

Södertörns högskola | Institutionen för Kultur och Lärande
Masteruppsats 30 hp | Genusvetenskap | Vårterminen 2013
Masterprogrammet för Genusvetenskap

Werkin' girls

- a critical viewing of femininity constructions in contemporary rap

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to examine the making of femininity in hip-hop, with a special focus on the performances of three artists - Mykki Blanco, Angel Haze, and Brooke Candy - and their representations made through music videos and lyrics. The thesis is structured around critical femininity studies, and created through a somatechnics perspective. I am investigating how femininity and the feminine body is *made* through and in relation to technology and different expressions of race, class, and sexuality. By questioning how structures of femininity is made and re-made through a somatechnical perspective, this thesis offers alternatives to interpret feminine representations in hip-hop, and bases its conversation in both culture studies and critical femininity studies. In the paper's conclusion, questions regarding active feminist resistance in hip-hop are raised, with hope to widen the discussions about female identified artists and their performances in this specific discourse.

Key words: Hip-hop studies, critical femininity studies, hip-hop, somatechnics, representations, female impersonations, feminist resistance, bodies and politics, feminism, music videos, close viewing, Mykki Blanco, Brooke Candy, Angel Haze.

Acknowledgments

This thesis wouldn't exist had I not been firmly backed up and continuously inspired by some truly fantastic people. Thank you Ida, for being such a great study partner and for sending me love notes when we occupied the library that night. Thank you Lovis, my fantastic friend, for always believing that I could, and for holding my hand through so many doubtful moments – you da bomb. Thank you Linda, for texting me cheerful good morning messages *every day* this spring and getting me in a great mood before I was even properly awake (now that's an achievement!). Thank you, my wonderful, wonderful master class – you are all *so* bright and have taught me so much throughout these years! Thank you, Katarina Mattson and Ulrika Dahl for being inspiring supervisors and pushing me in directions I never thought was possible for me to explore – I am so grateful for all your help! Thank you, my fierce homegirls Mykki Blanco, Angel Haze, and Brooke Candy for making the beats to my life – without you, nothing would be as fun. You run the world!

Lastly, as always, the biggest thank you to the strongest woman and most powerful feminist I ever got the privilege to get to know - mom. You gave me the courage to always write whatever I felt like, and *you* laid the foundation to my feminist beliefs and greatest achievements – I miss you every day.

All my girls, I love you.

Moa Johansson

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	3
”I love rap even though it don’t hug back”	6
<i>Introduction</i>	6
Aims and empirical focus	8
Somatechnics and “hip-hop technology”	8
Personal desires	11
Terminology	12
“Motherfucking faggots taking over the industry”	14
<i>The material</i>	14
Getting to know the ladies	15
Songs and videos	16
Wavvy	16
Werkin’ girls	17
Das me	18
“And even after all my logic and my theory, I add a ‘motherfucker’ so you ignorant niggas hear me”	20
<i>Theoretical frame</i>	20
Female impersonation(s) and the masquerade	20
“Doing femininity” and the process of becoming	22
Standpoints and Black Feminist Thought	24
“I taste my own flow on this beat, hmm, delicious”	26
<i>Choice of method</i>	26
Cultural practices and the meaning of language	27
Reflexive writing	28
“My persuasion can build a nation, endless power - our love we can devour”	30
<i>Previous research and research position</i>	30
Sista’s, Chickenheads, and safe spaces	31
“Okay let’s get this shit started, hold up, let me pause that”	34
<i>Analysis</i>	34
The Beat: analytical themes and patterns	35
<i>Hoods, Family & Class</i>	35
Defensive work	36
Oh well, what’s a royal ball...	37
Fagmob families	38
<i>Realness & Body talk</i>	40
Sluts and genitals	40
The Hook: closer looks	43
Defensive Femininity and feminine survival	44

Fluid Femininity and matters of Tittie Technology	45
Titties at technés	48
The Outro: gathered keys and final words	50
Quotes in the headings	52
References	53
Appendixes	56
“Wavvy” by Mykki Blanco	56
“Werkin’ girls” by Angel Haze	58
“Das me” by Brooke Candy	60

“I love rap, even though it don’t hug back”

Introduction

I remember sitting outside my older brother's room, eavesdropping on him and his friends as usual. I was nine, maybe ten, and I knew nothing about rap or hip-hop - my main musical influences came from boy bands, dad's prog rock and commercial pop music. This moment outside my brother's room therefore became vital for hip-hop's entrance and future importance in my life. Sitting there, quietly trying to hear what my brother and his friends were talking about, I suddenly heard the harsh tuning of a guitar, a beat, and seconds later a voice calling out:

We used to be number ten

now we're permanent one

In the battle lost my fingers, mic became my arm

(Jean et al. 1995)

I didn't understand the words, but I was fascinated. What *was* this? I felt warm, almost like I was blushing, and my fingers started to tap the rhythms of the beat against the wooden floor. My brother turned up the volume, and I sat in tense excitement, my ear glued to the door. This was the first time I felt the wonders of what a really good hip-hop production could sound like - "Fu-gee-la" with Fugees¹ took my breath away. My brother later showed me the album cover, and I remember holding it in my hands, stroking the orange letters spelling out "The Score", looking at the three artists, wide-eyed. On the cover, Wyclef and Pras are posing - Wyclef in profile with closed eyes, almost saint-like, and Pras arrogantly cocky with black shades on - next to Lauryn Hill that fiercely looks away from the camera, almost like she's getting ready to go into battle. She was the coolest thing I'd ever seen.

Later people would start asking me how I could listen to (and adore) rappers that objectified women “like that”, pointing sternly at my Busta Rhymes albums. People also asked me how I felt about the *female* artists in hip-hop, pointing out that many of them acted according to the heterosexist images produced through hip-hop, thereby confirming women as “sluts”, “bitches” and “hoes”. Didn't I think it was terrible? Confessing that I actually found courage and inspiration in the aggressive, feminine sexuality portrayed by Lil' Kim or Eve for example, wasn't easy when trying to be a politically correct feminist where I grew up. I was “supposed to” reject “that kind of femininity”, and instead embrace feminine performances that expressed the *opposite* than those of the hip-hop sluts. That was the proper

¹ Fugees - the name deriving from the word “refugee” - were a hip-hop group active in the 1990's (and in a brief comeback between 2004 and 2005), consisting of Wyclef Jean, Lauryn Hill, and Pras Michael.

way to discuss women's emancipation from patriarchal cultures like hip-hop, period. No more love for miniskirts and leopard bras, no more fascination for vile sex talk and milkshake's that brings all the boys to the yard. *No more fun.*

My longing to investigate *various* and *diverse* expressions and creations of femininity in the hip-hop culture have slowly been simmering underneath my love for rap, for quite some time. After attending a class of hip-hop studies in San Diego last fall, the simmering turned into a full pot of a boiling *need* to do so. Sitting on the porch of my college dorm house, allowing Eve and Gwen Stefani to blow both my ear and my mind away like many times before, I decided to devote my master thesis to hip-hop and the making of femininity and feminine bodies in rap. Can't fight it, it's time.

It took awhile to get me in, and I'm gonna take my time

Don't fight that good shit in your ear

Now let me blow ya mind

(E. Jeffers et al. 2000)

Aims and empirical focus

The aim for this paper is to examine how femininity is made in, and through, hip-hop. I seek to investigate how femininity gets structured in the representations of three female rappers - Mykki Blanco, Angel Haze, and Brooke Candy. The line of questions to do so, are as follows:

- 1) In the material, what analytical themes can be detected in the process of femininity, and how can these themes be understood in relation to femininity constructions?
- 2) How does femininity get structured through technology marked by the chosen themes (*Hoods, Family & Class, and Realness & Body talk*)?
- 3) What versions of femininities can be found in the material, and (how) do they relate to and/or communicate with each other?

As initiated above, I'm using a *somatechnical perspective* for my analysis, as a strategy to examine how femininity and feminine bodies are *made through* technologies² in hip-hop, with the important take-off that body and technology are indistinguishable and therefore co-creating each other through various processes - femininity being one of them. This choice is based on the combination of my theoretical position and the nature of my material and area of research - I'm approaching hip-hop through critical femininity theories, which can be connected to the theories and ideas of somatechnics, as does the culture of hip-hop. How I relate these different areas to each other follows below, together with a short presentation of the concept *somatechnics*.

Somatechnics and “hip-hop technology”

An early Western feminist notion is that the body is conceived and constituted as a natural and biological entity. This has been challenged through discussions of how the self, the body, and the *relation* between the two, are being produced through technologies. It has been discussed how technology might work as a tool to separate the self from the body³, but anti-technology feminists have also questioned the insinuated *naturalness* of technology, stating that ideas of cosmetic surgeries, reproductive technologies, sex reassignments and so on, are produced and defined by patriarchal

² “Technology” is actively being used as a collective term for the making and usage of tools, machines, crafts, material, and systems of meaning/thought throughout the paper. It thus includes everyday items and practical technologies like *clothing* and *makeup*, as well as social concepts like the *family* or different *hoods*.

³ E.g. see Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) where she is suggesting that reproductional technology can be used as a liberating tool to free women from their oppressive biology.

systems and that they therefore *by definition* work as oppressive tools against the emancipation of women⁴.

Later discussions of the relation between body and technology have brought up the notion of “a chiasmatic interdependence of soma and techné: of bodily-being (or corporealities) as always already technologised, and technologies as always already enfleshed” (Sullivan & Murray, 2009:3). It is this *interdependence* that is known as *somatechnics*, a term deriving from the Greek’s “body” (*soma*) put together with the meaning of technological craftsmanship. Sullivan and Murray explains the term as suggesting that technés “are not something we add or apply to the body, nor are they tools the embodied self employs to its own ends. Rather, technés are the dynamic means in and through which corporealities are crafted, that is, continuously engendered in relation to others and to a world.” (Sullivan & Murray, 2009:3) This is the main thought I will be using for the analysis and my critical viewing of the artists’ performances - along with the idea that body and technology are *inseparable* rather than separate entities, I will examine how technology (technés) crafts femininity and bodies, and how bodies are carrying and giving meaning to technology in return. Focus is in other words on the *dynamics* of the making (and perhaps un-making) of femininity, which in a somatechnic perspective could be thought of as *becoming* and *unbecoming* (Sullivan & Murray, 2009:4). The idea of *becoming* is strongly connected to some of the theoretical insights I will be using⁵, which also makes this perspective well suited for the structured outline for my analysis.

Now, I mentioned that the nature of my material also connects to somatechnics - in fact, I would say that hip-hop is *actively structured* through different technologies and that hip-hop is vibrant in its process of giving specific meaning to technology. For example, one can’t argue with the microphone’s importance to the MC⁶, providing the artist with vocal magnitude, while the artist simultaneously gives the microphone its important position in hip-hop through lyrics and performances⁷ The DJ equipment is an

⁴ E.g. see Janice Raymond and her *Women as Wombs: reproductive technologies and the battle over Women’s Freedom* (1993).

⁵ See theoretical section, page 20.

⁶ For definitions of terms and words used in the paper, see section on terminology, page 12.

⁷ There are many lyrics discussing the “mic” in different ways and contexts, and thereby giving it different meanings. One example is “How many Mics” by Fugees (1996) where the crew repeatedly asks “how many mics do we rip on the daily [...] me say many, many, many” (Jean et al. 1996), calling attention to how active they are in the community, and how high they should be rated for their skills - all symbolized through their use of the microphone. In one of the verses, Praz says “too many MC’s, not enough mics/exit your show like I exit the turnpike” (Jean et al. 1996), letting the microphone symbolize how very few rappers actually got what it takes to be a real MC. In this example, the microphone emblemizes both the specific fame and capacity of certain rappers, and shows how boasting is an important element in rap. The message it quite clear: without a mic, you’re nothing - and *with* a mic you might be *something*, but *you* have the responsibility to take care of *it*. In return the object (“it”), becomes a meaningful signifier to the rapper and marks his or her style, career, and expression in rap. Another example of how the mic gets acknowledged in rap, see the Fugees quote presented in the introduction, page 6.

equally vital element of hip-hop, creating the beats, sounds, and samplings, and the importance of certain hard- or software shouldn't go unrecognized⁸. Another practical tool important for hip-hop's existence is the Internet that in many ways changed the face of music production (and its producers). When tools for beats and sounds were made available with one easy download or click, it allowed technology and hip-hop to blend together even more.

Yet another technological aspect of rap is how MC's and other hip-hop artists are performing through different technologies to construct authentic and functioning voices and identities in their artistry; the use of money disguised in different paraphrases - e.g. "I'm on top of my green like a motherfucking tractor" (Haze, 2012) - is one example of how material and/or systems of meaning help construct the artist's identity. Promoting oneself with branded clothing and articles with high status, is also a common use of technology in rap, and provides the artist with stories of (upper or lower) class importance. For example, when Iggy Azalea begins her song "Work" (Azalea & Sims, 2012) with "walk a mile in these Louboutin's⁹/but they don't wear these shits where I'm from/I'm not hating I'm just telling you/I'm tryna let you know what the fuck that I've been through" (Azalea & Sims, 2012) she is letting the listener know that she wasn't able to wear Louboutin's when she grew up, but that she's since then worked her way far from her original (working) class, meaning she can afford them now. In the opening frame to the video, Azalea is seen walking alone at a deserted highway, wearing a pair of Louboutin's - so the shoes does not only carry a class connotation, they *become* the marker for class (both upper and lower) when Azalea is wearing them and at the same time lyrically acknowledging that she once couldn't.

This was just a few examples of how somatechnics connects to the culture and community that I'm investigating, but I think it shows how one can relate them to each other, and that there is great potential to start examining hip-hop representations as not just technical, but *somatechnical*. In short, the productions and performances of hip-hop are in different ways intimately tied to technology, which makes this chosen perspective both exciting and suitable for the aims of this paper.

