respectability, which subjected Black women to likening themselves to the image of white women to gain acceptance and respect. Megan Thee Stallion’s encouragement of celebrities and followers from around the globe to participate, invited and united individuals of all different class statures to be ratchet.

Sexuality

“Savage” rejects the politics of respectability and the politics of silence⁵ because Megan Thee Stallion explicitly articulates sexuality. In “Savage,” Megan Thee Stallion focuses on her sexuality and pleasure as she narrates how aroused she is; she states that her “pussy [is] like water” (2020a, l. 10) and that she “need[s] a mop to clean the floor, it’s too much drip” (2020a, l. 23). She goes on, stating how her partner can sexually gratify her: “eat me [out] and record it” (Megan Thee Stallion, 2020a, l. 18), but she will not give him that satisfaction of saying that they had sexual intercourse; she sings that his “edge-up⁶ [is all that she is] showing” (2020a, l. 18) because she keeps her “niggas private, so his AP [is all she is] showing” (2020a, l. 19). Two significant conclusions can be drawn from Megan’s line mentioned above. The first is that this subverts the idea of women sleeping with affluent men or

³ Clatchet: An individual who is classy and ratchet (Jennings, 2020).

⁴ Sophistiratchet: A person who is highly educated and fluent in various forms of “public etiquette yet is equally knowledgeable of the latest trap music . . . prime-time ratchet cable shows and conversant in the tongue of ratchet” (Jennings, 2020, p. 57).

⁵ Hammonds (1999) identified the politics of silence as practising silence, secrecy, and a partially self-chosen invisibility to react to these repressive forces of hegemonic discourses on race and sex that oppressed women.

⁶ Refers to when a man has a bad haircut.

celebrities for status and fame. The second is that she negates a chance for her partner to sexually exploit her for his own fame—as is the trend when celebrity sex tapes are publicised. Rather than avoiding engaging in sexual activities and the scandals that can arise from it, Megan indulges her sexual desires and keeps her partners private so that all one would be able to see from a leaked sex tape is his edge-up. She further states that she “keep[s] a knot . . . keep[s] a watch . . . keep[s] a whip” (Megan Thee Stallion, 2020a, l. 24). These lines create the imagery of an affluent business figure who is sexually dominant.

Discussion

CDA Explanation Process

Megan Thee Stallion’s (2020a) “Savage” narrates the multiple identities, experiences, expressions, and complexities of individuals in order to collectively reject all politics of respectability. Paisley Harris analysed the multiple understandings of respectability politics in African American communities, highlighting that the politics of respectability entailed “reform of individual behaviour as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform” (Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, as quoted in Harris, 2003, p. 213). She stated that there are two audiences: the African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable; the White people, who needed to actively see respectability performed by African Americans (Harris, 2003). According to Green (2020), for African American women, respectability politics is based on a performance of “acting ‘respectable’ or tolerable to White audiences” (p. 8). Green (2020) further stated that this performance is rooted in “reforming” one’s behaviour to rid the individual of unsatisfying behaviours mirroring those that are condemned by the Black Baptist Church (p. 8).

This reformation focuses on the hegemonies whereby White people are placed on a pedestal at the highest tier and Black women are placed on the lowest level of the respectability pyramid. Thus, Black women must conform and reform not only into an image, but also in terms of the type of behaviour that White people deem respectable. By challenging these images that suggest how women should perform in different spaces, erasing the lines of identity binaries and associating what would otherwise be viewed as paradoxical images—such as an individual being classy versus ratchet—Megan Thee Stallion disconnects any association of a woman being framed in one narrative to be socially or culturally accepted.

Patriarchal ideologies of sexism, racism, and hegemonic masculinity exist and continue to be promoted through organisations and institutions that occupy powerful positions. These discourses and ideologies regarding the politics of respectability have been promoted by men. Megan Thee Stallion’s music, which is explicitly sexual, fiercely narrates what Morgan (2015) defined as women’s “complex, messy, sticky [and] joyous negotiations of agency [and] desire” (p. 36). In both her lyrics and visual representations, Megan Thee Stallion adopts what Hunter & Soto (2009) labelled as “the ‘pornification’ of hip hop” (p. 171). As previously mentioned, queer theory problematises notions of gender binaries and heteronormative sexual identities by centring them and scrutinising them. An example of this is Megan’s inclusion of her pussy (2020a, lines 10 & 29). By challenging the portrayal of women for the male gaze, Megan Thee Stallion’s dynamic lyrics focus on the female genitalia as a site of women’s pleasure rather than for male gratification and consumption. It gives Black women the space and agency to articulate their pleasures while empowering themselves. Megan Thee Stallion states: “any nigga I let hit⁷ is still attached” (2020a, l. 28). In doing so, she promotes her sexual capabilities and challenges the idea that men constitute the only gender that is “good” at having sex—a discourse popularly promoted through the chorus of songs such as “Bedrock,” where rappers such as Lil Wayne

