

The Cultural Significance of “WAP”

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On August 7, 2020, Atlantic Records released Cardi B's lead single “WAP,” featuring hip-hop star Megan Thee Stallion (Cardi B). The song stands as an acronym for “Wet Ass Pussy,” which the artists rap recurrently throughout the song. This single is comprised of uncensored, sex-positive lyrics sung by women in an effort to desensitize the stigma surrounding women and traditional views on sexuality. The explicit and overt references to the nature of female sexuality can be viewed as a means to dismantle long-standing misogynistic views propagated by the patriarchal hip-hop industry. The song also alludes to many sexual innuendos in an attempt to advocate an unapologetic message of uninhibited self-expression and sexuality. Together, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion adopt the vulgarity that men within the hip-hop genre have perpetuated for years, using it positively as a means to empower all women. They challenge the double standard of men being praised for rapping graphically about sex while women are looked down upon for attempting to do the same. The lyrics in “WAP” have been glorified by many but have also drawn negative attention from more conservative individuals (Holmes). The polarizing nature of the lyrics and overall controversy surrounding the song serves to increase its cultural significance, pushing boundaries and branding “WAP” as a powerful female anthem and social rally.

The success of “WAP” can be greatly attributed to its composition. The lyrics included can be described as risqué and attention-grabbing with memorable lines such as Megan Thee Stallion's “Gobble me, swallow me, drip down inside of me / Quick jump out ‘fore you let it get inside of me” (Cardi B). Cardi B incorporates an assortment of sexual metaphors and allusions to convey to the listener that she is not afraid to fully embrace her sexuality, as women should be free to do without fear of judgement both within the hip-hop community and the rest of society. An example of an allusion made within “WAP” is, “Macaroni in a pot / That's some wet ass pussy” (Cardi B). The line “macaroni in a pot”

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(Cardi B) alludes to a 2014 viral *Vine* (Hofmann) video by 16-year-old Mohamad Zoror, who suggests in the video that the sound of macaroni and cheese being stirred is comparable to the sound of "good pussy" (Zoror). Cardi B uses this allusion to add another creative layer to the song, further establishing herself as sexually confident. Additionally, Megan Thee Stallion composed her lyrics to deliver a similar effect, rapping, "Your honour, I'm a freak bitch" (Cardi B), indicating that she is open and accepting of her sexuality, flaunting her sexual desires without fear of judgment. By addressing "Your honour" (Cardi B), Megan Thee Stallion admits to a court judge that she is a "freak" (Cardi B) and takes pride in it. She also raps, "never lost a fight, but I'm looking for a beating" (Cardi B), acknowledging that she is seeking out taboo sexual experiences entirely out of her submission. The artists' repeated acceptance of taboo sexual desires in the lyrics are demonstrative of their firm belief that their sexuality is not one to be scrutinized but rather one to be accepted and cherished.

In addition to the lyrics, musical characteristics and features play a large role in the success of "WAP." For example, the songwriters and producers employ a deep bass throughout the entirety of the song. This deep bass is catchy for the listener but does not overpower the rappers themselves. There is also a heavily repeated sample of "Whores in this House" (Ski), an older Baltimore Club Single by Frank Ski. The inclusion of the sample further exaggerates the sexual nature of the song and empowers Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion by allowing them to reclaim the word "whore." This word is often used derogatorily towards women who enjoy sexual intercourse, dress in a provocative way, or frequently engage in sexual acts. These social roles of a "whore" are "common images in [Western] culture which are often either glamorized or denigrated" (Pheterson 45-46). They also have "notions of dishonour" (Pheterson 46) but could also be categorized as "good whores and bad whores" (Pheterson 46), depending on the integrity of their work. However, the word "whore" does not necessarily reflect a woman's physical appearance or actions. Instead, it can be used to objectify and demean a woman. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion reclaim this controversial term by demonstrating that a whore can be defined as a person with "values, tastes and satisfactions" (Pheterson 47); they establish that these are the true determinants of self-respect. By pushing the lyrics of the song to the forefront while including repeating musical features, the songwriters and producers have employed an effective technique to highlight the sex-positive message of "WAP."

The song "WAP" has found great social significance in its release, especially among Generation Z. A popular video sharing platform, *TikTok* (Ying), has featured over a million videos and dances inspired by the song. One trend, inspired by Megan Thee Stallion's lyrics, "If he fuck me and ask 'whose is it' / When I ride the dick, I'ma spell my name" (Cardi B), led *TikTok* users to dance along to the verse while spelling out their name with their hips (#SpellMyNameChallenge). The #SpellMyNameChallenge trend sparked discourse on how Westernized societies have overly objectified women so that any exploration of sexuality is

perceived for the gratification of men rather than for women to exhibit self-confidence. However, trends like the #SpellMyNameChallenge served as a major catalyst that also ignited a cultural reset in our generation, allowing westernized societies to see a new perspective on femininity that has been previously restricted. The #SpellMyNameChallenge acts as an example of how people in westernized societies can unite to challenge the status quo and embrace women’s empowerment.