⁸ E.g in chapter 4 of *That's the joint!* (Forman & Neal, 2011) scholars discuss important technological segments of hip-hop and ties it together with views of language, narrativity, and "sampling ethics" (Schloss, 2011:609).

⁹ "Louboutin's" refers to a pair of expensive shoes, made by Christian Louboutin, a French fashion designer. The shoes come in different shapes and styles, but the most commonly referred to in hip-hop are the sky high heels with the characteristic red-lacquered sole. A typical price for a pair of Louboutin's is about \$1,000.

Personal desires

Besides my empirical and theoretical aim for this paper, a more personal and political goal is my wish to expand the voices of the artists I'm investigating, and to let them carry the discussion forward through quotes, bars¹⁰, and their personal artistry. This paper is a contribution to expand the voice and space of three female identified artists located within a patriarchal framed culture, and also an attempt to connect with them from an academic, feminist point of view. When starting to articulate this project I felt, and I still feel, that female artists in male dominated cultures and communities needs to be lifted and discussed more frequently, and that their space and level of exposure needs to be actively broaden and problematized¹¹. Questioning how femininity is made in hip-hop is a way of doing just that. Choosing upcoming, relevant artists and looking at contemporary hip-hop is also a strategic choice, since the artists in question are in some ways molding (and offering more diverse perspectives to) ongoing discussions about female rappers and hip-hop femininity.

Yet another wish of mine, which also affects the linguistic structure of this paper at large, is the desire to actively use a creative and accessible language, making the text available to readers beyond the strictly academic area. Hip-hop studies and the academization of hip-hop have been criticized for making hip-hop unavailable for the actual practitioners - MC's, break dancers, DJ's, and graffiti artists - and further changing a culture created on and for the streets into privileged science for (white) academics. It is my ambition to actively challenge the notion that knowledge production belongs to the elite, and to construct a thesis accessible for both the homegirls and homeboys of hip-hop, my fellow academics, and the people identifying themselves in *both* hip-hop and academia. Hopefully this ambition will result in a dynamically written thesis with a flow that suits both the topic and the empirical material I've chosen to communicate with. Sharing is caring, and I intend to do exactly that.

¹⁰ For definitions of terms and words used in the paper, see section on terminology, page 12.

¹¹ See more elaborative motivations in the material section, page 14.

Terminology

In order to clarify some terms and words being used throughout the paper - both in the material and in my analysis - a list of explanations follows below:

Bars: Lines in the lyrics of rap. One bar consists of two lines that usually rhymes in the end, e.g: “I’m the only thing hoppin’ like a kangaroo/I mean the only thing poppin’ like a can of brew” (Minaj, 2009). Usually when rappers refer to “bars”, it’s linked to how fiercely they can perform or write them, but a “bar” is also a technical term describing how long a song is (most commonly a mainstream rap song is about 24 or 36 bars). Important to note is that bars generally are separated by dashes, as presented in the Nicki Minaj quote above. This is also how I will present lyrics throughout the paper.

Hip-hop: Hip-hop is more than just a word describing a specific genre of music. Depending on how it’s spelled and in what contexts it is being used, hip-hop can either be referred to one or several of the four elements found in hip-hop (DJ’ing, MC’ing, graffiti art, and break dancing), or relate to hip-hop as a world view and/or religion¹². There will occur several different spellings throughout the material and in texts from previous research (e.g “Hip hop”, “Hiphop” “Hip-Hop” and “Hip Hop”), but I have personally chosen to spell it “hip-hop” - which most commonly refers to *rap* - and to use it as an overall term in my paper. For example, I’m using “hip-hop” *consistently* when referring to *either* rap, the culture of hip-hop, or hip-hop academics. I do this foremost to tighten the text and to make it more reader friendly, but I wish to notify the reader that hip-hop sometimes have more complex meanings than the ones I have stated here. For more elaborative explanations of the term, I would recommend Price’s *Hip Hop Culture* (2006) or Forman and Neal’s *That’s the joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (2011), also cited under previous research¹³.

Hood: Can be understood as slang for lower class suburban areas, and is often used as an identity marker to gain respect and rep for being *real*: e.g “I’m from the hood stupid, what types of facts are those?/if you grew up with holes in your zapatos/you’d celebrate the minute you was having dough” (Jay-Z et al. 2004). Another example of how to use the hood as an identity marker is to *own* the term itself, e.g: “I think I need a barber/none of these hoes can fade me/I’m so good with this/I remind you I’m so hood with this” (Knowles et al. 2011) - in these lyrics, Beyoncé is letting us know that she is as tough, smart, and badass as the neighbourhood she grew up in, or any hood that has a rep for being

¹² The anthology *Noise and Spirit - the Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (edited by Anthony B. Pinn, 2003) is a great example of just how multifaceted hip-hop can be, and provides several takes on how hip-hop can be interpreted as a form of religion.

¹³ See page 30.

tough, for that matter. Hood is also as a shortening for “neighborhood”, which is a more class neutral way of talking about where you’re from, where you’re staying, or who you’re associated with. I will be using the latter understanding, describing how the artists use their concepts of hoods/locations to structure femininity. If or when quoting a different understanding, I will comment on that in running text.

MC: Short for “Master of Ceremonies” and refers to rappers and sometimes spoken word artists. Back in the 1970’s when hip-hop was young, the original MC was a supporter to the DJ, giving shout outs and getting the crowd going while the DJ laid down the beats. The MC later developed into a rap artist spitting rhymes to the music, and starting battles with MC’s from other hip-hop crews (Price, 2011).

Rep/repping: Can be described as a colloquial verb; to represent/give a voice to something or someone. Beyoncé takes care of her girls like that when she says that she’s: “repping for the girls who taking over the world/let me raise a glass for the college grads” (Knowles et al. 2011). “Rep” is also a common shortening for “reputation”.

Spit: Another word for rapping. For example, when Angel Haze says that “I spit ‘til my lips need 16 stitches” (Haze, 2012) she’s referring to how fast she can rap.

Twerk(ing): A form of dance move, where the practitioner is shaking and jerking his/her hips and butt in an up- and down motion, making the bottom shake really fast. The phrase “twerk it” probably derives from the combination of “to work it” and “twist” and “jerk”, and is a popular (and steamy!) form of dancing mainly performed in the hip-hop and r’n’b community, deriving from the Bounce music scene in New Orleans.

“Motherfucking faggots taking over the industry”

The material

When browsing through the very diverse flora of interesting rappers possibly suited for the purpose of my thesis, I decided to limit the scope of my material with three questions in mind:

1. Is there any (eventual) analytical potential fitting my different aims in the representation?
2. Do the representation I'm looking at speak from a women identified space or body?
3. Can the representation be located in a *contemporary* hip-hop context?

The decision to only focus on artists identified as women originally came from my own interest in female rappers and the women of hip-hop. Like mentioned earlier, I felt - and still feel - that female artists in male dominated cultures and communities needs to be lifted and discussed more frequently, and in more diverse ways. This paper is a contribution to expand the voice, view and space of three artists located within a patriarchal framed culture, and also an attempt to connect with them from an academic, feminist point of view. Using this frame of thoughts together with the aim to examine the making of femininity in hip-hop, the limitations based on an all focus on women identified artists became a matter-of-course choice. *I'm here to rep the girls.*

With that said, I started out with a huge material - Northern American, women identified hip-hop artists is not a small group to circle or overlook - and I needed to find a way to structure a more specific plan for the selection of artists I had in front of me. The idea to explore *contemporary* artists and their representations in hip-hop is built upon ideas that speaks to my personal desires described above: to use material relatively fresh and close in time to my own research will give the thesis an important topicality, and to engage *new* and *ongoing* female representations in my discussion speaks to the ambition to create new spaces for the ladies of hip-hop¹⁴. In other words, these limitations are directly relevant in order to give my paper an active presence in the contemporary discourse of both hip-hop studies and femininity studies.

¹⁴ According to this ambition, I'm making room for *several* female hip-hop artists to speak throughout this paper, not just the artists from my material. The chosen quotes presented in headings and in some quotes in the running text thus come from a variety of female identified hip-hop artists, either active in a contemporary context or in a slightly older one. This paper is not written just for the three fierce ladies in my material, it's for *all* my girls that might find themselves limited by binary femininity norms in hip-hop. I wish that I had pages enough to let them *all* speak, but at least I can create space for some of them.

Getting to know the ladies

Since I'm doing a qualitative study, and have a somewhat short range to place my research in, I choose to look closely into a few contemporary artists with all of the above in mind when making the selection. These three artists are all placed within an upcoming and ongoing discourse of Northern American hip-hop, and are in different ways analytically interesting for my paper. Given that their bodies (both social and physical), their language, and performances of femininity all challenge some of the prevailing norms of hip-hop *and* stereotypical femininity, they constitute a diverse and multifaceted base of material for my aims. For each artist I am going to use one music video, along with lyrics to the specific song. Below follows a background presentation of them, and a more specific list of exactly which videos and lyrics I have chosen from each one.

The artists are, as previously mentioned, Mykki Blanco, Angel Haze, and Brooke Candy. All three of them - even though coming from different geographies of Northern American hip-hop - can be placed in areas some would refer to as “alternative hip-hop”, since none of them have fully pervaded the mainstream hip-hop area (just yet). Mykki Blanco (originated from Harlem, New York) and Angel Haze (originated from Detroit, Michigan) could both be situated in the wake of LGBT hip-hop, a phenomenon relatively new in the Northern American hip-hop scene¹⁵. Both Mykki and Haze have been categorized as LGBT and/or queer artists in interviews and reviews - for example, Mykki has been called one of “Hip Hop’s Queer Pioneers” (van Meter, 2012) - and are acknowledged not just for their ability to spit, but for their sexual politics as well. Worth noting is that the epithet “gay rap” or “queer rap” is not something either Mykki or Haze necessarily identify themselves with (e.g see Oliver, 2013), even though they’re both providing the hip-hop community with lyrics like “niggas so greasy in the daylight, he glistening/’oh this fag can rap?’ yeah they sayin’ that, they listening” (Blanco, 2012) and “this is for them girls that like them other girls back/I just want the head ho, yeah like where yo’ curls at?” (Haze, 2011). Mykki have also been acknowledged for the - when talking about hip-hop - rare fact that she is biologically male but has a female identity and prefers a female pronoun. This has led people to describe her as “the new (drag) Queen of Hip Hop” (Davies, 2012) and as a “cross-dressing” rapper (Oliver, 2012), but Mykki herself articulates her identity as transgendered and “multi-gendered”¹⁶(Chapman,

¹⁵ The documentary *Pick up the mic: the explosive documentary on the Revolution of homohop* (Hinton, 2006) provides a great overview of the history of LGBT hip-hop, “homohop” and other alternatives to heterosexual mainstream hip-hop, and explores how the subgenre grew from it’s roots in Oakland, California through artists like Deep Dickollective, JenRo, and Paradigm. The documentary (and the artists performing in the documentary) can be seen as an informative background (and groundwork!) to the more contemporary queer hip-hop scene, where Blanco, Haze, and Candy all can be situated.

¹⁶ “Mykki Blanco” have been described as the female version of Michael David Quattlebaum (Mykki’s birth name), but as mentioned, I am focusing on the performances of *Mykki* the artist,, looking at her representations according to her artistry and expressions. Whether Mykki *is* Mykki full-time, or chooses to drag into Michael (or the other way around) is not something

2012). In my analysis I'm approaching Mykki as a female identified artist, and not as a drag artist or female version of a male artist, according to how she describes herself: "you can't tag me as the rapping transvestite. I never vogued in my life. I'm from a punk and Riot Grrrl background" (van Meter, 2012).

Brooke Candy (originated from Oxnard, California) has been called a "fucking nuts ex-stripper" (Yates, 2012) and has also been mentioned as a reformer of female sexuality, and as a "new frontier in female empowerment" (Pelleschi, 2012). Since Candy is relatively new in the game, not a whole lot have been said or written about her yet, but coming from herself she's "about being freaky, speaking for oppressed people, spreading joy, and going hard as fuck" (Pelleschi, 2012). Candy is one of the founders of the crew "Fagmob", consisting of herself and a bunch of her creative friends and colleagues: "The term 'faggot' is so negative, and I wanted to reclaim that word. I wanted... a word for *us*, and it fits perfectly, 'cause we're all gay. Kinda like NWA¹⁷, you know? Fagmob is our version of NWA." (Grotto, 2013).

Songs and videos

For my analysis I will be using videos to the songs "Wavvy" (Blanco & Brenmar, 2012), "Werkin' girls" (Haze & Brthr Films, 2012), and "Das me" (Candy & Lorenz, 2012). The complete lyrics are attached in the appendix section (page 56), and a more detailed description of the three video pieces follows below.

Wavvy

Directed by Francesco Carrozzini, this video - 4:51 minutes long - is filmed in Chinatown, New York, and at the Jane Hotel¹⁸. The video starts with the image of Mykki Blanco dressed in dirty, off-white pants and a snapback cap, standing on the curb of a busy street, talking to a dealer about a new form of drug that is supposed to get you "wavvy"¹⁹. They're bickering, and the dealer tells Blanco that "yo man, if your jeans get any tighter yo dick's gonna fall off", which makes Blanco reply that "I don't wanna

I'm focusing on in the analysis - my ambition is to view the making of femininity through Mykki and her performances in the chosen material.

¹⁷ NWA stands for 'Niggaz Wit Attitude', a hip-hop group from Compton, California. The original lineup consisted of Arabian Prince, DJ Yeall, Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, and MC Ren. They were active from 1986 to 1991, and can be situated in hip-hop as a sub-genre to Gangsta rap.