⁷ “Hit it” is a slang phrase that refers to having sex with someone. Generally, the phrase is “hit that,” an alternative to phrases such as “tap that.”

boast about male virility and capabilities by making a women's bed rock (Young Money, 2009). In the song, Wayne states that "[his] room is the g-spot [and that women] should call [him] Mr. Flintstone [because he] can make [their] bed rock" (Young Money, 2009, 1:11–1:19). This furthers discourses that suggest that women gain sexual gratification through penetrative sexual intercourse with these artists. However, Megan Thee Stallion centres this discourse of being good at sex—and not only critiques it but subverts the narrative as she discusses her sexuality and how her sexual partner is attached to her after sex, thus promoting her virility and how good she is in bed.

Subverting Sexual Scripts

Using subversion and queer theory as lenses over the CDA analysis, one notices that Megan Thee Stallion shifts away from the politics of silence and embraces the politics of articulation to vocalise pleasure politics. Pleasure politics refers to the conversations surrounding women's exploration and discussion of their sexuality and sexual pleasures, and how these intersect with themes such as power and patriarchy (Institute of Contemporary Arts, n.d.). Women in hip hop culture experience misogyny, sexism, and objectification that is subject to sexual scripting based on demeaning stereotypes of women (Adams & Fuller, 2006; Railton & Watson, 2011; Stephens & Few, 2007; van Rooij, 2018). Commercial rap videos use sexual scripts to interpellate objectified images of women through the male gaze. These continue to function as stereotypes because the images continue to "help reproduce . . . hegemonic ideologies and replicate social inequality" (Richardson, 2007, p. 790, as quoted in van Rooij, 2018, p. 28). Various scholars have examined the sexual scripts of women in hip hop culture, focusing specifically on the stereotypes promoted through the scripts and the audiences' perceptions of these stereotypes which include video vixen, Jezebel, ho, diva, gold digger, freak, matriarch, and baby mama (Railton & Watson, 2011; Stephens & Few, 2007; van Rooij, 2018). In "Savage," Megan Thee Stallion (2020a) explores and subverts these sexual scripts. Working from within the hip hop genre, Megan's articulations of sexuality and pleasure challenge the male gaze by encouraging Black women to reclaim their autonomy and enjoy being a hotgirl. Considering that queer theory focuses on problematising gender binaries, when looking at the words captured in the CDA analysis, it is evident that Megan has placed emphasis on centring the male-dominated ideologies and discourses and adopting their stances so that she can critique these binaries that prescribe specific words and traits to a set gender. Beyond this, her adoption of these stances, together with her own perspective and discourses, subverts these dominant androcentric discourses.

Megan Thee Stallion, as a pro-hoe icon, allows for the normalisation of sex and body positivity among a new generation of women by using her music as a medium through which women can take up agency and autonomy. Through her expression of her sexuality, Megan Thee Stallion challenges the representation of women who enjoy sex as whores/hoes in society, generally, and by male rappers in hip hop culture, specifically. Megan Thee Stallion's subversion of the discourses of a hoe ties in with the pro-hoe movement, which is taken up by individuals to subvert the misogynistic ideologies of a hoe—thus, individuals take control authorship of their sexuality and pleasure (N'diaye, 2019). The ideology behind the movement, as can be understood through Penda N'diaye's (2019) "Pro Hoe" blog, is that people of colour reject the politics of respectability and openly enjoy sex without shame, regardless of the societal and religious ideals that may have been imposed on them. Megan Thee Stallion's music, which empowers women to sexually liberate themselves, supports the pro-hoe movement's advocacy for sexual autonomy and freedom and re-centres the dominant discourses of women's sexuality, pleasure, and representation by centring hip hop's tropes of masculinity and notions of sexuality. She centres and uses the notions of gender and identity fluidity to interrogate hip hop's fixed, stereotyped, and marginalising ideologies about gender. This is significant because it educates consumers of hip hop culture that women are multifaceted and are no longer allowing themselves to be defined by androcentric-stereotyped sexual scripts. Instead, they are centring these narratives and images to critique them and empower themselves through subverting them. As consumers and members of society, this empowers women to challenge society and cultural views of

women, and how they have been conditioned to conform to these androcentric discourses and ways of thinking.

Conclusion

This article explores how Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage" (2020a) speaks back to broader social, political, and cultural ideologies of women. Her adoption of a queer, fluid idea of gender through her persona subverts the dominant heteronormative ideologies and discourses of gender presented by hip hop culture. Megan adopts the script of the hegemonic, dominant male artist who discusses sex and pleasure. Megan Thee Stallion subverts hip hop's discourse where men are viewed as the consumers of pleasure and women are the providers of this pleasure. Instead, she presents an alternative perspective that challenges this dominant ideology by stating that she is in control of her sexual experiences. Megan Thee Stallion's music not only subverts gender binaries and hegemonies, but also empowers women to embrace and celebrate their sexuality.

