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Construction of Identity in Diasporic Communities:
Musical Artists Performance of Caribbeanness and Latinidad

By

Dayrielis Noa Guzman

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Political Science
and
Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies

UNION COLLEGE
MARCH 12, 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to my two thesis advisors; Lori Marso and William Garcia. I am thankful and appreciative of them for extending their valuable expertise, encouragement and support throughout this process. I would not have been able to do this without you. Thank you.

I would like to take Philip Poczik and the AOP family. If it were not for their support, I do not know how I would have made it through Union College. They have blessed me with incredible opportunities and adequately prepped me to take on such a rigorous task.

I would also like to thank my family and friends. They have supported me through this journey in college and they provided me with insights on my thesis. I want to thank my parents for always pushing me to achieve greatness and encouraging me to pursue my passions. As a first-generation college student, I hope I make them proud because I know they sacrificed a lot for me to have the opportunities that I have received. Te amo Mami y Papi. Gracias por todo.

ABSTRACT

NOA GUZMAN, DAYRIELIS Construction of Identity in Diasporic Communities:
Musical Artists Performance of Caribbeanness and Latinidad. Department of Political Science
and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, March 2020.

ADVISOR: Lori Marso & William García

This thesis highlights and explores the performances of four diasporic Caribbean artists—Jennifer Lopez, Cardi B, Bad Bunny, and Rihanna. Their performances inhabit intersectional factors of race, gender, class, sexuality, creating a multifaceted experience of moving in the world. Their existence is marked by stereotypes that criminalize and sexualize them. United States representation of these communities is riddled with stereotypes that justify racial and gender injustice. These four artists both reinforce and undo these stereotypes in fascinating ways. Using Latinx cultural theorist Isabel Molina-Guzmán along with political theorist Judith Butler's theory on performativity as my theoretical guide, I conceptualize Latinidad and Caribbeanness, analyzing what performance can do in order to subvert stereotypes as they risk reinforcing them. These artists engage in gender and racial patriarchal scripts while simultaneously critiquing the norms that dictate the performances they present.

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INTRODUCTION

On February 2, 2020 Superbowl XIV created history with two Latina women, Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, headlining the performance. Their decision to participate in the half time show came with much criticism as many viewed this as a form of disconnect with the black community. The National Football League has had a tainted reputation following its mishandling of Colin Kaepernick's unjust dismissal from the league (Betancourt, *Harper's Bazaar*). In 2016, the San Francisco 49ers quarterback was dismissed due to the controversy of him kneeling during the national anthem in protest of racial inequality, since then the NFL has been struggling to fix its image. Several black performers, including Rihanna and Cardi B, had declined the coveted halftime slot (Exposito, *Rolling Stone*). In trying to appease the black community, the NFL has signed a deal with Jay Z to rebrand its image; the first step in this new partnership was getting two big Latin¹ names to perform in the halftime show. Prior to the performance, there was already much disagreement surrounding Jennifer Lopez and Shakira's acceptance to perform. As stated by Melania-Luisa Marte (2019),

It would've been a truly powerful moment for the Latinx community if two white-passing Latinas with the social and economic capital of J.LO and Shakira had stood up and aligned themselves as allies to the Black community and rejected an offer to perform at the Superbowl. Unfortunately, moments like these continue to prove that there is a lack of solidarity within Latinidad and much of it has to do with race (as cited in Betancourt, *Harper's Bazaar*).

¹ Throughout the thesis I will be switching between Latinx and Latina/o. When I use the term Latin, I would be signifying all of Latin American, meanwhile for Latinx it would remain in the social context of the United States. In the music market, Latin is used to designate Latin Americans, including Caribbean's. Although Latinx can be used for both U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans, in my thesis I am usually referring to U.S. Latinx communities. The term Latinx is used when referring to all community members in Latinidad regardless of gender, meanwhile when specifically talking about a woman or a man I would use the gendered pronouns. Latinx is meant to be more inclusive for all, including those in the queer community, rather than using the masculine gendered pronoun that is typically used to refer to both women and men.

The Afro-Latinx and black community were disappointed with the decision of choosing two white-passing Latina performers to accept the offer as it is not showing solidarity with the black community. However, there has long been a disconnect between the Latinx and black community in discussions surrounding blackness, with many African Americans claiming the Latinx community as not being black enough. Additionally, Latinx communities often perpetuate anti-blackness rhetoric that has been ingrained in our culture, furthering the divide between the two groups despite our many similarities. The hip hop industry, as a space for black exploration, insists that Latinx people constantly prove their belonging, yet people desire unity and solidarity amongst all minorities when one group is given the opportunity to perform on a national platform. Nonetheless, the performance was a tremendous victory for the Latina performers despite the criticism.

After the show, there was a denunciation of the artists as people were too distracted with their bodies, missing the meaningful parts of the performance such as J.LO's tribute to Puerto Rico, the U.S. territory that has been going through a multitude of issues. Jennifer Lopez brought attention to the conditions of this Caribbean country that has been in disarray since Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. The island was devastated after the hurricanes and the United States hardly gave humanitarian aid despite Puerto Rico being a U.S. territory since 1898. In 2019, Puerto Rico also dealt with corruption allegations of its state officials and ousted their governor in the summer. In the beginning of 2020, Puerto Rico was shaken with a number of earthquakes, a natural disaster it was not equipped to face since the country was still recovering from the 2017 hurricanes. Jennifer Lopez brought recognition to Puerto Rico when she emerged donning a feathery cape, decorated to resemble the American flag. When flipped, Lopez revealed a Puerto Rican flag beneath, reminding many viewers that Puerto Rico, under neo-colonization, is still part of the

United States. As the most vulnerable victims of the ongoing climate crisis, this moment within the show spoke volumes to Puerto Ricans, as they face punitive negligence from both the Trump administration and that of Governor Wanda Vásquez (Exposito, 2020, *Rolling Stone*). In addition, other powerful moments included the highlighting of blackness within Latinx culture. Shakira gave a shout out to the African and Arab roots prevalent in Latin American culture when she let loose a celebratory Arabic whoop called a *zaghroua*. She brought the performance to an end with an Afro-Colombian dance crew and Swing Latino salsa troupe. As the night's only visibly black performers, despite many insinuations of their white-passing capabilities, they educated American audiences on the African roots of many coastal Colombian traditions, including folk dances like the *champeta* and *mapalé* (Exposito, 2020, *Rolling Stone*). Many stated that the performance was “not a win for Latinas” as their dance moves were sexualized, “obscene” and “inappropriate” for kids (Burgos, *Remezcla*). However, they did not take into account the politics of the performance; the way they used this national platform to bring awareness to current issues.

The show brought attention to the immigration crisis currently occurring in the United States. There was a moment when Jennifer Lopez's daughter came out singing “Let's Get Loud” surrounded by stylized cages representing the many asylum seekers and their children incarcerated in cages today (Exposito, 2020, *Rolling Stone*). The reference to the immigration policies and deportation in Trump's America raises awareness to the human rights violation that is currently happening within our borders. Nonetheless, all these political signals were completely ignored as people complained about the lack of moral decency in the artists' choreography, outfits, and props. The focus on the hyper-sexualization of the performance clouded the deep powerful messages that resonated in the performance because people rather discuss the decency surrounding women's sexuality; where's the concern for the children and migrants locked in cages or the decency

regarding deporting people back to countries riddled with crime and civil unrest? The concerns are not so much about bodies in motion but the prevailing stereotype of unpredictable and hypersexualized brown women's bodies (Fallas, *Sojourners*). It goes back to the notion of respectability politics that deems to de-sexualize women of color and have them abide by white standards of appropriate behavior; the criticism propagates racist tropes of Latina hypersexuality, trying to censor and regulate their sexual expression. Jennifer Lopez and Shakira did not let these judgements overshadow the importance of this night as it signified an incredible moment of recognition for a community constantly trying to find and assert its place in this country. As Suzy Exposito (2020) writes,

It's impossible to play down the fact that for 15 fleeting minutes, hundreds of millions of eyes were on Latinas. And not just Latinas, but Latinas getting *loud*. Latinas, both mothers, confidently basking in their sexuality. Latinas speaking out against the abuse of migrants. Latinas schooling Anglo-Americans on the racial and cultural diversity of Latin Americans, especially the kind we still don't see represented enough on television (*Rolling Stone*).

The rejection of respectability politics on this national platform demonstrates a reclamation of agency that was stripped from people of color and forced these communities to engage with their perception in a country that continually tries to invalidate their belonging.

Respectability politics is an issue that arises within each of the female performers as black/brown bodies are constantly judged and controlled by outside forces. As described by Mikaela Pitcan, Alice Marwick, and Danah Boyd (2018), "Respectability politics describes a self-presentation strategy historically adopted by African-American women to reject White stereotypes by promoting morality while de-emphasizing sexuality" (163). This set of behaviors to reproduce prevailing norms has historically been viewed as a way to achieve respect from the dominant class and to achieve social mobility. It is a mode of code-switching that occurs to regulate how others feel about them; it began as a way for minorities to counter negative stereotypes about them. It

creates a juxtaposition between respectable minorities and shameful ones, the closer one is to replicating white bourgeois standards, the higher their status (Pitcan, Marwick, Boyd, 2018, 165). Respectability politics essentially reproduces white middle class normativity, a set of dominant norms that all ethnic groups should adopt. However, the imposition of what is appropriate behavior or not is rooted in structural inequality. Although respectability politics was a tactic deployed within ethnic communities to resist racist imagery of people of color, it upholds and idealizes white womanhood, deeming all ethnic women representation as inadequate or not respectable (Pitcan, Marwick, Boyd, 2018, 165). The three female performers I study—Jennifer Lopez, Cardi B, Rihanna— all reject this notion of respectability politics, promoting a sexual agency rooted in sexual liberation and empowerment. None of these women shy away from their sexuality, rather they revel in it. They promote a self-objectification that embraces their bodies and sexual freedom. Their performances are representative of their communities as it moves away from a narrative of modesty that is sexist and repressive towards sexual desires; it promotes feeling sexy in your own skin. Many views this performance as reinforcing damaging stereotypes of hypersexuality, but what these artists are really doing is removing the power that stereotypes has over them.

The criticisms of the Superbowl XIV performance demonstrates the power of representation and what it signifies. The construction of Latinidad is nuanced, multifaceted, with many intersectional experiences that determines the ways in which Latinx and marginalized communities can move or appear in public spaces. Expanding on political theorist Judith Butler of gender performativity, I discuss the ways in which the gender performance of diasporic artists is linked to the construction of their racial and cultural identity. Butler (1990) discusses the power of representation, how the body is bounded and constituted by different markers of identity. Bodies are marked by social systems and reinterpreted through how they are perceived. She writes,

gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (3).

The performances of these artists hold important implications for their identity and the ways in which they conform or reject societal norms. Norms dictate the way we live our lives because of the inherent violence that comes to those who deviate from standard modes of appearance. This is evident with homosexuals, trans folk, as well as racial minorities for whom stereotypes are created and perpetuated to justify their mistreatment. Stereotypes and norms have a violent discipline in them that we are given over to norms; controlled by them due to the risk of violence or injuries to our bodies when others want to police our gender and racial expressions. Stereotypes surrounding ethnic minorities can have harmful effects as it dictates gender and racial discrimination. The concept of Latinidad is riddled with stereotypes as Latinxs are “Othered” but also specific identities—e.g. Afro-Latinxs—are marginalized and excluded. For these Latinx and Caribbean artists, their racial, cultural and gender identity are inherently linked; they cannot be separated, therefore their performance holds important associations for the representation of a group of people.

For my analysis of Latinidad, I use cultural theorist Isabel Molina-Guzmán’s discussion of how gender and race connect to produce a narrative of the Latinx community that is commodifiable and marketable. Gendering is interconnected with racialization as both work together to create a media discourse of Latinidad as Other—many Latina artist who make it into white mainstream culture are gendered and racialized outside whiteness (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 11). She describes Latinidad as

any person currently living in the United States of Spanish-speaking heritage from more than 30 Caribbean and Latin America countries. It is an imagined community of recent,

established and multigenerational immigrants from diverse cultural, linguistic, racial, and economic backgrounds (Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004, 207).

The Latinx community's identity and presence in the United States challenge popular notions of the presiding image of the nation, embodying the concept of transnationalism, defined by Jorge Duany as "The establishment of multiple social, economic, political and cultural links between two or more countries" (2007). Transnational identity is marked by multiple identities and allegiances; it maintains the link between the two countries with the immersion of the culture into the new land through music, food, dance and the constant migration of those visiting their homeland. The Latinx and Caribbean communities are always linked to foreignness because of the connection to their home countries even if many are American-born citizens. The fusion of their culture in American life makes them inherently different, thus their identities are marked with stereotypes and ostracization. In addition, *Latinidad* embodies a fluidity and racial ambiguity that lies outside the normative boundaries of black and white binaries. *Latinidad* signifies a brown space where Latinx people can engage in both white and black culture, but never truly belong in either. The performance of all the artists are constantly associated with their ethnic/racial identity; the ethnic subject is othered through their categorization and marginalization in relation to dominant constructions of Whiteness, masculinity, and femininity (Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004, 206). Transnational diasporic cultures are continually engaged in shifting categories of authenticity, difference, identity, and their representation holds weight in subverting negative stereotypes of these communities, opening up opportunities for others who look like them (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 117). Performances in music videos are cultural productions positioned in a transnational context; these music videos are both American and Caribbean. There are various references and locations that positions them within a U.S. locality while concomitantly alluding to Caribbean cultural aesthetics. The transnational nature of the performance can position itself

simultaneously in multiple locations, allowing for diverse cultural references at once. The four case studies focus on the ways in which their performances, mostly through their music videos, reinforce while simultaneously destabilize stereotypes associated with their gender and racial/ethnic identity.

The first chapter “Representations of Latinx and Caribbean Bodies in the United States” examines the stereotypical representation of the Latinx and Caribbean community in the United States. The discourse surrounding ethnic bodies stems from a narrative of difference, putting them in a position of Other. The numerous stereotypes surrounding brown bodies include criminality, alien, fertility threat, which all reinforce specific performances and gender expressions dependent on racial identification and markers. The exclusionary practices of *Latinidad* reject those with African roots, further marginalizing them in a category/group that is already ostracized. I move on to my case study of Jennifer Lopez—her performance of gender and sexuality. She is a unique case with her ability to move fluidly between whiteness and blackness. She, along with Cardi and Rihanna, all represent a transnational femininity. This femininity embodies the cultural, political and economic exchange between the United States and the Caribbean region. They are all global personas whose identity is commodified, marketed on a scale that extends beyond the Caribbean diaspora and into the international arena. Their feminine presentation is always attached to their specific cultural identity, but it also embodies a hybrid notion of identity; excluding Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez and Cardi B are both American citizens and “foreign other”.² As stated by Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia (2004), “Lopez, a U.S. born Puerto Rican, a Nuyorican, privileges both her

² Although Rihanna has cultivated her persona in the United States, she is not viewed as being part of the Caribbean diaspora. Her identity is always linked to her Barbadian identity; she is the child of Barbados and they hold onto her as a representation of their nation, bringing them recognition. Her accent and her music videos constantly link her back to her childhood in the Caribbean. While she is a global megastar, she does not belong to the typical American imagery. They accept and take her in, but she truly is an exotic and foreign other whose difference is capitalized upon.

U.S. Americanness and her Puerto Ricanness as way of challenging dichotomous discourses and the erasure of Latina bodies in Hollywood films” (218). Jennifer Lopez’ racial fluidity has provided her the opportunity to encompass both white and black spaces, while never fully immersing in it. It has allowed her to dictate the performance of gender and sexuality she exhibits in specific localities.

Jennifer Lopez is often relegated to her curvaceous body along with her big booty which she fully embraces and self-objectifies. This emphasis on the sexual appeal of her body plays into the hypersexual image of Latinx women, removing their agency to appear and engage with the world. The hyper-sexualization of ethnic bodies is controlled and policed by the white gaze that keeps them under a racial hierarchy. The alterity of ethnic bodies limits the spaces where visibility is granted to them and JLO risks promoting damaging sexual stereotypes for mass consumption. She makes visible the Latinx and Caribbean community, while playing on the threat of excess through her performance of sexuality, which is in contrast to traditional white femininity. I focus on three specific music videos: “Dinero” ft Cardi B, “Love Don’t Cost a Thing,” and “Te Gusté” ft Bad Bunny. In many of her videos, she sexualizes herself through her lack of clothes along with an emphasis on her butt contributing to the fiction of the “Latina Body.” The Latina body is mass produced through myth, location, desire that are marked onto brown bodies and advertised to mainstream culture. In addition, she connects to her diasporic community with references to her Puerto Rican identity alongside the introduction of Spanish in her songs. Her smooth transition into linguistic code-switching marks her in a locality of dissimilarity that continually Others her. Her performance of gender reflects and promotes an expression that is generalized onto other Latinx people. Her representation conforms to damaging stigma of materialism, excess sexuality, and the reiteration of objectification as a woman’s purpose.

While the use of stereotypes can risk reinforcing them, it can also dismantle and break pre-existing notions of identities. A woman's experience will always be defined by the objectification of her being. Their relationship to the world is attached to the notion that they are meant to be looked at instead of being the looker. However, in re-envisioning and re-socializing with the world and having a transformation within, women and ethnic people can move about as free subjects. Jennifer Lopez takes control of the conditions under which objectification happens. When the control of how they are viewed is put in their hands, the interaction with feminine ethnic bodies becomes less stereotypical. Even if it does reproduce a stereotype, it changes the narrative surrounding the representation that evokes a redefinition on the power of stereotypes. Her self-objectification flips the script on the object vs subject dichotomy and puts her ethnic/racial identification in the forefront to change the outlook on ethnic bodies. Prior to J.LO ethnic bodies were undesired, but in reclaiming the beauty of different body types it allowed for new visibility and acceptance. The Latina body now had a space in the table surrounding beauty ideals.

The next chapter, "Diasporic Citizenship: Cardi B's Performance of Afro-Latinidad," examines her transnational femininity and her performance of Afro-Latinidad. This chapter explores Cardi B's hip-hop feminism and her rejection of respectability politics. She encourages a female empowerment that stems from sexual agency as she does not shy away from her sexuality, also self-objectifying to change its narrative. While Cardi B follows within a trajectory of Latina bombshells whose sexuality has been exoticized and commodified, she critiques the gender and racial script through the reclamation of her African roots. Blackness in Latinidad is a divergence from the cultural script of success passed down to Latina women. I explore the legacy of Latina bombshells, how their entrance into mainstream consciousness all fall within a capitalist script that emphasizes materialism and wealth. It is the same script passed down to all women, including

white and black women, as is seen with megastars such as Marilyn Monroe and Madonna. Cardi B's cultural racial identity both follows and subverts typical constructions of Latinidad. While she has the privilege of having a lighter-skin that allows her to fit into the mold of the typical Latina, her self-identification, the reiteration of Afro-Latinidad, detaches her from this monolithic perception of Caribbeanness and Latinidad.

Cardi B refuses to behave "lady-like" and does not conform to the stereotypical ideas of how a woman should present herself. She steps out of the spectrum of respectable behavior, choosing to create her own path on her own terms. She does this in the hip-hop industry with a feminism that tackles misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and discrimination for those who do not fall in line with "accepted" experiences of blackness. Her continual defense for her belonging in a space cultivated for blackness highlights the lack of knowledge surrounding Afro-Latinidad, emphasizing the problems within an industry that ought to provide a space for cultural exploration. Furthermore, while she risks promoting the hypersexual stereotype imposed onto black and brown bodies, she redefines it to a narrative of empowerment. I analyze her music videos "Money," "Please Me," and "I Like It" since each one emphasizes a different aspect of her identity. Her "Money" video subverts the male gaze, sexualizing the female body through a gaze that enhances its natural beauty as she teases viewers with the exposure of certain body parts while simultaneously hiding it. Moreover, she unsettles the capitalist script with the rejection of the sexist expectation that a woman needs a man to receive her riches, emphasizing independence for all women as a means to break away from patriarchal expectations. Next, her "Please Me" pays homage to Latin superstars before her and continues to market to a community outside the diaspora to extend her appeal to other minority groups. In her "I Like It" video she performs her Afro-Latinidad, constantly reminding people of her hybrid cultural identity. She collaborated with two

big Latin trap artists to solidify and bring visibility to a large community that is often relegated to the margins of American society. The Caribbean aesthetic was a shout out to her people *y la isla* [and the island].³

Cardi B's defiance to conform to a "presentable" Latina mold and her description as "ratchet"⁴ purposely juxtaposes her to the ideal of respectability politics. Many criticized her for her inability to code-switch and present herself in a respectable way once she made it into mainstream culture. In addition, her hypersexuality goes against notions of moral decency, but she removes that stigma of sexual indecency to reclaim the power in sexuality. There is nothing wrong with women engaging in their sexual expression. It is empowering to be sexually liberated, not conform to strict patriarchal standards and guidelines. Cardi B demonstrates an authenticity that is not always found in big, global personas. Her refusal to change the way she is makes her appealing to her consumers allowing her to gain the platform that she has.

The chapter "Bad Bunny: Reimagining Latinx Masculinity" explores the transformation of *trapero* artist Bad Bunny into a representative of the Latinx queer community with his non-binary presentation, although this was not his initial introduction to the music world. Many people praise Bad Bunny due to his fluidity and his aloof persona. He does not care about the opinions of others and his nonchalant attitude towards his critics is refreshing. He is actively against the machismo culture prevalent in the Latinx community, constantly defending the rights of the LGBTQ

³ The pride she has in being Dominican is rooted in her bilingualism and the desire to bring it to fruition in her music. Not shying away from creating Spanish songs or bilingual tracks, she constantly links herself to the diaspora along with those back in the old country. Dominicans take pride in her repping her Latinidad with many loving that she brings recognition to the relevant role the diasporic community plays in the fabric of American identity. Dominicans on the island and in the U.S. admire Cardi B for her constant appraisal for where she comes from.

⁴ This is a trope given to minority women who are loud and boastful. This new stereotype deems all ethnic women into a certain category, pigeonholing them into a preconceived perception of "blackness" for women. This term is mainly associated with blackness as it is viewed as disgraceful due to the inability to code-switch. So, when they do not embody this blackness then these minority women are too white; they are not black enough. This is a negative stereotype that states that all minorities are loud and cannot fit into white spaces.

community. Bad Bunny initial introduction began with an imitation of the hypermasculine persona that persist in both the trap and hip-hop industry. This patriarchal script follows a heteronormative construction of men as sexist misogynists who objectify women. His songs discussed women in disrespectful ways, while also having a negative outlook towards them. However, over time he has changed his persona to become more sensitive and respectful towards women, alongside becoming an assertive ally of the LGBTQ communities.

Bad Bunny presents himself as non-binary through his androgynous clothing and creative nail designs. His style is always changing along with his hair, he never sticks to one distinct attribute. His attitude surrounding gender norms is disruptive as he constantly plays with the boundaries of femininity and masculinity. He embodies both or neither when he chooses to, refusing to allow anyone to judge him for it. He unsettles gender binaries with his fluidity and is the only person in the trap genre to do so. Much of his activism is bringing awareness to the oppressiveness of the categorizations of heteronormativity. He envisions a different masculinity within a space that continues to resort to toxic practices of what it means to be a man.

I analyze three music videos: “Soy Peor,” “Solo De Mí,” and “Caro.” Much like the other artists, he plays with a gender and capitalist script throughout all his videos. His music video for “Soy Peor” is a representation of his toxic masculinity prior to becoming a global phenomenon. He played with very stereotypical notions of masculinity that sexualized and degraded women. In his “Solo De Mí” video you begin to see his transformation as he advocates for the end of gender violence. He is becoming the social activist we know today that cares for women’s and LGBTQ issues. Lastly, “Caro” blurs the gender lines as he resorts to the use of drag performance with the inclusion of a woman as his alter ego. This toying of the categories of gender positions his non-binary identification and aligns him with the LGBTQ community. Moreover, the title plays with a

capitalist script that critiques the exclusion of communities of color in the American Dream. The use of expensive both signifies what one wants to achieve and want many cannot afford. Bad Bunny uses these cultural codes as ways to reimagine life that does not fall within strict binaries, allowing for the full freedom of expression and the celebration of self-love/self-worth.

My final case study “From Barbados to the United States: Rihanna’s Depiction of Black Sexuality & Erotic Violent Desire” discusses her performance of black sexuality that is linked to her Barbadian nationality. Rihanna differs from the other case studies because she does not belong to the diasporic community. Although her identity is Caribbean, her persona was built and cultivated within the United States. Her Barbadian national identity is always at the forefront of her representation. She belongs to Barbados as much as she does to her global consumers. Her music videos are cultural texts that constantly link her to her foreign and exotic status. She follows along the same trajectory of the other female case studies with the refusal to conform to respectability politics and the trope of materialism that is passed down to female performers. Nonetheless, she differs in her presentation of erotic violence that might stem from her 2009 assault.

Rihanna is a survivor of domestic abuse after her publicized incident with former boyfriend, Chris Brown. This initiated a complete transformation in her persona where she began to foster an intimate relationship with violence. Rather than distancing herself from the situation, she cultivated a closeness to erotic pleasure that played within the notion of pain. Her videos following the incident shows a trend that romanticizes violence. She sings of rage, passion, pain, and complicity. She explicitly goes against respectability politics with the exploration of subordinate sexual practices such as BDSM. The erotic violence in her videos brings discomfort to people who judge her depiction of black sexuality. She takes control of the way she is presented,

refusing to run from sexual desires and fantasies; instead she plays them out in her videos. The violence depicted in her images are deemed disturbing but only because it is coming from a woman of color. Her videos can be read as feminist manifestos calling for the sexual liberation of women through the exploration of their desire and the violence that comes from unshackling the chains that are holding them down. Her play with violence is a critique of the control of black women's bodies.

The music videos discussed in this thesis are “Bitch Better Have My Money (BBHMM)” and “Love the Way You Lie.” “BBHMM” plays both with the narrative of wealth and simultaneously evokes the erotic desire/violence that became part of her persona. The video promotes a sexualized violence against a white heterosexual couple. Many criticized the video for its depiction of female violence and outed her as anti-feminist, but the video sings of vulnerability, rage, as she was betrayed by her white male accountant, with the music video being inspired by her actual experience. It flips the script of numerous male-oriented revenge narrative fantasies in movies. The video was directed by Rihanna herself and reversed the narrative of women as solely being victims of violence. Lastly, “Love the Way You Lie” follows a white couple caught in a cycle of violence and abuse. The lyrics discusses the inability of people to walk away from toxic relationships and patterns. The video follows the highs and lows of a couple who physically abuse one another while also romanticizing the good times in the relationship. This is one of the videos that keeps her closest to her personal experience with violence and projects the unshared aspects of holding on to unhealthy relationships. All these videos play with her performance of black femininity/sexuality and does not conform to “respectable” depictions of black women.