¹⁸ The hotel is located on 113 Jane Street, NY, and is an American landmark. In the 80's and 90's the hotel was a part of Downtown New York's bohemian culture, hosting guests like "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" and "Million Dollar Club". The hotel describes its guests as "with more dash than cash ever since". (The Jane Hotel. (2012) "History". Downloaded on May 15, 2013, from <http://www.thejanenyc.com/#/history>)

¹⁹ "Wavvy" is usually used as a synonym to "fresh" or "cool", but Blanco uses it when describing a high, caused by the drug presented in the video.

hear that shit man”. Blanco is also questioning the dealer’s goods, saying they “look like Tylenol²⁰, what the fuck is this? You rob a Walgreens? This is fucking supposed to be wavy?”, whereupon the dealers assures Blanco that the stuff he offers is so effective it’s “Mike Tyson style, biting the ear off and shit”. The sirens of a police car signals that Blanco needs to hurry, and in the middle of the drug deal, a female officer yells out “stop!” and starts chasing Blanco down the streets. The beat gets going through the sound of Blanco’s heartbeats, and progresses with her jumping up on the back of a moving truck, aggressively spitting bars into a mic, while images from the street chase is being showed in fast cuts. As the chase proceeds (with the officer finally giving up, falling down hard on the curb), the truck gets filled with a jumping crowd. The cuts from the chase gets replaced with images from a decadent party in some kind of a ballroom, filled with people dancing, making out, and playing with extravagant masques. The camera sweeps over a stage with musicians, centered by Blanco, now in long hair and a sequined short skirt, holding a red rose, seductively repeating that she’s feeling “real loose, real fly”. The video proceeds with alternate party images from the truck (where Blanco is dressed as, and acting according to, the stereotypical image of a male “real MC”) and from the decadent ballroom party (where she is featured with typically feminine attributes like high heels, long eye lashes, and a ballroom dress). The ending frame is a slowed down image of Blanco and her decadent crew, sitting gracefully in a portrait-like session, and the very last frame shows Blanco jumping off of the (now empty) truck, running from the scene.

Werkin’ girls

This piece is 3:11 minutes long, and directed by Alex Lee and Kyle Wightman. It starts off with fast cuts of closeups of Haze’s face and body - the frames changing with the beat of the song - and it shows Haze’s eyes (covered in purple eye shadow), her shoes, and her jewelry (a silver cross body chain hanging from her neck, and some thick silver rings on her fingers). When the camera zooms out, we see Haze standing in some kind of warehouse or storage room, filled with box pallets covered with plastic and random tools. Haze is standing behind two little girls swinging a jump rope, with one hand on her hip, looking directly into the camera. The girls are busy swinging the rope, looking away, smiling. Haze starts to spit, and the camera moves up close to her face -focus is on her glossy lips - and she tells the listener that she’s on top of her rap game: “I did what I say I did, did not fabricate one bit/I have been the fucking realest since my exit near the clit”. While she’s boasting, there are some fast cuts showing the little girls smiling, swinging the rope, and then the image of three masked men coming in from behind Haze, down a set of stairs. The men are shown walking slowly towards Haze and the girls,

²⁰ “Tylenol” is an American brand of drugs, commonly used for reducing pain, fevers, and relieving the symptoms of milder colds and flues. Can be found on any drug store - like Walgreens - no prescription needed.

together with fast closeups of their masked faces, blowing heavy smoke out of the ripped openings made for their mouths. The closeups of the men are mashed up with fast closeups of the little girls too, both still smiling to the camera, and fast cuts show Haze standing silently still, looking serious. In the chorus, when Haze spits about the fact that *money* is the only thing she's after ("money and more money is the only shit I'm after/you can cut the fake shit, I'm not a motherfucking actor/I'm on top of my green like a motherfucking tractor"), dollar bills starts raining over her and the two girls. The video proceeds with Haze standing in the warehouse behind the rope swinging girls, mixed with fast cuts of the masked men smoking, Haze's slow walk around the room, and closeups on a glove Haze is wearing on her right hand - it's covered with scissors/razor blades and looks like something Edward Scissorhands would wear²¹. As the beat continues, some of the lyrics are highlighted and written across the screen in white letters, e.g: "KILL IT", "SICK, SO SICK", and "HELP". In the ending frames, a big cardboard box signed "New York" is centered and seems to be on fire - heavy white smoke is making its way out of the closed sides. Cutting from the image of the box, the masked men appear behind a wall and starts running towards the main scene in the warehouse, attacking the girls and carrying them away under apparent protest. All the while this is happening, Haze is silently watching them, and a short cut shows Haze smiling for a mere second. In the last image, a lit cigarette is being thrown on the floor, and is firmly put out by a big black boot.

Das me

Directed by Matthew Boman and Brooke Candy herself, this 4:21 minute long video starts off silently with the frame of a street intersection on Rodeo Drive²² (Los Angeles). Candy stands still, almost completely camouflaged, up against a wall covered with golden jewelries, and when the beat starts creeping up (a sound not so different from a grasshopper chafing its legs together), she starts walking towards the camera, fiercely swinging her corn rolled pink hair. Snapshot to three female butt cheeks, dressed in thin, metallic thongs, standing in a circle twerking to the beat, and then back to Candy laying on a bed in silver tights with pink marijuana leaves printed on them, licking her lips in sky high heels. Several colorful snapshots later (including images of Candy caressing her body with five inch leopard finger nails, and a man masked in a pink and white hood with golden horns, pumping golden weights), Candy is walking on the streets, nonchalant and aggressively seeking the spectators eyes through the camera, spitting about how the term "slut" is now a compliment. The video proceeds with Candy

²¹ *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) is a film by Tim Burton, and tells the story about a boy who's got scissors instead of hands and fingers.

²² A well known Los Angeles shopping district - mainly three blocks of boutiques - known for expensive designer labels and haute couture fashion.

roaming the streets of LA suburbs with her crew (consisting of both men and women dressed in ravy neon clothes and heavy makeup), on bicycles, in (and on top of) a pink stretch limo. Candy is also being pushed around the urban areas in a golden wheelchair. From the suburbs, Candy and her crew moves along the nicer streets of LA, and the camera sweeps over people passing by, looking horrified and shocked at the sight of them. Candy laughs and begins to take pictures with some of them, almost like she's an attraction to come and look at. Throughout the video, Candy is telling the spectators who she is, how all the dudes need to "wiggle their dicks" for her (and simultaneously that all the "hoes" need to "wiggle their tits" for her too), and she is promptly promoting herself as the "realest bitch" out there throughout the entire film. The video cuts from the street images to Candy and her crew getting crazy in a hotel room, twerking on the bed and in the jacuzzi, taking some unidentified white pills, drinking champagne, and making out among the bubbles in the tub. The final frame shows Candy alone on Rodeo Drive in her gold armor cat suit and platform shoes, walking a small child with a blue leash connected to a little backpack on its back. Candy walks towards the camera, and the video ends with the chafing grasshopper beat slowly tuning out into silence, as the picture turns black.

"And even after all my logic and my theory, I add a 'motherfucker' so you ignorant niggas hear me"

Theoretical frame

As mentioned in the introduction, my main theoretical focus originates from critical femininity theory. The text I'm concentrating on in this area comes from Carol-Anne Tyler (2003) and her ideas of female impersonation through already existing theories of femininity, and I'm also using Beverley Skeggs' theories of the process of femininity tied to class (2001). Alongside with these theoretical tracks, I am borrowing a reflection from Ulrika Dahl (2012) regarding how femininity could be used through somatechnics. This main focus is placed next to a line of thoughts gathered from standpoint theory and Black Feminist Thought, where I specifically turn to Sandra Harding (2003) and Patricia Hill Collins (2003). The moldings of my theoretical frame, as I am trying to work through this in a process of feminist knowledge production, starts with ideas - and some critique - of femininity studies.

Female impersonation(s) and the masquerade

Tyler's *Female Impersonations* (2003) organizes how femininity have been problematized through different perspectives (both temporally and thematically), and discusses various theories from Beauvoir, Irigaray, Young, and Butler. I have decided to focus on Tyler's examination of two concepts that have all been important in the studies of femininity: *masquerading* and *mimicry*. I find these concepts interesting when looking at hip-hop culture and more specifically the expressions made in the material I'm examining²³, but they are at the same time theoretically problematic as they all connote to forms of essentialism when speaking of expressions/performances of femininity. This is why I've chosen to look at these concepts through Tyler's critical eye, in order to see how I can use the ideas of femininity performances - or, female impersonations - in more diverse ways than what might have been intended originally. I set out with a few thematic questions in mind: is there a difference between *real* and *masked* femininity? And when and for *whom* is a performance of identity a masquerade, rather than "the real thing"?

Let's start with the notions of how femininity can be seen as a form of masquerading, or acting in mimicry. Tyler describes mimicry as the gap between *woman* and her image of women/the feminine self; a space where woman can imitate or parody femininity in order to either question it, or *pass* as

²³ The performances of Blanco, for example, can be understood as a form of masquerade/drag in performative motion, with wigs, short skirts and high heels, and more traditional masculine attributes like the traditional hip-hop cap, tattooed arms, and baggy jeans. She *becomes* and *un-becomes*, all the time. With that said, Blanco's performances can't necessarily be put in a discussions of masquerade or mimicry that is articulated in earlier femininity studies (e.g Irigaray), but she's certainly impersonating some of the discussions in very physical ways.

feminine in return. She also notes how this gap has been described in femininity studies (e.g in Irigaray's *The Sex which is not One* (1985)) as offering a feminine representation of the female identity as an *alternative* to identifying with masculinity (Tyler, 2003:21-24). In mimicry, woman repeats the already structured images of femininity that are processed through a phallic and objectifying gaze, and mimics herself as a woman in relation to those imageries. So, acting in mimicry could be viewed as a form of parodic resistance to the objectification of feminine bodies/identities, as it questions femininity as a nature and rather produces the notion that it is an exploitative role (Tyler, 2003:21). Masquerading can in femininity studies be seen as either equivalent to mimicry (as both describes a form of performative act, a repetition of femininity), or distinct from it - Tyler notes that masquerade "serves as the norm, the zero degree of femininity that mimicry exaggerates or parodies. If masquerade is fetishism, mimicry would be hyperfetishism." (Tyler, 2003:29)

Seeing femininity as acts of mimicry or masquerading, then, raises a few thoughts. Firstly, the acts of mimicry presuppose a binary view on gendered identities, where the feminine is always seen as opposite (or at least in relation) to the masculine. Secondly, if the acts of mimicry and masquerading are ways to parody, imitate, or question phallically shaped forms of femininity, what or who is this phallic, masculine identity? The universal (hu)man, Tyler points out, is a white, heterosexual, upper class citizen - which means that if femininity is a performative act masqueraded or mimicked from phallic masculinity, femininity is also constructed through those exact social categories: "the man who is the representative of the 'universally human' is not just any man - he is white, bourgeois, and heterosexual; to a limited extent (some) women can operate his values because they are able to identify with him (and be identified with him) on the basis of their share in that proper identity" (Tyler, 2003:68). I wonder which of those values Mykki Blanco, Angel Haze, and Brooke Candy would feel comfortable operating? Their representations of femininity - as all others - needs to be looked at *through* various intersections of social categories instead of being *compared* to this universal (hu)man. Seeing these ladies through a frame of white masculinity would be a terrible (or "fucked up", as the ladies would put it) way to write off the complexities of femininity that can be found in this context. Tyler points out the importance of this when saying that "any feminine identity is necessarily produced at the site of the intersection of a number of competing and even contradictory discourses, perhaps most importantly those of race and class" (Tyler, 2003:68). Another thought, and one of my initial questions when choosing to look into masquerading and mimicry, is if there is a difference between masquerading femininity, and *choosing to be* feminine, if both make the identity an unnatural act? And what is "natural" femininity, if the acts of masquerade or mimicry are "unnatural"? Tyler says that

if there can be no clear distinction between being and miming the feminine because there is no genuine womanliness, since all identities are masquerades, then a feminist analysis of the grounds for labeling some masquerades as mimicry is required. What has passed for “passing for” rather than *being* womanly - the “parody” of femininity - may cover up certain unexamined notions of “genuine” or “natural” femininity that are class biased and ethnocentric, securing rather than contesting the identity of the middle-class white woman. (Tyler, 2003:21)

I’m looking to investigate makings of femininity through the performances of Blanco, Haze, and Candy, with a wish to expand the notion of femininity as a binary fixed identity, and look at possibilities of several *versions* of femininity that might come from different intersections and understandings of race, class, and sexuality. These versions may be found through performative acts that can be connected to the ideas of mimicry or masquerading, but I want to unlock the concepts as they were once presented by theorists like Irigaray or Young²⁴. I’m viewing makings of femininity not as locked to binary perceptions of sexual- or gendered identities, but instead as *flows* of understanding identities that are in motion. My thesis is theoretically structured around the *questioning* of how femininity is being made and categorized, and a challenge to the more essential and binary ways femininity have been explained in the past. Tyler provides me with tools to see female impersonations as ways of doing gender and femininity through masquerades or parodic mimicry, but with the important addition that the impersonations do not derive from an already fixed (masculine) identity construction. I also want to point out that I do not wish to examine the makings of femininity solely as a masquerade - I seek to use the concept of masquerade as *a part* of how one can understand makings of femininity.

