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Analysis of gender construction in South African hip-hop music and videos

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Abstract

This study contributes to the growing body of research in South African hip-hop by analyzing gender construction in the music and videos of the selected artists, Hip-Hop Pantsula, Slikour and Zulu Boy. South Africa is the chosen country as it is one of the most developed in terms of hip-hop in Southern Africa. The overall purpose is to investigate ways in which the three selected hip-hop artists represent and articulate gender in their music lyrics and videos. It is of the assumption that the chosen hip-hip artists' songs contain social change messages, therefore, it is expected that their articulation of gender would be more progressive than other mainstream hip-hop artists who are known to portray ideas that objectify women. The literature review discusses a brief overview of research that has been done in the field and a discussion of some key issues identified by theorists. Here, themes discussed include music and popular culture, hip-hop music and identity, hip-hop music and gender, and hip-hop music in the South African context. The theories chosen and discussed include theories of feminism, theories of the male gaze and media representation, which encompasses gender and representation and theories of identity. This study uses a qualitative research approach as it seeks to understand and make meaning of media texts, specifically using thematic analysis. The research findings and analysis have revealed interesting results. Two themes were found during the presentation of findings section. The first theme encompasses sub-themes: objectification of women, stereotyping of women, hyper-masculinites, as well as demeaning and un-acknowledgement of women. These sub-themes highlighted problematic gender representations. The second theme focuses on intersection of class, race and gender. Here the relationships between gender, race and class are examined on multiple levels to explicate various inequalities that exist in society. Finally, explanations of problematic gender representations are also explored. These include 'commercialisation of the music industry', 'patriarchal economy in the South African music industry' and 'consumerist and celebrity culture'.