I conclude with a discussion on how these four artists all play with their performance of gender, racial, and cultural identity. They are all interconnected to determine the ways in which

visibility is provided and granted to them, to demand a representation that does not solely conform to detrimental stereotypes. While all these artists risk promoting stereotypes, they also resist the power it has over them. Stereotypes have a way of always coming back, even when they subvert them, new ones take their place. By destabilizing categories and norms through their performances, these artists provide a representation that empowers their community, flaming the desire to dismantle the binaries. The female performers subvert the stigma of hypersexuality to a positive connotation of female empowerment and agency through acceptance of their sexuality. Bad Bunny changes the dominant narratives surrounding gender expression, engaging with a new construction of masculinity. All the performers provide new opportunities to appear and move in a world that challenges societal norms, moving past a construction of identity imposed on them by popular culture.

Chapter 1: Representations of Latinx and Caribbean Bodies in the United States
Stereotypes of Latinx Representation in the United States

The stereotypical representation of people of color, specifically Latinx and Caribbean bodies, in American media, has led to distorted ideas of what Latinidad is. These distorted notions affect the way others view and interact with minority groups while simultaneously affecting the way they view themselves. Latinidad and Caribbeanness have been racialized, posited as Othered, leading to a discourse of marginalization and exclusion. Despite the United States heavy influence in Latin America and the Caribbean, the location of diasporic communities in America is always that of the foreign alien. The large diasporic communities of the Caribbean are not viewed as belonging to the national image of the United States; their presence is often viewed as a threat to the dominant culture. The lack of representation in the images of diasporic people excludes the diversity found within Latin America and the Caribbean; erasing them from the national imagined community. Despite the United States insistence on being a melting pot of cultures, their portrayal of American culture remains white, cisgender, heterosexual, and middle class. Latinx individuals have seen a rise in representation in U.S. media, yet, much of these reinforce damaging stereotypes. Stereotypes have a duality in that it oppresses nondominant groups through misinformation and perception, but through reclaiming stereotypes these minority groups are able to resist the power and control it has over them. Despite reinforcing stereotypes, through its reclamation people can break away from the negative connotations, using it to empower and encourage a redefinition. Many Latinx artists have both reinforced and resisted these stereotypes through various performances and bodily actions leading to reinterpretation of what it means to be a person of color. There are a variety of stereotypes that persist regarding black and Latinx representation in United States popular media.

Discourse on Latino Men

The most common stereotype attributed to Latino men is that of criminals as seen in films like *West Side Story*⁵ and *Strangers in the City*⁶. Much of the discourse surrounding Latinx bodies seeks to “Other” them in order to maintain a level of difference between the dominant group and minorities group, thus establishing a hierarchy. Through a perpetuation of difference, certain privileges are guaranteed to one group while simultaneously disadvantaging others. In the United States during the 1960s through the 1990s, the growing Latino communities were brought to the attention of mainstream America. There have often been misconceptions about the Latinx minority and immigrant groups that make up the population and the diasporic communities that have settled in cities around the country. In the discourse of mainstream American values, whiteness—with all its privileges—has been the “ideal”. In this regard, minority and immigrant groups have been discriminated against emphasizing their “foreignness” and lack of belonging.

Due to this mentality, the mainstream media have portrayed these “outsiders” as detrimental to American communities. Regarding the Puerto Rican minorities in New York, they have been misrepresented as criminals, prone to violence, aggression, thus bringing about crimes into decent neighborhoods. This criminalization of the Caribbean diaspora is portrayed in

⁵The film was directed by Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise’s and released in 1961. The film conceptualized Latin Americans, specifically Puerto Ricans, as Others, reiterating the ideology that immigrants are the root cause of the Urban problem in America. It rationalizes that these urban centers and the crime are bad places to raise their children due to immigration. It also supports and provides the basis for “white flight,” the migration of the middle class to the suburbs. The film reinforces the stereotypes of immigrants and people of color.

⁶ 1962 film by Rick Carrier that illustrates Latin Americans as aggressive and prone to violence. It demonstrates aggression as organic to their nature that cannot be resisted. The film presented the struggles that immigrants face when they arrive to the “land of opportunities,” how difficult it is to actually achieve success. Despite depicting the struggles, it still presented the Alvarez family as violent and aggressive, reinforcing the idea that poor people choose to be poor, rather than acknowledging the various obstacles that keep them oppressed. Latinidad is colonized through the American Dream—all come for better opportunities, but when they arrive, they are forced to assimilate, and their difference marginalizes them.

mainstream media with shows like *Law and Order*⁷, that despite not being about Latinos fill their episodes with Latino criminals. Despite Puerto Ricans being U.S. citizens, their construction as racial and ethnic foreigners threaten the U.S. imagined nation (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 65). In the 1970s, Puerto Rican numbers swelled in the U.S., marking a transition in the demographics, specifically in NYC where they embraced a racialized political identity. In doing so they became associated with blackness, poverty, and criminality (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 85). NYC has a racialized geopolitical demographic because although Mexicans make up the country's largest Latinx population, NYC specifically is dominated by the Hispanic Caribbean. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans make up the largest Latinx population in this region. The demonization of the Puerto Rican community as criminals constructed them as social political threats in the U.S. making it easier to mark them outside the boundaries of the nation, thus enhancing an us versus them dichotomy. The criminal stigma is heightened with the association of machismo in Latin culture where the men are typically viewed as aggressive and controlling. This stereotype of criminality leads to institutional systematic oppression of people of color providing justification for the neglect of inner-city communities and its inhabitants.

In addition, Puerto Ricans are not the only Latinx group to be criminalized. Mexican Americans are often referred to as *cholos* which is a derogatory term for those in a lower social class and it connotes a specific kind of group. These people have a certain street style, way of dressing, and typically speak in slang. They are also involved in gangs, inciting the stereotype

⁷ American police procedural and legal drama tv series created by Dick Wolf. The entire run was aired on NBC, it premiered on September 13, 1990 and completed its twentieth and final season on May 24, 2010. The show is set in NYC and follows a two-part approach: the first half-hour is the investigation of a crime and the apprehension of subject by the NYPD; the second half is the prosecution of the defendant by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. The plots of the episode are often based on real cases that recently made headlines, although it is loosely based on the actual events as the crime and the perpetrator may be different. The accuracy in the show is the depiction of an all-white legal team apprehending predominately communities of color as there is a racial disparity within the criminal justice system that disproportionately affects poor racial bodies.

most pervasive in American media. Television series like *Gang Related*⁸ and *On My Block*⁹ play on this stereotype of the *cholo* which is incredibly damaging to the Chicano community in the United States. The perception of Mexicans as criminals or gang members is what led President Trump to state that “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” Trump opened up his campaign through the repetition of a stereotype and boasting about it. The opening of a political campaign through the demonization of the Latinx community for a man that eventually became the President of the United States holds powerful insinuation in their belonging in the nation. It demonstrates how pervasive stereotypes of ethnic communities are and its ability to create fear when there is a lack of understanding and representation. The stigma surrounding Mexicans enhances the racial tension and rejection of immigrants in the states. On his twitter, President Trump has proudly promoted his racist anti-immigration rhetoric which have largely been inspired based on stereotypes of criminality and danger among people of color. He posted a tweet saying “Sadly, the overwhelming amount of violent crime in our major cities is committed by blacks and Hispanics-a tough subject-must be discussed” without acknowledging that inner city communities are generally policed at higher rates than affluent communities, leading to a higher incarceration rate among people of

⁸ The show aired in May of 2014, it followed a Mexican American LAPD detective who is part of a gang task force forced to take on the city’s most dangerous gangs, however he had close and personal ties with these gangs. His childhood best friend was the son of the gang leader and he was raised by them after his father was murdered. This show tackled recent issues of immigration and criminality, reinforcing the stigma on Chicanos linking them to gangs and drug related activities.

⁹ This is a Netflix original show that follows the life of four teenagers in the inner-city of Los Angeles. It follows their friendship as they navigate life and growing up. All the teens are young people of color with discussions on the real issues within these communities—crime and awareness of potential violence in everyday life. One of the characters is Mexican American who is being forced into the gang and drug lifestyle after his brother gets out of prison. The stereotype of the *cholo* is specific to the locality of Chicano communities in California.

color. This assertion that Latinx communities stain the purity of American cultural identity is heightened through their depiction as foreign nationals leading to the next dominant stereotype.

Another pervasive stereotype is that of the illegal alien/job stealer. The illegal alien stereotype stems from the same Othered position that promotes the criminal one. The view of being foreign, not American, leads to the idea that they are here illegally taking American jobs. This stereotype has seen a recent rise with the immigration policies that currently dominate our media. In the past few years, we have seen numerous videos of Americans telling Latinos to “stop speaking Spanish, we live in America” or to “go back to Mexico” with the assumption that all Latinos are Mexican, not realizing the immense diversity in Latin America. Many Americans tend to blame the immigrants for negatively impacting the economy despite the fact that immigrants actually help boost the economy. Immigrants tend to take the jobs Americans would not want as it is dangerous, often for low pay. The alien stigma of non-citizenship created by mainstream values, as well as the media representation, leads to discrimination as well as the removal of bodily agency. Their precarious status in American society makes them an easy target for scapegoating which is why much of American problems are essentially blamed on them. The foreign stereotype makes these communities more vulnerable limiting their agency in the way they move about in the world. With ICE playing a greater role in the lives of these communities, many of them have uncertain futures in their position in the United States.

Generally, Latinx and Caribbean people are rarely differentiated amongst each other, contributing to the homogenous origin. All Latinx and Caribbean people are viewed the same in mainstream culture suggesting they all come from the same ethnic background, race, or culture. There are diverse Latin American communities represented among immigrants in the United States, however in this country all Latinos are often linked with being Mexican. Furthermore, many

people tend to associate the Latinx community with the nationalities and countries they are exposed to. For example, in New York City people often view Latinos as being Dominican or Puerto Rican because of the high population that inhabit the region. It is similar in other regions such as Florida where Cubans and Central Americans are their reference point in interpreting Latin American identities, signifying the geopolitical demographics of the different Latinx groups and the different perceptions associated with the groups (Alarcón, 2014, 73). Messages and stereotypes thus become associated to the subgroups of Latinx people they are exposed to because it is generalized to all Latinx people. The homogenous origin plays the regulatory role of race production, maintaining its norms through certain stereotypes. Similar to Butler's (2004) theory on gender as a regulatory means for the production and maintenance of gender norms, the stereotype of homogenous origin where all Latinx people are the same dictates that their production of their race and ethnicity conform to the dominant fantasy of what the existing norms actually are (55). In our society, Latinx bodies have a specific image and association where those that do not conform to this image produce anxiety. The discourse of race/ethnicity dictates specific consequences for Latinx bodies. These consequences are heightened when breaking away from stereotypes because non-conformity is viewed as a threat. In addition, the homogenous origin essentially encourages the production of the model minority myth where members of a group need to be an example when interacting with people outside their race in order to break away from reinforcing several damaging stereotypes. The power of stereotypes is its ability to generalize and dictate a person's visibility in public space. Stereotypes can be detrimental in that it affects interactions among peers enhancing the vulnerability of certain bodies in particular spaces/locations. The homogenous origin feeds into this power of generalization that makes breaking away from it much harder.

Discourse of Latina Bodies

There are specific images that arise when Latina bodies are mentioned or discussed. The prevalent one is that of the fiery Latina. This stereotype is often circulated in American pop culture as seen with Sofia Vergara's character on *Modern Family*¹⁰ where she is viewed as the hot-tempered sexy Latina Bombshell. Another prominent artist who promoted this image included Carmen Miranda, the Brazilian singer known for her outlandish costumes linking her to her racial and ethnic identity. In recent presentations, Naya Rivera's character on *Glee*¹¹ reinforces the spitfire Latina with her cold rude demeanor while remaining sexually appealing. This stereotype plays into the sexualized and exoticized image of Latinas, but with an emphasis on the attitude and the heavy accent. These women are often presented wearing high heels, tight clothing, with very curvy bodies; their foreignness is socially desired. Rather than the negative stigma of alien, the exoticism of the fiery Latina contributes to their desire while continuing to remain socially contested. Their bodies are objectified, desired for sexual purposes, but they would never be considered for marriage unless it is to serve the purpose of a "trophy wife." The feisty Latina is always linked to her ethnicity; despite Latinidad's ability to be racially ambiguous and fluid, the fiery Latina is always fixed in her position as Other. Her sexuality and femininity are accentuated, and these disciplines are used to uphold their subordinate status. Those that do fit into the fiery

¹⁰ Sofia Vergara's character, Gloria, portrays the stereotypical perception of Latinas as loud and fiery. Her feisty personality is viewed as part of her exotic nature, it further perpetuates the racial fetishization of Latina bodies. The bodies of those deemed as Other are controlled under the white/male gaze that objectifies them and presents them in certain characteristics. The actress has propelled these stereotypes outside the show as well, as evident during the 2014 Emmy Awards where she was put on a pedestal and spun around like a sexy prop. The explicit objectification complies to the male gaze; she received a lot of backlash from fans as promoting the sexualization of Latinas. She does not display shame in her stereotypical portrayal inciting "What's wrong with being a stereotype?" She claims that her portrayal is inspired by her aunts and mom; she does not feel as if there is anything wrong with the Latinas who fit into these depictions.

¹¹ Naya Rivera's portrayal plays into the fiery Latina bombshell similar to that of Sofia Vergara's character. Her character is a typical mean girl, but with her ethnicity it turns into a stereotype of being feisty and aggressive. She is vivacious with a huge sex appeal despite her domineering personality. She is eroticized, her persona as a bitch furthers this appeal that fetishizes the dominant personalities of Latinas.

Latina are often questioned or not seen as Latina enough. The Latinas who do not participate or conform to this cultural production of the assertive sexy Latina often ostracizes them.

Another stereotype is the virginal Latina. There are misperceptions that Latin American and Caribbean countries are overly religious with this commitment to the religion dominating their behavior. Latinas have historically been viewed as passive and religious with this passivity attempting to play into notions of pure white femininity of American culture. However, because of their racial markers they can never fully achieve it. During colonial times, virginal purity in Latin American countries was greatly emphasized with virginity being highly linked to honor. The virginal status of the female dictated their family honor with marriage being immensely valued, it was with great importance that the woman they married remained “pure.” This was the time period when sheets of blood were hung out of windows on the wedding night in order to prove the virginity of the woman. Consummation that did not result in blood brought shame upon the family of the wife staining their reputation and honor. However, these practices no longer exist in modern Latin America. While religion remains widespread, it does not dominate their practices and this stereotype seeks to shame any woman who does not conform. Latina women are often viewed as promiscuous and highly sexualized; this stereotype goes in the other extreme of complete purity and fanatic religious behavior. Examples of this production include Gina Rodriguez’s *Jane the Virgin*¹². While some may view this in a more positive light, it does not help the production of Latinx bodies because of the controlling factor involved in limiting the expression of their sexuality. Many Latina’s find embracing their curves and their sexuality as empowering. This stereotype removes this ability, continuing to fall under patriarchal control.

¹² Gina Rodriguez plays a character who gets impregnated via sperm insemination despite being a virgin. She was saving herself for marriage. Due to her religion, she chose to keep the baby despite not planning it or being prepared for it. She is essentially taking on or embodying the virgin Mary and demonstrating Latinas in a pure light.

Finally, the most widespread and damaging stereotype is that of the fertility threat—the hypersexualized woman. This stereotype is similar to the Jezebel trope in black culture that was produced during slavery. While that stereotype sought to justify and naturalize the rape of black slaves and the subordination to their white masters, the fertility threat of Latina bodies has social political implications that has major impacts in the way they can freely present themselves in the world. Both the jezebel and the fertility threat oversexualize women of color leading to their frequent objectification. The hyper sexualization of their sexuality is dangerous because these depictions are detrimental in their agency to appear, since it affects how people treat them and interact with them. This stereotype stems from the view of large Latinx families with multiple children which is explained with the Latina’s “hypersexualized” nature (Chaves 2013). With the current trends of low birth rates among white populations, the fertility threat holds greater importance in the subordination of minority groups. The stereotype of the hyper-sexual fertile Latina is another social construct aimed at creating the Latino threat narrative in the United States. This has political and social risk because Latina fertility has surpassed the birthing rates of white people which causes anxiety amongst the dominant group, due to the fear of becoming the minority adding to the threat of their presence. This “menace” is what contributes to the sterilization of people of color that has occurred in the United States and in Puerto Rico in the 1970s and continues today in prisons in California. The hyper-sexualization of Latinx bodies makes them susceptible to the male gaze which can remove their autonomy and agency. All these different stereotypes play a calculating role in suppressing racial bodies while maintaining the status quo of white supremacy and authority.

Rejection of Afro-Latinidad in Mainstream American Culture

Latinidad is defined as “a fluid set of cultural boundaries that are consistently reinforced, challenged or negotiated by and through Latina bodies” (Mendible, 2007, 4). Latinidad has historically been linked to one’s proximity to whiteness, despite inhabiting a pan ethnic space of racial ambiguity that lies outside the margins of whiteness and blackness (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 5). Latinidad stems from the countries included in the definition of Latin America with many of these countries having similar attributes such as language, food, dance, and music (although Haiti and Brazil are exceptions). In the embodiment of Latinidad, there is an exclusionary practice at play in that certain groups and nationalities are not included in who is able to identify as Latinx. For those in the Caribbean, only three countries are included in the space of Latinidad—Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The term Latinidad denotes a sense of unity and identity despite the varying nationalities, gender, racial identities, sexual preference, and immigration status, yet this solidarity continues to promote a specific aesthetic in coherence with white, straight, cisgender, and able-bodied privileges. Latinidad negates to acknowledge its African roots continuing to privilege those most closely resembling Eurocentric standards. Those that identify with their African heritage/ancestry often identify as Afro-Latina with the hyphen connoting an adjustment being made as if Latinidad cannot include blackness. They are usually pitted against one another which is why Afro-Latinidad is hard for many to conceptualize. Afro-Latinidad involves people having to adjust to a space that was not adjusted for them, making visible their presence in this locality. Their bodies are constantly under scrutiny and surveillance; it is highly contested because it does not fit into the simple binary of black and white. Afro-Latinidad in American culture is still widely unexplored with many people not understanding the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality that gets compounded onto a person’s body and bodily

expressions. There is often confusion when people say they are both Latinx and black because of Latinidad's association with encompassing the racial space of brownness. Brown tends to mediate between white and black with the racial ambiguity of many Latinas allowing for a racial fluidity that passes along white lines. This proximity to whiteness excludes those that cannot pass—the ones who are fixed and racially marked as black.

Mainstream American culture does not include Afro-Latinx or Afro-Caribbean in its representation of Latinidad. The most popular well-known artist of Latinx descent that come to mind include Jennifer Lopez, Sofia Vergara, Cardi B, Eva Longoria along with a few others. Many of these women, besides Cardi B, do not identify as Afro-Latina. The few that fit the visual representation of Afro-Latinas, such as Rosario Dawson and Zoe Saldana, do not come into the mind as easily. White Latina stars are put on a higher pedestal than Afro-Latinas thus demonstrating their ability to make it into mainstream culture, although their performance and representation often plays on specific stereotypes. The lack of representation of Afro-Latinas and Caribbean people demonstrate the privileges of whiteness and racial fluidity in disseminating images of the U.S. imagined community. Popular culture seeks to produce a certain narrative that represents the imagined vision of the nation which is why much of it remains white, heterosexual, and middle class. However, the recent inclusion and representation of different types of people in the cultural production is a way of changing the narrative, although much of it remains stereotypical. Additionally, the exclusion of Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx identities demonstrate how there is still a long way before the media will accurately represent the cultural racial demographics of the United States.

Agency through Objectification: The Sexualization of Jennifer Lopez

Jennifer Lopez embodies the stereotypical ideal of what Latina bodies look like and signify. The perceived image of Latinidad is represented through the body with its various interpretations and implications. The Latina body is mass produced through a combination of myth, desire, location that is marked onto brown bodies and marketed to mainstream culture (Mendible, 2007, 1). The emphasis on the curves, the racially ambiguous markers that are not exactly white but not black either evokes an image of brownness where Latinidad lies. These specific markers of language, racial and bodily phenotype dictate the imagery of Latinx bodies with the few famous Latinx artists managing to break into mainstream culture continually perpetuating this ideal. Latina bodies come in different shapes, color, sizes but yet the commodifiable version of Latinidad conforms to the media archetypes and representations of what it means to be Latina (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 1). Many of the Latinas who have managed to break into the limelight are white, curvaceous, leaning more towards Eurocentric modes of identification, signifying a preference for white passing Latinos. Afro-Latinidad is contested within media, as within other localities where their identity cannot be confined or categorized. The subtle invisibility of Afro-Latinas that deviates from the mass-produced ideal of Latinidad evokes a questioning of acceptability. Who is allowed to make it and be presented? Who is accepted into the national imagery of the nation and to what extent? The signifiers of Latinness communicate stereotypical gendered, racialized, and national identities through the production of ethnic characteristics such as language, dress, music, food, but also racial markers such as facial and body features, skin color, and hair texture (Molina-Guzman, 2010, 4). Those that do not fit into the accepted variations of the marketable Other are marked with invisibility that not only fails to represent them, but also fails to acknowledge their existence. The inability to comprehend the blending of the two within in a single body and identity

leads to a destabilization of the category of Latinness.¹³ It goes against the imagined vision of what a Latina body is supposed to be.

Although Jennifer Lopez can identify as Afro-Latina because of her Puerto Rican identity which intersects between European, African, and Taino heritage, it does not change that she gets preferential treatment due to her skin tone and white-passing abilities. Jennifer's ability to cross racial boundaries is signified through her occupation of this unique space of brownness that mediates the racial tensions of black and white. In the music industry, she highlights the racial disparities within this medium because her success comes at the expense of darker skinned individuals, specifically her fellow Afro-Latino/as. Many tend to view Latinx people as a monolithic group, but there is so much diversity within Latinidad that is excluded in their representation. Blackness applies to various ethnicities, its occupation within Latinidad gives the Latinx community a unique ability to occupy multiple spaces, as is evident in Jennifer Lopez's fluidity. The ambiguity of the racial identification allows her the connection to black culture because of her identity as a minority and a woman of color, in addition to the cultural experience that happens in NYC, but her ability to white pass allows for that racial fixation to be forgotten or ignored when she plays a white woman in films. The cultural success of J. Lo strives from the ideology of colorism, defined as

the discrimination and unequal treatment of individuals belonging to the same ethnic or racial group, and these tend to be based upon differences in physical features — specifically skin complexion, but also hair texture and facial features (JeffriAnne Wilder, 2015, as cited in Davis, 2017, 4).

¹³ The confusion surrounding Afro-Latinidad is not only from white culture, but also with the Latin American community. There are Latinas who has othered themselves outside the black experience, despite advocating for diversity fail to acknowledge it within their own communities. Blackness transcends borders, ethnicities, nationalities; this desire to categorize and box it into neat areas is what causes the destabilization when it appears in arenas outside its "culturally designated spots." Blackness in Latin America has been rejected and Latinx stars fail to adequately use their platform to acknowledge this. Gina Rodriguez is a prime example of a star who advocates for Latinidad but fails to acknowledge Afro-Latinas place in this community. She has specifically othered herself from blackness in multiple instances which is a reflection of the rejection of African heritage in Latin America.

Her success lies within the same trajectories of other Latinx artists who fit within a specific mode of Latinness. The ideology of *blanqueamiento* is evident in Latin America and the Caribbean which privileges whiteness, explaining why the support of Latinx artist tends to be towards those with lighter complexions over those with darker skin tones (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 13). This is seen within the telenovelas they present where Afro-Latinas are hardly displayed, unless in the role of servant/maid. They are never the protagonist with many of the famous Spanish soap opera stars tending to be white passing Mexicans. This phenomenon continues into the United States with the preference for white or racially ambiguous Latinas. Throughout J. Lo's career, she has enjoyed the benefits of being both socially accepted and praised as a sex symbol with the same being said for Sofia Vergara. Both represent the epitome of Latinness with their olive complexions, curvy figure, and their marketable features. There are Afro-Latinas who have darker skin, different hair texture and features, whose presence in mainstream media does not equate to the level of success of these two artists. Much of J. Lo's success is attributed to her sex appeal and the ways she has been able to market that in her favor. The objectification of her body has allowed her the space to gain visibility for a group that was previously ignored.

Jennifer Lopez began her career in dancing, with her inclusion in the popular series *In Living Color*.¹⁴ The show introduced Jennifer Lopez as a member of the shows dance troupe "The Fly Girls" with actress Rosie Perez serving as the choreographer. J. Lo's "girl from the Bronx" persona along with her ethnic identity plotted her into the African American culture, despite her ability to

¹⁴ American sketch comedy tv series that ran on Fox from April 15, 1990 to May 19, 1994. Keenen Ivory Wayans created, wrote, and starred in the show. It was produced by Ivory Way Productions. The title was inspired by the NBC announcement broadcast being presented "in living color" during the 1960s when mainstream color tv was not yet the norm. It also is a reference to the cast being predominately black, which was in opposition to other sketch comedy shows at the same time, like *Saturday Night Live*. Apparently, the show was controversial due to the Wayan's decision to portray black humor from the ghetto in a time when mainstream American taste regarding black comedy are coming from more refined shows like *The Cosby Show*. In a way this show also rejected notions of respectability politics with its edgy critic of social issues through humor, and its positionality in a localized Ghetto context.

white pass. Lopez also belongs to the first “Latino Boom” that occurred in American culture in the 1990s. The 1990s was an important time as it is the same period where the term Latino becomes coined. The concept of Latinidad is produced at the same time that Jennifer Lopez comes into the stage, so this ethnic label of Latino is imposed on her just as it arrives into American collective consciousness. Nonetheless, while cultivating her image as a U.S. Latina woman, she received the role of a lifetime with the 1997 biopic *Selena*¹⁵. Despite being Puerto Rican, she was able to play a Mexican American and this role skyrocketed her career in both acting and singing. After this role, she went on to act in films alongside famous actors such as George Clooney in *Out of Sight* and Matthew McConaughey in *The Wedding Planner*. In both these films, she passes as an Italian American due to her European features. Although people may recognize her as Latina, she is close enough to whiteness that she can pass for such in films without anyone questioning it. She is able to cross over through multiple ethnic racial populations within her career as an actress, however, in her music career she remains fixed in her Puerto Rican ethnicity and connected to black culture. Her ability to pass as white plays into her inauthenticity as a Latina woman with many viewing her as not being Latina enough due to her “poor” or Nuyorican Spanish (Mendible, 2007, 158). Her transgressions between the boundaries of race allows her to perform blackness, whiteness, and brownness that has opened up the ways in which Latina bodies and identities are represented and coded. She negotiates the ways in which she is racialized by playing on different codes/markers which is not accessible to all Latinas.

