

Introduction

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This special issue of *Women & Language* focuses on “Hip Hop’s Languages of Love.” We sought critical analyses of this topic because hip hop has been and continues to be a significant cultural force that often refers to intimate relationships. Although critics often decry hip hop for being misogynistic, we hoped to provide a forum to both delve into that critique and provide insights about other facets of hip hop’s treatment of love. This exciting set of articles and poems accomplishes our goal by exploring diverse contexts, concepts, and constructs to illuminate complex dynamics of hip hop, love, language, and gender. The eight articles and two poems span hip hop’s history from the 1980s to the present. Although most of the selections are situated in hip hop’s home in the United States, Mwangi and Mbure denote hip hop’s international reach by offering a gendered reading of a song by a Kenyan artist. The special issue’s historical, conceptual, and geographical diversity extends through to its methodologies as well. Contributors employed content and textual analyses of lyrics, ethnographic dramaturgy, postcolonial critique, poetry, critical discourse analysis, and survey research.

Authors who recognize love and loving as a revolutionary act inaugurate the special issue. Corrigan’s “Sacrifice, Love, and Resistance: The Hip Hop Legacy of Assata Shakur” assesses how hip hop artists Paris, Common, Mos Def, Tuiya Autry, and Walidah Imarisha engage in “love talk” about revolutionary black activist Assata Shakur. Hastings explores the potential of revolutionary love through personal, political, and performative histories of black women in “Black, Blue, and Loved All Over: Revolutionary Love, ‘Seven,’ and the Ritual of Spoken Solidarity.”

Other authors also invoked numerous images of black women and womanhood in hip hop. Mwangi and Mbure’s “Passion in a Mathree: Metropolitan Love in Nazizi Hirji’s “Kenyan Girl/Kenyan Boy” extends the privileging of women’s voices. Their discussion of Hirji’s role as a female Kenyan emcee reveals how her languages of love interrupt conventional expectations for intimacy. Day’s first person poem “Falling out of Love with Hip Hop” offers an alternative perspective by questioning hip hop’s potential for intimacy. At the same time that hip hop’s international impact proffers insightful postcolonial critiques, a young woman in hip hop’s home spaces wonders whether its compromising complexities will cause their relationship to come to an end. Jones’ clarion

call for men to reclaim their places within the hip hop community in “Love Magnified: Where Art Thou?” encourages men to come and correct their misrepresentations.

The volume represents masculine responses to the questioning and challenging of these women in relationships with hip hop by considering how male artists and performers help to perpetuate or resist hegemonic gender paradigms. Jeffries allows Tupac, Jay-Z, Lil Wayne, and R. Kelly to have their say in his analysis, “Can a Thug (get some) Love?: Sex, Romance, and the Definition of a Hip Hop ‘Thug.’” The conversation about masculinity continues in “What’s Love Got To Do With It?: Analyzing the Discourse of Hip Hop Love Through Rap Balladry, 1987 and 2007.” Bell and Avant-Mier compare and contrast LL Cool J’s “I Need Love” and Soulja Boy Tell ‘Em’s “Soulja Girl” in order to discern generational differences in conceptions of love and gendered expectations.

Relationships are further scrutinized in the special issue’s final three essays. In “Lovin’ Momma and Hatin’ on Baby Mama: A Comparison of Misogynistic and Stereotypical Representation in Songs about Rappers’ Mothers and Baby Mamas,” Tyree queries why rappers love their mothers yet harbor so much disdain for the mother(s) of their children. Family conflict is also the focus of Chaney’s “Trapped in the Closet: Understanding Contemporary Relationships in the African-American Hip Hop Community.” She investigates how heterosexual married couples, specifically those in R. Kelly’s hip hopera *Trapped in the Closet*, address divergent ideas about intimacy and commitment. Finally, in “Show Some Love: Youth Responses to ‘Kiss Me Thru The Phone,’” Utley and Menzies’ findings about youth of color’s relationship to hip hop, interpretations of a video, “Kiss Me Thru the Phone,” and experiences with romance, show that young people of color actively seek representations of love within hip hop culture.

We hope that this issue informs and enlightens readers while also inspiring communication researchers to continue to study hip hop, gender, language, and love. We are extremely grateful to Anita Taylor for her wisdom and vision in inviting us to create this timely special issue. We also are quite indebted to our reviewers for their time, expertise, and insights. Finally, we deeply appreciate Julian Long for serving as copy editor.