“Doing femininity” and the process of becoming

I’m using Skeggs’ description of “doing femininity” as an explanatory way to get close to the different processes of femininity makings in my material. Firstly, she defines femininity as “the process through which women are gendered and become specific sorts of women” (Skeggs, 2001:297), and later adds that this *being* or *becoming* are very different for women of different classes, races, and nations. Class is an important marker for how femininity is being made and repeated, and the idea that the “accepted femininity” belongs to the white, heterosexual, and upper-class women is being underlined by Skeggs: “working-class women were not expected to inhabit femininity in the same way as middle and upper-class white women. Femininity was always something that did not designate them precisely: a sign under which they could not and did not belong” (Skeggs, 2001:297). This means that femininity can be

²⁴ E.g, see Iris. M. Young’s *On female body experience: "Throwing like a girl" and other essays* (2005), where she is discussing concepts like “phallic female power” as feminine attributes constructed off of the male gaze. Young is, like Irigaray, creating a somewhat binary understanding of femininity through a starting point in masculinity, which gives femininity the notion of being an fixed identity, already determined by a phallic system.

considered an *achievement*, something to strive for, pushing to become - and aesthetic technologies like clothing and makeup can be seen as ways of completing that achievement. The achievement is structured in different ways depending on class- and racial contexts, though. For example, to use the significance and symbolism of a pair of expensive shoes - say, Louboutin's²⁵ - they will mean different things in different social classes, and will shape the body wearing them differently depending on the context. Now, the *achievement* I'm focusing on does not originate from the idea of one accepted or normative femininity, but rather from various expressions of femininity, and the makings of the same through technologies and intersections of social categories like race, class, sexuality, and location²⁶. Skeggs points out that we need to pay more attention to issues of space and taste in the making and reproduction of gender and sexuality (Skeggs, 2001:305), which I intend to do while focusing on the makings of femininity and feminine bodies.

An important addition to the ideas of seeing femininity as made through different expressions of masquerade, becoming, and achievements, is that I seek to tie these concepts together with the somatechnics perspective I introduced earlier²⁷. To examine the making of femininity as an active process of interdependence of both flesh and technology is the main ambition for this thesis, which can be seen as parallel to Dahl's ideas of the somatechnics of feminine subjectivity:

[...] rather than being the expressive and visible resources of an autonomous and rational human subject who at best aspires towards better tool-use or make-up, femininity, and thus feminine subjectivity, is irreducibly co-constituted through soma *and* knowledge. Extending the insights from feminist phenomenology and sexual difference theory we might stress feminine specificity and call the "emancipatory" qualities of gender neutrality into question, but without insisting on proper feminine objects or bodily processes as the foundations for our object(ion)s." (Dahl, 2012:63)

This quote successfully encircles the framework I wish to use for my analysis, and future projects in femininity studies as well: the exciting mix of flesh and technical knowledge, with processes of meaning *through* (not just with) technology at the same time. To sum it up, I'm borrowing a few more words from Dahl:

Equipped with differential consciousness and attending to both pleasure and pain, we might lose the (academic) masculinity complex and use our speculums beyond narcissism and alienation and instead revisit, reinhabit, an renarrate the dark continent of femininity [...] as neither a "white patch" on the map, a

²⁵ See example on page 10, where I bring up how Iggy Azalea uses Louboutins as a signifier for her class identity.

²⁶ The issue of location - or *hoods*, rather - will be further elaborated on in the first part of the analysis, see page 35.

²⁷ See page 8.

compulsory straight jacket or a dangerous sexualized jungle. In so doing, critical femininity extends feminist legacies, imagines (queer) feminine elsewheres and (re)figures the gendered politics of research. (Dahl, 2012:63)

In the words of hip-hop: *word*.

Standpoints and Black Feminist Thought

Harding (2004) describes a version of standpoint knowledge production that agrees with my idea of seeing hip-hop as a space for active knowledge production, and as a standpoint of its own. She suggests that standpoint theory - applicable to the culture of hip-hop - is a kind of "organic epistemology, methodology, philosophy of science, and social theory that can arise whenever oppressed people gain public voice" (Harding, 2004:3). Harding discusses the importance (and controversy) of using standpoint theory/methods when producing new knowledge, and points out that standpoint theories map how "a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage" (Harding, 2004:7-8). Looking at hip-hop as a culture that bases its core and aesthetic expressions in socioeconomic disadvantage and racial oppression²⁸, the idea of using standpoint theory to encircle and explore hip-hop as a place for knowledge production, seems both legit and interesting. Borrowing Harding's take on how different groups are oppressed in different ways, and then how these groups have the possibility of obtaining specific insights regarding relations of power/oppression both in the system where they are operating *and* in more general and dominating systems (Harding, 2004:9), I'm using standpoints as a general marker to explain and examine the culture of hip-hop. It is my claim that hip-hop in itself can be read and understood as a form of critical standpoint and that the makings of femininity within that standpoint could be understood as yet another one.

Within the form of standpoint theory offered by Harding, I am also focusing on Patricia Hill Collins' ideas of how "the outsider within" status produces a form of feminism that might reflect certain standpoints on identity, family, and society. The representations I'm looking at can in different ways be analyzed through their "nearness [...] remoteness, concern and indifference" (Hill Collins, 2004:104) to hip-hop as a dominant culture, with their active roles as "outsiders" inside of that culture. Hill Collins also offers a Black female-centered analysis when describing the outsider within-status, which I find useful for my material at large. Two of the different tools used by Hill Collins to structure her version of Black Feminist thought is the *self-definition* and *self-valuation* of Black women. Hill Collins means that they are necessities for Black Feminist Thought because "defining and valuing one's consciousness of

²⁸ See section on previous research, page 30.

one's own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified 'other' is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination." (Hill Collins, 2004:108). She also points out the importance of creative expressions in "shaping and sustaining Black women's self-definitions and self-valuations" (Hill Collins, 2004:113), which directly connotes to the way I'm interpreting hip-hop culture: as a creative space possible for makings of a variety of identities. I will try to view the artist's expressions through their own use of self-definition and self-valuation in relation to their female identified bodies, and how they make use of them in discussions regarding race, class, and sexuality²⁹.

²⁹ An important note is that since I do not wish to examine the artists as researcher-defined variables - which would create a risk of objectifying them via their gender, sexuality, or race - it is my goal to communicate with them as "workers in oppressive jobs", and therefore focusing on their expressions through their own self-definition(s) and self-valuation(s).

“I taste my own flows on this beat, hmm, delicious”

Choice of method

Going through the material with both my analytical aim, and the framing of questions I've chosen to execute my aim with in mind, it quickly became clear that I needed ways of *viewing* and *reading* the different analytical themes I have chosen to work with. How does one start to *look* for representations of femininity and makings of the same? What questions did I need to ask in order to get close to the material? As I am familiar with text analysis from previous papers and research³⁰, I decided to approach the material in the manners of a classical *close reading*³¹: looking for patterns, repetitions, similarities, and perhaps contradictions while reading, listening, and looking at the material. After locating evident and/or recurring patterns and themes, I continued with a closer look at metaphors and details of specific language and images used in the material. Together with matters of location and context, this form of close reading then allowed me to ask questions about the found patterns: what could this particular recurring pattern of, say, the use of a mic, mean in relation to the lyrics or settings of the video? Does it relate to the artist's body? How? These are just examples, but approaching the material through close readings like this - or “dive ins”, as I have started to call them - is a form of qualitative method well suited for my material. Pulling out pieces from the videos and texts I am examining with this form of reading, and then organizing them through the somatechnic perspective I described earlier, allows me to puzzle my way through the questions I've articulated about the makings of femininity. The process of *reading* the material in this critical way, formulated interpretations that led me to the core of the analysis: ways of making femininity.

Now, as I am looking at the lyrics and the videos through this *reading* perspective, I am actively translating it to a way of *viewing* while conducting the analysis. To structure the ways I am viewing the material, I am using Stuart Hall's (1997) notes on representations and signifying practices as a guide. His elaborations on language, meaning, and discourse, blends well together with my idea of *reading* texts and images through repetitive patterns and contradictions/similarities. In other words, I have created a methodological frame specific for my aims and questions related to this thesis. It starts with close readings as a base, stretches out through Hall's notions of representations and signifying practices,

³⁰ In my Bachelor paper, for instance, I examined the constructed talk about sexual harassment in a local debate. My material consisted of different types of texts, which I analyzed through ways of looking at linguistic stereotypes and constructions of meaning through words and speech. The paper is called “Man tiger, biter ihop och går vidare?” (Johansson, 2010) and can be found at <http://sh.diva-portal.org/>

³¹ The term “reading” is being used collectively for interpretative ways of approaching a text/object: in this specific analysis, it is e.g both viewing and hearing since the material is structured around both lyrics and images/films. The notion that everything around us are texts structured by different types of language/discourses goes along with Hall's notions of meaning, which I elaborate on further on.

and lands in a blend of reading/seeing which hopefully creates a dynamic approach to the works of Blanco, Haze, and Candy. In more direct words, the method for this paper is structured around ideas of how language, communication, power and meaning can create parallel and flowing understandings of the makings of femininity.

Cultural practices and the meaning of language

Hall's very definition of what representations *are* - "the production of meaning through language (Hall, 1997:16) - is the definition I will use to approach my material, and will also be a way to structure the critical readings mentioned above. Using the structures of language³² and power that Hall offers (with connotations through Foucault), I will conduct a form of close reading and critical viewing of the material, through the theoretical frame I presented in previous passage. Viewing the material as produced in a certain discursive culture - looking at hip-hop as a standpoint - will help me to circle the themes I'm focusing on in my analysis:

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images, and practice, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. These *discursive formations*, as they are known, define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity; what knowledge is considered useful, relevant, and 'true' in that context; and what sorts of persons or 'subjects' embody its characteristics. (Hall, 1997:6)

Since I am looking at femininity as irreducibly constituted through technologies, Hall's notions of cultural signifiers within a discursive formation will become useful: the importance of images, narratives, sounds and symbols are all concrete practices of signifying, and parts of cultural meaning production, and I will focus on hip-hop through this lens. Hall argues that "culture" is not so much a set of *things* - objects, paintings, videos, etc. - as it is a process, or a set of *practices*. The different practices of cultural expressions are built on the "production and the exchange of meaning - the 'giving and taking of meaning' - between the members of a society or a group" (Hall, 1997:2), and the giving and taking of meaning is structured by signifiers - actions, thoughts, etc. To actively read hip-hop as a culture of its own - in line with standpoint theory - would then mean to look for signifying practices giving and taking meaning within that area. Connecting to the somatechnics perspective used in this paper, Hall underlines that *what* gives meaning to cultural practices can be understood differently

³² In conformity with my use of "reading" mentioned in note 31 (and in line with Hall's own thoughts of the matter), I'm also using "language" as a collective term for different ways of expressing or producing meaning: as speech, facial expressions, music, etc.

depending on how what it means in that specific context, or together with a certain way of acting, dressing, or speaking:

Things in “themselves” rarely if ever have any one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning. Even something as obvious as a stone can be a stone, a boundary marker or a piece of sculpture, depending on *what it means* - that is, within a certain context of use, within what the philosophers call “language games” [...] It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them - how we represent them - that *give them a meaning*. In part, we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them. (Hall, 1997:3)

In the analysis I will use this framework when constructing the readings of the material. By focusing on sets of *practices* performed by Blanco, Haze, and Candy, I will map the use of different technologies and tie it to the makings of femininity. While connecting the *doing* with the *undoing*, and interpreting patterns I’ve located in the videos and lyrics, the practices of the artists might provide me with new meaning related to femininity and hip-hop. Like Hall says, “it is our use of a pile of bricks and mortar which make it a ‘house’; and what we feel, think, or say about it that makes a ‘house’ a ‘home’” (Hall, 1997:3) - so, what kind of houses are being built by the ladies? What do they look like, and what kind of bricks are they working through?

In line with Hall’s notes on how we understand and apprehend cultural text/images, I’m also using the perspective that knowledge is never finally fixed (Hall, 1997:9). This creates an interesting flow in relation to the idea presented in the theory section³³: that structures of femininities are in constant movement and not binary fixed. In other words, I’m looking at processes of femininity as producing new meaning and knowledge.

Reflexive writing

To accomplish the methodological aspects of representation theory and close reading, I am also going to use *reflexivity* as a part of my analytical writing method. Linda Finlay (2002) writes about different ways of mapping how reflexivity can be used in research practice. Finlay says that reflexivity is something that researchers no longer questions the need to have or do, but that the questions is *how* to do it - in her article she lists five suggestions of just how reflexivity can be done, and I’ve decided to use what she calls *intersubjective reflection* (Finlay, 2002:215). This method is developed through the researchers exploration of the mutual meanings emerging within the research relationship, and focus lies on the situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter. Questions to be asking through this

³³ See page 20.

method, when gathering or examining the material for example, could be: how does this make me feel? Is it possible that what I'm feeling (or sharing!) with the material is affecting the way I'm approaching it? A strong self-reflection is needed when working with intersubjective reflection, and I think this might be a rewarding method for me to use when trying to see how Mykki, Haze, and Candy are speaking with each other, but also if or how they're speaking to *me*. I see it as a way of examining my own motivations in order to understand another - hopefully this will give me a deeper understanding of the material and culture I am trying to access.

While using close reading/critical viewing through the theories and methods of representations and power/discourse, I will be making use of a log that I initiated when I first started to articulate this project. It consists of thoughts, sidetracks, and feelings regarding the paper at large, and the work I'm doing with the material in particular. It is my hope that the log will guide me through "the complicated landscape" (Finlay, 2002:212) that is research, and that it will help me to reflect and make a path through my writing method. The log won't be a visible part of this paper - I have found that the importance of keeping it active lies in the personal writing and parallel discoveries of mine - as a research journal - and not in a manifested section of the paper. Allowing my personal writing to exist next to the articulated thesis brings me a needed reflexivity outside of the academic box, and will hopefully give my work a more dynamic approach to academic writing.

“My persuasion can build a nation, endless power - our love we can devour”

Previous research and research positions

This thesis is placed as a contribution to ongoing discussions of makings and re-makings of femininity, and situates itself in the intersection of culture (hip-hop) studies, somatechnics, and critical femininity studies. In this intersection of equally important and interesting discussions, I have decided to position my research in relation to different texts written about hip-hop specifically, both in epistemological perspectives, and in more direct feminist ways. It's within the growing spectrum of hip-hop studies that I find the most relevant conversations given my own topic, and also where I see opportunities for my research to expand and interact with other voices and ideas. I have divided this section into two segments: firstly I've looked into three titles covering the history of hip-hop as a culture *and* as a relatively new scholarly area (Forman & Neal, Chang, & Price), and secondly I have focused on texts examining cultural and social expressions in hip-hop that connotes to my paper more directly (Rose, Morgan, and Pough et al).