¹⁵ Many people objected when Jennifer Lopez was chosen to play the Mexican American singer. Selena Quintanilla meant so much for so many Mexican Americans and J. Lo received backlash due to her Puerto Rican identity. Many argued that she was taking the role away from a Mexican artist who has a greater connection to what the artist meant for their culture and people. However, after the release of the film and witnessing the similarities between the two artists, many people praised J. Lo’s performance and this role propelled her career in acting and ultimately singing. She received a Golden Globe nomination for this performance; this established her as the highest paid Latina actress in Hollywood until Sofia Vergara came along.

Latinas racially ambiguous markers dictate that they would never be fully incorporated into a nation obsessed with racial fixity; they will always lie outside the margins of whiteness and blackness (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 15). Some are able to white pass such as Jessica Alba, Cameron Diaz, and Christina Aguilera who do it so successfully that many are unaware of their link to Latinness, but others are racially marked as Other, i.e. Jennifer Lopez, so she can dance along the lines of whiteness, but she can never fully embody it. She can be white for a film, but she would never be good enough to date the White American heartthrob which was evident with her relationship with Ben Affleck. They received lots of backlash for their engagement. She received negative attention with many promoting a hypersexual image, focusing on her past relationships.¹⁶ She did not receive this media attack when dating Sean Combs, known as Puff Diddy, because her racial fixation as foreign allows her the ability to date black men as she is viewed as being culturally closer to blackness. This backlash when dating the White American golden boy demonstrates this inability to undo racial categorizations and fixation. Therefore, she used her platform to bring visibility to the Latinx community doing so through her transition into a sex symbol, claiming agency through self-objectification, and turning the hypersexual narrative into one of empowerment.

Jennifer Lopez pedigree within black culture has constantly taken root with her fluid ability to cultivate a presence there. She navigates the boundaries of blackness and whiteness with the temporary inclusion into both, however her ethnic identity always associates her more with the urban black community. This connection with the community is evident with her acceptance to

¹⁶ Throughout their relationship many people objected his connection with Jennifer Lopez because she was not “good enough” for him. She had just gotten out of a marriage before she got with Ben Affleck, with much of the tabloid and publicity she received recounting how she can’t keep a man or stating that she is untrustworthy. They placed the hypersexual stigma on her to demonstrate that these pure white men should not fall into the temptations of these hypersexual Others. Nonetheless, after they ended their engagement and she was linked to fellow Puerto Rican artist Mark Anthony, they praised the relationship, discussing how she finally found love. Tabloids also loved Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner together demonstrating the anxiety that comes from interracial dating.

perform the Motown tribute at the 2019 Grammy's. However, there was immense criticism regarding the choice to have Jennifer Lopez perform because she was not a black artist. Although she can flirt with the boundaries of blackness, as well as find a belonging in specific spaces of black culture, she was not black enough for a tribute to Motown and their legacy for their community. Many viewers were upset that Jennifer Lopez—a white passing Latina—was given the offer over a black female singer. Many critiqued that this white Latina was given the honor of performing a tribute to a record label “that was dedicated to grooming black talent when blacks were still relegated to the back of the bus, in life, and in entertainment” (Helligar, 2019, *Variety*). Her fellow performer for the tribute, Smokey Robinson, came to her defense claiming “Motown was music for everybody. Everybody. Who’s stupid enough to protest Jennifer Lopez doing something for Motown?” as he suggested that growing up in the Bronx gave her black credit (Helligar, 2019, *Variety*). This objection to her incorporation in the tribute demonstrates the constant opposition the Latinx and Black community face when discussing history of blackness. When it comes to urban experiences of growing up in the ghetto and gaining entry into the hip-hop cultures, Latinx people get a pass. However, when it comes to saying the N word or participating in a tribute for a music genre that means a great deal for the black community, they are not black enough; they are Othered within a space that is already marginalized for their difference. While some people did not mind her inclusion in the tribute, others were simply bothered that she became the headliner for a performance that signified importance for black culture. Many would have preferred to see all African American artists up on stage, completely disregarding blackness within Latinidad.

Jennifer Lopez embraces her curvaceous body playing on her objectification to gain success. She is well known for her backside, embracing an agency of self-objectification to

empower her fellow Latinas. Her music videos accentuate her body and her performance of sexuality plays on the hypersexual image associated with Latinas. This hypersexuality of ethnic women's bodies allows for the white gaze to control and police them keeping them under a racial hierarchy. The limits on nonwhite bodies are available due to the power of whites to control and construct narratives of nonwhite ethnicity which produces damaging stereotypes (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 65). Just as the male gaze seeks to objectify and contain women under patriarchal control, the white gaze does the same to the bodies of ethnic minorities. Under the white gaze, the concept of model minority myth is enforced where nonwhite expressions and performances are evaluated and critiqued. The model minority is an explicit performance that seeks to undermine and dismantle stereotypes but, in the process, furthers divide different people of color, discouraging racial unity. Her self-sexualization plays on this risk of enforcing stereotypes, but on the other hand, also troubles the negative connotation linked to hypersexuality.

She incites the "threat of excess" with her performance of sexuality that breaks away from normative notions of white femininity and social acceptability (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 63). J.Lo has presented herself outside of white femininity with her emphasis on her body which for so long was viewed as undesirable. She lays outside of whiteness in the production of her music videos where she's typically surrounded by black hip hop artists and dancers. She is shown wearing hoops and large jewelry, along with the emphasis on her ass which posits her as being more culturally similar to black culture, pushing her further away from white acceptable standards and presentations. J. Lo embraces her curves and sexuality with self-objectification, positing it as empowering because it takes the racialized/sexualized constructions of Latinas and reclaims the white/male gaze to reject Latina's position in the margins of mainstream culture. Lopez reclaims and redefines the Latina body from its previous associations with undesirability, fat, marginal

status and converted it into a body with visibility that matters, although the ways in which they are able to appear is questionable (Mendible, 2007, 2). Nonetheless, her reclamation of desirability and appearance has allowed for ethnic bodies to be recognized in various spaces and manners.

Lopez use of the “threat of excess” extends beyond sexuality into a discussion on material wealth. Early in her career, she played within the trope of wealth that follows many women but did so in a different manner. Rather than conforming to the stigma of woman as gold diggers, she explicitly rejects that in “Love Don’t Cost a Thing.”¹⁷ She sings,

You think you gotta keep me iced (you don’t)
 You think I’m gonna spend your cash (I won’t)
 Even if you were broke
 My love don’t cost a thing
 Think I wanna drive your Benz (I don’t)
 If I wanna floss I got my own

When she is first beginning, she purposely goes against the materialism stigma imposed onto all women; although they hold greater implications for women of color. It plays into the stereotype of temptress that seduces men into their demise; the stigma that ethnic women use their sexuality to lure men in and steal from them. She is explicitly letting her lover know that is not the case with their relationship. The music video opens up with her in a mansion with a pool-side view receiving a call from her partner. She is covered in jewels which temporarily places her within the aesthetic of wealth and the material desires people wish to afford. Through the phone call, you find out that the partner will not be able to make it...again, implying that this is not the first time he has cancelled plans with her. He asks if she had received the gift, demonstrating that it is a pattern for him to cancel and then compensate or make up for it through buying her jewelry. He uses money to ask

¹⁷ Song recorded for her second studio album J. LO (2001). It was released on December 2, 2000 by Epic Records as the lead single from the album. At the time of the song’s release, J. Lo was transitioning into a sex symbol and in a relationship with American rapper, Sean Combs. Lyrically, the song is about the exploration of love and how Lopez is unhappy about her materialistic lover. Many believed it to be an innuendo towards Combs as they ended their relationship shortly afterwards.

for forgiveness and keep her love. This can be a critique of the values imposed by the capitalist society; consumerist values focus too much on material gain. She throws the gift away to prove she does not care for the material items. This throwing away of the bracelet also strengthens her argument about how she is not with him for the riches or the lavish lifestyle. She goes against the portrayal of dependency invoked onto women when she says she doesn't want to drive his Benz, because if she wants to flaunt any wealth it would be her own. She continues to sing,

All that matter is that you treat me right
 Give me all the things I need
 That money can't buy
 I think you need to take some time
 To show me that your love is true
 There's more than dollar signs in you
 Then you can win my heart, and get what's in my heart

The video continues to follow her as she walks to a beach, slowly undressing. She begins to remove the necklaces, the bracelets, her coat that all signify items that he probably gifted her. She throws them away, eventually pulling out a picture that says, "Wishes you were here." This evokes the capitalist script that includes blackness in its imagery. She has braids and is shown dancing to hip-hop with black back-up dancers which is a same aesthetic she produces 20 years later in her "Dinero"¹⁸ music video. However, in this context, she tries to distance herself from the material girl projection, meanwhile in "Dinero" she actively embraces it.

Her music video "Dinero" is a cultural production that situates her in a pan-ethnic space with her incorporation of hip-hop aesthetic and the intermingling of bilingual phrases. The entire song is spoken in Spanglish linking her to her Nuyorican identity, where they embrace the combination and blending of Spanish and English to signify their own cultural space within the

¹⁸ Translation is "money." It is a Latin trap song by Jennifer Lopez featuring American record producer DJ Khaled and rapper Cardi B. The song was released on May 17, 2018 by Nuyorican Productions (J.L.O own production company) and Epic Records. The music video was directed by Joseph Kahn and was shot entirely in black and white. The music video was released on May 24, 2018 and won Best Collaboration at the 2018 MTV Video Music Awards.

United States. Puerto Rico's history with the United States has a unique aspect in that they are considered American citizens, yet their locality as a colony still Others them. Their position as different has marked their navigation in American culture with the desire to assimilate, which contributes to why many Puerto Rican Americans fail to know Spanish. The following generations have reclaimed the pride in being Puerto Ricans from New York. This pride brought the cultural colloquialism of Spanglish and the Nuyorican identity to signify the cultural experience of growing up in New York as a second-generation Puerto Rican. They are often viewed as not being Puerto Rican enough and not American enough, with New York inhabiting a space of fluidity and transnational signification.

Jennifer Lopez identifies with her Puerto Rican ethnicity which positions her into the imagined Latino community that is racially and ethnically distinct from dominant US culture (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 59). This song situates her within that Nuyorican space with her bilingual dialect that references to her mother country and the borough in which she was raised. She says, "Soy la Princesa, San Juan, Puerto Rico/ They say money talk but my talking bilingual." This explicit reference to Puerto Rico, along with the interchanging of English and Spanish links her to the Caribbean diaspora. In addition, it focuses on materialism which sets her away from "respectable" notions of whiteness. It plays on her image of "coming out of the ghetto" and the success is attributed to her determination. For this song, she collaborates with another Bronx native, Cardi B, which becomes a point of comparison in her lyrics, "Two bad bitches that came from the Bronx. Cardi from the pole and Jenny from the block." This reference to the Bronx discusses how they came from nothing, yet now they have reached the epitome of success in American identity. This economic success is often viewed as threatening to the dominant group. Her excessive display of economic capital is perceived as a danger as it heightens the dominant

group economic and racial anxieties (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 81). In addition, Cardi's verse further promotes a link to Caribbeanness by referring to popular dances of the island when she says, "Yea tell me what you think/ Merengue to the money/ Bachata to the bank." The code switching between English and Spanish, the referencing of specific cultural aspects fixes her in the imagined Latinx community that is distinct from mainstream American culture. The end of the video also promotes Latinx and Black culture as similar with the inclusion of hip-hop dancing, the baggy clothes, and the connection to black aesthetic with cornrows. Moreover, they are all wearing Yankee hats again linking her back to where she grew up, where she came from—The Bronx—which is representative of urban ghettos and synonymous with blackness.¹⁹ The continual fluidity within blackness and whiteness in one performance demonstrates that her gender and racial identity cannot be separated. In her pride and objectification of her body, she will constantly reiterate her racial position as an ethnic minority.

The impossibility of separating her gender and racial identity is shown with her collaboration with one the biggest Puerto Rican artists, Bad Bunny. His success is on a transnational level, although he holds a very special place for the Latinos in the Caribbean diaspora. Latin trap music has become an international success and many of these artists come from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic. Their collaboration for the Spanish song "Te

¹⁹ Actress and activist, Amanda Seales, stated that there is a different cultural experience that happens in New York City where the hip-hop culture and the urban community offer a shared experience that extends beyond black Americans. It offers an experience of being othered because of their blackness that happens in NY in a way that is unique to those that are not black, thus including the Latinx community. This extension of otherness, of blackness to the Latinx community, is part of the NY urban experience, which Jennifer Lopez acknowledges this in her music videos. Her constant transition between blackness and whiteness, despite inhabiting a space that falls outside both, reveals this unique cultural space that she grew up and she plays homage to that with the Yankee cap and the hip-hop dancing. Her racial position as a minority thus links her to the blackness within an American context despite also having a link to blackness with Caribbean and Latinx culture. The black experience in the USA differs from that in the Caribbean and the diasporic communities have the ability to encompass both.

Gusté”²⁰ links both of them to their island, furthering their success in the Latin pop genre. The music industry has had a shift in the past several years with more bilingual tracks as evident with the recent releases of collaborations with artist like Bad Bunny, Anuel AA, J. Balvin and Ozuna. Artist like J. Lo, Cardi B, Selena Gomez, and even DJ Khaled have all made songs with these Latin trap artists promoting the genre into mainstream consciousness.

The music video was filmed in a tropical island, not Puerto Rico, but its aesthetic and vibe gives off Caribbean vacation feels. Both artists are Puerto Rican although there is a separation in their self-identification because he is from the island which already promotes a difference. She is Nuyorican, speaks improper Spanish while he is from the mainland promoting an “authentic” Puerto Rican identity. Therefore, her collaboration with him and the fact that the song is mainly in Spanish with a few English phrases thrown in, demonstrates her desire to appeal to her fellow Puerto Ricans. They are both contributing to each other’s success by expanding their audience with Bad Bunny bringing in those from the Caribbean and J. Lo bringing him into mainstream culture exposing him to a wider array of people. Throughout the video, she continues to play on her sex appeal as she is shown in a swimsuit and accentuating her fit body figure. The sexualization of her body in a Spanish context further posits her as foreigner promoting the exoticization of ethnic bodies. This eroticism of her body is her way of changing the stigma surrounding sexuality encouraging a body positivity that is linked to her ethnic/racial identity. Women of color have long been told that their body is not beautiful, they were put in the margins of beauty ideal, but her transition into a sex symbol changed the narrative. As stated by Molina-Guzmán (2010) in her analysis of J. Lo,

²⁰ Spanish song by Jennifer Lopez and Bad Bunny. It was released as a single on November 9, 2018. The song is an exchange of a couple when they first meet, fall for each other, and reminisce about the moment. The music video was directed by Mike Ho.

Through both her ethnic specificity and racial ambiguity, Lopez serves as a cultural symbol of Puerto Rican and Latina resilience in a nation that has antagonistically welcomed them. Lopez's media visibility creates an opening for cultural resistance because the unclassifiable nature of her identity vexes established representations of U.S. ethnic and racial identity...Lopez's conscious play with ethnic and racial classification potentially destabilized gender/race power hierarchies in the United States (62).

In presenting herself in a sexualized manner, surrounded by her difference as Caribbean and Latinx with the location and the commodified agent of Puerto Ricanness—Bad Bunny— she is presenting the Latinx community in a light of being sexually desirable. She is also destabilizing the racial categorization of the United States that is obsessed with a white vs. black binary. Her Latinness has been capitalized upon for mainstream culture, but it has also presented a group that does not fit in one or the other. Latinidad is a mixture of white, black, indigenous, therefore occupying a space outside rigid categories. Despite reinforcing the hypersexual stigma that has followed her since the transition into a sex symbol, she has chosen to put a positive spin on it by openly embracing it, demonstrating that there is not a problem with wanting to be or feeling sexy. She troubles the stereotype by removing the power that controls the way she can present herself and troubles the racial categories that deem to keep those who are different in an oppressed position.

J. Lo's self-objectification is demonstrated in the majority of her music videos. "Dinero" focuses on her bodily features, as does much of her other works. It emphasizes a desire for material items and money which contribute to the materialistic ideal associated with women. The link with materialism and sexualization promotes a vision of women as linked with vanity. A major staple of Jennifer Lopez is her butt, and the sexualization of her body puts emphasis on her curves. The video starts off with her in sexy lingerie while grilling food, complying to the male gaze. She is partaking in a masculine activity but doing so in an exploitative way where her body is the focal point. She is dressed in a sexy black lingerie with thigh high socks and high heels, while also being covered in jewelry. She is in front of a mansion with a pool signifying the wealth she has acquired

with the lyrics explaining how she has made it. She chooses to solely focus on her desire for more capital and not love. She flips the gender script throughout the video as displayed in the poker scene. She is fully dressed, although she continues to display herself in stereotypical scenarios, she reverses the gender script by having the men shirtless and sexualizing themselves thus reclaiming the male gaze. The reversal of the gender script with the reclamation of the male gaze and the objectification of the men continues with the car scene. Typically, in music videos and magazines, women are shown half-naked surrounding cars, posing in erotic ways to entice men into buying these cars because it would make women desire them. While she is dressed provocatively, she takes control of the situation through having the shirtless men surround the car juxtaposing it with the general image that occurs. The gender script brings awareness to the objectification that occurs with women, how inscribed it is in our culture. The entire video plays on the oversexualization of the body. She is dressed provocatively throughout the entirety of the video with moments of her actions being over-exoticized, such as when she was eating the marshmallow. She is also seen walking with an Ostrich with only a white bodysuit on and heels representing not only her wealth as exotic animals tend to be expensive, but it also links to her exotification in mainstream culture. The ostrich is a metaphor for the ways in which ethnic bodies have been put on display; both represent their exotic status in society. The sexualization present in the video marks her gender and sexual performance as linked to her racial/ethnic identification.

The Latina body has a racially marked sexuality that signaled a threat to the body politic—a foreign other that went against the ideals and narrative of white femininity and the cult of domesticity (Mendible, 2007, 8). In becoming a sex symbol, she demonstrated that white standards can no longer exclude the Latina as the most beautiful or sexually attractive group. The slim thick body has long been a part of black and Latina culture, but they were demeaned and ridiculed for

it. The white thin ideal made curvy women seem undesirable. Yet today, slim thick is the new beauty standard. Everyone wants to have a large backside, curves, and people often incite the Kardashians for creating the trend. Their appropriation of black culture and aesthetic repeatedly deems minority features as desirable once a white person has done it. Jennifer Lopez reclaimed this desirability narrative way before the Kardashians with her transition into a sex symbol. She even created a fashion line that specialized in clothing for women of all shapes and sizes as she felt that the voluptuous woman was ignored. J. Lo's sexuality and sex appeal changed the discourse surrounding Latinx bodies converting a stereotype of excess fertility and sexual promiscuity into an empowering notion of self-love. The Latina woman lived outside beauty standards for so long and she brought visibility to this issue. As stated by Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2010),

positive Latina/o media visibility, particularly of queer Latinidad, in an environment of invisibility and hostility once again appears to be a transformative moment with the potential to rupture dominant constructions of Latina/o identity, specifically representations of Latina femininity, Latina heteronormativity, and the Latina/o family (122).

Jennifer Lopez created a positive outlook from a negative stereotype that shamed black and Latinx women for their body shape and femininity. The white construction of the ethnic body as sexually promiscuous, hypersexualized was meant to control and oppress them, but in reaffirming a pride in sex appeal and a femininity that accentuates sexuality allows for control to be regained and remove the stigma of feeling sexy.

Throughout her career, her racial ambiguity has allowed her the opportunity to move through various locations switching between white and black spaces, ultimately creating a pan-ethnic brown space. While she can pass as white in films and embrace black and Latino culture in her music, she can never fully embody both. This racial fluidity between the two dictates the performance of gender and sexuality she exhibits in certain spaces. As stated by Isabel Molina-

Guzmán and Angharad Valdivia (2004), “Lopez is provided an unprecedented space for signification not overtly determined by racial or other physical markers of difference” (215). The introduction of Spanish into her songs and her smooth transition into bilingualism marks her in a locality of difference that frequently Others her. Her performance of gender reflects and promotes an expression that is generalized onto other Latinx people. Her representation conforms to damaging stigma of materialism, excess sexuality, and the reiteration of objectification as a woman’s purpose. While the use of stereotypes can risk reinforcing them, it can also dismantle them breaking pre-existing notions of identities. Through purposeful objectification, women and ethnic people find their freedom from it because in controlling the way someone sees them, it creates a transformation within them, igniting change in how others’ view them to re-evaluate their initial outlook on difference and confront preconceived ideas. Her self-objectification is a form of gaining agency under conditions of oppression and has changed the outlook on ethnic bodies. Before J. Lo, Latinx and black bodies were degraded and mocked, in constant opposition to white beauty ideals.²¹ She reclaimed curves, thickness, and redefined the Latina body from its previous associations with undesirability opening new possibility and visibility to different body types. The Latina body went from being marginalized to exoticized generating new problems and questions for redefinition and reclamation.

²¹ There is a slow shift occurring away from white Eurocentric standards. Although it may remain the dominant beauty standard, there has been strides toward diversity and inclusivity. 2019 marked a year of first in that all the beauty pageant winners were all black women. For the first time in history, Miss USA, Miss Teen USA, Miss America, Miss Universe and Miss International Queen were all black women and Miss International Queen is a black trans woman marking greater inclusion. This shift has marked a change in black women’s desirability in that they are now seen as beautiful. Even better, 3 out of the 5 black women embraced their natural curls and did not fit into oppressive notions of dominant beauty standards that emphasizes and demonstrates a preference for straight hair and light skin.

Chapter 2: Diasporic Citizenship: Cardi B's Performance of Afro-Latinidad
Cardi B's Hip-Hop Feminism

Cardi B has successfully articulated a space for herself within the hip-hop realm, which is a space known for its repression and objectification of women. Belcalis Marlenis Almánzar, commercially known as Cardi B, came into mainstream consciousness in 2015. Of Dominican and Trinidadian descent, she was raised in Highbridge in the South Bronx. Hip hop culture got its start in the same locality, having since grown to the consciousness of mainstream America. Hip-hop remains a space of gender exploitation through this female objectification and female competition, however the latest waves of female rappers are slowly changing the culture. Despite hip-hop being classified as a misogynist space, female artists have managed to break into the scene, carving out their own path. Female rappers, like Cardi B, use the platform to critique and call out what is wrong with hip-hop culture. The hip-hop industry is infamous for its inability to provide equal success to its female counterpart without creating narratives of dispute and drama. Female rappers are often pitted against each other, as evident with Lil Kim and Nicki Minaj, as well as Nicki Minaj and Cardi B. In recent times, Meghan the Stallion is having her come up and many people are trying to claim that Cardi B's time is almost up as if two women cannot both be simultaneously successful in the same realm. The inability for hip-hop to have two thriving female rappers lends itself to the idea that this is a man's domain. As stated in "Is Rap Finally Ready to Embrace its Women?" by Briana Younger, "The genre, celebrated for its ability to document and honor the myriad ways that marginalized and oppressed people negotiate their existence, has tragically failed to provide that same space and enthusiasm for black women." Despite these issues within the hip-hop realm, Cardi B projects a feminism that is linked to her position in this space and uses her platform to change the issues within it.

There is a feminism that occurs within the hip-hop scope; it is one that tries to subvert the misogyny implicit within the field and raise awareness to these issues. Women in hip-hop have the added burden of not only creating a space for themselves, but also demanding the respect that they belong there. They must change the culture that protects toxic masculinity and confront their intersectional experiences within this specific cultural context. As stated by Viola in “Who Needs Hip-Hop Feminism,”

Hip-hop feminists use hip-hop to analyze how race, gender, and socioeconomic status effect the creating and the consuming of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop feminists strive to embrace the contradictions within their lives, like loving hip-hop but recognizing its misogyny, which is important because it starts a conversation about pleasure, sex and what it means to have sexual desires that do not necessarily match up with feminist ideals.

Women have used hip-hop to claim a voice and a story that is often marginalized making it visible. They often have to navigate “what it means to be a young woman in dangerous urban environments; what it means to be a woman who participates in and loves a culture that doesn’t always love you” (Pough, 2007, 90). In the case of Cardi B, growing up in a dangerous urban environment she did what she had to in order to survive, eventually leading her to join a gang at the age of 16. She joined the Bloods, more specifically their subset, the Brims (Weaver, 2018, GQ). While she does not promote it now, she also does not shy away from this past and acknowledges that she was young when she made the decision. She encourages young girls to stay in school, discouraging them from joining any gangs. At the age of 18, her mother kicked her out of the house. After being fired from her job at a local supermarket, she turned to stripping to provide a stable income at the age of 19. Despite her tough upbringing, she does not have any shame regarding her past, openly embracing the barriers faced to get to where she is today. She actually views her decision to become a stripper as one of the more positive choices she’s taken for her life because it saved her from other experiences. She became a stripper in order to escape

poverty and domestic violence, having been in an abusive relationship at the time after being kicked out her mother's house. In addition, stripping was her only way to earn enough money to escape her dire situation and get an education. While stripping, Cardi B became an internet sensation becoming the person we see today. Her owning her truth of what she had to go through is an important articulation of her feminism and why she belongs in this space. She still claims and defends a diasporic community that sometimes criticizes her for being too ratchet or projecting a persona that is harmful to them. She navigates a space and community who attack her realness, her honesty, making claims that she is projecting a bad image of the loud, sex-craved Latina. Cardi remains outspoken about being a Latina within the hip-hop world and her constant defense for why she belongs there. As stated by Juan Flores (1997), "in the present generation Latino youth from all backgrounds played a formative role in the creation of hip-hop, and its inflection toward Latino expression and experience" (191). Her music impacts a multitude of communities including African American, Caribbean, and mainstream U.S culture, but her space within hip-hop constantly needs to be negotiated and reaffirmed because of the invasion of her ethnic identity within a cultivated black space.