Another trend that arose from *TikTok* is Brian Esperon’s “WAP” choreography (Esperon). Esperon’s video, incorporating quirky and unique dance moves, spread like wildfire. His moves appealed to the interests of Generation Z, and many participated in this trend. Many praised Esperon for his courage in traversing gender barriers as it is rare to see a cisgender man dancing to a song about female sexuality, especially in a society with defined gender stereotypes. Contrarily, many of the more conservative *TikTok* users have taken offence to both the lyrics and the dances accompanying “WAP” trends. Some may argue that Esperon’s dance reinforces gender barriers because men are portrayed as dominant figures who hold and reclaim power and status in society. Similarly, Esperon’s viral choreography can be interpreted as an appropriation of the message and the significance of “WAP.” As a cisgender man gaining popularity for dancing to a female anthem, it is as if he is drawing attention away from the profound issues of feminine sexuality. The message delivered by Esperon through this dance educated Generation Z about the stigma surrounding feminine sexuality. This is a large contributor to the controversy of “WAP” and why its cultural impact is so significant.

Politically, “WAP” itself does not make as bold of a statement with its lyrics as it does socially and culturally. However, the song is still politically relevant as it has boosted Cardi B’s and Megan Thee Stallion’s platforms and political influence. As celebrities, the two could potentially make an impact on their audience’s knowledge and action in politics. For example, with 2020 being an election year, Cardi B conducted a virtual interview via *Elle* (Gordon-Lazareff and Lazareff) with Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden (Cardi B and Joe Biden’s CANDID Conversation About Racial Equality, Free College and Healthcare). During Cardi B’s interview, she was able to communicate her political ideals, such as racial equality, free post-secondary education, and free healthcare, in detail to Biden and her fanbase. Cardi B declares that she wants “black people to stop getting killed” (Cardi B and Joe Biden’s CANDID Conversation About Racial Equality, Free College and Healthcare) and that “[they are] not asking for sympathy, [they] are just asking for equality” (Cardi B and Joe Biden’s CANDID Conversation About Racial Equality, Free College and Healthcare). She speaks up for all of America, saying “nobody wants animosity” (Cardi B and Joe Biden’s CANDID Conversation About Racial Equality, Free College and Healthcare). Cardi also reveals her view on free health care and believes it is important because of “what is happening right now” (Cardi B and Joe Biden’s CANDID Conversation About Racial Equality, Free College and Healthcare)—the Covid-19 pandemic. Biden also expressed an interest in Cardi B’s fans’

concerns and what political changes they would like to see, claiming he will “address all [of their] concerns to his administration” (Cardi B and Joe Biden’s CANDID Conversation About Racial Equality, Free College and Healthcare) if he elected. As a celebrity, Cardi B uses her platform to advocate for political issues on a global scale; she encourages her fans to stand up for what they believe in to make a change that could benefit future generations. On the contrary, those with more traditional and conservative values who look down upon or disapprove of premarital sexual acts may feel as though songs like “WAP” will push youth, especially Generation Z, to act out of alignment with traditional values. James P. Bradley, a Republican congressional candidate from California, writes, “Cardi B & Megan Thee Stallion are [examples of]... children... raised without God and... a strong father figure” (Holmes), and he “feel[s] sorry for future girls” (Holmes) if they are their role models. They fear these types of music “threaten the very future of women everywhere” (Holmes). All in all, a song like “WAP,” which promotes an artist’s platform, can also create connections and debates across westernized societies.

Despite the importance of the social, political, and cultural contexts of the song “WAP,” the cultural impact and context are certainly the largest. To begin, a quick Google search for “hip-hop artists” (*Google search*) yields 51 results, with only 6 of whom identify as women. This is only a small testament to the lack of representation women have seen in hip-hop despite their past contributions. Increasing female representation in traditionally patriarchal genres is an important step to tackling widespread misogyny. For example, rapper Kanye West has featured lines such as “Fuck you and your Hampton house / I’ll fuck your Hampton spouse / Came on her Hampton blouse / And in her Hampton mouth” (West). Kanye West’s lines appear to be more of a loosely veiled and jarring threat than a reclamation of sexuality. Kanye implies that because he is upset, he will have sexual intercourse with someone’s wife out of spite. This is a bold statement that essentially dehumanizes women, reducing them to sex objects to empower Kanye West and establish his superiority. However, when female artists Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion rap about their bodies and sexualities in “WAP,” they are rapping about consensual actions that they enjoy participating in. Contrastingly, “WAP” is empowering for women and does not aim to degrade men to spread the message of feminine sexuality.

Overall, “WAP” and its associated controversy have quickly generated numerous forms of content and conversations regarding the over-sexualization of women and their small numbers in hip-hop in comparison to men. Pop culture is typically used for entertainment purposes; however, “WAP” by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion serves as the bridge between pop culture and the deeper issue of sexism in westernized society, specifically the repression of feminine sexuality. Through the platform *TikTok* alone, “WAP” has reached and influenced individuals in various countries. This will progress as Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and other female rappers continue to release music that features women speaking openly about feminine sexuality. “WAP” has had a positive influence on the

cultural view of women rapping about their bodies and women within the hip-hop industry. Widespread exposure to this song was necessary to further challenge those who do not believe female artists should speak as freely as male artists can. Hopefully, over time, listeners will begin to normalize the ideas presented from lyrics such as those from "WAP."

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