The investigation of hip-hop culture and different cultural studies of hip-hop as an epistemological field are becoming a well spread area both in popular science and scholarly contexts. The anthology *That's the joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (Forman & Neal, 2011) is a contemporary example of just that; a comprehensive gathering of hip-hop scholars that thematically addresses both the history of hip-hop, identity politics, hip-hop as a cultural industry and gender and racial perspectives on rap. Forman and Neal (along with scholars like Paul Gilroy and Andreana Clay) pervades hip-hop through these themes and offers a deeper understanding of hip-hop as an intellectual culture and means that

[s]ince its inception, hip-hop has inflected conditions at multiple scales, and it remains a vital force in the articulation and expression of culture, politics, and identity for literally millions of people around the world. This is to say that hip-hop is an essential facet of everyday life and of experiential *being*, a cornerstone of individual and communal existence. (Forman & Neal, 2011:3)

A couple of years prior to Forman and Neal's anthology, Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a history of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005) discussed hip-hop as a generation-defining global movement, and historicizes social change and globalization alongside with hip-hop's development as a culture of its own. Emmett G. Price continued on the same path with *Hip Hop Culture* (2006) where he linearly explores three decades of hip-hop's influence on social culture and the artists that got it all started in the Black suburbia of Harlem (Price, 2006). These titles offer a summarizing map of the history of hip-hop as a culture, epistemology, and a place for politics, and provide a comprehensive background to the field and background of my own study.

Sista's, Chickenheads, and safe spaces

Scholar and Professor Tricia Rose came out with *Black Noise: Rap music and Black culture in contemporary America* in 1994, and processes the expressions of hip-hop culture through lyrics, music and storytelling. Rose discusses female rappers and how they work in (and against) a male dominated rap environment, and how the most common critical claims about hip-hop is expressed through the talk about women and women's bodies. This is one of the first scholarly texts focusing on hip-hop with a gender perspective, and I find it relevant to communicate with Rose's ideas regarding "Bad Sistas" and how the sexual politics of hip-hop gets expressed through female bodies (Rose, 1994). Rose discusses how Black women *create* sexual politics in rap, the issues of heterosexual courtship in hip-hop, and the importance of Black female voices in a contemporary Western culture. This speaks not only to the areas of female rap that I have chosen to investigate, but it also communicates with my theoretical approach regarding Black Feminist Thought and how self-evaluations/definitions are important elements of female rap.

Joan Morgan coined the term "hip-hop feminism" in *When Chickenheads come home to roost: My life as a Hip-Hop Feminist* (1999) and discusses what feminism in such a specific culture like hip-hop could look like, and the importance for modern Black women to have a feminist ideology of their own (Morgan, 1999). Morgan calls out for a feminism that doesn't necessarily come from an academic perspective, but from a more vibrant, contemporary expression of hip-hop through rap, dance, and beatboxing (Morgan, 1999). Even though she focuses solely on a heterosexual female frame of expressions (which I find problematic in itself), I find her discussions about feminist resistance and alternative feminist strategies interesting given the final questions I raise in the analysis: if hip-hop can be interpreted or used as a possible space for feminist struggle, how can femininity studies expand notions of bodies and voices in rap? Finding new ways to hold feminist discussions in hip-hop is much needed, but returning to Morgan and her fiery feminist approach that is bold enough to "fuck with the grays" (Morgan, 1999) is both an inspiration and a useful reminder of what has already been said and done.

In the anthology *Homegirls, make some noise...* (Pough et al, 2007) several articles discuss queer women of color and the sexual politics in hip-hop, and a range of different examples of "hip-hop femininity/masculinity" is being put in a feminist context. I've given special attention to "How to NOT be 21st Century Venus Hottentots" (Muhammad, 2007), "Sista' Outsider: queer women of color and Hip-Hop" (Darnell Pritchard & Bibbs, 2007), and "Not the average girl from the videos: B-girls defining their space in Hip-Hop culture" (Washington, 2007). These articles all connote to femininity

constructions and hip-hop feminism, and feels important to give reference to when browsing through my material.

Besides raising important notions of how LGBT hip-hop is a space reserved and adjusted for gay and queer *men*, Darnell Pritchard and Hibbs also makes an interesting point of how the Internet has become a space that is “more affirming of the diverse and collective experiences of all LGBT folks in hip-hop, particularly queer women of color” (Darnell Pritchard & Bibbs, 2007:33). Seeing that Blanco, Haze, and Candy all have started their alternative rap journey through different (queer) communities and forums on the Internet (which is where I first found them), Darnell Pritchard’s and Bibbs’ article about *sista*’s and lesbian rappers applies to the material perfectly. The article also brings up how heterosexist versions of queer and lesbian women - calling lesbian rappers “homie-sexuals” (Darnell Pritchard & Bibbs, 2007:22) for instance - is constructing an uncomfortable mold for women and female bodies to be placed in, but that it’s still the only obvious mainstream choice:

the obvious problematic is that LGBT youth of color are being asked to prioritize their identities, as the choice here is to either embrace hip-hop despite its homophobia and inability to offer voices and images that reflect queer identity, or reject what has become one of their generations most viable tools of expression for an identity of which they may have no way to communicate about anymore (Darnell Pritchard & Bibbs, 2007:23).

Now, this only reassures me that new ways of looking at makings of femininity and feminine bodies through intersections of race, class, and sexuality within in hip-hop is called for. Washington (2007) brings up strategies for girls³⁴ to survive in hip-hop culture, and defines survival as “the ability to reject an image that objectifies the person for one that is subjective” (Washington, 2007:81). She means that women in hip-hop have been forced to create a special “consciousness that enables them to create their own ‘frames’, or a self-defined standpoint, in order to find their voice” (Washington, 2007:81), which (like Darnell Pritchard and Bibbs) also speaks to Black Feminist Thought and the ideas of standpoint theory. What I find most useful and suggestive in Washington’s article, is that she articulates how femininity is being controlled and expressed in hip-hop, and how even though men and women will share intimate love with the culture of hip-hop, they won’t *experience* hip-hop the same (Washington, 2007:88). Washington calls out for more diverse ways of seeing gender and femininity within this discourse, and suggests that creating more safe spaces is a way of doing that. Although I agree to a certain point, I find it important to be observant as to *how* these safe spaces are constructed, and also

³⁴ Washington is focusing on B-girls (female breakdancers), but I believe her thoughts on safe feminist spaces in hip-hop culture, and feminist strategies to survive in patriarchal environments applies to all women identified bodies.

acknowledge what kind of femininity that is presented through them. *Who* are the girls of hip-hop, and *how* are they?

Muhammad discusses ways Black women perform roles in hip-hop, and how the performances (of both gender and femininity) reflects women's adoption and creation of Black female identities, and concludes that "Black women experience roles and identities within hip-hop culture as they are framed by systems informed by racism, sexism, and economic oppression" (Muhammad, 2007:118-119). She means that since discourses about race, class and abridged economic opportunity predominate the hip-hop culture, Black women and their construction of Black female spaces/identities, are standing at all fronts of social struggles (Muhammad, 2007:119). All through the article, Muhammad is looking at how femininity and female bodies are performed, talked about, and expressed through the social categories presented above, and offers a somewhat diverse way of seeing female sexuality, meaning that female sex talk in hip-hop might be serving both as objectifying *and* as female empowerment. For example, she calls Lil' Kim's controversial rap a "pussy-power platform" (Muhammad, 2007:125), describing it as an important way of releasing female voices into a masculine structure, but she also points out that the pussy-power is shaped through a male fantasy, designed for *his* pleasure, and means that "not every female standpoint is feminist" (Muhammad, 2007:125). Muhammad ends the article with a specific demand: "hip-hop feminists (as artist/performers and audience) must create something fitting and beautifully inspiring to prepare our daughters for balanced identities and fulfilling lives" (Muhammad, 2007:136), and thereby clings on to my own train of thoughts. Blanco, Haze, and Candy *are* the daughters of this hip-hop generation, and looking into their representations of femininity is to back up and stretch out the inspiring notions already made by the scholars presented here.

“Okay let’s get this shit started, hold up, let me pause that”

Analysis

The analysis is structured thematically in regards to my line of questions, and is divided into three passages all centered around different processes of femininity and the makings of the same:

1) **The Beat:** in the first passage I focus on mapping social and technological themes found in the videos of Blanco, Haze, and Candy. This passage allows me to lay out a solid foundation for my analysis, and is created to function as a firm body for the thesis to rest upon - much like the beat to a rap. The themes presented in this section, which I am also focusing on further on in the analysis, are the assemblings of *Hoods, Family & Class* and *Realness & Body talk*.

2) **The Hook:** this section concentrates on more detailed examinations of the picked up themes, with close looks at how femininity is made through (and together with) the different thematic and technological expressions made in the videos. If the first passage is the simmering intro, the solid beat leading up to a rap song’s first fierce words, this passage should be thought of as the hook³⁵ of the song. You know those bars that repeat some catchy phrases through the beat, to show you what the song is about? Yeah, this is it.

3) **The Outro:** in this final passage I shortly gather the key moments/movements in the process of femininity structured within the representations of Blanco, Haze, and Candy. You could say that this is the inspiring outro of the song - the beat has silenced down a bit, and the last bars are being blasted out. In this passage, I take the opportunity to ask some questions for eventual discussions beyond the ones in this paper: do these discoveries say anything about female rap or hip-hop femininities? What could it all mean? The different makings of femininity in hip-hop might offer a new arena for critical femininity studies - perhaps for feminist resistance in rap as well - and this section should be seen as a curious attempt to start a discussion toward future possibilities of hip-hop and femininity studies at large. Lastly, the outro is finalized with some humbling words, directed to the fantastic women of hip-hop, and more specifically to the fantastic ladies in my material.

³⁵ A “hook” can be referred to as a musical *idea* or passage that functions as the catchy phrase of the song. The hook is not always, but often the chorus of the song, but either way it’s suppose to stand out and make the song easy to remember. A definition well suited for my usage of the term would be “a melody that stays in people's minds [...] a lyric that furthers the dramatic action, or defines a person or place.” (Hook. (no year) downloaded on May 21, 2013 from Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hook_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hook_(music)).)

THE BEAT

- Analytical themes and patterns

Hoods, Family & Class

“We all just chasing a dream/in the land of the free /while we paying a fee /to stay on this concrete”

The idea to start locating examples of how Blanco, Haze, and Candy are repping or in other ways acknowledging their hoods was an obvious choice from the very start. In line with the classic hip-hop custom of introducing yourself through coasts³⁶ and cities, they artists are all showing off their zip codes. As made clear in the terminology section³⁷, I am using the hood as a marker for the artists' different *neighborhoods* and environments (New York, East coast and Los Angeles, West coast), but I am also letting the term collectively describe functional and social areas (like gatherings of friends/family and more spatial rooms like the storage/warehouse where Haze is located, for example). The hood is thereby a loosely articulated understanding of different *locations*. Now, by mapping *how* Blanco and the others are recognizing their hoods, and circling the procedures where this is done, two analytical subcategories quickly became visible: structures of *class* and notions of *family*. These underlying categories became important building blocks when understanding how femininity is made in and through the hoods of these ladies, and the patterns of location became more complex and layered throughout the viewings. In her theorization of class and femininity, Skeggs says that “...appearance became the signifier of conduct; to look was to be” (Skeggs, 2001:297), which guides me to a first approach: how do the hoods get described, and what meaning is given to the ladies' representations of femininity in these hoods in return? Besides the obvious geographical markers in the videos letting us know where the ladies wish to belong - Blanco run's through Chinatown in New York and is being chased by a NYPD³⁸ officer, Haze also reps New York through the mysterious smoking box where the city's name is printed in big black letters, and Candy is quite obvious repping Los Angeles since she is raging around on both Rodeo Drive and the suburbs of LA - the hoods can be understood through a variety of technology.

³⁶ This tradition is as old as hip-hop, but is perhaps most commonly connected to the Northern American East coast-West coast rivalry, a hip-hop feud started in the 1990's. Two of the most famous frontiers in this feud were East coast-based rapper Notorious B.I.G and his label Bad Boy Records, and West coast-based rapper 2pac and his label Death Row Records. Both B.I.G and 2pac were shot and killed (1997 and 1996), and even though the murders are still unsolved, they are often referred to as outbreaks from this feud. If it wasn't important to show what coast you were repping *before* this feud, it definitely became crucial after it. Even though the rivalry between East and West isn't as bloody as it once was, the tradition to show your colors is still in play.

³⁷ See page 12.

³⁸ Short for “New York Police Department”. This information can be found on the police woman's uniform; on her left shoulder a patch spells out “Police Department: City of New York”.

Defensive work

Haze shows a hood that is both inhospitable and dangerous, and which can be read as a threat to expressions of femininity. First of all, the title of her song is “Werkin’ girls”, which could indicate either prostitution or hard labour in general - two strong markers of both working class and physical/psychic unsafety. Secondly, Haze’s spatial hood is the site of a storage, or warehouse - a space with few other qualities than those related to *work*. Skeggs maps characteristics of stereotypical working class women, and means that they are “involved in forms of labour that prevents femininity” (Skeggs, 2001:297), and that working class women thus becomes the deviant other against which femininity is defined (Skeggs, 2001:297). This makes the representation of Haze and her hood quite interesting given the ambition to examine makings of femininity through the technological hood. If Haze is actively making femininity in an environment that, according to theory, is *preventing* femininity, does that make her performance a contradiction? Or is the nature of this presented hood co-creating a femininity that is shaping the expressions of Haze’s subjectivity?