Cardi B has to continually defend her blackness to those who question her Afro-Latinidad and her location in the hip-hop world. One of the many arguments that is used against her is her use of the N word. She's had many people call her out for it, but she has clarified in interviews that she defines herself as a black woman, specifically an Afro-Latina woman. Cardi B has been compared to Gina Rodriguez in the discussion of who gets a pass at saying the N word. Gina Rodriguez received major backlash and criticism when she said the N word rapping along to a song on Instagram with many commenting on why Cardi B does not receive the same energy.²²

²² Gina Rodriguez is a completely different case than Cardi B because she is a person that has repeatedly positioned herself outside the discourse of blackness. She's had a couple of instances in where she has Othered herself from the

Cardi B has explicitly stated, "I expect people to understand that just because we're not African-American, we are still black. It's still in our culture. I hate when people try to take my roots from me. Because we know that there's African roots inside of us" (Payne, *Teen Vogue*). This affirmation of her blackness within her Latinidad has been repeatedly questioned because it is not understood by mainstream society. Yet for the record, blackness is not a United States concept. Not only was the Dominican Republic the first colonized country in the Americas, the majority of slaves were imported to the Caribbean and Brazil. Only 20% were sent to the United States and yet blackness has come to be synonymous with the African American experience. Latinas are supposed to sit in this space of racial ambiguity that does not mark them as either, so for those to embrace blackness is seen as dangerous and out of line. As stated by Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2010),

Latinas pose a double threat, sexual and racial, to the dominant popular culture and social and political order of a nation that continues to see itself in terms of a dominant white identity and a black minority...Latinas are also coded as posing a class threat to the middle-class dominant national imaginary of the United States as threatening and inescapably working class (131).

However, not only are they working class, but now many are defining as black leading to a racial demographic imbalance that is dangerous for the dominant group. Latinx and black individuals are often grouped together when discussing poverty, racism, and other experiences within an urban environment, yet there is a continual divide between the two. Within a space of hip-hop that is meant to historicize the black experience, Latinas are not welcome and if they are, it's a precarious

black experience. In conversations regarding blackness, she has always silenced the voices of black people to interject a "What about Latinas" stance that deafly ignores that Black and Latinx experiences are similar, completely disregarding the experiences of her fellow AFRO-Latinxs. While Gina Rodriguez is Puerto Rican, she falls on deaf ears when discussing issues of inequality and racism because she perpetuates her own ideology of colorism that furthers divide the Black and Latinx community rather than unite us. Her comments continually undermine black people and she has made too many anti-black comments to be compared to Cardi B in who gets a pass at a word that is meant to reflect the black experience. There is also the hip-hop culture of New York that further protects and solidifies Cardi B within this space that allows her a pass at the word, which is also extended to Jennifer Lopez to a varying degree.

acceptance validated within their constant reaffirmation of belonging. Cardi B not only has to target misogyny within hip-hop, but also discrimination due to her ethnicity. She uses her platform to acknowledge these discrepancies, bringing to the forefront that her experience should be as valid as any other female rapper in the game.

Hip-hop feminism provides a space of interrogation of multifaceted experiences in regard to racism, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and classism. Despite hip-hop being an open space of articulating experiences of blackness, it still falls victim to norms that produce exclusion and marginalization. That is why hip-hop feminism is essential because it challenges these dominant narratives and values trying to change the culture to be more inclusive. This feminism “produces occasional spaces in which those annihilating norms, those killing ideals of gender and race, are mined, reworked and resignified” (Butler, 1993, 124-125). In regard to the space of hip-hop, women are reimagining a space that is welcoming to them and to people of different sexualities. It is attempting to move away from a culture that protects toxic masculinity and a realm of degrading objectification. Women are validating their experiences within this sexist culture and loving themselves. If women participate within their own objectification, like Cardi B does, she does it on her own term, to regain control of her sexuality. As Viola writes,

An important hip-hop feminist notion is promoting love of one’s self and having a defined, unique sense of self. This stems from a desire to reject respectability politics and the strains that they place on black women in America. Respectability politics were created by black feminists as a strategy to gain respect from white people by presenting themselves as proper, never openly sexual, pious women. And at one point in time, respectability politics did aid in helping to better the lives of black people. But respectability politics also serve as a damaging repressor for women’s sexualities in black communities (*Who Needs Hip-Hop Feminism*).

Women in hip-hop, specifically Cardi B, rejects this respectability politics and takes pride in her sexuality. She finds agency in presenting herself as a sexual object through her complex identity.

Female Empowerment through Sexual and Cultural Identity

Cardi B, whose stage name derives from the Bacardi brand, has a production of people behind her to construct the persona and performance she presents to the public. She rose to international fame through her viral videos on Vine and Instagram. Through her hood persona and comedic comments, fans have praised how refreshingly real she is, her unapologetic attitude to tackling real problems from misogyny to micro-aggressions to sexual agency (*Dazed*). Her Instagram videos made commentary on issues relating to politics, sex, racism, and more. Despite her loud and “ratchet” persona, she has managed to appeal to a mass population of people. Evidently her internet popularity got her cast on season 6 of *Love and Hip-Hop: New York* (2016), a VH1 reality show documenting the lives of a handful of people with varying degrees of tangentiality in the hip-hop scene (Weaver, 2018, GQ). She was considered the show’s breakout star by Jezebel magazine with this role skyrocketing her career into the transnational star she is today. The show chronicled her rise to stardom and after two years she left to pursue a career in music. From 2016 to 2017 she released two mixtapes, *Gangsta Bitch Music Vol. 1 & 2*, however her breakout single that propelled her to commercial success was “Bodak Yellow”²³ which was released in the summer of 2017. Since then, Cardi B’s success has transcended to a global level as she continues to break new barriers, creating history. She had a verse on G-Eazy’s “No Limit”²⁴ followed by a verse on Migos’ “MotorSport”²⁵ within one month of each other. Her second single “Bartier Cardi”²⁶ was

²³ The song was produced by J. White Did It and Laquan Green. It was released on June 16, 2017 by Atlantic Records. It topped the US Billboard Hot 100 for three consecutive weeks, making her the fifth female rapper to ever lead the chart. The music video was shot in Dubai. The song won Single of the Year at the 2017 BET Hip Hop Awards and Favorite Song Rap/Hip Hop Song at the 2018 American Music Awards.

²⁴ Song by American rapper G-Eazy featuring American rappers ASAP Rocky and Cardi B. The song was released through RCA Records on September 8, 2019. This song was G-Eazy’s and ASAP Rocky’s highest charting song, but Cardi B’s second top 5 single. The song became certified triple platinum in the US by RIAA on March 23, 2018.

²⁵ Song by hip hop group Migos featuring Cardi B and Nicki Minaj. It was released on October 27, 2017. It was produced by Murda Beatz and Cubeatz. It reached number six on the US Billboard Hot 100.

²⁶ The song was recorded by Cardi B featuring Atlanta-based rapper 21 Savage. It was released on December 22, 2017 as the second single on her *Invasion of Privacy* album. Before the release, she became the first female rapper to send

released in December along with "La Modelo"²⁷ which is a Spanish collaboration with Puerto Rican and Dominican singer Ozuna that all charted on the Billboard Hot 100 (Weaver, 2018, GQ). "Bodak Yellow" became the first number one hit by a solo female rapper. Cardi B has taken the world by storm by becoming the first rapper—including both men and women—to land three consecutive Top 10 singles in Billboard's Hot 100, along with being the first female rapper to cover Vogue magazine and the first solo woman to win a Grammy for Best Rap Album for *Invasion of Privacy* (Gunn, *Revolt*). Cardi B, while navigating new fame and records, stays true to her Bronx roots and continues to move through uncharted territory, opening a new path for people who look like her.

Her construction of identity as a raw ethnic woman is created through her various experiences and interaction with societal injustice. Intersectionality plays a role in how bodies are constituted, delegating how they can move in the world. Interlocking systems of oppression hinder a persons' ability to navigate the world when their appearance is stereotyped on the factors of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Political theorist Judith Butler (1990) discusses the ways in which the body is politicized and able to appear in public spaces; how agency is governed within a socio-cultural context (*Gender Trouble*). Identity is performed and normalized through a recognition from cultural forces and a representation that takes place to solidify its presence. Cultural institutions regulate which identities exist or not—those who do not conform to their gender, racial or sexual scripts are deemed as not existing, which explains why they struggle to move about in

her first three Billboard Hot 100 to the top 10. The music video premiered on April 2, 2018 and was directed by Petra Collins. The music video received nominations for Best Hip-Hop Video at the 2018 MTV Video Music Awards.

²⁷ The song was released by VP Records on December 22, 2017. Cardi B performs both in English and in Spanish demonstrating her versatility. The music video which was released on December 19, 2017 was directed by Nuno Gomes and filmed in Jamaica.

social space and why there is really no space/place for them. The body is shaped by political forces; it is kept bounded and constituted by different markers of identity. She states,

the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations (Butler, 1999, 127).

Cardi B's construction of Latinidad is demarcated within cultural expectations of a community that demands that she represents them well while simultaneously conforming within narratives of success imposed on female artist by the industry. She performs a femininity that is exoticized and sexualized but subverts norms dictating the behavior of Latinx women through her unfiltered and unapologetic persona. While she risks the promotion and normalization of racial stereotypes, she also breaks free from them when she refuses to conform to the ethnic script prescribed to her by both the community and the industry. She embraces her Afro-Latinidad which is a deviation from the marker of success for Latinas who are able to white-pass, elevated to a higher status than those of black descendants. In addition, she subverts the male gaze through a purposeful objectification that emphasizes a female gaze that turns herself into a subject rather than an object. Lastly, she rejects respectability politics which constantly tries to control and censor the way she presents herself to others. Her performance seeks to gain back the agency that is often taken in order to reach the level of success that she has. She reinforces certain racial and gender scripts, but in doing so also manages to critique these very scripts that dictate the way she can materialize.

Despite her stereotypical performance of hypersexuality, she stresses the importance of sexual agency. Cardi B has always been open about embracing her Caribbean identity and with that the blackness that is often repressed. She is blatantly against anti-blackness and racialized sexism encouraging women to assert their sexuality as they see fit. While she may promote the hypersexual woman of color, she subverts its attempt to control her body. Cardi B takes pride in

her sexuality, as is evident in her lack of clothing along with her explicit reference of the sex she has with her husband, Offset. She continues to discuss her sexuality on Instagram being completely transparent with those that follow and support her. She has no shame in discussing sexuality and embraces changing the taboo regarding sex in society. Women's sexuality has long been repressed and controlled by the demands of patriarchy; Cardi B refuses to silence her voice and desires to fit in. She rebels against the social norms surrounding respectability politics which is when marginalized groups are made to learn that in order to receive better treatment from the dominant group you must behave better; you must be the model minority.²⁸ The industry has always held demands of ethnic women's bodies to stand in for their specific ethnic communities (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2). Minorities often have to represent their community, thus making ethnic bodies having to conform to the stereotypes attributed to them or else they are crossing a dangerous line. Cardi poses a particular danger because of this inability to categorize her into these stereotypes. Those who critique Cardi B are attacking her authenticity, the very persona that appealed her to the masses of people.

She embraces her hood aesthetic and does not compromise her authenticity for mainstream consumption. She actively goes against the people's desire to contain her by not code switching in different environments. People know Cardi B persona from her Instagram videos and her stunt on *Love and Hip Hop*, however critics of Cardi B find fault with her inability to code switch in award shows or interviews. When she first got interviewed by Jimmy Fallon, many were embarrassed or

²⁸ Model minority is defined as a demographic group whose members are perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average. This term is typically relegated to describing Asians and is used as a racial wedge between Asians and other minority groups, i.e. Black and Latinx. This concept is used to support the idea that racism can be overcome by hard work, not recognizing or acknowledging the role racism plays in the continual struggle of minority groups. While this term is mainly linked to upward mobility and socioeconomic status, I use it in a sociocultural context of behavior and norms. I link it to the idea of code switching and the pressure of minority people to conform to a certain standard of etiquette in order to receive approval from the dominant group.

appalled at her demeanor, but she was simply being Cardi.²⁹ Nonetheless, this complete disregard for “proper” presentation is her ultimate appeal. Minority people are constantly policed and surveillance for their action; code switching is what we are taught at a young age in order to navigate the white world in which we merely exist. Code switching is meant to make us appeal to our white counterparts, showing them we deserve the same respect. It means giving up certain colloquialism in the workplace, while also making sure you are not too loud or opinionated. It is a form of silencing the voices of people of color, making us complicit and docile in a space not meant for us; it is a reminder that we must change the way we talk and act in order to fit in into the dominant culture. As stated by Jeannette Diaz in her case study of Cardi B,

Cardi B is problematic because she is disrupting the narrative of what the trajectory of success should look like. She is problematic for the music industry because she has been able to enter and dominate an industry not designed for her without compromising her authenticity. She is problematic because she is a reminder of how the world is continuously attempting to rid the power found within an unapologetic, marginalized identity regardless of how it chooses to exist and navigate within the system.

Cardi B does not shy away from her sexual and cultural identity, she instead capitalizes on it, and she is unapologetic about it. The industry has failed to impose boundaries on her expression, choosing instead to exploit it and maximize her earnings with her appeal of realness.

While the industry tries to commodify Cardi in order to take advantage of her success, they cannot contain her realness and had to emphasize it in order to garner more mass support. As stated by Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2010),

Through the media's commodification of gendered constructions of Latinidad—usually grounded in racialized representations of ethnicity—Latina bodies are disciplined into docility. The global media consumption of Latinas, made possible through the gendering

²⁹ Jimmy Fallon was not prepared to interview a person like Cardi B. Her Bronx rawness left him speechless at times and there was a clear discomfort in the interaction. While he tried to keep the mood light, it often felt awkward as it was evident he did not know how to handle her extravagant personality. Many people came after Cardi B for not being able to present herself differently in interviews, but why should she? She became this incredible superstar because of this persona, and she should not have to change once she is the limelight.

and racialization of Latinidad, depends on the representation of Latinas from diverse national backgrounds as similar and familiar docile bodies (11).

While most Latinas are considered docile because they do not provoke controversy, Cardi B is not that kind of Latina which is why she receives so much condemnation. Her outspokenness, along with her complete disruption of the Latina imagery is considered threatening because she does not conform to the typical Latina; the pride in her Afro-Latinidad along with her loud and bold personality disrupt preconceived notions of what it means to be Latina. The industry wants a performance that does not push buttons and provide controversy; it is a commercial market molding them into this global transnational image to maximize their earnings. Therefore, they fix them into a specific image that always works well, the material girl, that has dominated feminine presentation in the media. While Cardi B does participate in this image construction, she does so on her own terms. She changes the narrative to one of empowerment and deconstructs anyone's attempt to define her and situate her in a specific context. As stated by Nelson Santana in his article, "Cardi B Continues to Break Barriers and Shatter Glass Ceilings,"

she is as real as one can get, meaning that although she controls her own destiny including what she allows to filter to the public, she is someone who provides a lens for the world to see her, including during private or intimate moments.

She does not let the demands of her diasporic community and the industry to define how she presents herself. She contests patriarchal expectations through the subversion of how to present her sexuality; she regains a control and agency that is removed when one is turned into a sexual object. Cardi B inspires people—especially women and girls because she is proof that one does not need to be ashamed about the line of work one is in and shows that one should not be ashamed in feeling sexy (Santana, "Cardi B Continues to Break Barriers and Shatter Glass Ceiling"). One should not be slut-shamed into docility nor should one be ashamed to speak how they want, as

loud as they want. She prides herself in her ethnic and cultural identity that is often repressed to fit into a model of respectability, and she rejects this attempt to contain her.

Performance of Transnational Femininity

Cardi B performs a femininity and Latinidad that is commercially marketed to mainstream culture. Her performance of femininity plays on a *chapiadora* aesthetic in which her songs are constantly referring to money.³⁰ This obsession with money relates to Marilyn Monroe's material girl image that produces the stereotypes of women as vain and very materialistic. This trope of materialism within female artistry extends through generations with various female artist partaking in this archetype. It has been seen with Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Rihanna and others. It is a patriarchal cultural script that transcends national boundaries and identities because it goes from a Caribbean context to mainstream American cultural exploitation; it is the site where Caribbean cultural identity and mainstream industry expectations collide and coincide leading to hypersexual stereotype of ethnic bodies. The trajectory of female artists falling into the material girl aesthetic is imposed onto them by the industry as a marker of success. The commodification of female artistry to fall within the same narrative of emphasizing money/wealth imposes limitations on their creativity, reinforcing damaging stereotypes of women as narcissistic, egocentric, and temptress. However, this trope is not only imposed onto female artists, but in the hip-hop culture in general. Hip-hop culture gets a reputation as being misogynistic and homophobic with much of this narrative being due to the clichés that proliferate through the medium. Hip hop is a realm of fantasy and desire for a culture of people; it envisions success and wealth as the ultimate achievement of the American Dream in the socio-economic context of exclusion of communities of color. Much

³⁰ *Chapiadora* translates to gold digger in English. It is often used for women who use their sexuality in order to receive money and take everything from men. This trope can be linked with virgin vs whore dichotomy where the whore is linked with temptation and materialism.

of the images in hop hip relate to money, drugs, women; these are the holy trinity of the rap genre. The objectification of women is a staple in the hip-hop industry with much of their music videos involving half-naked women shaking their asses surrounded by money, alcohol and/or drugs. These women as video vixens promote an aesthetic of what women's bodies should look like, promoting a sexuality of excessiveness. They have big butts, big breast with small waist and the male gaze eroticizes these body parts, creating the entire music video to mainly focus on these areas. With Cardi B as a woman in hip-hop she continues to play on this trope and capitalizes on it for her own profit. Her raunchy persona is a celebration that is rejecting the passivity of objectification along with middle-class values, and this is where her feminist agency is triggered.

Cardi B also plays a transnational femininity that is linked to her identity as a Caribbean diasporic woman. Her eroticized femininity is exploited for mainstream consumption and plays into the hypersexuality often linked to female artist of color. Sex sells and Cardi more than anyone is aware of this. Cardi's curvaceous body, which is a result of plastic surgery and illegal butt shots that occurred in a basement in Queens, is her money maker. It is what got her into stripping, it is what she emphasizes in much of her videos. Her cleavage is on constant display and she does not miss an opportunity to show off her dancing skills. This objectification of her own body allows her to become successful in a male dominated profession. She plays on stereotypes of black women such as the oversexualized jezebel. The Jezebel was produced in the age of slavery as a way to justify the sexual violence of women of color, specifically the slaves. Today, the hypersexual stereotype is used to demean the sexuality of ethnic women and create a narrative of victim blaming where any sexual harm that befalls them is their fault. When people think of Latina women, they usually associate words like sexy, spicy, curvy, freaky, slutty to them which shows how they are often portrayed as being sex symbols for male pleasure. She plays on this notion in

“Money” when she is put on display for the pleasure of white elites within the video.³¹ Cardi B appears as a statue in a glass case, being gawked at by wealthy attendees; they are just watching her as if she’s this exotic creature. It further relates to the history of Sarah “Saartjie” Baartman, the South African woman who was displayed to be marveled at in 19th-century Europe for her curves and body. Her performance of femininity is a continuation of the stereotype of women of color being hypersexual. She has an eroticized and transnational femininity that is made for white consumption and maximizes on the marker of success in the hip-hop industry known as objectification.

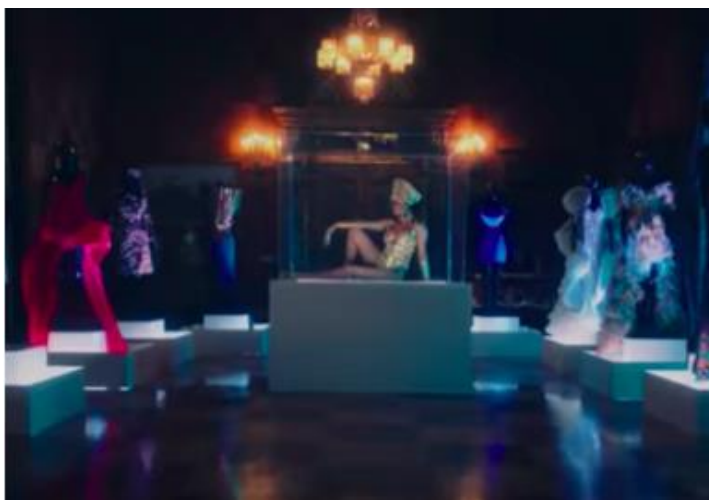


Figure 1: “Money”, video still, Atlantic Records

Her music video “Money” falls within the narrative of success for most hip-hop and female artist which is that of wealth and flamboyance. The presentation of excessive wealth through material items such as clothing and money is a visual achievement in the American imaginary; it

³¹ Music video was released on October 23, 2018 by Atlantic Records. It was produced by J. White Did it and directed by Jora Frantzis. Having a woman direct the video allowed for the feminine gaze to come in; she no longer caters to the male gaze as she included elements of Cardi’s life like a young mother breastfeeding. Cardi’s maternity shoot was also directed by Frantzis and continues the same path as “Money” where she presents nudity but cover the areas that are typically exposed for male pleasure. The photoshoot made sure to cover Cardi’s breast and genital area, so that the emphasis was simply on her pregnant belly. The song has received acclaim and accolades including Best Hip Hop Video at the 2019 BET Hip Hop Awards and the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards.

plays on our ideals of consumerism and capitalism. The music video opens with a woman dancing on an invisible pole which is a nod to her dancer origins. She advocates and continues to support exotic dancers because she understands that this a means of survival for them. She is never ashamed of her past, continuing to acknowledge and embrace it. Cardi plays different characters in this music video with her first appearance being in a black and white dress surrounded by a group of women with open blazers baring their nipples. She inverts the male gaze despite the potential to fall victim to its sexualizing gaze. The nude female body and form in film and media has always been geared towards the breast and ass, but with her inclusion of a breastfeeding mother in couture as her next persona, she removes the sexualization of the breast. The woman is casually presenting herself in the nude form removing the power of the male gaze and presenting it from a female gaze as beautiful and natural; the body part that nourishes the next generations. She also appears as a nude piano player, once again playing with the male gaze because while you see her nude figure, she only teases it, never fully exposes it. In addition, the camera quickly zooms into her face removing the pleasure that would arise from the nude body. There is another scene where she is naked but is covered in money, therefore you cannot see anything but the silhouette of her curves.



Figure 2: "Money", video still, Atlantic Records

She constantly plays with the male gaze because while you may think she is appealing to her male audiences with the visual presentation of a nude woman along with the pole dancing, she is essentially removing its power and sexualization. She demonstrates the nude body while simultaneously hiding it. She subverts it with the incorporation of the female gaze that reclaims the body for objectification. The body is viewed as beautiful subject not sexual object. She reclaims the derogatory views of pole dancing, embracing it to show the beauty in its technique and form. She does this in her last persona as both an audience member in the strip club, but also the actual stripper. Just as the music video subverts the male gaze, she also challenges the white gaze that continually racializes her. Her character as the statue in a glass case challenges the white gaze through its explicit confrontation with white cultures' obsession with exoticism. White people have to confront the discomfort surrounding their history of exploitation of people. As stated by Coco Fusco regarding his "Couple in a Cage" exhibit, "human exhibitions dramatize the colonial unconscious of American society" (Aparicio, 1997, 8). This illicit a direct connection to slavery when people were property that were taken, sold, or displayed. In addition, Cardi B promotes an exotic image with a Cleopatra inspired look in the bank. She appears in a jewel covered bikini in the vault and has a headpiece that samples the ancient Egyptian queen. She is exposing the dominant culture's fixation with exotic people and things, presenting herself as such in both the vault and the glass case. It is also a critique of capitalism for how these exotic pieces are commodified and capitalized upon. Her representation allows for a recognition to occur of her experience as an ethnic woman and how she navigates this identity in US culture.

Judith Butler (1990) states that representation is "both political process that extends visibility and legitimacy to nondominant groups as political subjects & normative function that reveals or distorts what is assumed to be true of the category of nondominant groups" (1).

Recognition puts them in a political space where appearance plays a role in how they are treated as subjects; representation allows for stereotypes to continue to be disseminated and distort the way in which visibility is granted to them. But representation also has the power of resisting stereotypes and reinterpreting it to work in our benefit. Cardi B reiterates sexual norms imposed on colored bodies in an act that can also be seen as subversive. Much like she did in her “Money” video, she parodies the dominant norms of objectifying and sexualizing women to displace it with a female gaze that is often lacking. She maximizes on a femininity that is sexualized playing into the norms of objectification that is typical for women, specifically women of color, but this self-objectification redefines the male gaze, reclaiming their sexuality and their expression under the patriarchy. In her refusal to be passively objectified and engaging in a sexualized persona, she is taking back her agency as a sexual being. Her lyrics also play into this subversion of dominant narrative of women as materialistic because while she discusses money, she reiterates that it is her OWN hard-earned money. Her success does not come from a man which is the general assumption in this narrative.

The chorus of the song emphasizes her material wealth but suggest her success is from her own doing. She writes,

I was born to flex (Yes)
 Diamonds on my neck
 I like boardin' jets, I like mornin' sex (Woo!)
 But nothing in this world that I like more than checks (Money)
 All I really wanna see is the (Money)
 I don't really need the D, I need the (Money)
 All a bad bitch need is the (Money)

Her chorus is powerful because she reverts the normative narrative of women as vain and gold diggers going after men for their money, instead choosing to discuss how she has worked for her success. I was born to flex is an ode to how hard she's worked to get to where she is and while she

flexes all the material items of her success with her reference to boarding jets, it does not change that the money she has is her own. She explicitly states “I don’t really need the D” showing that she does not need a man in order to enjoy the riches in life. This elicits a difference with Marilyn Monroe (“diamonds are a girls’ best friend”)³² and Madonna (“Material Girl”).³³ Cardi B is not expecting a man to provide her the luxury in life, unlike these previous female artists.

Cardi B plays a sexualized femininity that is marketed on a global scale and plays into consumerist ideals. She falls into the tropes of materialism because they play into a fantasy that reinforces the desire for material success and affluence. Her femininity is also exoticized due to the inability to remove her racialized and ethnic identity from her performance. She is a Dominican-Trinidadian American woman whose ability to appear is marked by her ethnic difference. Her performance of femininity is one that will continuously fall within racial stereotypes, producing images of what Latinx and Caribbean bodies are. Her sexuality will always be Othered, therefore it would hold greater implications in the way she presents herself but that does not discourage her from embracing it, nonetheless. She presents this transnational image of sexuality that embraces objectification, changing the narrative of how women’s bodies are viewed. Her music video takes control of the male gaze, turning herself into a sexual subject filled with agency and acceptance, refusing to conform to repressive gender roles and expectations.

³² The song is jazz song by Carol Channing, but the famous version is performed by Marilyn Monroe in the 1953 film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Her character has been followed by detective hired by her fiancé’s father who wants assurance that she is not marrying purely for money. The song is about exploiting men for riches.