With close consideration of the theoretical frameworks—namely, CDA, queer theory and subversion—this article uses the findings of the analysis to justify the need to promote the politics of articulation to problematise issues of misogyny and sexual exploitation in hip hop culture. Furthermore, the discussion emphasises the positive effects of Fairclough's (1995) model of CDA as a framework in research that explores gender and sexuality.

Fairclough's model offers the reader or listener deeper insight into the message of Megan Thee Stallion's music or, rather, the issues that she problematises. By interrogating the lyrical elements of her music using Fairclough's (1995) three interrelated processes of analysis—description, interpretation, and explanation—in addition to using queer theory and subversion as lenses, Megan Thee Stallion's music traverses surface entertainment value and becomes an anthem for women in hip hop culture who are subject to the sexually exploitative and androcentric discourses. Considering the influence that United States music has on the image and the ideologies associated with women globally, it is important that androcentric discourses of women are problematised. By problematising and subverting the depiction and discourses of women in hip hop culture, Megan problematises and subverts the discourses of women who not only identify with hip hop culture but the terminologies that society has adopted from hip hop culture to name, label, stereotype, and oppress women around the world.

In the literature analysis, research stated that subversion focuses on one working from within a society or institution to problematise and challenge the ideologies held by that society or institution. In addition, literature on queer theory argued that the adoption of queer is "a celebration of continuing marginality which holds the 'centre' (heterosexuality) up for scrutiny" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 129). Subversion and queer theory were used as yardsticks to analyse how Megan Thee Stallion has subverted hip hop's male-dominated status quo centre. Megan Thee Stallion as a rap artist and performer works from within hip hop culture to challenge the dominant ideologies and narratives of sexism and the sexual exploitation of women. Noting Butler's (1999) argument that there is no criterion for subversiveness, queer theory offers a criterion as it explores how discourses of the dominant centre are discussed and challenged so that alternative perspectives can be presented to re-centre those that are regarded as submissive. It is important to note that by using Fairclough's (1995) model of CDA as a tool and lens, this research was able to apply queer theory and subversion as secondary lenses to explore the discourses of sexuality and gender in Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage" (2020a).

This article applied CDA using queer theory as lens to explore the construction of gender, sexual scripts, and performances. The findings present how Megan Thee Stallion navigates through issues of sexual scripting, identity, and sexual exploitation by using subversion and the politics of articulation. Megan Thee Stallion's music promotes women being autonomous, expressing or performing multiple identities, and embracing their sexuality. The article used subversion as lens to examine whether Megan Thee Stallion uses her lyrics and music videos as a tool to disrupt sexism and sexual exploitation. Research by various scholars has argued that hip hop culture sexually exploits women and promotes ideologies of sexism and misogyny (Gourdine & Lemmons, 2011; Hobbson & Bartlow, 2008; Mohammed-Baksh & Callison, 2015; Railton & Watson, 2011). As an artist, Megan Thee Stallion works from within hip hop culture to problematise and challenge these sexist and misogynistic ideologies.

In the methodological section, it was noted that there is no criterion for subversion, nor is there a specific set of techniques that can be used to subvert. However, queer theory is also used as a theoretical lens in the analysis. The combination of queer theory and subversion situates a space for subversion to insert an alternate perspective and challenge the dominant discourses of sexuality, pleasure, and identity that are produced by hip hop culture. Megan Thee Stallion's music subverts the dominant discourses promoted through these songs by sampling the songs and including her own rhyme schemes and rap lines that explore her sexuality, pleasure, and fluid identities. Thus, by holding the centre of hip hop culture—hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and gender binaries—up for scrutiny through adopting a queer position, Megan Thee Stallion attempts to re-centre women in hip hop culture by catering to women's pleasure.

In conclusion, using CDA as a theoretical framework allows one to question the semantics and discourses of gender on a deeper level. The use of queer theory examines how hip hop music has centred heterosexual masculinity and how Megan Thee Stallion re-centres this by focusing on pleasure from a woman's perspective, and introducing new perspectives and discourses regarding the sexual scripts of women. This offers a space for the criterion of subversion to be explored and discussed. Although women and their bodies are generally commodified and commercialised by male listeners or consumers of hip hop music, Megan Thee Stallion's choice of lyrics (her diction) challenges the notions of the politics of respectability and the politics of silence. It is through an analysis of her lyrics, and how these words function in the song to problematise these dominant androcentric discourses that sexually exploit women, that women are encouraged to challenge the patriarchal ideologies of what it means to be a woman. Thus, this study offers the potential to educate others about gender and problematising binaries and patriarchy by exploring hip hop culture, which has a mass global influence and support.

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