In the video, two elements of the hood functions as bearing signifyers in the representation of Haze: the rope jumping girls and the three masked men. The girls can be viewed as a live image of Haze’s *family* or *childhood* which, placed in the fluorescently lit, hostile environment, becomes a feature of the specific femininity that Haze is creating, or even *longing* to access. The girls are seemingly misplaced, two foreign visitors in a landscape not suited for them, and behind them stands Haze, quietly observing, but also spitting about how she’s nasty, insane, and too much (Haze, 2012). Her performance is distant from the rope swinging, but viewing the playfulness embodied by the girls as a part of Haze’s created hood - her home, family and chosen space - the distance becomes an explanation to her aggressiveness. The game played by the girls - a form of technology portrayed as childish and girly - can be understood as part of Haze’s femininity making, and is enhanced by the appearance of the three men. They lurk in the background through almost the entire video, and seems to make Haze nervous as she keeps turning her eyes towards them. When they finally break through to the centered stage where she and the girls are standing, it’s hard not to interpret their entrance as a threatening penetration of the scene - and the femininity performance structured through the hood. As the men violently captures the little girls and takes off with them, Haze is left alone with the smoking box labeled “New York”, and the final words “you niggas ‘bout to be bitches, you bitches ‘bout to be Casper³⁹” (Haze, 2012). As well as this environment functions as a marker for Haze’s feminine subjectivity, she is in return actively recognizing

³⁹ Refers to the little ghost in the movie “Casper” (1995), which indicates that Haze is letting the addressed “bitches” know that they are about to be killed (owned) by her, and become ghosts.

this hood *through* a defensive set of technology consisting of a will to return to a version of femininity (impersonated by the girls and their activity) and the apparent threat to that femininity (impersonated by the men and their invasion). This defensive work is understood through both the hoods' scenery and the rough lyrics presented by Haze, together with the vibrant elements of violence and abuse.

Oh well, what's a royal ball...

Jumping from Haze's hostile surroundings into the different locations impersonated by Blanco and her wavy passage through both streets and fancy furnished ballrooms, the divide between two settings is distinct. The locations are structured around the truck where Blanco first starts to spit, and the hotel/ballroom where she performs her rap in a more refined manner wearing heels, a dress, and luxurious long hair. Two hoods are represented and impersonated by the same body - Blanco's - and it is the movement in between the different settings that is describing important elements in Blanco's performed femininity, as well as it raises a couple of questions. Are *two* versions of femininity being put on display through the same body, and *is* the body *one*? I will elaborate further on these issues when bringing them back to the Hook⁴⁰, but first a more detailed mapping of the movement in Blanco's hood: from the truck to the ballroom, and back again.

Starting with the drug deal on the streets, and later the chase from the police woman, Blanco makes it clear how hood she *is*. Not only do the streets seem familiar to her as she successfully outruns the long arm of the law, she knows her hood so well she *becomes* the hood. From the beginning of the chase to the moment she dives into the truck (seemingly at the same day of the chase, since she is wearing the same clothes and is sweaty as from running), the narrative is in constant motion. The vehicle is moving, picking up people along the way, and Blanco is telling everybody to "get in line" (Blanco, 2012) with her actions. The introduction to this hood (run by Blanco) comes through the words "welcome to **hell** bitches - this is Mykki Blanco/new world order motherfucker, follow pronto" (Blanco, 2012) and describes a place defined by sweat, the roughness of the streets, and her aggressive challenging of what an MC is suppose to be, or look like: "what the fuck I gotta prove to a room full of dudes/who 'aint listening to my words 'cus they're staring at my shoes" (Blanco, 2012). By carefully portioning out traces of femininity (the comment "maybe she born with it, maybe it was Maybelline" (Blanco, 2012) is made while showing the street chase, for example) in this hood ordinarily marked by masculinity, she is defying a normative hip-hop space and replacing meanings of masculinity with structures of a performative femininity. While standing in the truck - which can be understood as not only a vehicle for transportation between two locations, but as a part of Blanco's femininity process - she is slowly

⁴⁰ See page 43.

working her way through one order (the appearance of a lower - or working class) to another (the Bourgeois ballroom). Blanco's hood takes on a new shape with the words "we make **love** tonight/in the back of the club, yeah we feelin' alright" (Blanco, 2012), and suddenly the images from the dirty truck is replaced by a decadent party, showing people feeding each other the wavy pills first presented by the dealer on the streets. Later, Blanco is shown in the middle of the Bourgeois ball, elegantly performing with long hair, fancy makeup and a short skirt. Now, as interesting as these different locations are in regards to Blanco's femininity construction(s), it is the interdependence between the truck and the ball that holds the capacity of showing how complex the works of technology/body really are. The locations are obviously valued differently by Blanco - when first jumping onto the truck she proclaims it to be "hell" and when taking place at the ball she emphasizes it as a space for lovemaking - but moving in *between* hell and love might be where the making of femininity gets real. After the divide, Blanco is seen throughout the video in both environments, which shows femininity structured and understood either as belonging in two different classes, or as a feminine subjectivity articulated via a journey through class and family formations. As I am viewing femininity as not binary fixed, and knowledge production as a constant motion - it is the transportation of Blanco's represented hoods and class I will focus on when bringing these thoughts to the Hook.

Fagmob families

Blanco's divide between two class systems can be found in Candy's hood as well, but where Blanco seems to belong (and feel comfortable) in both the working class and the Bourgeois setting, Candy has the more obvious outlook of being an outsider in the upper class area. Riding through the suburbs of LA, Candy doesn't seem to reflect on her surroundings (consisting of graffiti covered walls and a lower-middle class residential area) which gives her representation an impression of comfort, as she (like Blanco's owning of the New York streets) is reflecting or embodying the hoods she's traveling through. But when she roams the upper class streets of the city - with focus on Beverly Hills and Rodeo Drive - it becomes apparent that she does not belong there. Walking through the Hills, Candy shows a suspicious glare when she observes the other pedestrians, and later laughs at the reactions she gets in return (people looking at her with surprise and even chock), and proclaims "trust no hoe, bitches out to get ya/staring at me so hard you need to take a picture" (Candy, 2012) when she poses with two girls for a picture. She is embracing the assumed notion that she's a foreign sight, a tourist attraction, which can be understood as a she is using her position as an *outsider within* to gain knowledge or survival (Hill Collins, 2004). It also shows a certain element of movement (her travelling through different class scenes as a kind of tourist) in Candy's representation - similar to the movement detected in the representation of Blanco -

which leads me to wonder if fluidity might be another active technological aspect of how feminine bodies are made in hip-hop. We're bringing this thought to the Hook.

Now, Candy's hood is sprinkled with markers of both class and family belongings, described through upper class technology like a limousine, a jacuzzi, luxury fashion stores like Hermés⁴¹, and the various bottles of champagne being foaming all over her and her crew throughout the video. Lower class markers are shown through the streets of the suburbs, graffiti covered walls, and Candy's over the top, ghetto fab⁴² accessories. Through the expressions of class and locations, and the movable subjectiveness of Candy, two family constellations are formed in the video: Candy's "Fagmob"⁴³ and her "Locals". The Fagmob is presented as Candy's playmates, party crowd, and the "outsider" companions that are travelling with her from the suburbs to Beverly Hills and the Bourgeois Rodeo Drive. This crew consists of what can be read as exclusively white bodies, and is referred to by Candy as the ones who are supposed to take over "the industry" and the ones who run the world (Candy, 2012). The Fagmob is presented as the dominant culture in this video (with Candy as a centered queen: "baby that's some real shit, I'm a Mob boss" (Candy, 2012)), as they twerk their way through both the lower class *and* the upper class, and they do seem to "run shit", as Candy puts it. The other constellation understood as part of Candy's hood and family, are a group I refer to as the Locals. In contrast to the Fagmob, the Locals only exist in *one* of the two class systems - the lower class - as seems to function as a confident escort to Candy when she is travelling through those areas. One very figurative example of this, is the images of Candy actually being pushed around the graffiti ghetto in a golden wheel chair, operated by one of the Locals. Also in contrast to the Fagmob, the Locals consist of exclusively black and non-white bodies - which raise the very important question: how do these different families affect Candy's active femininity construction?

⁴¹ A French high fashion manufacturer specialized in leather, perfumery, and other luxury goods.

⁴² "Ghetto fab(ulous)" refers to the style and culture of American ghetto inhabitants, and derives from the lifestyle(s) of a poor/working class African-American urbanity.

⁴³ Presented on page 15.

Realness and Body talk

“My vag speak five different languages, and told yo vag ‘bitch make me a sandwich’”

When first looking through the material with the techniques of close reading/viewing, one repetitive pattern stood out from the other: the artists’ body talk and their use of functions connected to the female body. They all acknowledge and emphasize parts of the female body or different technology intimately tied to the female body, in order to enhance their agency, make a point of their ability to perform (with focus on how fast they spit, or how real they are), or to boast about themselves in any way. By using a variety of femininity expressions, the artists are not just proving their “realness” and authenticity in hip-hop, they are also confirming and giving meaning to femininity in return. With the help of some titties (Candy), the clit (Haze), and a figurative body chase (Blanco) the ladies are showing what they’ve got, and that they’re not scared of being graphic. The lyrics and images makes it quite obvious that the female body is not “just” a physical, fleshy mass, but that the body (and the use of the body) is being understood in different ways depending on the specific motives of the artist in question, and that the body is always irreducibly made through a variety of technologies.

Sluts and genitals

When Candy tells us that you can get any “amount of candy if the price is right/double D’s, these are real titties” (Candy, 2012) the physicality is apparent (and boldly confident), but she is not trying to actually sell you her body for Skittles - she is telling you a story about her identity and her history using *the body* and its functions to operate her narrative. Looking at Candy’s body talk and the way she sternly focuses on “real” breasts, it becomes apparent that she is operating a form of social and subjective positioning (Skeggs, 2001:297). By enhancing what is clearly “fake” (her extended hair and nails, for example), she is expressing how important “the real” parts of her are, which also gives the impression that she, even though she might not be doing femininity in the normative, upper-class way⁴⁴, is authentic in her feminine body and expression. She is impersonating a form of *slut femininity* made out of “fake” accessories, but is eager to prove that underneath the acrylic, she is still passing as real - and in that way, respectable - feminine. She even tells the listener that this vibrant expression of hers, is claimed and *owned* by her: “next time they call you a slut - Brooke Candy tells you not to give a fuck” (Candy, 2012). So, how can this slut femininity and body performance be read as constituted through technology? I will elaborate on this in the next passage⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ Which Skeggs describes as a category of “pure, white, heterosexuality” and “ease, restraint, calm, and luxurious decoration” (Skeggs, 2001:297).

⁴⁵ See The Hook passage, page 43.

The same line of ideas found in the representation of Candy - narrating a story of personhood through the female body - can be found in Haze's clit comment in the first verse of "Werkin' girls" (Haze, 2012). When underlining exactly how hard she runs her rap business she let's the female genitals lead the way: "I did what I say I did/did not fabricate one bit/I have been the fucking realest since my exit near the clit" (Haze, 2012). Almost directly after proclaiming this, Haze derives the attention a little further south into the embodied boasting, when she says that she's "show[ing] my whole fucking ass like a fat bitch's chaps" (Haze, 2012). Two important meanings in this narrative is being performed through the female body: firstly, *the clit* (together with the cleverly masked notion of a vaginal opening) embodies the story of Haze's skills and realness - both as a rapper and as a *female* rapper - and secondly, *the ass* incarnates how she is really putting herself and her experiences out in the spotlight without any sugar coating. All the while she spits the story of who she *is* through the immediate presence of a female physicality, the video shows closeups of her glossy lips and heavily painted eyes. It becomes quite clear that the stories of Haze - or at least *this* story - needs to be told and shown through defined structures of femininity.

Mapping body talk and various functions related to the body in Blanco's "Wavvy" (2012), took a somewhat different turn than in the cases of Candy and Haze. My immediate and first response to her lyrics was "well, okay - Mykki is all about the pussy" - but as I dove in deeper in her narrative, I realized that Blanco's lyrics are not really focused on the female body in the obvious ways that Candy and Haze are. Instead, the focus on the female body is found in signifying practices through the dynamics of technology and flesh in the video, which brings the illusion of her lyrics as accentuating the same, when *words* like "pussy" and "woman" is actually just mentioned a few times (and in ways that can be interpreted as pure ego boosting by degrading her opponents) in the lyrics. A first example of the feminine body being described through Blanco's representation in the video, is in the opening frames where she is doing business with the dealer. She is dressed as a stereotypical, male MC with a baseball cap on backwards, a t-shirt tied loosely around her bare chest and shoulders, and the signature hip-hop bling⁴⁶ in her left ear. When checking out the merchandise offered by the dealer, the camera zooms in on Blanco's hands, and shows images of half scraped off, clear blue nail polish on her nails. It's the first tiny detail in the representation of Blanco that marks a process of femininity getting into play, which is accentuated by her rejection of the figurative masculine when answering the dealers "'yo man, if your jeans get any tighter yo dick's gonna fall off" with "I don't wanna hear that shit, man" (Blanco &

⁴⁶ "Bling" or "bling-bling" is slang for flashy jewelry and other maxed out accessories.

Brenmar, 2012). When the police starts chasing Blanco down the streets, the process of femininity continues as Blanco runs from what can be interpreted as a “the real female body” impersonated by the police woman, and starts to make a femininity version of her own. When standing at the back of the truck, sweating and spitting aggressively into the camera, Blanco cleverly asks us “maybe she was born with it? Maybe it was Maybelline?” (Blanco & Brenmar, 2012) and then continues to proclaim how people are surprised by her appearance: “oh so this fag can rap’?/yeah they sayin’ that, they listening” (Blanco & Brenmar, 2012). The female body is made and re-made continuously through the images of the video, and is structured through a variety of technology intertwined with Blanco’s physicality. There is a clear focus on the *becoming* that Skeggs mentions: “the process of becoming feminine [...] occurs in the spaces of textually mediated discourse, in the dialectic between the active creating subject and the organisation of her activity in and by texts” (Skeggs, 2001:297). Blanco is *becoming* feminine and creates a feminine body through the discursive formation of flesh and technology, shown through the chase in the street - and later through her wig, makeup, and sequined dress when she performs at the decadent party. Even though Blanco might not explicitly perform body *talk*, she is inexorably talking and creating meaning *through* the body.