³³ Song was recorded for Madonna’s second studio album *Like a Virgin* (1984). It was released on January 23, 1985 by the Sire label as the second single of the album. The lyrics identify with materialism, with Madonna asking for a rich and affluent life, rather than romance and relationships. The music video is a mimicry of Marilyn Monroe’s performance of “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend.” Many critics identify this song as the song that established Madonna as an icon.

The Legacy of Latina Bombshells

Latinidad in mainstream Hollywood has always envisioned a specific type of Latina. As stated by Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2010), "symbolic colonization is the ways in which media practices reproduce dominant norms, values, beliefs, and public understandings about Latinidad as gendered, racialized, foreign, exotic, and consumable" (9). Hollywood and its media practices have long produced images of what Latinas are based purely on stereotypes. Hollywood's first Dominican star was María Montez who opened the doors for many Latinas and came to represent the national image of Dominican Republic.³⁴ She, like many other Latina artist, was unable to break out of stereotypical roles of the "exotic other" assigned to her by Hollywood elites (*Hidden Figuras: María Montez*, 0:28-0:35). Despite her Eurocentric features, her racial ambiguity type-casted her into the alluring foreign woman. Her screen image was that of a hot-blooded Latin seductress, dressed in fanciful costumes and sparkling jewels. She became known as "The Queen of Technicolor" and was Universals "glamour girl" (*Hidden Figuras: María Montez*, 0:18-0:21). The imposition of the exotic onto Latina bodies continues well into today.

Latina women reproduce archetypes of the patriarchal script with the repetition of patterns of performativity that is also a capitalistic script of materialism and sexualization. María Montez, along with Carmen Miranda³⁵, Selena³⁶, Jennifer Lopez, and Cardi B, all fall within the

³⁴ She was a Dominican motion picture actress who gained fame and popularity in the 1940s as an exotic beauty. Over her career, she appeared in 26 films, with 21 being made in North America. Universal made her its "Glamour Girl," however, she eventually got tired of playing the same roles of the exotic sexy woman and wanted to pursue other roles. They did not allow her to, so she sued Universal for \$250,000 and went freelance.

³⁵ A Brazilian samba singer, dancer, and actress, she was nicknamed "The Brazilian Bombshell." She starred in 14 Hollywood films between 1940 and 1953. She is noted for her signature fruit hat outfit that constantly links her to notions of tropicality. She came to resent the stereotypical image she had cultivated and attempted to free herself from it with little success. Nonetheless, her performances popularized Brazilian music and increased public awareness of Latin culture.

³⁶ She was a Mexican American singer and fashion designer, regarded as the "Queen of Tejano Music." Her contributions to music and fashion made her the most celebrated Mexican American entertainers in the 1990s. She was part of the first Latin Boom that occurred in the United States. She ranks amongst the most influential Latin artists of all time and is credited for catapulting a music genre, Tejano music, into the mainstream market. On March 31, 1995, at the age of 23, she was shot and killed by Yolanda Saldívar, her friend and former manager of her Selena Etc.

construction of their identity as exotic. These women are produced as foreign as a way to be exploited for the pleasure of mainstream audience; they are supposed to be commodified and objectified but in a passive way. These are all megastars therefore their persona and performance are an extension of one another. They influence each other which is why their performance repeats the same pattern of engaging with the trope of wealth and sexuality, because this is a script that speaks of success in the industry and mass appeal to mainstream audience. As stated by Frances Aparicio (1997), “Latinization is limited to reformulations of cultural icons by the dominant sector: it is, thus, synonymous with commodification” (3). They incorporate and disseminate this patriarchal capitalist script, created from a male gaze, despite having an agency that can reject to do so. These are all women who conform to the stereotype of the hypersexual Latina because sex and exoticism sells. As stated by Jillian Baez (2018), “When scholars analyze media representations of Latinas across time and space, the most ubiquitous trope they find is that of hypersexuality, Latina’s repeated depicted as sexual objects for a heterosexual gaze” (Baez, 2018, 51). This hypersexuality remains central to their representation in U.S media even today. However, recent Latinas, like Cardi B, have begun to flip the script so that they are embracing their sexuality rather than suppressing it.

Commodification of Black Latinidad

The racial ambiguity that classifies many Latinas puts them in the category of eroticism which exemplifies their hypersexuality. These performances are meeting the standards of the industry and the patriarchal cultural expectations that put Latinas in a different category than white female performers. While white female performers, like Marilyn Monroe, have also fallen victim to tropes of sexuality and being a sex symbol, the hypersexuality of women of color have always

boutiques. As of 2016, Selena has sold 60-65 million albums worldwide, marking her as one of the best-selling female artists in Latin music history.

heightened their risk when existing in certain spaces. Cultural identity cannot be separated from gender, and white women have always had the advantage of being protected by their white counterparts due to the imposition of their “pure womanhood,” which is an advantage that women of color do not have. White women sexuality and womanhood is always protected, that is why the notions of moral decency and honor were placed upon them. The institution of marriage was created to protect the purity of white women (Mosse, 1985). The intersectionality of race and gender hold important implications for women of color and their communities since the stereotypes imposed onto them have damaging effects. Tropes impact our thoughts about women of color which in turn impacts the lives of these young women. Cardi B re-envision this Latinidad through her performance of femininity that reinforces her hypersexuality, while simultaneously subverting the categorizations of her ethnic and cultural identity with her embracement of her African roots. Cardi B performance breaks away from the cultural expectations of the diasporic community and the industry building a path of unapologetic sexual agency and feminism that falls outside the confines of patriarchal expectations and desires.

The discourse of Black Latinos claiming spaces have been consistently denied to them, unless they fall within stereotypical representations of either Latinidad or blackness. Latinx people ability to fluidly pass between the two means they are able to find a place within either space, but they simply cannot combine the both. Black Latinidad lies within notions of difference and does not have a belonging within the United States; Latinidad is not a monolith, but there is an absence of Black Latino representation (Mota, 2020, *Remezcla*). Black Latinos are marginalized within a group that is already silenced and disregarded. The recent identification of Afro-Latinidad has begun to cultivate a space where their existence is being acknowledged. As stated by Jennifer Mota (2020), “In the Latinx community, you have this separation between white Latinx and Afro-Latinx,

and Afro-Latinx not getting proper platforms to have a voice at the table” (*Remezla*). However, this is currently changing with artists like Cardi B and Amara la Negra having the difficult discussions of blackness and Latinidad, educating those about the roots of our culture. Afro-Latinx are embracing/projecting their roots and Amara la Negra provides a great example of the commodification of black Latinidad. She is a dark-skinned Dominican woman whose representation falls in line with black aesthetics with the afro and voluptuous body. Her cultural productions emphasize these aspects of her body, allowing her to appeal to this subgroup that is deemed invisible in the eyes of mainstream society. She provides young girls who look like her with the opportunity to envision themselves on screen and to have their identity recognized. Despite her appearance going against typical representations of Latinidad, she also conforms to stereotypical notions of Latina sexuality. However, like Cardi B, she embraces these stereotypes in order to promote self-love in the way she looks.

Connection to the Diaspora: Performing Afro-Latinidad

Cardi B presents a cultural identity that stems from her diasporic community and mentality. Cardi B represents and projects her identity through a diasporic framework in which she acknowledges she is American but does not hinder the expression of her Afro Dominican and Trinidadian roots. Dominican-Americans and Dominicans from the mainland differ in their identification with blackness and the ways in which they engage with constructions of race, gender, and class. There is a greater education on the roots of our culture and acceptance of blackness that happens in New York that does not happen in the Dominican Republic. There is transnational dynamics that leads to the reaffirmation of our African heritage. As stated by Lorgia García-Peña (2015) in “Translating Blackness: Dominicans Negotiating Race and Belonging,”

more than 10% of the overall Dominican population who move to the United States continues to transform how blackness is imagined, understood and performed by Dominicans at home and abroad (11).

The cultural identity of the diasporic communities allows for a reengagement in the mainland with notions of gender relations, racial/ethnic identity, and class struggles. Her politics of representation is negotiating a racialized identity as a Dominican-Trinidadian American woman, presenting herself as an Afro-Latina. She uses the discourse of blackness as a “political language to articulate her own experiences of racialization, oppression, disenfranchisement and silencing” (García-Peña, 2015, 17). Despite Cardi B fluid immersion into the hip-hop culture, she continues to project her diasporic identity with her collaborations to well-known Latin trap artists. Cardi B openly embraces her *dominicanidad*, with the community openly embracing her as well. While initially starting her rap career in the hip-hop industry, once her platform blew up, she began to do Spanish songs and collaborate with transnational artist like Bad Bunny, Ozuna, and J Balvin. One of her most famous songs, “I Like It”³⁷ pays homage to and anchors her persona in her Latin heritage.

Her performance of sexuality also extends to her Caribbean identity and she further reinforces perceptions of Afro-Latinidad and what that entails. Her song “I Like it” is a direct link to the diaspora here in the States. In this song she is sampling Pete Rodriguez’s famous salsa song of the same name; this is evident with the salsa dance seen throughout the video. The music video opens with a tropical neighborhood, which was the intention of the director Eif Rivera. You have the visual signals of the *piraguas*³⁸, followed by Cardi B wearing bright colorful dresses which returns us to this tropical sensation. Through her colorful and flamboyant wardrobe, she samples Latina Bombshell Carmen Miranda taking us back to this image of tropicalization and exoticism.

³⁷ Released May 25, 2018 through Atlantic Records. Directed by Eif Rivera. Producers include J White Did it, Tainy and Craig Kallman. Tainy produces a lot of Bad Bunny’s music. Filmed in Little Havana in Miami. The single topped the US Billboard Hot 100 becoming Cardi’s second number one which is the most for a female history and a first for both Bad Bunny and J Balvin. The collaboration was a way to garner the audiences of each artist and set them to a higher level of transnational recognition.

³⁸ It is a Puerto Rican shaved ice dessert shaped like a pyramid and is covered with fruit-flavored syrup. They are sold by vendors, known as *piragüeros*, from small colorful pushcarts. These are also seen in New York, Miami, Newark, and places within US mainland that have large populations of Puerto Ricans.

There is a sense of community in these countries which is why you see children and adults all together hanging out in the streets. You also see Bad Bunny smoking hookah which gives a more urban, “street hood” vibe. The music video needed to have a hood feel to make the diasporic connection more authentic. The urban experience within the diaspora emphasizes the racialized identity of Latinx and Caribbean bodies. Dominicans and Puerto Ricans present themselves as Afro-Latinx, using a discourse that embraces African Americans, therefore Afro-Latinidad becomes synonymous with black culture. This is a completely different experience from the old countries where there is “racism without race.”

Black in the Dominican Republic is synonymous with Haitians which has negative connotations due to the tensions between the two nations. Dominicans on the island began an identification with *indigenismo* that erased blackness from the national rhetoric, and this is the same situation in Puerto Rico. As Lorgia García-Peña (2015) writes, “the term ‘black’ became associated with the idea of slavery, and so mixed people of color in Santo Domingo began to imagine themselves as other than black” (13). The diaspora moves away from this repression of blackness because of the specific cultural experience that happens within urban environments. Everyone is oppressed due to their race and class, so Latinos and Blacks share a commonality that is not present within the island. The music video pays respect to this urban dynamic and provides an authentic experience of the community. It also had the Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Colombian flag to represent the nationality of each of the artists, essentially doing a shout out to their communities acknowledging their experience and history. The music video presented a bilingual pan Caribbean aesthetic as the modern depiction of Latinidad, which explains its mainstream appeal. Latinos are the largest minority group explaining the rise in bilingual collaborations with Latin artist in the hip-hop scene. Cardi B, as a Latina in the hip-hop industry,

has provided a link for Latin trap artists to come into the mainstream consciousness and further validate the Caribbean experience within the US.

Cardi B samples iconic artist in several of her music videos continually linking her to her ethnic identity. Much like her song with Bad Bunny, in her “Please Me”³⁹ video with Bruno Mars, her outfit was reminiscent of Selena, who was a famous Chicano artist in the 1990s. Selena was part of the Latin boom that emerged in the 1990s along with Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, and Marc Anthony. Selena was a great inspiration for many young Latina women, but her life was tragically taken away at the age of 23 by an obsessed fan in 1995. Although she was not a Caribbean or diasporic person, Selena was a role model for many young Latinas and continues to hold a great legacy. Selena was well known for the bustier bras which were often covered in jewels with a cropped leather jacket and high waisted pants. Cardi B explicitly states that she was sampling Selena because she looked up to her and often loved her outfits. Therefore, in the music video, Cardi B is seen entering with a purple bustier bra, a cropped purple leather jacket with fringe and high waisted black shorts.

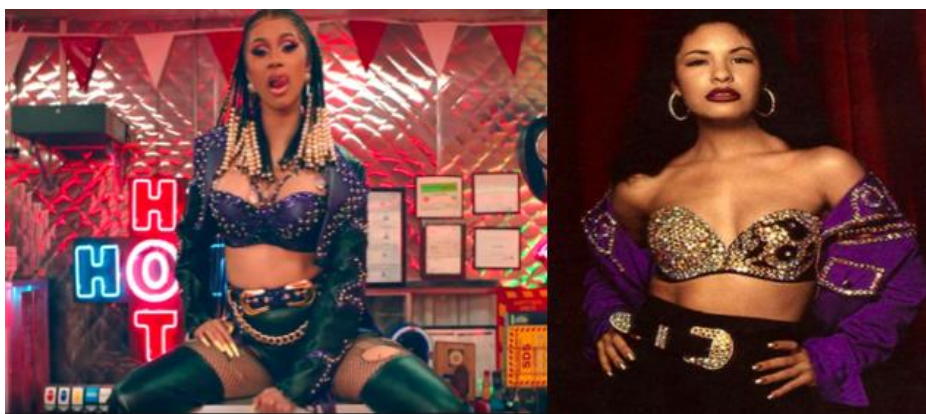


Figure 3: “Please Me”, video still, Atlantic Records

³⁹ The music video was released on March 1, 2019 and was produced by Bruno Mars and The Stereotypes. It was directed by Florent Dechard and Bruno Mars; it was filmed in Los Angeles. This is their second collaboration and the song debuted at number five on the US Billboard Hot 100 making it Cardi B’s seventh top-ten song.

The music video also takes place inside a Mexican taco shop and the locality in Los Angeles, with its high population of Mexicans demonstrates how she is trying to attract this specific market. Cardi B is attempting to show that she is a hybrid Latina that does not only perform Caribbeanness, but also pays her respect to the largest Latino majority in the United States. Cardi B already has the Caribbean audience in her pockets, but she is trying to tap into the big Mexican American market that is the largest Latin American group outside diasporic communities. She is fitting into different molds in order to acquire the most audiences. In addition to providing a visual homage to Selena, she also sampled the legendary Cuban salsa singer, Celia Cruz. Her hairstyle was a tribute to Celia because it was in cornrows with beads at the end which reminds you of a famous picture of a young Celia. This referencing of artist is an intertextuality that sustains the link to our history and reminisces on the past people who have opened the path for Latinx and Caribbean representation today. Even if the person is not explicitly diasporic, there is a unity that needs to occur within the Latin American community and acknowledging important figures in more than one culture signifies this unity. While Cardi B plays on the sexualized Latina image in her referencing of these iconic artist, she provides new identification for younger generalizations. She produces a feminism that pays respect to past important figures while also encouraging the expression of female sexual desire.

Chapter 3: Bad Bunny: Reimagining Latinx Masculinity

Latin Trap music is slowly making its way into the American consciousness as evident with the continuous collaborations and cross overs of Latin and hip-hop artists. There has been a trend in popular media to embrace Latin music, which has been climbing in mainstream radio, beginning in 2017 with the crossover of “Despacito”⁴⁰ and J Balvin’s “Mi Gente”.⁴¹ It further continued, escalating with Cardi B’s “I Like It” in 2018. The years 2018 and 2019 saw a rise in the number of bilingual singles and hits that reached the Billboard charts, making their way into popular culture. With Spanglish collaborations such as DJ Khaled’s “Stay”⁴² and Karol G and Nicki Minaj’s “Tusa,”⁴³ Latin flare has slowly been making its way into hip-hop with Latin trap

⁴⁰ A song by Puerto Rican singer Luis Fonsi featuring Puerto Rican rapper Daddy Yankee. The song and the music video were released on January 12, 2017 by Universal Music Latin and is part of Fonsi’s 2019 studio album *Vida*. The music video consisted of the artists performing the song in La Perla neighborhood of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico and the local bar La Factoría. Canadian singer Justin Bieber released a remix version on April 17, 2017 which helped improve the songs’ chart performance. This song has been widely credited by music journalists as being instrumental in popularizing Spanish-language pop music in the global mainstream market, since from 2017 onwards there has been a worldwide increase of Latin pop music consumption. This song is Fonsi’s and Daddy Yankee’s most successful single to date and for the United States became the first song primarily in Spanish to top the Billboard Hot 100. It became the longest-running number one on the Hot Latin Songs chart and has been ranked among the best Latin songs of all-time as well as one of the most successful Spanish-language tracks in pop music history. In August 2017, the music video became the most-viewed YouTube video of all time after receiving its three billionth view. Jylissa Lopez of *The Washington Post* stated that the success of this song, along with “Mi Gente” is the “beginning of a new Latin crossover era.”

⁴¹ The song was recorded by Colombian singer J Balvin and French singer and producer Willy William. It was released on June 30, 2017 through Scorpio Music and Universal Music Latin. It is a remix of Willy William’s song “Voodoo Song.” Beyoncé released a remixed version on September 28, 2017 that was released as a single by Universal Music Latin, Republic Records, Columbia Records, and Parkwood Entertainment. In the United States, the original version peaked at number 2 on the Hot Latin Songs chart and number 19 on the US Billboard Hot 100. The remix with Beyoncé reached number 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 in the US and reached number one on the Hot Latin Songs chart, becoming Balvin’s fourth number one on the Hot Latin Songs chart. The music video was directed by 36 Grados and has won an MTV VMA. In 2019, *Pitchfork* listed *Mi Gente (Remix)* at number 189 on their greatest songs of the decade list. The song is considered to be about a shared cultural pride that transcends borders and race, connecting all of Latinidad as stated by Matthew Ismael Ruiz from *Pitchfork*.

⁴² A downtempo collaboration between DJ Khaled, Meek Mill, Jeremih, J Balvin and Lil Baby. The artists are pondering why women continue to stay in relationships when their men are being unfaithful. The intro samples Puerto Rican singer La India’s 1994 song “No me conviene” which provides the women perspective of relationships where they are treated poorly. DJ Khaled told XXL magazine that he included J Balvin in the outro to “pay homage to the Latin world.”

⁴³ Song by Colombian reggaeton singer Karol G and Trinidadian-American rapper Nicki Minaj. It was released as a single by Republic Records, Universal Music Latin, and Universal Music Group on November 7, 2019. The song has peaked at number 42 on the US Billboard Hot 100 making it Karol G’s 4th song on the chart. It debuted at number 56 on the *Rolling Stone* Top 100. It reached number one in multiple Spanish-speaking countries. “Tusa” is a Colombian slang for the mixture of heartache and desire for revenge felt by a person when their partner breaks up with them. In the US, the song debuted at number one on the Hot Latin Songs becoming the first song by two lead female artists to

music finding its footing in US culture among Latinx and diasporic communities. Latin trap is a kind of Latin hip-hop that originated in Puerto Rico in the early 2010s, with Bad Bunny being considered one of the pioneers within this genre along with J Balvin, Anuel AA, Bryant Meyers and more (Gonzalez, “Bad Bunny is Latin Music’s Rising Star”). Bad Bunny is considered both a Latin trap artist and Reggaeton singer. Reggaeton also originated in Puerto Rico in the 1990s as a style of music heavily influenced by American hip-hop (Gonzalez, “Bad Bunny is Latin Music’s Rising Star”). Both genres include singing and rapping in Spanish and have crossover into American popular culture through the multiple collaborations with mainstream American artists such as Drake, Cardi B, Nicki Minaj, and even Ed Sheeran. Latin trap has long been visible to Latin and diasporic communities, but it has now found its way into the national imaginary of the dominant culture in the United States as a reminder that Latinx people are part of the fabric that makes this nation whole. Diasporic artists have created a bridge that closes the gap between the dominant group and those that are marginalized to bring our culture into the limelight. Their recognition and contribution provide representation that would otherwise not be granted, with this representation allowing for difference to be accepted and acknowledged as contributing to the national image of a country. As written by Juan Flores (1997), “Any discussion of the ‘American community’ must be inclusive of Latinos and cognizant of the existence of a ‘Latino community’ intrinsic to any historical discourse about U.S. culture” (184). Trap music introduction into the world of hip-hop and its association extended it further into popular culture. This created a space for Latinx people and our cultural production to be validated and appreciated, continuing to mark the existence of our people as important contributors to the traditions and lifestyle of the nation.

debut atop the chart, and also the first song by a female act in the lead role to chart at number one since 2016 when Shakira’s “Chantaje” reached the top.

We can no longer pretend to be a homogenous country that is purely white and middle class. Our existence matters and trap music popularity in mainstream culture is a step in accepting this.

Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, better known by his stage name Bad Bunny, came into the spotlight in 2016 with his first breakout song “Diles”⁴⁴ which was a collaboration with Ozuna, Farruko, Ñengo Flow, and Arcangel. However, his first solo breakthrough single was “Soy Peor”⁴⁵ (2016) which established him in the Latin trap scene. The 25-year-old was born on March 10, 1994, in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. While Bad Bunny is one of the biggest artists in the Latin market, his recognition into mainstream consciousness arrived after his collaboration with Cardi B in “I Like It.” Cardi B is famous both within the diasporic community and the dominant culture, having a fluid ability to appeal to both masses with her unfiltered and real persona. The song brought both Bad Bunny and J Balvin to international recognition as they needed to cross over into the American market.⁴⁶ They were well known artists among the Latinx and Caribbean communities as well as in their respective countries. However, to gain the dominant audience in the US that extended beyond the diasporic communities, they needed to be introduced to artists who have that platform. Bad Bunny has entered the American imaginary because of Cardi B. “I Like It” was released in May of 2018 opening up an array of possibilities for him, such as a collaboration with Puerto Rican salsa singer, Marc Anthony and American actor and rapper Will Smith in “Está Rico,”⁴⁷ which was released on September 28, 2018. Soon after, on October 11, 2018, he released his collaboration

⁴⁴ This song was released on SoundCloud which caught the attention of DJ Luian who signed him to his record, Hear this Music.

⁴⁵ The song established him as a forerunner in the Latin American trap scene and reached number 22 on the Hot Latin Songs chart.

⁴⁶ While Cardi B is the muscle in the American market in this moment for them to crossover, it is a two-fold process for her as well. She is being promoted in Caribbean and global markets where J. Balvin and Bad Bunny have a larger fan base. They connect her to a greater Latin American audience that extends beyond the United States diasporic communities.

⁴⁷ Song is by Nuyorican artist Marc Anthony, American rapper Will Smith, and Bad Bunny. The single was released by Sony Music Latin. The music video was directed by Carlos Pérez.

with Canadian singer and rapper Drake “Mia.”⁴⁸ The following month he released “Te Gusté”⁴⁹ his collaboration with fellow Puerto Rican singer Jennifer Lopez. On December 24, 2018, Bad Bunny released his debut album X100PRE⁵⁰ which hit number one in the Billboards Top Latin Album charts (Gonzalez, “Bad Bunny is Latin Music’s Rising Star”).⁵¹ In addition to all these partnerships, in 2019 he and J Balvin opened up at the MTV Video Music Awards. Irina Gonzalez (2020) states, “The pair's headlining performance was part of an even bigger movement of Latino and Spanish language artists making their mark at the VMAs as the lineup also included Spanish flamenco singer Rosalía and Puerto Rican singer Ozuna” (“Bad Bunny is Latin Music’s Rising Star”). This crossover of Latin music into hegemonic spaces has allowed for greater acknowledgement of the diversity within Latin America. It has produced a space for Latinx people to make their mark on this country, further solidifying their belonging. This was expanded on with Superbowl LIX (February 2020) when two Latina artists, Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, performed at the half time show making it the first time two Latinas co-headlined America’s most watched event (Bruner, *Time Magazine*). They brought Bad Bunny and J Balvin out into the stage continuing to cultivate their success in the States. The Superbowl was held in Miami, one of the

⁴⁸ The song was released through Rimas Entertainment, OVO Sound and Warner Bros. Records as the second single from his debut studio album, X100PRE. The song was produced by DJ Luian and Mambo Kingz. “Mia” peaked at number 5 on the US Billboard Hot 100, becoming Bad Bunny’s first top 10 single on the chart as a lead artist. It topped the charts in Spain, Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Portugal and more. The music video was directed by Fernando Lugo.

⁴⁹ Bad Bunny benefits from being with Jennifer in mainland market just as she does because she gets his younger fanbase around the world. While she helps him cross over into mainstream market, he helps her with the intergenerational crossover. Jennifer Lopez has a long pedigree in the industry and this is explicitly referenced in the song when she states, “que tú puede ser Bad Bunny but I’m Jenny from the...you know my name” [you can be Bad Bunny but I’m Jenny from the... you know my name]. There is a power dynamic at play where she incites her superiority acknowledging that she is so well known to the point where she doesn’t need to clarify her identity. She is asserting her relevance today, regardless if she is using him to reach the younger audiences of today and essentially “restarting” her career.

⁵⁰ The album title translates to “Por Siempre” in Spanish meaning forever.

⁵¹ Soon after releasing this album, he left DJ Luian’s label Hear This Music revealing on an Instagram live stream that he was never allowed to make an album and confessed that he actually produced his music by himself. He soon joined Rimas Entertainment after leaving Hear This Music and released his album through them.

U.S.'s most diverse cities with a population that's over 75% Hispanic or Latino (Bruner, *Time Magazine*). This was a very historic event for all Latin American people despite the backlash and criticism it has received.

This second Latin boom that is currently occurring holds immense weight for Latinx and Caribbean people in regard to who is representing them and in what ways. Bad Bunny is developing a space that accepts various identifications, creating a more inclusive place despite the misogyny and toxic masculinity that surrounds him. As stated by Bianca Richards (2019), "Many consider his approach to music and fashion to be "bold" and "different" as he challenges the rules of masculinity within a market that is engrained in machismo culture" ("Bad Bunny Explosive Year of Collaborations"). His defiance to stay within this patriarchal script is a recent development as his initial entrance into the trap world was marred with stereotypical qualities of toxic masculinity. His lyrics, the way he regarded women, was from the perspective of the male gaze which always comes with the dangers of removing a woman's subjectivity. Bad Bunny today presents a non-binary masculinity that participates in social activism to bring awareness to societal issues that are dominant under a patriarchal and capitalist state.

From Hypermasculine to Queer: Bad Bunny's Transformation in Persona

While Bad Bunny is now regarded as a sensible fluid artist due to his gender-variant presentation, this was not always the case. He completely transformed into a different masculinity in less than a year. He is no longer presenting a trap macho image but has rather relaxed into someone that has no hypermasculine anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality. He is not a fan of gender norms or the machismo that is often prevalent in Latinx culture. While he continues to play into the cultural scripts about wealth in the trap genre, he filters it from a non-normative masculinity that allows for different expressions and identities to find a place in a space that is

regarded as homophobic and filled with toxic masculinity as the hip-hop industry. The trap genre is blurring national identities, therefore creating the close relation between American hip-hop and Latin trap. His transformation is evident in his music video and the lyrics of his songs. His first breakout single “Soy Peor,” is essentially a breakup song that falls very much in line with the “macho” attitude most men in patriarchal society assume following a breakup. The song discusses a woman that left him and his nonchalant attitude regarding the end of the relationship; he is convincing himself that he is better off without her. He begins with saying “*No me vuelvo a enamorar*” (I will not fall in love again) and continues on with the chorus that states:

Sigue tu camino que sin ti me va mejor
 [Go your own way that without you I’m doing better]
Ahora tengo a otras que me lo hacen mejor
 [Now I have others who do it better]
Si antes yo era un hijueputa ahora soy peor
 [If before I was a son of bitch, now I’m worse,]
Ahora soy peor, ahora soy peor por ti
 [Now I’m worse, now I’m worse because of you]

This song is essentially a fuck you to the woman that broke his heart, falling within a very hypermasculine attitude of not projecting that he is heartbroken. It is a way to mask his pain through violent objection, reverting back to a language and position that degrades women to downplay any feelings he had for her making it seem as though he is unbothered. The song continues along this path when he states that he celebrates that they are not together, as she is no longer around to question him about all the women that are on his phone. In the music video he is surrounded by different women in sexy bodysuits and lingerie. They dance around him playing within the same aesthetic and pattern of how men who get out of relationships typically go out and sleep with women to show that their masculinity is not shaken by the end of a relationship. The ideology of sleeping with multiple women to validate their masculinity is at play here, and it intensifies further as the lyrics become more targeted. It is a way to diminish the sentiment and

love that he once had, going back to this patriarchal notion of not demonstrating emotion such as pain, sadness, and loss. Their action of sleeping with an array of women is a cover up for their emotional state, but it is one that degrades women, viewing them as sex objects. It is a degrading synecdoche of turning *todos* (all) into a part—*culos* (ass)—to refer to the women he has in his contact list on the phone. He discusses his happiness at being single again and writes,

ahora hago todo lo que quiero (yeh)
 [Now I can do whatever I want]
Solo pienso en mí primero, yeh (woo)
 [Only think about myself first]
Tirando billete' adentro del putero
 [Throwing bills inside the strip club]
Pal' carajo el amor verdadero, yo solo pienso en hacer dinero
 [Fuck true love, I just think about making money]
Baby lo nuestro ya descansa en paz
 [Baby ours is already resting in peace]
Me importa un carajo con quién te vas
 [I don't give a fuck who you're with]
Dile a tu mai que ya no me hace falta
 [Tell your mother I no longer miss her]
Que ahora tengo suegras de más (woo)
 [That now I have plenty of mother in laws]
Tengo la blanquita que me hace lap dance
 [I have the blond that gives me lap dances]
La rockerita que se lo meto to' y Vans (woo)
 [The rocker that I give it all to and Vans]
Las prietas, las rubias, modelos y eso sin contar todas las fans
 [The black girls, the blondes, the models and that's without counting all the fans]

He mentions all the women he has to flaunt how much he does not care, in a perfect display of toxic masculinity. However, as he sings these lines, there is no pleasure and enjoyment in his facial expressions; it's almost like he is numb. This can be read as a critique to the socially imposed hypermasculinity that is not bringing him enjoyment. Toxic masculinity states that he should boast about all the women, that it would bring him satisfaction, however what it's really doing is making him suppress his feelings. He is playing into the idea that you are a macho man due to the number of women you sleep with, but he does not seem to be content in this participation. By listing all

the women he has, he is trying to diminish his ex-girlfriend effect on him by degrading her as just another sex object to him. He is removing her agency by limiting her to another piece of ass that he can easily attain from other women. This song is very pessimistic towards love and sexist towards females. In the video, he is seen burning a rose which is a universal symbol for love. In addition, at the start of the video, there is a figure tied and bounded that is shoved in the back of the truck. It has a bag over its head with an X drawn on the eyes and a sad face over the lips. This figure represents a muñeco [doll] that has been kidnapped. In the line where Bad Bunny is looking at the figure in the trunk, he says,

Salí jodío' la última vez que en alguien yo confié
 [I got screwed the last time I trusted someone]
 Me compré una forty y a cupido se la vacié
 [I bought a forty and on cupid I emptied it]

Bad Bunny is remarking on a violent imagery where he discusses murdering Cupid because of this failed attempt at love. He is saying this the same instance he is viewing the figure trapped in the trunk. The figure of the doll is representative of a man without agency. Later in the video, the kidnapped doll is shown to be Bad Bunny himself; therefore, the doll represents the old Bad Bunny that conformed to these notions of hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity is what made him lose his relationship and broke his heart, although he attempts to put the blame on the woman. In the scene, where the rose is burning, he is reiterating the line of how he would never fall in love again, but the imagery is uncomfortably verging on the threat of gender violence as he addressing her and is repeatedly “pointing a gun” with his fingers which is a symbolic murder of her and the idea of love. In general, the entirety of the song is a major fuck you to love and in addition, he is blowing off all women because of one that broke his heart. As a pioneer in this new up and coming genre of music, he began along the same path that promotes toxic masculinity and misogyny. He disparages women in the lyrics and the music video by sexualizing and objectifying them,

promoting a view of women as objects. This trend continues for a while longer in some of these other collaborations such as “Te Boté”⁵² and his collaboration in Cardi B’s “I Like It”.

The start of Bad Bunny’s career was heavily influenced with misogynistic tones and emphasized the male gaze. Hegemonic toxic masculinity has been positioned as the norm and is pervasive in all cultures and societies. It enforces certain behaviors operating as the “gender police,” therefore any non-normative performance of masculinity is thus ridiculed and effectively suppressed. Behavioral norms of hegemonic masculinity are often regarded as universal thus legitimizing/normalizing certain forms of masculinity and marginalizes others, such as gay men, ethnic minorities and more (Nurse, 2004, 6). In “Masculinities in Transition: Gender and Global Problematique” Keith Nurse (2004) writes, “Masculinism operates as an instrument of disciplinary power through its surveillance, hierarchization, categorization, and normalization of gender and global relations” (7). Toxic masculinity is so pervasive that men cannot help but continue to reproduce these dangerous viewpoints and notions that essentially become a cycle in oppressing women. An aspect of this toxic masculinity is misogyny, as well as the sexualization and objectification of women. Bad Bunny’s sexualization of women’s body is a trope that exist in both hip-hop and the trap realm. While he has changed his image over time, his verse in “I Like It” illustrates the objectification that he would partake in. He writes,

Me gustan boricuas, me gustan cubanas
 [I like Puerto Ricans, I like Cubans]
 Me gusta el acento de las colombianas (¿qué hubo pues?)
 [I like the accents of the Colombians]
 Cómo mueve el culo la dominicana (¿qué lo que?)
 [How dominicans move their ass]
 Lo rico que me chingan las venezolanas (woo!)

⁵² The song is originally by Puerto Rican rappers Nio García, Darell, and Casper Mágico and it was released by Flow La Movie Inc. as a single on December 1, 2017. On April 13, 2018, American artist Nicky Jam, Bad Bunny, and Ozuna did a remixed version that was released as a single. The remix was produced by Puerto Rican producers Young Mvrtino, Kronix Magical, and Shorty Complete. The music video premiered on April 11, 2018 on YouTube and as of December 2019, it is one of the 50 most-viewed videos with more than 2 billion views.

[How good the Venezuelans fuck me]

This line overtly refers to these women purely as sexual beings. While he states his preference for Cuban and Puerto Rican, he accentuates the ass of the Dominican woman and how good Venezuelans are in bed. When they performed this song at the Superbowl they completely sanitized this part opting not to sing it, but rather went into Shakira's song "Chantaje"⁵³ mixed with Bad Bunny's latest single "Callaíta."⁵⁴ They were performing a melody so "I Like It" was cut before moving into the others and the same occurred with "Callaíta." In the performed version of "Callaíta" at the Superbowl, he completely changes the line "Pero por sexo es atrevida" which translates to "but for sex she is adventurous" and censored out the sex part. He is remodeling his image in order to disengage from the heteronormative macho man that limits a woman's worth to her sexuality. His song has taken a different style when discussing women. While he continues to discuss sexuality, he no longer does so in an objectifying and demeaning manner. His newest song with Sech, "Ignorantes,"⁵⁵ discusses a breakup and is less bitter than his previous songs. Rather than denying his feelings for the woman, he questions why they cannot make the relationship work when they are still in love with one another. He admits they argued and that he misses her. He

⁵³ The song is by Colombian singer Shakira along with fellow Colombian singer Maluma. The song was released on October 8, 2016 as a single from her eleventh studio album *El Dorado* by Ace Entertainment. It is a pop and reggaeton song. The song is considered a battle of the sexes as the lyrics indicate that the male protagonist is not sure where he stands with his lover and the female protagonist does not want to clear things up. The song was nominated for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Urban Fusion Performance at the 18th Latin Grammy Awards.

⁵⁴ Song by Bad Bunny featuring producer Tainy and it has samples from Zion's song "Alócate." It was released as a single on May 31, 2019 by Rimas Entertainment. The music video was directed by Kacho López Mari and produced by Puerto Rican production company, Filmes Zapatero. In the video, Bad Bunny is talking about a girl who despite being seemingly shy and quiet, she lives a life free of inhibitions and hesitations, both in terms of herself and of people who criticize her.

⁵⁵ The song is a collaboration with Panamanian singer Sech, and it is a *reggaetón romántico*, a single released on February 14, 2020 as part of his second album *YHLQMDLG*. The song was produced by Panamanian producer Dímelo Flow. The song focuses on a failed relationship, but they gloss over the fights and choose to dwell on the good times. It celebrates the relationship despite them no longer being together and there is an understanding of why it ended. The music video was directed portray same sex couples speaking to Bad Bunny's push to redefine hypersexuality in *urbano* music, embracing LGBTQ representation.

admits to his flaws, which is a complete switch up from his first single “Soy Peor.” He listed all the possible reasons for why the relationship ended bearing much of the responsibility. He writes,

no sé si fue la distancia
 [I don't know if it was cause of the distance]
 O tal vez culpa de mi ignorancia
 [Or the fault of my ignorance]
 No sé si fue por mi inmadurez
 [I don't know if it was cause of my immaturity]
 Que mi nena no quiere volver
 [That my girl does not want to come back to me]
 Quizá necesitaba espacio
 [Maybe she needed space]

This acknowledgement of his role in the end of the relationship demonstrates a shift in how he regards women and relationships. His previous songs masked the pain while in this one he openly engages with it. This goes against the masculine narrative of men not being able to express emotion. It is a self-reflection that does not embrace the troublesome aspects that led to the collapse; it discusses a failed relationship without any blame being put on the woman. It demonstrates an immense growth from where he started. X100PRE is his departure from that hypermasculine persona. The switching of labels from Hear This Music to Rimas Entertainment at the same time that he is crossing over and cultivating this new persona demonstrates how Hear This Music productions imposed his initial heteronormative presentation. He left the record because they were not giving him agency; not allowing him to produce the album or cultivate his own artistic persona. With Rimas Entertainment he was given the freedom of expression to be his true self. He sanitized his appearance as he crossed over because it does not hurt him, especially in the time of the #METOO movement. He is cleaning it up in a time where hypermasculinity is being targeted for its oppressive powers and trying to redefine itself.

This recent sanitizing of his persona with the censoring of “I Like It” at the Superbowl and this song with Sech are just recent efforts of reframing his artistic persona. The transformation is

also evident with his other songs and videos that were released after he reached international success. His song “Solo De Mí”⁵⁶ discusses a woman reclaiming herself after being a victim of domestic abuse with the music video being a part of a campaign against domestic violence. This is the beginning of his remodeling as a man that respects women as he promotes awareness to the worldwide issue of gender violence. The music video opens up with a woman on a stage lip singing to the song. S/he⁵⁷ is wearing an open blazer with nothing but a bra underneath and as she sings, s/he is getting abused by an imaginary figure we cannot see. The first incident of violence occurs when s/he says “no me vuelvas a decir bebé / yo no soy tuyo ni de nadie / yo soy solo de mí” [don’t call me baby again, I’m not yours or anyone’s I’m mine alone], and that is when s/he gets slapped. Her head gesture lets us know it was a slap as well as when s/he turns back to the camera with red bruising on her cheeks. The second incident occurs after s/he sings, “Por eso ni te amo ni te odio” [for that I neither love you or hate you], after s/he stated that they ruined the relationship and the end of it did not break her heart.⁵⁸ S/he notably puts the blame on them claiming “lo nuestro ya se murió / lo siento si te dolió / no fui yo que decidió / fuiste tu que lo jodió” [our love is dead, I’m sorry if it hurt you, I wasn’t the one who decided, you were the one who ruined it]. S/he is not showing remorse for the breakup, rather letting them know that they were the problem. In her stating s/he neither loves nor hates them, it offended the person as this was the moment where it

⁵⁶ “Solo de Mí” is a reggaeton and Latin trap song released through Rimas Entertainment on December 14, 2018. It was released as one of the singles from his debut album X100PRE. The video is a woman lip-syncing the song while being abused.

⁵⁷ As I refuse to impose a gender to the imaginary figure, when referring to the woman I use s/he because I am acknowledging that while she is taking center stage in the discussion of domestic violence, a man (Bad Bunny) is still the one singing the lyrics. It is a way to have the conversation to include both; gender violence is not one-sided. Women can be perpetrators of domestic violence just as easily as a man can. The recognition of Bad Bunny role in producing the lyrics allows the lyrics to be interpreted to all people regardless of gender identification.

⁵⁸ When referring to the imaginary figure, I use the pronouns they/them in order to not gender the person. While many tend to view gender violence from a heteronormative stance, I refuse to interpret it in a heterosexual context. Men are not the only abusers in an intimate relationship with women and while the video may be suggestive that the figure is a man, I want to extend the discussion of domestic violence to non-normative relationships. While the video is a campaign to end violence against women, it does not need to remain in a purely heterosexual domain.

punches her because s/he appears with a black eye. S/he continues to sing, and the final act of violence occurs when s/he states, “Que me quisiste te lo agradezco / pero no te pertenezco” [You loved me and I appreciate it, but I do not belong to you]. This is seemingly the final straw as s/he receives an uppercut that ends in a bloody nose.



Figure 1: “Solo De Mí,” video still, Rimas Entertainment

S/he is ending the relationship and getting hit until s/he finally pushes the figure away not allowing them to lay another hand on her. This is the moment in which s/he reclaims her power, finally stating that enough is enough. When s/he removes her hand that is covering her face, s/he is no longer bruised and this time s/he now sings the words proudly; there is a sense of happiness and relief of finally being free of this violent cycle. A strong woman is reborn, and s/he praises that s/he does not belong to them or anyone else, finding her strength in those words; it implies that s/he would never again stand to be abused by another person. The scene then quickly switches to her in a club with Bad Bunny; s/he is celebrating this newfound strength with him. S/he is demonstrating that s/he is doing fine without her ex and is at a much better place. This music video was a shift in Bad Bunny’s music and persona as it began his slow change into critiquing gender

norms, becoming an activist in areas that are of importance to him. His eclectic style and personality are shown here, and this is one of the videos that has moved him away from the hypermasculine persona he initially presented at the start of his career. Bad Bunny has no qualms about putting women center stage, so having a female actor lip-synch the song produces a gender-bending nature that is further emphasized in his other music video, “Caro.”

Capitalist Script and Gender Performance in “Caro”

The next video that continues to push boundaries is “Caro,”⁵⁹ with its disruption of gender norms and its social critique of the capitalist script that is prevalent in the trap world. This was the song and music video that completely altered his persona setting in stone his non-binary representation. The music video for “Caro” disrupts both the gender and capitalist script promoting a dismantling of these categories that keeps people oppressed. The translation of *Caro* has two meanings. One is expensive while the other means costly, as in to “pay dearly or a high price for something,” and it is a reference to the idea that he’s finally made it. Capitalism dictates that with hard work and competition anyone can climb the social economic ladder not taking into account various factors such as race, class, gender that produce barriers to achieving this ideology. There is a facetious defense of exclusion that occurs within the ideology of capitalism which is why the “American Dream” seems to only be possible for white people. The mainstream values of the American Dream do not envision minorities within its world. Communities of color have been excluded from this ideology, so this fantasy in the videos are their way of entering without asking permission, but it also flips the script because it exaggerates their desire for material gain.

⁵⁹ The song was released through Rimas Entertainment, OVO Sound, and Warner Bros. Records on December 24, 2018. Song features vocals from Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin. This was the second single released from his X100PRE album. The music video was released on January 23, 2019 and has 150 million views on YouTube. The song was produced by Tainy and La Paciencia.

There is a hip-hop obsession with wealth that also contains an ironic innuendo about capitalism. Communities of color in trap and hip-hop overly express their affluence once they have acquired it, which goes against the presentation of rich white people as they do not behave in that manner. This trope, rooted in hip-hop culture, got its start in the 1980s in the time of Reagan and the Yuppies. It was a desire by minority artists to be included in that world of excess and wealth that was decadent as a way of claiming their citizenship and inclusion in a capitalist society. They incorporated “hood” aesthetics, but they were a reflection of the capitalist culture in the 1980s. White people engaged in this culture of capitalism that was not discreet or in good taste; the Wall Street culture was hypermasculine and crass as they only focused on accumulating wealth, often at the expense of others. The white community were just as materialistic, flaunting their affluent lifestyle, however, the aesthetic mainly became associated with hip-hop culture because it was mass produced in a small space. The luxury cars, private planes, expensive bottles, and the dozens of girls to spend their cash on are all archetypes in the hip-hop presentation of success. This excess of wealth seems to only be a trope for those who did not grow up with it; there is a discretion amongst rich white folks that is not taught to people of color once they have made it into the same social class. The idea of decency that shows up in respectability politics does not only extend to sexuality but also presentation. While rich white people also engaged in the same desire to parade their possessions as people of color do, they did so in a less flamboyant manner that it seemed as though they do not engage in that behavior. The trope of richness, throwing money in the air, exist within the cultural space of hip-hop that extends into Latin trap. This obsession with capital and physical possessions and their demonstration of it is their way to show the dominant culture that they are also able to reach that level of success despite all the barriers put in place to keep them out. People of color desire to show off stems from the capitalist exclusion of not envisioning

themselves within this social class. They engage in different behaviors once they reach this economic status because they are aware that they are “intruding” in a world and space that would never truly be theirs, but they are not apologizing for their existence within this desired space. Bad Bunny engages with this script of materialism in his “Caro” video.

The song is basically the epitome of the American Dream. It discusses coming from nothing and finally making it with all the wealth that he has accumulated. He exhibits this prosperity knowing that he has worked hard to get it. He opens up the song saying,

me ven y me preguntan por qué visto caro,
 [They see me and ask me why I dress expensive]
 ¿tú no ves que yo soy caro?
 [Can't you see I'm expensive]
 De lejos se nota que mi flow es caro”
 [From far you can tell my flow is expensive]

This first line opens up the song and already he is acknowledging the exclusion within the imagery of richness. By pointing out that people see him and question his ability to afford his style, he is recognizing his difference in a world that is purely viewed as white middle class, showing how people of color are excluded from this capitalist opulence. They would always be viewed as not belonging to this particular space. He counteracts the shock of his existence in this space with the next line when he jokes, “Can’t you see I’m expensive.” He is not taking offense to people’s shock because he is aware of the dynamics at play. He acknowledges that he was not born into this world and had to fight his way into it when he writes,

Antes mami decía: ‘Está to' caro’
 [Before my mom would say: That’s too expensive]
 Eso' tiempo' se acabaron
 [Those times have ended]

He brings his past and his struggles to light in order to situate himself as Other in this space to show he had to force his way into this coveted world; it was not simply given to him. For people

raised in poverty, the American Dream is their way out, but for many it is also a fantasy. These music videos that emphasize luxury are an escape from reality; it's the consumption of the fallacy of the American Dream. Much of the people consuming these music videos are lower middle class and working class. They are the ones holding onto hope that they can one day reach that level of success and seeing people that look like them flaunting all this wealth and prestige provides hope.

Hip-hop and Latin trap music videos today are similar to the drag balls in New York City in the 1980s and 1990s. They provided a way for people to envision and participate in the appropriation of a reality not guaranteed to them. The balls stemmed from a desire to achieve the coveted dream and these music videos create the same effect of appealing to this fantasy. As stated by Butler (1993), "pageantry represents a life of pleasurable fantasy, and the lives outside the drag ball are the painful 'reality' that the pageantry seeks phantasmatically to overcome" (136). She further writes,

This [the balls] is not an appropriation of dominant culture in order to remain subordinated by its terms, but an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake—and sometimes succeed (Butler, 1993, 137).

Just as the drag balls were to reconfigure the narrative and insert themselves into the space of hegemonic white culture, the music videos in hip-hop and Latin trap are inserting these marginalized subjects into the visual representation of the ideal upper middle class. The aesthetic behind the capitalist script in music videos are bringing to light these communities that have been left behind by the "American Dream." The drag balls created a space for the poor black and Latinx queer community to live a fantasy where they can enjoy the riches in life. To be real meant to pass for a woman, a man, a rich person, and more. It is a way to experience privileges that have been denied to them because of their intersectional identities. It fantasized being real in the white world as one of the privileges of whiteness is economic status and prestige. The "Caro" video allows

these communities to live out that fantasy. The trope of affluence in the hip-hop and Latin trap industry is reproducing the same outlet the drag balls did. It is providing the ability to imagine and fantasize this life of success and material wealth as possible to achieve. This trope survives in this cultural space to make their existence a reality. As stated by Butler (1993), “repetition works at once to legitimate and delegitimize the realness norms by which it is produced” (131). The repetition of the capitalist script within the cultural space of hip-hop and Latin trap that has been delegated to marginalized communities is using its platform to delegitimize the notion of the American dream, dismantling capitalism as the savior from poverty and inequality, seeking to present it as its very cause of inequality and oppression.

In the “Caro” music video, Bad Bunny plays with this capitalist script of a luxury lifestyle with the inclusion of archetypal consumerist behavior always reproduced in these cultural productions. He plays with the stereotypes of presenting luxury cars, and his female persona, Puerto Rican model Jazmyne Joy, is seen flexing on the hood of a Ferrari convertible (Villa, *MTV*). Moreover, in the scene right before Bad Bunny replaces Joy as comes back into center stage, there is pause as the group of men surround the car and Bad Bunny queers this communal space because it is not the typical “boys in the hood” presentation. Typically, the trope establishes men as gathering together admiring a car. The car is an important symbol of masculinity. This product placement (gold jewelry, cars) are notions of hypermasculinity in ethnic communities to compensate for white subjugation. It tweaks the script through the inclusion of a diverse group of “men,” but also the color scheme that engulfs them. The luxury car is not in the traditional colors of black or red, but rather is a soft pastel turquoise and is placed directly in front of the pink pastel houses. He plays with the tropical color scheme of blue and pink pastels that are representative of Caribbean colors. It queers the gathering around the car with the female model performing in drag

the non-binary masculinity of Bad Bunny. There was also an instant where the pixilation begins to act up which is a digital metaphor for the blurring of identity. Men are always the ones surrounding the car, driving the car, establishing it as a man's domain, and this is the product placement aimed at viewers. It allocates which items they should look forward to acquiring; music videos function as consumerist props that market specific brands and items. It is a lavish script in capitalism that is emphasized and exaggerated for people of color, a consumption.

Product placement means marketability, therefore bringing these marginalized communities to the forefront in these cultural production means they are feeding into a market that desires to see the aesthetic in the videos as a reality for themselves. The fantasy is produced for them and consumed by them as representation continues to bring their experiences and struggles to light. In addition to the luxury car, his fashion style is another extravagance that many people in underserved communities cannot afford. Despite living in poverty, many in communities of color always manage to get their hand on name brand items as a way to flex and detach themselves from the reality of their conditions. Moreover, consumption is understood as citizenship/belonging in a neoliberal social economy. Fashion is a material item that can express affluence, and this was evident in the first line of the song. The logo of the name brand Supreme was seen at the start of the video and despite not seeing other explicit logos, we can assume the clothes he wears gears more towards the expensive side, again signaling prosperity. This script of opulence, along with the gender dynamics at play, creates a music video that critiques the status quo of both capitalism and the social category of gender.



Figure 2: “Caro,” video still, Rimas Entertainment

Not only does this song fall within the cultural and capitalist script of working hard to reach success, but it also plays with gender performance and the idea of gender as a social construct. The music video opens with the image of a giant pink house and inside Bad Bunny is getting his nails painted black. The décor of the house produces a “feminine” aesthetic with the theme of pink continuing to be seen with the mini tv, curtains, fluffy pillows, and the carpet. The aesthetic of the house almost reminds you of a life-size Barbie house and he is playing with this gendered color demonstrating the ways in which concepts linked to gender are produced. He is reclaiming pink as not just a woman’s color but a color that can be embraced by either gender. As the video continues, almost immediately after showing Bad Bunny, he switches into his alter ego, Jazmyne Joy, who presents an androgynous identification. She is dressed exactly like him and proceeds to lip synch the song. Having a woman play him disrupts the gender binaries and demonstrates the fluidity of gender and the myriad of ways that is it a performance. As Butler (1990) writes “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). In producing a woman to represent him, he is dismantling the notions that men and women are different and shows how gender only works through performative actions;

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (Butler 1990).

Gender is only naturalized through mannerisms, sartorial codes, and the way people perceive you. This music video was all about *performing gender* with the female model portraying Bad Bunny as part of the representation, it is one that critiques and disrupts gender norms; it subverts the notion that gender is natural and blurs the line of rigid norms that seek to uphold this idea of naturalness.