THE HOOK

- *Closer looks*

So, I've been working hard to produce a functional beat to the rap that carries this analysis forward, and it's time to start spitting the Hook of the song. As elaborated earlier, the pulsing beat to this critical femininity analysis brought up bearing themes of *Hoods*, *Class*, and *Realness* through *Body talk*. The different patterns are interlocking and produces specific standpoints where deeper understandings and knowledge about femininity constructions can be gathered. What I'm saying is that if hip-hop is to be considered a standpoint of it's own - as a subculture to a dominant Western frame structured around an oppressive system of race and class - femininity created *through* the hip-hop standpoint is yet another frame articulated through a strong resistance of identity norms for female bodies and identities. As the artists are all defining (and valuing) their own viewpoints in hip-hop through expressions bounced off of the mentioned themes, they are also structuring ways of making feminine subjectivity their strategies for survival. As brought up by Washington (2007), using an oppressive environment to create a unique self-defined standpoint becomes a special resistance - by acting and *reacting* to norms tied to race, class, and sexuality specifically shaped through the culture of hip-hop, the ladies are resisting the dehumanization that Hill Collins suggest is essential to systems of domination (Hill Collins, 2004:108). The femininity versions embodied and structured through Blanco, Haze, and Candy are not just the makings of three *artists*, but creations of workers in an oppressive environment where part of the regulation is structured through bodies and identities constantly being put in binary relations to *fake* and *real*.

From the femininity standpoints offered by Blanco, Candy, and Haze, I am collecting two versions of subjectivity processes - *Defensive Femininity* and *Fluid Femininity* - and a set of understandings collectively referred to as *Tittie Technology*. I am actively retracing my steps back to the themes and patterns discussed in the Beat in order lift these versions which can all be detected through the voices and actions from the artists. *My* version of the Hook - as many other rap hooks out there - can be viewed as a repetitive chorus, underlining what was solidly built through the Beat. It's beginning to flow.

Defensive Femininity and feminine survival

As brought up in the section regarding Hoods, Family and Class, Haze's representation in "Werkin' girls" (Haze, 2012) shows a femininity made through a mixture of aggressive expressions and actions. Haze is not only manifesting physical abuse in her lyrics (e.g the first lines describes how she "ramshacks"⁴⁷ her competition, which later follows up by her expressed wish to "find an ass I can put my fucking foot in" (Haze, 2012)), it is underlined by her abrasive clawing and scratching with the razor covered glove. Haze's whole persona is structured through a femininity that is seemingly created as a form of resistance to oppression or *threats* of oppression, and can be understood as a strategy for survival or at least as a fighting tactic.

Looking at the video and searching for constructions of femininity through the different themes, it suddenly hit me that the *scenery* of the video could be viewed as an extension of Haze's body and identity structure - the warehouse and all the boxes, the girls, *and* the masked men might best be understood as technés indistinguishable from Haze's body and femininity version. If Haze *is* the room, and the room is read *as* Haze - the different components of her femininity making is laid out right in front of us. Standing in (and at the same time embodying) an obvious working class set, Haze's desire to be restraint, non-sexualized, and *naturally* feminine - upper class feminine that is - is read through the girls and their childish rope jumping. The childish game can also be understood as a safe space where Haze situates a wish of having the pureness and innocence defined through that classed femininity. This wish and safe space is actively threatened by structures of the oppressive environment where Haze is sited, and is manifested through the masked men and their lurking existence in the margins. When they penetrate Haze's space and captures the girls, it can be understood as the ultimate abuse towards a classed and raced femininity that can never exist in the same world as Haze does. As a result of this abuse, Haze is creating a defensive femininity that actively acts out against the threat to her female body and that *uses* the female body as a physical weapon to the threat of her de-feminization. The aggressiveness mapped in her posture, lyrics, and razor sharp actions is a way of showing a *hard* femininity that doesn't get "fucked over" (Haze, 2012), and can be viewed as a counteraction to the upper classed femininity that was so easily devoured. Haze is embodying a femininity carefully constructed by the nature of her given location, class, race, and gender, and that is made to stand solid under attack. This defensive femininity is active when oppression is apparent and noticeable, which makes it even more relevant given the context of its creation: hip-hop is a standpoint understood and

⁴⁷ To "ramshack" someone is, according to certain slang, an abusive action where one forcefully insert ones penis into someone else's anus.

expressed through socioeconomic alienation. This makes Haze's active choice to become a defensive, feminine survivor even more comprehensible.

Fluid Femininity and matters of Tittie Technology

The technological and spatial markers for class found in Blanco and Candy's representations shows, as brought up earlier, how they are both flowing through two different areas - one more *street* and lower class, and one Bourgeois. I am understanding the *movement* and between the two as describing an active femininity construction consisting of *fluidity*. Both Blanco and Candy's bodies are in constant motion throughout the videos, siting them in classed and raced situations that are structuring their femininity. By observing how and through what their bodies are travelling to get to the different areas, the femininity version represented through them shows some exciting craftsmanship.

Blanco starts her transcending - or escape - from a lower class in the very first frames of the video, when the drug deal is in motion. The chafed off nail polish shows proof of the beginning of a femininity process - manifested through the interdependence of her body and the polish - but something is making Blanco nervous, and holding up the process. The *becoming* of her femininity seems not to be placed well at the streets of Chinatown (or in front of the dealer), and Blanco escapes as the police woman yells at her to "stop". The truck later takes Blanco to the Bourgeois ballroom where the process seems fully developed, and a classic female body and expression is embodied by Blanco and her performance at the party. Now, these sets of actions can be understood as a metaphorical and figurative way of describing a femininity process in motion, with meanings connected to Haze's: starting with a desire to express classic upper class femininity in an environment that does not allow it, the subject escapes and makes a journey between classes, and gets to act and perform according to a more attractive and respected feminine ideal. However, this assumption forecasts that femininity is only fully developed and being performed *correctly* when in a certain *class*, and according to a certain ideal, which Skeggs have already told us (Skeggs, 2001:297-299). The fluidity and motion I am understanding as part of the femininity made in Blanco's representation, are not the traced track that takes her from A to B, but the hyphen that connects A - B. Blanco is not doing femininity *less* in one setting or *more* in the other - she is performing through different technés that makes her femininity get perceived differently depending on the contexts. So, instead of understanding femininity as performances that are either "real" or "masked", the discussions about made femininity should be focused on the fluidity in female representations. When Blanco is talking about how she is might be born with it, but that she might be putting it on with makeup, it's a sarcastic comment to questions regarding her "true" identity. Well, since Blanco isn't necessarily keen on sharing her personal sex and gender, her performances in the truck and at the

Bourgeois ball takes on different appearances, but they are both equally real *and* equally masked. As the video flows through images from the truck and from the ball, the two expressions should be seen as parallel and intertwined: through both classes and settings, Blanco's representation *is* an active questioning of femininity norms and regulations. At the ball, she is performing through classic feminine attributes such as a white tulle and sequined dress (which extends her body from consisting of "just flesh" to bear meaning of innocence, elegance, and class), and a single red rose - traditionally the meaning of love - that she carefully strokes. While she is working through these meaning bearing technés, she is also actively questioning a binary understanding of gender. When Blanco is telling us that she is feeling "real loose, real fly" (Blanco, 2012), the rose gets its head bit off by one of the women at the ball, and is slowly chewed on, and Blanco is all of a sudden on the floor, crawling at the camera and aggressively proclaiming that she "bite the head off a harpy"⁴⁸ (Blanco, 2012). Directly after this, images from the truck are being shown with quick throwbacks to the ball. This describes the fluidity I detect as a leading marker in Blanco's femininity making: she is never *just* one body or *one* class, she is several understandings at once, biting the head of arguments based on binary understandings of femininity being *either or*, or half and half.

Now, fluidity is also a bearing part of Candy's femininity making, but shown a little different than in the example of Blanco. The motion in Candy's femininity and in her overall representation throughout the video and lyrics is carried by two sets of understandings: her outsider within status when she is walking on Rodeo Drive, and the two family constellations providing her with transport and confirmations of "realness". Candy's personal standpoint created through her alienation from a centered upper class (presented through the upper class streets and the expensive fashion brands) is co-creating her feminine expression with the help of confirming practices from her Fagmob and the Locals. The latter is a constellation of raced stereotypes connected to working class, and an urban ghetto - the Locals consists of black bodies routing for Candy, singing along to her lyrics and pimping her ride (two black men are seen washing the windows of the pink limo), and carrying her female representation forward. One of the clearest examples of how the Locals functions as Candy's escorts and confirmation of her badass *realness*, which I brought up earlier, are the images of Candy being pushed through the graffiti hoods in a golden wheelchair. This escort is way of confirming her extravagant and aggressively sexual phrasing of femininity, molded through an understanding of working class, female bodies as *hard* and *robust*. When Candy is being pushed in the wheelchair by one of the Locals (a black woman wearing some ghetto fab bling), she is physically being situated as a dominant queen of working class femininity. It

⁴⁸ A *harpy* is a creature in Greek mythology: half woman, half bird.

also becomes clear that even though she is located in a working class environment, she has the ability to move *in between* classes and races, as she also does when riding with her Fagmob to Rodeo Drive and the outraged party in the jacuzzi - an ability the Locals does not seem to have in this video. One could describe Candy's overall representation in the video as an ongoing *party* with different stops and elements - where it is the Locals that embody the pre-settings of the festivities, but the Fagmob that populates the actual party scene.

Candy's fluidity is based through these families that provide her with different abilities to perform femininity: the Locals gives her the working class rep that is needed for her outsider within status which she achieves with and through the Fagmob on Rodeo Drive. When she is walking along the upper class streets with her crew, she is actively using her body as a tool for resistance, pointing and laughing at the people passing by, allowing them to take pictures with her. By underlining her aggressive *difference* to the culture represented through the luxury fashion stores and the people shopping there, she is becoming an outsider within a dominant culture: Candy is *both* pictured on the outside of that culture, but passes through it with the active knowledge from the margins - and this is made possible by the Locals support and escort. The ability to gain rep from voices from the margin⁴⁹, and then *using* that rep in a setting created as oppressive to those exact voices, is indeed a questionable move and quite perilous. The risk of reinforcing oppressive structures by taking part in them (Brooke becoming a form of tourist attraction on Rodeo Drive, acting and performing through the reinforced status from the Locals) is apparent, and can be interpreted as offensive. Is Candy *using* the margin and ditching it later? This is interesting and also evidence of Candy's fluidity through the use of a structured standpoint, and as Muhammad points out "not every female standpoint is feminist" (Muhammad, 2007:125). So. Candy's fluid femininity is based in the expressions of class and her ability to use her body as non-fixed to enter different settings and twerking the rules of femininity formations - the makings of femininity through Candy exists *both* in the graffiti hoods *and* on the fancier streets, and can't really be read as separate. The one does not exist without the other, and Candy's dominance overlaps it all when she bosses up and tells us that she's "a sexy-ass female who running shit in confidence" (Candy, 2012). She sure does, but only through the help of other, dominated, bodies.

⁴⁹ This expression is humbly borrowed from the ever so fantastic bell hooks and her "Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness"(in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: intellectual and political controversies*, editor Harding. Routledge: New York), a text so inspirational that once read, it's hard not to reference it between the lines.

Titties as technés

As part of the somatechnical perspective used as an overall frame for this paper, I have been analyzing the representations of Blanco, Haze, and Candy with the notion that their bodies and the technology found in the videos are inevitably connected. This got me thinking about how bodies could be perceived as a form of technology on its own, and Brooke Candy's representation became a way of trying out that thought analytically.

Candy performs through a variety of classically feminine coded technology in the video, all of them exaggerated to the absolute maximum creating something that could be read as a hyperfeminine⁵⁰ masquerade, or mimicry. Her hair, which she throws back and forth to the beat, is braided in what looks like almost four feet of hot pink extensions. Candy's acrylic nails - five inch long and painted in shrill neon leopard prints - are being shown off in almost every frame and her lashes that seem almost as thick as her hair, are golden and perfectly following the stark lines of her black eyeliner. Covered in extreme gold jewelry (chains hitting her chest when she walks, ear studs spelling out both "Brooke" and "Barbie", hardly visible behind her pink braids) she is the spitting image of what Tyler means is a fetish masquerade or a hyperfetish mimicry (Tyler, 2003:29). But if this were to be the leading interpretation of Candy's appearance and actions - that she is masquerading or performing in mimicry - who or what is she making a parody of? Her appearance and video performance put together with the repeating words "das me", makes me ponder. By following her own lyrically direction, the starting point has to be that this really *is* Candy. She is telling us that she *is* a "motherfucking freaky princess" (Candy, 2012), so why should we doubt her or assume that she is mimicking someone else? All of the acrylic, makeup, and gold *is* Candy because this is what she is choosing to let us know and take part of. All the cleavage, butt cheeks and double D's are also parts of Candy's subjective process, since they are not just intimately intertwined with the obvious technology generously shown and used by her - they are indistinguishable from each other. Now, there is a possibility that she is mimicking or putting on a parodic show, yes, but interpreting Candy's structures of femininity should not be an attempt to decide if or when she is "real" or "masquerading" - the ambition here is to dynamically interpret *how* she is being a motherfucking freaky princess, and what that feminine representation consists of.