Joy's performance as Bad Bunny can be interpreted as a form of drag that exaggerates male mannerisms and show the unstableness of the categories of masculinity and femininity. As declared by Butler (1993), "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced" (125). Drag in this context is the positionality of the woman as his alter ego; she *is* him for the sake of the video. She dresses in the same way and overemphasizes her actions to conform to his movements as a man. Despite the clothing being androgynous, it is still a reminder of who she is meant to be. It also brings us back to Bad Bunny's own presentation as a non-binary person. Also, as in the "Solo De Mí" music video, to have a woman, center stage, performing him, symbolically "decenters" or contests normative masculinity's roles of authority and power. The invasion of queerness in his performance of a traditional Puerto Rican man disrupts notions of Latinx and Caribbean masculinities, along with demonstrating the instability of the gender binaries with Joy's easy manipulation of Bad Bunny's mannerisms and style. The fluidity and naturalness of this imitation is subversive in challenging the categories of gender that are meant to be rigid and stable. In addition, Butler (1993) states,

drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes (125).

Drag both incites violence and opposes it, and Joy's ability to act just like Bad Bunny and his preference for painting his nails and wearing androgynous clothing are all viewed as transgressions towards the masculine figure. It is located outside the confines of strict gender conventions and values subverting traditional masculine roles that situate him in a regime of power dynamics that punishes anyone that does not conform to its gender expectations. This disruption of normative masculinity is dangerous for racial minorities.

Gender is invisible to men; they do not see themselves as gendered, and society treats masculine characteristics as the prototype of human behavior (Nurse, 2004, 3). However, for racial minorities the desire to conform to traditional masculine projections is higher due to the heightened risk that comes from fearing the consequences of digressing from social norms. Masculine and feminine dichotomy/binary contributes to violence because it punishes those who do not fall in line. This is evident in our language when we say, "men don't cry" or "man up" to men who express emotion as a way to police their behavior and make sure they are demonstrating the appropriate conduct. We place hypermasculine expectations on men limiting them to one gender production that leads to the creation of toxic masculinity. Prescribing toxic masculinity for ethnic men has been a mechanism to maintain the small ounce of social power they have under a system of patriarchy that is governed by white supremacy. The construction of subordinate masculinities as effeminate and infantile come from a racialized, sexualized, and oppressed context that has "othered" men (Connell, 1995, 7 as cited in Nurse, 2004, 10). To be othered is to be feminized. As stated by Harper (1994),

Black masculinities, in the context of slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy have been constructed as primal, debased, and infantile and thus in need of control and supervision by white men (as cited in Nurse, 2004, 13).

Men of different racial identities have not had the ability to construct their own masculinity because it has always been controlled by the dominant group. They have been emasculated under slavery and colonization with the inability to own property. Enslaved black men were not entitled to certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity such as the right to family and a patriarchal authoritative status. Their wives were property of another male that deemed to emasculate them (Beckles, 2004, 236). In addition, black and ethnic men have also been hypersexualized in dangerous ways with the stereotypes of the Black Buck, Jack Johnson, and the Uncle Tom.⁶⁰

These stereotypes and emasculation techniques have rendered black masculinity as competition to white masculinity. Enslaved black men shared basic patriarchal values with white men; the assertion of masculine authority/power over women. However, "their inability to 'live' this ideology outside the jurisdiction of dominant white authority confirmed the subordinated status of their masculinity" (Beckles, 2004, 238). Therefore, undermining black manhood has led to a projection of hypermasculinity to regain the social control not previously granted to them. As stated by Patterson (1982), "The condition of being 'kept' or 'kept down', located enslaved black masculinity within white patriarchy as a subform starved of role nourishment, and ideologically 'feminized' (as cited in Nurse, 2004, 230). Black masculinity was represented through systems of infantilization and feminization to deem their masculinity as subordinate or not within white standards (Beckles, 2004, 233). This is why homophobia persist in black and Latinx cultures because of the deep-rooted connection to effeminate and subordinate masculinities. As stated by Hilary Beckles (2004), "the ideology of masculinity is largely 'a socially produced script' on which historical notions of role fulfillment have been coded" (226). There is nothing natural about our

⁶⁰ The Black Buck is the hypersexual black man that white women need to be protected from. As Cornell West (1993 as cited in Nurse 2004) states, he is "the mean predatory craver of white women." Jack Johnson is the super performer; he is the black man valued for his athleticism and used for the entertainment of white people. The Uncle Tom is viewed as the "spineless impotent sidekick of the white man."

gender roles and the behaviors we exhibit as men and women. They are all socially produced, performed to fit into norms designated to us prior to our existence, and the notion of toxic masculinity has been engrained in patriarchal society. Machismo culture is trying to remove itself away from this emasculation, but that in turn leads to a masculinity that harshly punishes anyone not following the standard social script. Bad Bunny's "Caro" blatantly resists and defies the machismo culture linking his cultural identity with a gender expression not typically associated with a Latino man.

The drag at play in the music video disrupts his cultural identification as a Caribbean man because it does not fall within the respected projected representation. Bad Bunny represents what E. Antonio De Moya (2004) describes in his essay, "Power Games and Totalitarian Masculinity in the Dominican Republic," as marginal homosexual masculinity. This is a feminine behavior in boys with androgynous characteristics that is acceptable (92). Although Bad Bunny has not come out with any label, many assume him to be a heterosexual because of his lyrics and his representation of heterosexuality in his music videos. Nonetheless, his non-binary identification and his fluidity between feminine and masculine attributes relegate him into this subordinate masculinity that is not really explored or allowed in cultural production. His music video allows for a critique of these gender norms to situate its unfounded belief of gender categorization.

He further destabilizes his cultural and gender performance with the physical inclusion of trans people, which positions him as an ally to the LGBTQIA community and further distances himself from traditional male expectations. There is an incorporation of different arenas that tend to be gendered, such as the masculine area of the car scene and the fantasy of a runway show that is typically a woman's domain. The inclusive fashion show incorporates plus size models, Latinx and different racial identities, a pregnant woman, a trans woman (or drag queen), a black non-

binary person, an old woman, and a woman with down syndrome representing disability on the runway. This is a fantasy of intersectionality and acceptance that is yet to be realized. It is fantasizing a world where all these diverse identities are recognized and accepted; where they are humanized in dominant culture and do not have to live a precarious existence. The music video is his form of allying with the LGBTQIA community cultivating a space for Latinidad and queerness to unite as they are often separated. The direct incorporation of the trans woman, the drag queen, and the nonbinary person disrupts gender as a binary category since their very existence defies the naturalness or organic nature of gender. The music video then switches to Bad Bunny standing on top of a hill at dawn with people running around him. This locality in this specific time can signify a new beginning. This moment marks a shift where you now see a volcano erupting in the same instance that Bad Bunny and Joy are in the same space at the same time. They continue to replicate each other's gestures, and the volcano erupts as a symbolism of rebirth; Bad Bunny emerges as a new man. Both men and women are seen kissing him on the cheek, while Ricky Martin sings,

¿Por qué no puedo ser así?
 [Why can I not be like that?]
 ¿En qué te hago daño a ti?
 [What damage have I done to you?]
 ¿En qué te hago daño a ti?
 [What damage have I done to you?]
 Yo solamente soy feliz”
 [I'm just happy]

This is a reference to people's criticism of his non-binary persona, but also a reference to the homophobia and transphobia that occurs in a patriarchal society. Queer folks deviate from the norm that is heterosexuality tending to live a dangerous existence because of it. This song goes out to all queer people who simply want to exist without the threat of violence. Throughout the song, he sings, “Hoy yo le llego y normal, eh / Me miran raro, eh / Yo se cuanto valgo” [Today I arrive normally, they see me as weird / I know how much I'm worth]. This section discusses how peoples'

perception labels him as weird and queer; judging him for it. He begins the song contesting the capitalist script but then towards the end of the song, he is no longer referring to consumption and wealth. The *caro* takes on the meaning of self-worth; he is worth more than the world tells him he is as a “weird/queer” person. Normative society tends to designate non-conforming identities as not worthy, but Bad Bunny rejects this idea calling for an embrace of self-worth; he ends the statement with recognizing how much he is worth, refusing to let heteronormative society dictate that for him. The video ends with Bad Bunny kissing Jazmyne Joy and it is viewed as a gesture of self-love; because she represented the gender queer version of himself. This act is not only understood within a heterosexual context but also takes on a queer connotation (Danielli, 2019). The music video highlights marginalized groups and shows how is unafraid to put himself at odds with toxic masculinity (Villa, *MTV*). He is telling the queer Latinx community to be rich in self-love/worth, to not change regardless of hardships they have to face. In “How Bad Bunny Bridges LGBTQ and Latinx Identities with his Inclusive ‘Caro’ Video” Lucas Villa (2019) writes, “With his painted, manicured nails and flamboyant sense of style, he's been at odds with the machista, or often toxic masculinity, culture that's often ingrained in Latinx life.” Bad Bunny has no qualms with presenting himself separate and different from the notions of what it means to be a man, specifically a Puerto Rican man. He is distancing himself from the norm/scripts in hip-hop/trap videos. He is rejecting heteronormativity and toxic masculinity, but also capitalism because self-worth is not going to come from money. He understands why representation matters and champions it in spite of his critics. Despite the machismo that exist in Puerto Rico, he still says “I love my island. It means pride, it means love, it means a lot of things to me. Being Puerto Rican, it means everything. It's what I am.” Although homophobia still persist in the island, his love for his nation and his cultural identity is what gives him the courage to critique the machismo and

homophobia that permeates the culture. Much of his activism that Bad Bunny engages in has to do with his cultural identity as a non-binary Puerto Rican man.

Social and Political Activism

Bad Bunny is applauded for standing out in the Latin trap world with his refusal to participate in homophobia and toxic masculinity, and this extends into the societal issues he chooses to be politically engaged with. He is proud of his Puerto Rican heritage and is heavily involved with the politics in the island. After Hurricane Maria ripped through the Caribbean and destroyed much of the infrastructure in Puerto Rico, Bad Bunny was very active in bringing awareness to the conditions of the island as President Trump had not mentioned anything about it. He was openly critical towards the lack of humanitarian aid after Hurricane Maria devastated the country. He personally distributed food, water, and generators in his hometown of Vega Baja and encouraged people to donate or help in any way they could. In the summer of 2019, he was actively involved in the protests that forced the resignation of Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló.⁶¹ He was active on Instagram demonstrating his involvement in the protest. He even paused his European tour to join the protest in Puerto Rico and released a statement encouraging everyone to take the streets and practice their right to assembly. Bad Bunny's engagement in the politics of the country along with his resistance to homophobia demonstrate his passion for challenging conservative political views and outdated conventions of gender and sexuality. Not only did he engage in protest to resist corruption and homophobic attitudes, but he also criticized the decisions made to close schools in Puerto Rico contrasting them with the opening of more prisons. His

⁶¹ He was ousted after a week of fervent public protests demanding his resignation after private messages were leaked where Mr. Rosselló and his closest advisors were discussing wrongdoings within their inner circle. It revealed sexist and homophobic comments. In addition, 6 people were arrested with two being top officials for federal corruption. Afterwards the Department of Justice executed search warrants for all those included in the chat and lawmakers were planning to convene impeachment proceedings against Mr. Rosselló. The citizens of Puerto Rican united together to demand his removal from office and after a week succeeded in getting his resignation, which led the nation into a celebration. Puerto Rican flags shot in the air and it was a tremendously historic moment for the country in fighting for democracy and justice.

political involvement denotes the importance of resisting the status quo. He is against the notion of mass incarceration which disproportionately affects communities of color. Black and Latinx are over-represented in the prison industrial complex and Bad Bunny is using his platform to bring awareness to this. Because of his activism he was actually nominated for Telemundo's Tu Música Urban Awards "Humanitarian Award of the Year." As mentioned, he is explicitly against homophobic rhetoric even criticizing a homophobic tweet by reggaetón artist Don Omar that was targeted toward Ozuna after the release of his gay sex tapes, and this was his way of holding his own people accountable and at a higher standard.⁶² Homosexuality is viewed as the negation of the masculine. As stated by Connell (1992), "homophobic responses to gay men are one of the means by which hegemonic masculinity polices the boundaries of a traditional male sex role and reinforces strict heterosexual practice" (8). This view of gay men as weak or effeminate is meant to subordinate them & put them in an inferior position. They are often compared to women, however there are men who appear to embody the stereotypical representation of "masculinity" such as boxers and football players, like Puerto Rican boxer, Orlando Cruz, who are gay, contradicting the stereotypical perception of how gay men are. Bad Bunny is a true ally to the LGBTQIA community with his constant defense of their rights.

While much of his activism comes from his defense of the queer community, he is also against gender violence as evident with his "Solo de Mí" video. In an Instagram post about the video, Bad Bunny wrote in Spanish,

No estoy seguro si las peleas de gallo son maltrato, pero la violencia de género en contra de la mujer y la cantidad absurda de mujeres que son asesinadas al mes SÍ LO ES. ¿Cuando vamos a darle prioridad a lo que realmente importa?! Siempre queremos culpar a todos menos al que tiene la culpa. ¡ES HORA DE TOMAR ACCIÓN YA! Sé que habrán muchas

⁶² In 2019, late Puerto Rican rapper Kevin Fret blackmailed Ozuna over an underage sex tape featuring two other men was leaked online. There was a huge controversy surrounding the incident and not long after, Kevin Fret was murdered adding fuel to the flame. Don Omar's comment used the term *pato*, derogatory term to refer to homosexuals, in a tweet regarding the incident. Bad Bunny responded to the comment by saying "Homophobia in 2019? Not cool."

opiniones, pero yo solo les digo que por algo se empieza, y cada cual hace su parte como cree que pueda. ¡NO QUEREMOS NI UNA MUERTE MAS! Respeta la mujer, respeta al hombre, respeta al prójimo, ¡respeto la vida! ¡MENOS VIOLENCIA, MAS PERREO! (Y SI ELLA LO QUIERE, SI NO DÉJALA QUE PERREE SOLA Y NO LA JODAS)

[I'm not sure if cockfighting is abuse, but gender violence against women and the absurd number of women who are murdered a month IS. When are we going to prioritize what really matters?! We always want to blame everyone but the one at fault. IT'S TIME TO TAKE ACTION NOW! I know there will be many opinions, but I just tell them that something starts, and everyone does their part as they think they can. WE DO NOT WANT ONE MORE DEATH! Respect the woman, respect the man, respect the neighbor, respect life! Less violence, more liberation (and only if she wants it, because if she doesn't, let her be free and enjoy herself, and don't bother her)."⁶³]

He is actively against the injustices that occur against women under a patriarchal society. He prioritizes analyzing gender dynamics at play with women and the queer community. Recently in February of 2020, he stood up against the murder of a homeless trans woman in Puerto Rico. The trans woman, Alexa, was murdered in Puerto Rico after videos surfaced of cops questioning her after receiving a phone call that a man dressed as a woman was peeping at girls in the bathroom, although she was simply using the bathroom. Soon after, a video surfaced of men harassing her claiming they were going to shoot her and the next day she was found dead. The news coverage that reported the crime kept referring to her as “un hombre con falda” [a man in a skirt]. They completely ignored her identity as a trans woman, specifically a poor Latinx trans woman refusing to acknowledge that what had occurred was a hate crime. Bad Bunny went on the Jimmy Fallon Show and brought awareness to this murder as there was not enough news coverage surrounding the incident. He had an interview with Jimmy Fallon to promote his newest album that was released on February 29, 2020 titled YHLQMDLG which is an acronym for “Yo

⁶³ The Spanish term used is *perreo* which has multiple connotations. I used liberation in the context because while *perreo* is often referred to as a style of music and dance, it can have the connotation of sexual freedom. Sometimes artist use the term to refer to sex or provocative dancing, so in the context of gender violence I assume he is referring to women's ability to express themselves as they like. In addition, he continues with “if she wants it but if not let her enjoy herself and leave her own” and I believe he is referring to a woman's ability to freely express her sexual desires without the threat of rape and violence to hinder her from doing so.

hago lo que me da la gana” [I do whatever I want]. In this interview, he performed the song “Ignorantes” and midway through his performance he opened up his blazer to reveal a shirt that said “They murdered Alexa, not a man in a skirt” while he himself was wearing a skirt. This was an extremely powerful moment as he continued to fight for the rights of the queer community.



Bad Bunny’s outspokenness surrounding injustice demonstrates the importance of representation. The struggle for recognition is much higher for marginalized communities and people of color. The perceptions of who we are is marked by people’s view of us, the struggle to become visible, and to see ourselves in a world not meant for us. We live in a white world so the construction of femininity and masculinity from different cultures tend to be marked by western ideals and is often conflicted with stereotypes. Intersectionality plays a major role in determining the conditions of our lives as these interlocking systems of oppression work together to keep people suppressed. As stated by Isabelia Herrera,

We [Latinx] remain a community of difference, defined by our intersections. More representation in pop music won’t save us from racism, commodification, or inequality, but it may offer us the space for artistic exploration and experimentation we are rarely afforded (“The Making of a Latino Superstar”).

Bad Bunny uses his platform to challenge heteronormative notions of gender politics, such as the construction of masculinity and femininity, gender violence, homophobia, sexism/ misogyny and transphobia. In “The Making of a Latino Superstar,” Julyssa Lopez writes, “His persona flips the script on the hyper-masculinity that most Latino stars present and reimagines what a Latino rapper can look like.” He separates himself from the ideals of toxic masculinity and raises attention to the damage it creates. Masculinity is always in crisis which is why it constantly needs to reinvent itself. However, in recent times hegemonic masculinity has really come under fire and has been scrutinized for its toxic depiction of how men should behave and present themselves. Bad Bunny is the physical embodiment of a new emerging masculinity that is currently underway that accepts more feminine attributes and non-binary significations. His bold and unique persona allows for a representation of a different masculinity; a reimagination of Latinx masculinity that removes itself from the constraints of machismo.

Chapter 4: From Barbados to the United States: Rihanna's Depiction of Black Sexuality & Erotic Violent Desire

In 2009, at the age of 21, a photograph circulated of pop singer Rihanna as she was beaten and bruised by her then boyfriend, R&B singer, Chris Brown. Her assault was publicized after gossip site TMZ.com released the image, receiving tremendous criticism for doing so. The exposure of her assault projected her as a victim of male violence trying to impose a narrative of victimization and helplessness to the incident. In the image, her eyes are closed refusing to engage with the gaze that seeks to render her as the powerless battered woman. The removal of her agency and choice in the circulation of that image has since defined the construction of her identity. This incident shaped the persona that will become pop sensation Rihanna in a plethora of ways. Not only did she refuse the description of the battered woman, but her post-assault persona has continued to link her to the eroticism of pain. She has sexualized violence maintaining a close relationship to the dynamics between of pain and pleasure, exploring/exposing this erotic fantasy. She challenges these notions of female decency with the play between dominance and submission; she romanticizes violent behaviors engaging with its explicit desires. As a survivor of domestic violence, she does not conform to the typical phases of healing. Rather than detaching herself from the incident, she uses it to her advantage to change the narrative surrounding black sexuality that brings exposure to subordinate sexual practices, such as BDSM.

Rihanna burst onto the scene in 2005 with her song "Pon de Replay"⁶⁴ which was a hybrid of reggae, hip-hop, and R&B style. Her immersion into U.S. consciousness came from her exotic positionality as a Caribbean woman from the small island of Barbados. Her translocality fixed her

⁶⁴ This is her lead single from her debut studio album *Music of the Sun* (2005). The song was released on May 24, 2005 and was recorded for her demo tape before signing with Def Jam Records. The lyrics revolve around Rihanna asking a DJ to turn the volume of her favorite songs up louder. The name means "play it again" in Bajan Creole, one of Barbado's two official languages.

into the national image of Barbados, despite her persona being built and cultivated in the United States; she never fully crossed over into being a diasporic entity. Rihanna was commodified; marketed as this transnational figure of foreign exoticness. Her Barbadian national identity has unsettled the discourses of female decency with a representation of black sexuality that moves away from respectability politics. There is a concept of belonging to Barbados that follows Rihanna. Her accent, a focal point in her music, along with her constant link to her Caribbean identity in her cultural productions puts a burden of representation that extends to an entire island. In 2008, she was named “Honorary Youth and Cultural Ambassador of Barbados” by the Prime Minister David Thompson (Russell, 2010). Her crossover has provided her a unique space of belonging to both Barbados and her global consumers, therefore after the incident, many tried to imprison her within this victimhood mentality because survivors wanted someone to relate to (Russell, 2010). However, the inability to confine her has led many to comment on her attraction to violence.

Her responsibility to her fans played an important role in the alteration of her persona. Several months after news of the incident made headlines, Rihanna broke her silence in an interview with Diane Sawyer. She discussed the assault stating she was ashamed that she had gone back to him, staying in that toxic environment for 3 years because it set a bad example for young woman in similar situations. On average, it takes a woman 8 or 9 times to leave an unhealthy relationship, and she did not want that to happen to her (ABCNEWS, 02:16-02:20). She made the mistake of getting back with him not realizing that she was providing young girls a lesson that normalized staying in abusive relationships. That realization made her finally end the situation with Chris Brown producing a change in her attitude surrounding violence and love. In 2012, she spoke with Oprah Winfrey about forgiving him. She acknowledged that for a long time she was

very angry, with this anger was appearing in her music, clothes, and attitude. This was the start of the “bad girl Riri” persona that arose in 2009 after the incident. There was a stark change in her post-assault appearance that was hardened, no longer innocent. She changed her hair with a dyed pixie cut, wore darker makeup, and her cultural productions—music videos, promotional artwork/advertisement—took on solemn tones projecting the anger she was feeling. She matured during this time because while many wanted her to be the face of domestic violence, she chose to distance herself from it allowing herself to feel the anger at being violated the way she had. That same year she released her album *Rated R65* which focused on intimate partner violence; it was used as the space to process her relationship (Fleetwood, 2012, 424). The album incorporates dark themes of violence with bleak views on love. However, it also discusses perseverance and overcoming adversity. In her interview with Oprah, she stated that in order to forgive Chris Brown she had to repair her relationship with her father. She tells her, “I was just angry about a lot of things from my childhood and I couldn’t separate him as a husband from him as a father. I thought he was a bad husband, so he was a bad father” (OWN, 01:02-01:15). She has long witnessed violence around her, growing up in Barbados where her father was an ex drug addict and physically abused her mother (Fleetwood, 2012, 424). Violence does not seem to escape her; it surrounds her therefore she has produced an intimate erotic relationship with it that removes its power.

Relationship to Pain: Post-Assault Reclamation of Violence

⁶⁵ *Rated R* is her fourth studio album. It was released on November 20, 2009 by Def Jam Records and SRP Records. The album was conceived after her assault, so musically and lyrically it was a departure from her previous album *Good Girl Gone Bad*. It incorporates elements of Latin music, rock, and Dubstep. Her persona for this album was edgier and angrier; her lyrics are characterized with raw and angry tones. Some of the songs contain boastful themes that are characterized by images of violence and brutality.

The shift in her music post-assault reveals in the dichotomy between victim/perpetrator. This is evident with “Man Down,”⁶⁶ a story of sexual assault. The video takes place back in the Caribbean as it opens with her character shooting a man down. There is a flashback that occurs revealing the events leading to the shooting; as viewers we find out she is a rape survivor. The video follows a rape-revenge narrative as she kills the man who assaulted her to take back a small ounce of the agency and autonomy that was taken from her when he chose to violate her body. This video connects her back to her Caribbean childhood where she admits to witnessing violence around her, playing on both the struggle between victim and perpetrator as she inhabits both. She is a victim of sexual assault, but the perpetrator of a violent act against the same man who put her in this locality. This intimacy with violence, the doubling of this positionality, is seen with her other works. Her music videos are an angry girl narrative that seeks to take back control empowering her to move forward. They are a self-narrative of her trauma as she attempts to distance herself from the language of victimization and image of helplessness that often accompany those who are victims of bodily harm. She cultivated a closeness to erotic pleasure that incorporates practices of pain (Fleetwood, 2012, 420). This flirtatious appeal to danger is further explored in her collaboration with Eminem in “Love the Way You Lie.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ A reggae song from her fifth studio album, *Loud* (2010). The song was released on May 3, 2011 by Def Jam Records as a single for the album. The song was inspired by Bob Marley’s 1973 song “I Shot the Sheriff,” so the writers wanted to create a song that embodied the same feel but from a woman’s perspective. Lyrically, Rihanna is a fugitive after she shoots a man, an action she later regrets despite the harm inflicted on her. The video was criticized by the Parents Television Council, Industry Ears, and Mothers Against Violence, who faulted Rihanna for suggesting that murder is an acceptable form of justice for rape victims. However, actress Gabrielle Union, a rape victim herself, praised it for being relatable.

⁶⁷ The song is part of Eminem’s seventh studio album *Recovery* (2010). The song was released through Interscope Records on June 2010 as the second single from the album. Eminem wrote the verses and chose Rihanna to sing the chorus as both had past experiences in difficult relationships. The song describes two lovers who refuse to separate despite being in a dangerous love-hate relationship. The music video was directed by Joseph Kahn and starred Dominic Monaghan and Megan Fox in a violent relationship while Eminem and Rihanna stood in front of a burning house. Rihanna stated that the song “broke down the cycle of domestic violence” because few people had insight on the topic.

The song is a love ballad about a violent intimate relationship; it romanticizes the cycle of violence that consumes unhealthy dynamics. The song is a two-part series where the first one is from the perspective of a man and the second part views aspects of the relationship from the woman's standpoint. The song begins with Rihanna singing the chorus,

Just gonna stand there and watch me hurt
 But that's alright because I like the way it hurts
 Just gonna stand there and hear me cry
 But that's alright because I love the way you lie
 I love the way you lie

The opening line already engages with the pleasure and pain dichotomy as she discusses the hurt but refuses to move away from it because of the joy it brings her. The line already emphasizes a destructive situation as she insinuates that the person she loves is the one causing her harm, but she accepts it because she loves the pain. She has become comfortable in that space, remaining close to her abuser. When singing this line, she is standing in front of a burning house as we are introduced to the story of the protagonists. The video follows a white heterosexual couple as we quickly begin to see unhealthy dynamics reveal itself. They were sleeping peacefully and the woman, played by actress Megan Fox, wakes up to see a number on his hand with the name Cindy. She immediately pushes him away, jumps on him, physically hitting him. She is punching him, and the man, played by actor Dominic Monaghan, slams her onto the bed in order to stop her. The violence is consecutive with one physical harm after another going in line with Eminem's fast-paced rhythm as he is rapping,

As long as the wrong feels right, it's like I'm in flight
 High off her love, drunk from her hate, it's like I'm huffin' paint
 And I love her the more I suffer, I suffocate
 And right before I'm about to drown, she resuscitates
 Me, she fucking hates me, and I love it, wait

In this moment, Fox spits in Monaghan face and he chokes her. The following scene plays along with the lyrics with the actors saying the next line, “Where you going / I’m leaving you / no you ain’t / Come back, we’re running right back / here we go again.” Monaghan physically grabs Fox in order to stop her from leaving, once again getting into a physical altercation leading to her punching him in the face. Eminem continues with,

It's so insane, 'cause when it's going good it's going great
 I'm Superman with the wind at his back, she's Lois Lane
 But when it's bad it's awful, I feel so ashamed
 I snapped "who's that dude?", I don't even know his name
 I laid hands on her, I'll never stoop so low again
 I guess I don't know, my own strength

The fight seems to have settled down with both people sitting on the couch trying to contemplate what is happening. However, when he touches her, she snaps again while this time he pushes her against the wall. He punches the drywall right next to her face, attempting to display some form of constraint although the act of violence has already occurred. Rihanna once again sings the chorus as the subjects are engaging in make-up sex. The video continues to juxtapose the state of their relationship now to when things were blissful. It flashes back to when they first met, but constantly switches from that place of content to their current state of anger and pain. The man is screaming with rage, the woman is on the floor crying while clips of enjoyment and happiness interject as it gives a timeline of the progression of the relationship. This is the moment when they romanticize this violent cycle, demonstrating how difficult it is to walk away when people tend to hold onto those moments of euphoria; in only thinking about those times when the relationship is going well it provides an excuse to stay. Eminem raps,

Now I know we said things, did things, that we didn't mean
 Then we fall back into the same patterns, same routine
 But your temper's just as bad as mine is, you're the same as me
 But when it comes to love, you're just as blinded, baby please
 Come back, it wasn't you, baby it was me

Maybe our relationship, isn't as crazy as it seems

There is a high that people receive from unsafe situations which makes it more strenuous to remove themselves from the situation; it is an addiction to the unhealthy routine and pattern that has been established. But this verse also highlights the abuser mentality in blaming the victim. While he acknowledges his wrongdoings, he does not fail to remind his partners of her own role in continuing the cycle when he states, “But your temper’s just as bad as mine / you’re the same as me.” The sexualization of dominance is at play when they engage in makeup sex right after he slams her against a wall. Women engage in pleasure and pain eroticizing toxic behavior that supports men putting women “in their place.” The inclusion of the sex scene marks the sexual desire that arises when dominant displays of behavior are expressed, even if it is a behavior that can be dangerous. As stated by Nicole Fleetwood (2012),

Rihanna’s desirability as a sexual subject are her statements of her sexual appetite and the pleasure that she finds in particular forms of sexual play that rehearse gendered power inequity and the titillation of pain (419).

The gender dynamics within the video produce inherent unequal power plays where the man is the dominant figure using his aggression to control the woman. However, in engaging in sex right after a threat to her body has occurred shows the arousal that comes from the reproduction of power dynamics and the appeal that pain/violence has. For this couple, their fights/arguments are their way of keeping the sexual spirit in the relationship alive; it is what turns them on, allowing for a rigorous and exciting sex life. This eroticism of violence goes against notions of black respectability surrounding sexuality. Black women’s bodies have constantly been surveillance and controlled with this surveillance having “its roots in colonialism and slavery” (Ferreday, 2017, 274). Their body has never truly been theirs to explore, so their sexuality has always been marked with limitation. The lust surrounding the violence in the scene is Rihanna’s exploration of a

sexuality that finds appeal in danger and precariousness. There is a sexualization of this dangerous cycle at play, representing a potential look into her relationship with Chris Brown as there may have been a toxic game of pain and pleasure. For the couple in the video, the violence produces sexual and emotional pleasure explaining why they continue to stay.



Figure 1a: "Love the Way You Lie," video still, 2010 Interscope/ Aftermath Entertainment and Shady Records



Figure 1b: "Love the Way You Lie," video still, 2010 Interscope/ Aftermath Entertainment and Shady Records

The video brings awareness to the issue of domestic violence and the ways in which victims remain stuck in unsafe habits. It breaks down the cycle of violence with Eminem exploring the psyche of the abuser. The lyrics portray Rihanna as the subject of Eminem's violence; she is seen standing in front of the burning house, remaining close to the crime scene. This is a subtle reference to how she remains close to her assault; not only does she have this erotic play with violence that came about after her assault, but it can also relate to when she physically and publicly returned to Chris Brown. This song about domestic abuse hits close to both artists as they embody the victim,

Rihanna, and perpetrator, Eminem. As stated by Nicole Fleetwood (2012), “Rihanna employs her body as a stage for the exploration of modes of violence structured into heterosexual desire and practices” (419). Fox represents the old Rihanna that was stuck in this same predicament unable to find her bearings to leave. The violence of the lyrics and her romanticism of jealousy—dangerous patterns of possessiveness—demarcate the different ways violence appears in heterosexual desires where inherent power dynamics are at play. The video engages with this notion when Monaghan smashes a beer bottle over a guy’s head that was playing pool with his girlfriend; he assumed the man was flirting with her bringing out his jealous rage. Typically, the assumption is that some women desire for their men to show some form of jealousy, but in this instance, she was upset although she did not try to stop him or pull him off the other man when he began to beat him. Nonetheless, this seems to be the last straw as Fox character decided to “finally” walk away. He asked for her forgiveness by gifting her a teddy bear. When it seems as though she would forgive him as they stared into each other’s eyes, her gaze changes, looking away from him and he understands this as the end. While this is happening, Eminem is rapping,

All I know is I love you too much, to walk away though
 Come inside, pick up your bags off the sidewalk
 Don't you hear sincerity, in my voice when I talk
 Told you this is my fault, look me in the eyeball
 Next time I'm pissed, I'll aim my fist at the dry wall
 Next time, there will be no next time, I apologize,
 Even though I know it's lies, I'm tired of
 The games, I just want her back, I know I'm a liar
 If she ever tries to fuckin' leave again,
 I'ma tie her to the bed and set this house on fire

She walks away in her attempt to leave with her bags packed, but instead he acts violently. She locks herself in the bathroom while he attempts to get in. The scene then focuses on multiple parts of the house going up in flames as Fox and Monaghan are engaged in their final act of violence as she screams trying to get away from the burning house and he slaps her. Afterwards, Monaghan is

consumed by the flames as well as Eminem and Fox. The couple is seen kissing one final time before being burned; Rihanna is the only person to be untouched. Her proximity to the crime scene, yet not being affected by it demonstrates how violence no longer controls her. As the sole survivor, she has reclaimed the power violence once played in her life. As Fleetwood (2012) writes, “Rihanna sings of her vulnerability and attachment, of her rage and passion, of her pain and complicity with her abuser” (426). This attachment to her pain is a way of taking back the control it took from her. Rihanna redefines her sexuality and her persona through his association with violence and pain as a way to understand the circumstances that put her in that predicament. Fox and Monaghan had to burn in order to signify that she has moved on from the incident of the assault; it has transformed her, but it no longer defines her. Nonetheless, the video ends just as it had started with the couple cuddling while asleep, showing how the vicious cycle will continue to reproduce itself until one person finally decides to walk away, no matter how tough it may be to break free from.

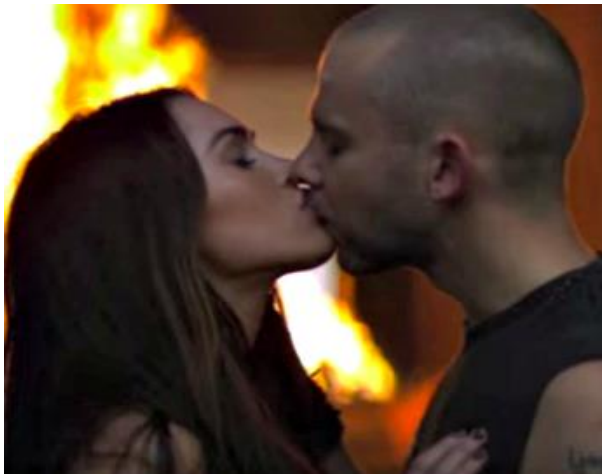


Figure 2: “Love the Way You Lie,” video still, 2010 Interscope/ Aftermath Entertainment and Shady Records

Violent Critique of Capitalism: Pain and Torture in “BBHMM” Video

The notions of erotic violent desires continue to be flushed out in Rihanna’s cultural productions when she participates in a capitalist script that is imposed by the industry. Her

eroticism of violence becomes linked with an industry rooted in a capitalist system as she also participates in a cultural production surrounding wealth and money. She critiques the capitalist system as it is based on individuality and selfish desires. The industry demands certain standards from artists which is why all female and male performers participate in the trope of materialism; the narrative of wealth appeals to all regardless of socio-economic status, race, or gender. The advertisement of consumerist ideals always appeals to those in a capitalist society; therefore, artists capitalize on this notion by targeting this trope. However, in Rihanna's "Bitch Better Have My Money (BBHMM)"⁶⁸ she criticizes the negative aspects of capitalism that brings about selfish desires and actions. The inclusion of violence in the video occurs within a racialized sexualized space.

The video opens with a shot of bloody legs in a trunk in the middle of an open field as trees are seen surrounding the figure. It soon pans out switching to a white upper-class woman getting ready to leave as she is putting on make-up as she gets dressed. The aesthetic of the space is a product placement demonstrating the luxury of the elite class; the material items people can surround themselves with. It is evident that this woman is in a higher socio-economic class as she is surrounded by chandeliers, she puts on a diamond necklace, has on a silk slip dress, and falling within the usual rich white girl stereotype: she walks around with her Pomeranian. Rihanna is seen taking a trunk from a car, dragging it into an elevator. When the woman finally leaves her house to enter the elevator, Rihanna is waiting. The next shot opens the elevator again displaying how

⁶⁸ The trap song was written by Rihanna, Travis Scott, Kanye West, and Bibi Bourelly. The song was digitally released on March 26, 2015 through the iTunes Store. The song reached the top-10 in eight countries. The music video was released on July 2, 2015. The video was directed by Rihanna and Megaforce, with cinematography from Benoît Debie and was filmed in April 2015 in Los Angeles, meanwhile the boat scene was filmed at Marina Del Rey. The video was rated MA for graphic violence, nudity, and adult language. The film starred Rihanna, Mads Mickelson as the accountant, Rachel Roberts as the model gf, and Sita Abellán and Sanam as her girl gang.

the woman is no longer present and Rihanna is now holding her Pomeranian. The assumption is that Rihanna put her in the trunk. She begins the song with,

Bitch better have my money
 Bitch better have my money!
 Y'all should know me well enough
 Bitch better have my money!
 Please don't call me on my bluff
 Pay me what you owe me
 Ballin' bigger than LeBron
 Bitch, give me your money
 Who y'all think y'all frontin' on?
 Bitch better have my money!

Rihanna is the leader of a girl gang in outlandish outfits. The next scene shows Rihanna driving a car with the woman tied up in the back stripped of everything except her underwear. The scene compares well with a line she says later, “Shit, your wife in the backseat of my brand-new foreign car / don’t act like you forgot / I call the shots shots shots.” This sexualized violence against the woman is demonstrated as a method to harm the person she is really after—the man who stole from her. In this entire video, the bitch she is referring to is a male figure. In positioning the woman as his wife, we are aware she is not meant to be the main target of violence, but rather she is collateral damage; she is a ploy to hurt the husband.



Figure 3: “Bitch Better Have My Money,” video still, 2015 Roc Nation

The following scene shows the car pulling up to an abandoned shed where the wife is now tied upside down, bondage and essentially gagged, as they play a cruel game of torture as she is

being pushed as though she's on a swing. Rihanna is shown angrily closing the phone; there have been multiple instances where she has attempted to call the woman's husband to receive what he owes her, but to no avail. She is seen slamming the payphone just as the scene switches to them burning the car, once again dragging the trunk with the woman in it. The shot quickly changes with Rihanna and her gang having a pool party on the top of a boat; this is a facetious critique of the aesthetics of the upper class. She is highlighting and playing with the material aesthetics the elite engages in to signify that this man stole what was hers to live this lavish lifestyle. The white woman is forcibly intoxicated and when a cop passes by as they sunbathe, she is smashed with a bottle over the head to stop her from yelling for help. This extravagant scene on top of the boat occurs as she says the lines, "Louis XIII and it's all on me / nigga you just bought a shot / Kamikaze if you think that you gon' knock me off the top." This line references that the boat might belong to the white couple as they are the embodiment of the upper class. However, all their riches came from her; she mentions the Louis XIII cognac bottle that he bought is all on her; this bottle cost upwards up to \$10,000 or more. It is one of the most expensive bottles to buy that only the ultrarich can afford. She is emphasizing the exploitation that occurs from the elite class as his comfortable lifestyle came at the expense of her own.

The video produces the appeal to danger with the sexualization of the torment of the woman. There is a sadistic torture of the woman that is repeatedly reproduced as she has been tied up for the entirety of the video. In the motel room scene, she remains trapped as they are doing her makeup which gives a nod to the hobbies of women; the stereotype of them being materialistic and vain that tends to follow all woman. Although she is their captive, she is shown drinking and smoking with them in this space. The aesthetic of the camera distorts the victim/perpetrator relationship because it presents the scene as a mutual enjoyment. It moves away from the vicious

torture to one that is more playful; it incites a feeling of role-playing. Rather than being terrified, she is bonding with her captors. They are laughing, partying, removing the feeling of danger; this is now a game and they are waiting to see if the husband will be baited to come save his wife.

This removal of a threat does not last long as the woman is once again put into a box and taken to a new location. Rihanna is shown caressing a series of weapons, including a chainsaw and a variety of knives. This is the moment where the violence is finally targeted towards its actual victim: the husband. The words “The ACCOUNTANT aka The Bitch” appears next to him as he is shown tied up in a seat. Rihanna is shown wearing a see-through latex bodycon dress inciting the image of a dominatrix. The moment we find out who he is, the images begin to recount events of the video. His bondage to the chair is played with flashbacks of when Rihanna tried multiple times to contact him and in all those instances, he was partying with sex workers. He was lavishly spending money that does not belong to him as he stole it from Rihanna. This song is a reference to her actual experience of being cheated by her accountant. The scenes are actively switching between earlier events with Rihanna’s rage, as the explanation is interjected with images of her low balance account being juxtaposed with all the money he spent at the club with multiple women. He played into the stereotypical trope of “making it rain” in the club which is another condemnation of capitalism; the consumerist ideals of spending excessive amount of money. When people inherit a wealth they did not previously have, they tend to overspend. Furthermore, the camera pans over the knives as words appear saying “he fucked up my credit” “account: \$0” and “fuck you.” These words are interpolated with black and white images of a crime scene; blood is splattered all over the plastic that covered the house, provoking a comparison to a slaughterhouse. She walks towards him with the knife, but we do not see the actual torture of the man.



Figure 4: “Bitch Better Have My Money,” video still, 2015 Roc Nation

Rather it moves from his terrified reaction to a panning of the trunk seen at the start of the video that is

revealed to contain a naked and blood-drenched Rihanna, reclining on a bed of dollar bills as she lights and smokes a cigar in a parody of both conventional sexualized femininity (the trope of the swooning woman in a state of post-coital bliss) and violent masculinity (the mob boss reflecting, with satisfaction, his latest kill (Ferreday, 2017, 267)).

The introduction of subordinate sexual practices such as BDSM with the use of bondage and role-playing signify the appeal that violence has. Although this song is about her anger at being screwed over, the video plays with the appeal of this sexual practice and its link to violent subjugation. The dominance and power dynamics that are reproduced in heterosexual relationships demonstrates that violence is always sexualized and racialized; it is gendered, and the violence here flips the script on the dominant narrative of male violence against women.



Figure 5: “Bitch Better Have My Money,” video still, 2015 Roc Nation

The video has received various criticisms with many condemning the romanticism of violence in the video. Critics of the video has called it “‘woman-hating, snub snuff video’ with ‘no nuance, no artistry’ whose ‘blatant female-on-female hatred’ attempted to make violence against woman sexy” (as cited in Ferreday, 2017, 264). Rihanna’s cinematic video can be seen as a manifesto, encouraging the use of violence to critique systems of exploitation. In a way, the video can be an embodiment of Valerie Solana’s *SCUM Manifesto*. The girl gang with their outfits and their blatant appropriation of violence represent scum women who are unafraid to use brutality in order to create a call for change and provide themselves with justice. Valeria Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto* reads as a proposition of the mass murder of men along with the dismantling of capitalism as the oppressive forces in our current society. Not only was the manifesto anti-capitalist, but it was explicitly anti-men. Her radicalism is simply an ignition of passion to contradict and challenge the way our society is structured, creating a manifesto of empowerment. Rihanna’s “BBHMM” evokes violence against men, but also violence against the women that stick by these men who exploit and oppress others. It can also be read as violence against the elite class who think they can get away with exploiting the poor. Just as Solanas’ asked for violence against all men, Rihanna can demand violence against the elite class who are the main beneficiaries in a

capitalist society. However, the projection of a white male as the main target of her violence cannot remove the racialized and gendered dynamics at play in her victimhood. Her video opens up “questions of sexuality, racialization, violence, gender and embodiment as they are negotiated and struggled over” (Ferreday, 2017, 270). Solanas’ is attacking men, capitalism, the nuclear family, and the middle class—all issues of respectability that she blames on men. These are all areas that Rihanna critiques in the video; she is beginning a revolution where black sexuality is no longer under the domain of white supremacy and patriarchy, where violence is targeted against the ultrarich who mainly benefit from capitalism. Her eroticism of violence is a removal from respectability politics that represents a black sexuality unafraid to indulge in its sexual desires. Solanas’ demands the use of violence against men and all systems of oppression; she romanticized the notion of brutality as liberating; the necessary path to freedom. Rihanna uses the same rhetoric as her sexualized racialized use of violence is her fight against patriarchy, sexism, racism, and capitalism that allowed her to become a victim to this white money-hungry man.

The criticisms regarding the video stem from the embracement of this violence, along with the promotion of a sexuality that incorporates aspect of pain. Women who engage in radical text that highlight and demand violence are harassed with disapproval, anger, and attempts to shame them for their encouragement of bodily harm. However, when men use violent imagery as a social critique, they are applauded for it. Chavisa Woods in her article, *Hating Valerie Solanas (And Loving Violent Men)*, regards the *SCUM Manifesto* as masterwork of literary protest art. She praised Solanas’ ability to parody Freud using all his sexist commentary of women and flipping it on its head to revert it onto men. As a parody, it plays a more powerful role in exposing the contradictions with the gender binaries, patriarchy, and the ways in which oppression is a staple piece of a patriarchal capitalist society. She states,

Valerie Solanas just said, in a modernized (now dated) vernacular, exactly what Freud had said about women, only about men, and everyone freaked out, because when we talk about men the same way men have talked about women for centuries, it reads as grotesque and insanely violent, un-compassionate, and shocking, which was exactly her point (Woods, *Hating Valerie Solanas*).

She exposes the inequality in how we regard radical men and radical women. Women who say outrageous things despite how true they may be are designated as mad and crazy, but when men say ridiculous things it is taken as a fact. This is the same reaction Rihanna got for her video. As a critic wrote,

Could it be we are all shifting in our seats because a black woman made this? Because a black woman commanded a bold cinematic experience of violence and rage? Because she challenged the status quo that historically only applauds white men for it? Yes, of course some people are disturbed by the depiction of violence, even made by white men, but society respect their artistic vision and never questions their morality (Ethans 2015 as cited in Ferreday, 2017, 276).

We applaud men, such as Quentin Tarantino who is known for his excessive use of violent imagery, when they produce these disturbing images and consider them great directors, but when a woman does it, it is not acceptable. As a woman of color, Rihanna was taking control of the way she is represented. She explicitly distanced herself from the victimhood mentality many tried to confine her in, presenting herself as perpetrator. She is repeatedly in the duality of victim/perpetrator. In this video, she was a victim of theft, but a perpetrator of murder; she constantly refuses to stay in one positionality choosing to overcome her victimhood by regaining agency through violence. Many were disturbed with the video stating she was being a terrible role model to young women, since she condoned violence with its presentation in a romanticized fashion. She made murder appealing and justifiable. Rihanna plays with Butler (2004) notion of bodies as signifiers of vulnerability and agency. As she writes,

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument

of all of these as well, or the site where 'doing' and 'being done to' become equivocal (Butler, 2004, 21).

Rihanna embodies the “doing and being done to” dichotomy in her duality within these two locations of victim and perpetrator. She performs how violence can be inflicted upon a person and reverted to gain agency. Violence is inescapable for bodies that lie outside normative representations. Bodies who do not conform to conventional norms are subjected to the infliction of harm whether it is on the basis of sexuality, race, gender, or class. Rihanna, as woman of color, was subjected to this violence in her assault. The gender violence perpetuated under a patriarchal system made her body vulnerable to this attack. However, violence is also a path to liberation from societal constraints that attempt to police certain bodies.

In her music videos, Rihanna is able to use this violence to reject its control over her. She produces vulnerability as empowerment; pain and pleasure as synonymous with each other rather than contradictory. Her erotic desire with pain situates her sexuality in opposition with acceptable forms of engaging in sexual pleasure. As stated by Nicole Fleetwood (2012), “Rihanna performs precarity, where her pleasure—both often social unacceptable forms for black women—is framed by the forces of violence, surveillance and shame” (427). Rihanna does not shy away from her past with domestic abuse, fostering an intimate relationship with it. Her sexual pleasure arises from dominance, sadism, and brutality in order to engage with the way violence dictates the body’s ability to move in the world. Violence is a constant in a person’s life, but she reworks the authority it plays in her life. The eroticism of pain is not a suitable presentation of sexual desire, but Rihanna participates in it, nonetheless. Her construction of black sexuality is intrinsically linked to violence; violence is both her oppressor and her savior. She removes the victimization surrounding vulnerability and demonstrates how strength can be found in reconfiguring what has harmed you.

Her relationship to violence is used as a critique against the intersectional factors that puts the body in precarious conditions.

Conclusion

Superstars construct a persona that is filtered out onto a global stage and perceived in a variety of ways. Musical artists, through their performance, present their gender, race, class, and cultural identity that is then analyzed and interrogated. Female performers have the added burden of having their autonomy removed with the imposition of a patriarchal capitalist scripts that fall in line with previous success stories. Rihanna, along with Cardi B, Jennifer Lopez and Bad Bunny, fall within a consumerist narrative that is thrust upon communities of color as a trope that signifies inclusion and acceptance. The three female performers constantly navigate promoting sexuality as agency while concomitantly rejecting respectability politics that enact codes of moral decency. Black and Latinx sexuality has consistently been controlled under white supremacy with the creation of stereotypes that puts them in opposition to “pure” white sexuality. These women have to gain agency in their field, meanwhile male performers are typically granted this agency from the moment they enter. However, the unique aspect of Bad Bunny is the way in which he creates a space for women and queer subjects to have that space for agency. Female performers gain this autonomy through their refusal to conform to white standards of appropriate behavior. These ethnic female artists bring representation to communities that are marked with difference, changing the narrative of de-sexualization as synonymous with respect. In reclaiming sexuality as agency and empowerment, brown bodies are able to appear without fear and with an air of defiance that critiques stereotypes ability to dictate how they can move in certain spaces. Rihanna, like Bad Bunny, underwent a transformation in persona that allowed her the freedom to express herself as she desired; without hesitation or a care for others acceptance. The refusal of all four artist to conform to scripts and stereotypes inscribed onto them produces an agency that subverts stigma attached to their bodies.

All these artists perform a capitalist script that plays with notions of citizenship, belonging and representation. United States representation regarding ethnic bodies falls within stereotypes that seeks to marginalize them, thus producing vulnerable bodies. The construction of identity for ethnic performers always follows acceptable modes of appearance that tend to reproduce stereotypical perceptions of these bodies; they conform to widespread ideals of how these bodies are supposed to look. The female performers conform to typical representations of Latinx and Caribbean bodies; they participate in the construction of their identity through an association with exoticism. All are constantly linked to their Caribbean identity that seeks to other them in the imagined community of the United States that presents itself as white, heterosexual, and middle class. Their sexuality is linked to “excess” as they reproduce stereotypes of hypersexuality with the objectifications of their body. However, through embracing this stereotype they remove the power it has in controlling the ways they are able to express themselves.

All the women flaunt a respectability politics that flips the script of patriarchal expectations; they shamelessly celebrate their sexuality creating a feminist agency that distances itself from the passive acceptance of objectification. They control the ways their body is objectified and perceived. Jennifer Lopez became a sex symbol in order to change the narrative of desirability for Latinx bodies. Cardi B purposely revels in her hypersexuality with her raunchy and loud persona to remove the stigma that women are not allowed to be sexual beings. Rihanna modified her persona after her assault to liberate women from the constraints of sexual suppression with her engagement with the exploration of non-normative sexual desires. She eroticizes violence as a proponent of BDSM relationships. The exploration of pleasure and pain within sexual desires goes against respectability politics where women, especially black women, have to desexualize themselves. This post-assault performance cultivates erotic fantasy that does not allow herself to

be victimized; there is an agency found in her survival. All these women have found autonomy through objectification when controlling the narrative and presentation of their own bodies.

Bad Bunny is a special case study as he is the only man, yet he also engages in a capitalist script that goes against patriarchal expectations. Latino culture is filled with the ideology of machismo that presents and incorporates aspects of toxic masculinity. As a persona in the trap genre, he was initially cultivated to produce the hypermasculine man, however he reconfigured his persona as he crossed over to global markets. The transition from his label records demonstrate the imposition of the industry's expectations in constructing the identities of their performers. With the new label, he was able to represent his non-binary persona. He was able to use his cultural productions to provide social commentary of capitalism and gender constructions. The capitalist system and the American Dream work hand in hand to exclude the poor and communities of color from their national imagery. Bad Bunny followed the trope of the materialist script to highlight this inequality while simultaneously blurring the gender lines, disrupting gender as a category. Bad Bunny reimagines and produces a new masculinity in a music genre that continues to project stereotypical notions of masculinity. He is unafraid to align himself with the LGBTQ community actively using his platform to bring awareness to social inequalities and injustice.

All four performers provide representation for groups of people who are marginalized in American society. The diasporic community recognition is fixed with stereotypes, therefore the community members who make it into mainstream culture have the burden of representing an entire group of people. Their performance and representation provide a voice to a community that is often silenced. While their performances often reinforce the stereotypes imposed on them, they undermine its power when they distort its reproduction. In their reproduction of stereotypes, all four of these performers flip the normative narrative to bring about a social critique of these

racialized, sexualized, and gendered constructions of identity. They do not allow the damaging stigma of the stereotype to define their identity and how they present themselves in the world.

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