Now, looking at both the lyrics and the video to "Das me" (Candy, 2012), it quickly becomes apparent that Candy is accentuating and signifying a very specific part of the female body - the titties. In three bearing parts of the song, she is underlining the importance of her real "double D's" (Candy, 2012), and

⁵⁰ Hyperfemininity is being used as a descriptive term for hyperbolized womanliness.

along with the extension of other feminine coded technology, they are co-creating her femininity. In the intro to the song, parallel to several snapshots of her standing in the streets and twerking her body to the beat, Candy is proclaiming that she is the queen of Italy, and that she has “double D’s, these are real titties” (Candy, 2012). Then in the first verse, she repeats this information, underlining that she truly *is* the real thing: “I’m a CEO, dream girl, drug dealer/real just like my titties, you can even cop a feel-a” (Candy, 2012), and in the hook of the song she orders “all the hoes [to] jiggle your tits for Brooke Candy” (Candy, 2012). Candy’s lyrical and figurative centering of the *titties*, and the way she is expressing herself *through* titties, creates an interesting possibility to view this body talk as a way of crafting femininity. When letting her chest carry proof of her *realness*, she is actively making a divide between her solid flesh and the acrylic technologies that she is *wearing* - an indirect way of saying that it doesn’t matter what she *puts on*, because underneath she is still authentic. This is interesting, and very common in the culture of hip-hop, but what is more interesting is the idea that Candy’s tittie language and imageries are showing a dynamic interdependence between the maximized “fake” technologies (nails/hair/makeup) *and* her “real titties”. Instead of adding and subtracting the “fake” from the “real” - the accessories from the flesh - this performance can be viewed as a form of Tittie Technology. Let me explain. Even though the acrylic technés (nails/hair/makeup) is presented as separate to the flesh (titties), to view them as *inseparable* becomes apparent when looking at the body as irreversible tied to technology. A simple example lies in how Candy’s intimate clothing actually requires to be understood parallel to and together with her own body: the “double D’s” presented in the lyrics wouldn’t *be* “double D’s” without her bra telling her the size of them. Why must we then separate the understandings or meanings of the flesh and the technology carrying it? The example of Brooke Candy’s Tittie Technology is showing a crafting of feminine corporeality that is not just depending on *both* technology *and* flesh, it is also proving that the body can’t be read without technology in return. As understood through Candy’s extended corporeality with acrylics and bulging flesh, Tittie Technology is a process actively structured through the re-inventions of bling, makeup, and elements of hip-hop fashion, and needs to be understood precisely as somatechnical. What has previously been thought of as enhancing accessories in the masquerade or mimicry of already existing femininities (particularly the white, upper class femininity described by Skeggs), can instead be interpreted as extended parts of a body in motion and transportation - which connects it to the femininity represented by Blanco and her fluid performance. Both versions are dynamically un-fixed and relies on social contexts and structures other than the bodily in order to function. Again, as pointed out by Skeggs, class is *one* such social context.

THE OUTRO

- *Gathered keys and final words*

The process of examining expressions of femininity in this very specific cultural area, has been a bumpy ride. Not only have I been forced to rethink some of my personal rap favorites, the configurations of femininity have really showed me how complex the world of female bodies can be. Even though the bearing themes of the analysis dawned on me quite quickly, the different understandings and embodiments of them were a tricky execution. Through their videos and lyrics, the ladies have presented me with a very important way of seeing and understanding femininity: with strong connections to, and emphasis on, class, race, and sexuality, femininity “is” what is being made and re-made through the signifying practices of bodies and technology. The “is” in this equation need to be placed in between quotation marks, since a finally fixed way of seeing (or doing) femininity can’t be achieved. It is the fluidity and motion found in identity constructions that offers dynamics with potential to interpret and collect new knowledge from. Hip-hop and rap is a blossoming area for knowledge production precisely thanks to the unique standpoints and transboundary motions that can be found there, and some of them have been presented in this paper. The ways Blanco, Haze, and Candy are doing their versions of femininity are not just inspirational for the active listener and consumer of female rap, they are also exciting from a feminist academic point of view. Their different makings and performances presents hip-hop as a new arena for future critical femininity studies, *and* offers a potential space for feminist and queer struggle. Hip-hop does not need to be limited as a sexist, objectifying culture seeking to categorize women as *either* sluts or queens, nor does it need to be a space for fixed understandings of gender or sexuality. Hip-hop can instead be seen as a standpoint for *resistance* and *questioning*, two concepts that can hold several understandings and meanings at the same time. It’s never *just* about bodies, or *just* about technology, or class. It is about various expressions indistinguishable from each other and read as inter- and codependent. Ways of seeing and doing feminine subjectivity holds a future in hip-hop, simply because it has to - the harsh rules for femininity structured through taboos and prohibition of certain expressions forces female rap (and girls listening to female rap) to accept that femininity is not something one does and chooses, it’s something one *is*. Now, that shit won’t fly when it comes to rap, and most certainly not when it comes to the three strong voices presented through this paper. Angel Haze says it well when she points out that she “don’t give one fuck bitch, I *done* this shit” (Haze, 2012). She certainly did, as did Mykki Blanco and Brooke Candy.

It’s time to wrap it up, say my goodbyes. It has been the utmost pleasure and privilege to get to communicate so intimately with the intelligent and creative minds and bodies that belong to Mykki

Blanco, Brooke Candy, and Angel Haze. The space that these ladies are occupying with their dazzling rhymes, sexy bling, and fierce attitude finally feels suited for me - and rap is *fun* and *shameless* once again. For that, I am ever so grateful. I started this search for femininity beyond binaries with an important quote from a rap song that became the beginning of my love affair with rap, and I think it is fitting to finish it all off with another quote. Something that expresses my motivation to keep writing and thinking about hip-hop as a space for active feminist struggle, and that might motivate someone else to feel the same. Rah Digga, take it away.

Do the ladies run this motherfucker? Hell yeah
I said, do the ladies run this motherfucker? Hell yeah!
Put it down for the bitches all across the map
All the real live bitches all across the map
Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead, go ahead
(Digga, 1999)

Quotes in the headings

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2. "Motherfucking faggots taking over the industry": Brooke Candy (2012). "Das me" [single, digital download]. Los Angeles: unsigned.
3. "And even after all my logic and my theory, I add a 'motherfucker' so you ignorant niggas hear me": Fugees (1996). "Zealots". From *The Score* [CD]. New York: Ruffhouse.
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Appendixes

WAVVY by Mykki Blanco

(Intro)

I'm the motherfucker rookie of the year

Mykki Blanco

Young Castro

(Pre-verse)

We on that chill tip, real high

We feelin real loose, real fly

We on that chill tip, real high

We feelin real loose, real fly

(Verse 1)

Welcome to Hell bitches, this is Mykki Blanco

New World Order motherfucker, follow pronto

Get in line nigga

Your soul is mine nigga

You scaredy cat pussy motherfuckers can't deliver

Maybe she born with it, maybe it was Maybelline

All white Blanco give your heathen ass a christening

Niggas so greasy in the daylight, he glistening

"Oh this fag can rap" yeah they saying that they listening

Pissing in the wind

At the 4 am spot

Blazed off the indica

A bottle of Ciroc

A mouth full of pop

Chug it in the pay phone

1-800-LOCO

Mother fuckers y'all can go home

I'm the new Rufio

Y'all ain't know

I pimp slap you bitch niggas with my limp wrist, bro
What the fuck I gotta prove to a room full of dudes
Who ain't listening to my words cuz they staring at my shoes

(Hook)

We...we we make love tonight
In the back of the club yeah we feeling alright
L-lights lights low
This shit feel crazy
Low key loose niggas know
We getting wavy

We getting wavy, getting wavy, getting wavy
We getting wavy, getting wavy, getting wavy
We getting wavy, getting wavy, getting wavy
We getting wavy -- huh -- we getting wavy

(Pre-verse)

(Verse 2)

I bite I bite I bite the head off a harpy
Eat these bitches alive, no water
I cry blood tears, Holy Mary, Holy Mother
Somebody get the shaman motherfucker run for cover
Blanco Blanco Blanco say it three times, Candy Man
I'm coming outta the dark with red eyes and red hands
I scalp these haters with a sickle I'm a sling blade
I'm cut-throat bitch, I cut throats bitches keep away

Now many play me for dummy, not funny
Now a bitch about to get money, they wanna love me
Tell them no no no I played that Destiny's Child
Young hearts run free, young bloods run wild (heyyy)
Green light, with a mic in my hand

I go forward into battle with a dice in my hand
One chance, one woman, seeking the truth
One truth - veiled in the illusions of youth

(Hook)

(Verse 3)

I'm bout to sour you niggas
Be that spitter shit I'm flexing all my power, my nigga
These no class trashy hood rap brat broads
Ain't got what it takes, put 'em back to training bras

Local mother fuckers, birds of a feather
If you's a dick rider you gon' dick ride forever
I said local mother fuckers, birds of a feather
If you's a dick rider you gon' dick ride forever, nigga

(Hook x2)

WERKIN' GIRLS by Angel Haze

(Vers 1)

Okay I'm Rambo I ramshack
I'm next to that cheese like rat traps
On top of that green like grass ass
That's over y'all head like snapbacks
I get it where I fit in, put up then I put in
Tryna find an ass I can put my fucking foot in
Run this shit no I run this shit
Don't give one fuck bitch I done this shit
I did what I say I did
Did not fabricate one bit
I have been the fucking realest since my exit near the clit
That's where I was born fuck what you on
All about me bitch fuck what you doin'

Round of applause bitches slap me with some clappin
Show my whole fucking ass like a fat bitch chaps
But I'll be running that shit like a motherfuckin' tracker
Like I run on sense like a motherfuckin' chopper
Like a cheetah in the jungle but I'm motherfucking faster
Like a pre-teen boy in the church with a pastor
Hold up I'm not serious I'm just playin—psych
Fuck your opinion bitch I mean it when I'm sayin that

(Hook)

Money and more money is the only shit I'm after
You can cut the fake shit
I'm not a motherfuckin' actor
I'm on top of my green like a motherfucking tractor
You niggas 'bout to be bitches you bitches 'bout to be Casper

(Verse 2)

I'll be on that other shit got that from my other bitch
She come from an island or a desert or some tundra shit
I am multi-faceted, bitch I do a ton of shit
Like I'm diarrhea or whatever sitting under it
I'm nasty, I'm insane, I'm too much, I spit grains
I came from the fuckin' bottom
I'm top now, I shift lanes,
I kick shit, like dope shit
Like no shit, like oh shit
Get in my way I fuck up everything
Like ho shit
See, they said that I wouldn't
I do whatever they said I couldn't
I'm not the one to be fucked with
Or to be tough with
I be on your head like duck, duck, duck bitch

I be in the air like pump-pumped up fists
Nah, I'm like up-chuck like gut fish like hands up my skirt
Like when you gon' let me fuck bitch

(Hook)

(Vers 3)

I'm an undefeated bastard
My tongue is the fucking rapture, bitch
I be at my peak, I am not the one to be mastered
I'm the one to be after, I'm sweeping you while I'm dusting
I just popped up out the blue, I'm spontaneously combusting
Spit a little different, give me just a minute
Beat the beat down bitch, fresh it then I kill it
We are not the same but they don't really get it
Tell 'em do the math, hoe—fraction, division
Sick flow sick ho, drop me in the clinic
Eat 'em 'til the end 'til they back at the beginning
Cause I ki-ki-ki-kill it 'til it's flat dead
And never pass a rock like a motherfucking crackhead

(Hook)

DAS ME by Brooke Candy

(Intro)

Uh yo yo what up it's Brooke Candy
Mother fucking freaky princess
Brooke rap style is the queen of Italy
Amount of candy, if the price is right
Double D's, these are real titties
Lady T-H-C, Betty Blow
Hoodrat Drew Barrymore
I'm repin' fag mob all day

Mother fucking faggots taking over the industry

Mother fucking faggots running the world

(Verse 1)

I'm a super bitch, I fuck it up, I do this shit

You say that I'm a slut

It ain't your business who I'm fucking with

A dude could fuck 3 bitches and they'd say that he's the man

But I get it in with twins, she's a whore

That's what they saying

It's time to take the back "Slut" is now a compliment

A sexy-ass female who running shit and confident

Lady who on top of it, a female with a sex drive

Lyrical don't fuck with me, the greatest in the world

Live living on my pussy, all my ladies let me hear you

I'm a CEO, Dream girl, Drug Dealer

Real just like my titties you can even cop a feel-a

Finger licking good, treat my pussy like a meal-a

Talk about my tit size I need to see your dick size

Show me what you're working with I better win a big prize

Next time they call you a slut

Brooke Candy tell you not to give a fuck

(Hook)

All the dudes wiggle your dicks for Brooke Candy

All the hoes jiggle your tits for Brooke Candy

If you gotta blunt, bitch don't let it pass me

Looking for the realest bitch? tell the world - DAS ME

Tell 'em that's me, tell 'em tell 'em Das me

Tell 'em that's me, tell 'em tell 'em Das me

Looking for the realest bitch? tell the world - Das me

Tell 'em that's me,, tell 'em tell 'em - Das me

Eh I'm coming back in

(Verse 2)

I could kill a bitch man, I'm so fucking crazy
Gotta gun, to your dome, foaming mouth rabies
Baby that's some real shit, I'm a Mob Boss
Take a knife to your dick, I'm a cut your fucking loss
Don't say a word, put the money in the bag
I'm a tie you up bitch, yeah I like it when you gag
Don't try nothing funny, bitch I came for the money
I'm a rascally rabbit, rap game Bugs Bunny
Trust no ho, bitches out to get ya
Staring at me so hard you need to take a picture
It'll last longer you're so fucking late
It's easy for you talking shit from that far away
I'm on top of the world I'm on top of the game
They don't show me respect they best remember the name
Brooke Candy, the haters love to doubt me
Candy is my name but there's nothing sweet about me

(Hook)

(Bridge x2)

Fag Mob killing shit/Brooke candy realest shit
Tight twat/white hot/feel this shit/feel this shit
Gotta blunt/roll it up/liquor store/hold it up
Uzi in my hand bitch/blow it up/blow it up

(Hook)

