

Book Reviews

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Motapanyane, M. (Ed.). (2012). Mothering in Hip-Hop Culture: Representation and Experience.

Bradford, ON: Demeter Press.

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The world of Hip-Hop is a culture within itself as Maki Motapanyane investigates in her book “Mothering in Hip-Hop Culture: Representation and Experience.” This anthology combines unique and powerful works from different authors who share perspectives ranging from emotional first-hand experiences to critiques of the culture that has made Hip-Hop necessary. Ultimately, these essays, stories, and interviews come together to paint a picture of the representation of mothers in Hip-Hop music and the experience of women who work in the industry. Motapanyane addresses the often violent and objectifying lens that women are portrayed in Hip-Hop music, by contrasting it with the lens that the rappers’ mothers are looked at through. This collection of literature also goes back to the roots of Hip-Hop as a form of poetic expression and verbal rebellion against a society that treats certain groups unfairly. This is related to the experience and life of women in Hip-Hop and how it provides community and support, but also has a long way to go. The book combines these dominant themes, supported through a variety of perspectives, into a collection that gives an introduction into what it’s like as a mother in Hip-Hop culture.

Hip-Hop was born in the late 1970s out of hardship and a collective desire for change. Henry describes Hip-Hop as having the potential to break “...down real experience with the lyricism of poets and the analysis of sociologists” (p. 77). Although oftentimes mainstream Hip-Hop music of today is commercialised in such a way that it promotes lavish lifestyles and

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violence, at its core and history Hip-Hop was used to express suffering and build a sense of belonging in a world where the artist felt alone. Motapanyane explores the power of Hip-Hop and underlines, therefore, how important representation and experience of women is in this cultural context from a sociological perspective.

Motapanyane covers the representation of mothers in Hip-Hop music using four works that address the topic from perspectives of male-rappers idolizing and appreciating their mothers in their music, how this contrasts with how they represent other women in their music, and what mothering is defined as in the culture, especially with regards to what's normal and Black motherhood. One of the first barriers that Hip-Hop tries to break down is the idea of what's normal; the artists of the genre often come from disadvantaged pasts and home situations where often the mother filled the responsibilities of both mother and father. The idea of what it means to be a good mother comes from a very narrow perspective where in order for your son or daughter to be a success, they have to be brought up in a certain way. Several of the works in this book discuss how assigning labels of illegitimate and bad to these parenting situations does nothing to acknowledge the effort of these mothers and the respect they deserve. Gumbs warns us of not approaching these different parenting situations as though they lack something and are fatherless, but instead as though there is an abundance of what's important and they are motherful.

In Hip-Hop music, male rappers celebrate everything their mothers have done to get them to where they are today. In these tracks, rappers step from their traditional dialogue and provide an ode to their mother who was always there for them, tried her hardest through her sacrifices to raise them, and loved them unconditionally. These odes to mothers acknowledge the hardships faced by women in these underprivileged circumstances and the unreserved love and sacrifice

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that are characteristic of mothers all over the world. These narratives of mothering, both from male-rappers about their moms and from female-rappers about their experiences as a mom, share interesting perspectives on what it means to be a mother and raise a child in a way that promotes his or her potential against all odds.

There are caveats however that the authors in the book explore with regards to these positive representations of mothers in rap music: the mother-whore dichotomy, the celebration of one mother and not motherhood, and the cultural situations that have created this discussion. Powers defines the Mother-Whore dichotomy as the ironic representation of the sacred mother in Hip-Hop contrasted with the representation of women everywhere else in Hip-Hop. A single artist can have one track about a woman that gave him everything, and then an entire album devoted to hyper-sexualized, women-bashing tracks about women everywhere else in his life. Nielson sums up this sentiment: "... tempted as we might be to embrace these poignant tributes to mothers as an antidote to that misogyny, we must also keep in mind that these songs eulogize mothers, not motherhood" (p. 49). It's not a tribute to all mothers, but a tribute to his mother in particular.

The second theme of works that Motapanyane shares in this anthology relates to the role Hip-Hop culture plays in mothering and pulls from narratives of personal experiences from different authors including personal anecdotes, commentaries, and interviews from various scholars and artists. From these works, it's very apparent how Hip-Hop culture has an important role in shaping communities generally and supporting mothers specifically. Understanding this role starts with looking at the history of where Hip-Hop music comes from and how it's different from rap we know today; Sharon Miller shares this sentiment saying how "...Hip-Hop is a culture" (p. 104). This is a connection shared by all the contributors to the book, albeit for

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different reasons. For Henry, Hip-Hop provided a family for her when she was pregnant and alone in Columbia and allowed the youth she worked with in Boston to have a refuge and creative outlet to create discourse on societal issues. Calixte describes how marginalized indigenous communities in Canada embraced Hip-Hop culture to articulate complex and unjust feelings of prejudice. The role of Hip-Hop in providing an outlet and a call for help to marginalised populations is at the core of the role of Hip-Hop.

Being a mother in the Hip-Hop community has its own complexities within the male-dominated industry. Generally, women are pressured to choose between being a mother or performing in the Hip-Hop industry. These double standards have given rise to another sub-culture of Hip-Hop where all-female collectives rewrote the script on what it meant to be a Hip-Hop artist and a mom; several of these collectives are analyzed in the book. These narratives expand on the possibilities of Hip-Hop to promote the discussion on important issues and pass on important values. All of the mothers in the anthology that discuss their personal experiences with Hip-Hop culture acknowledge the barriers that they had to overcome and also the opportunities that they found through those same barriers. With Hip-Hop music they've been able to find another way to communicate with their children in giving them a chance to be creative and be who they want to be.

Motapanyane brings together this anthology to provide a new perspective on the often overlooked culture of Hip-Hop, and frames this perspective through a feminist lens by examining the role of mothers in representation and experience. Hip-Hop music has value beyond entertainment; it provides an outlet to discuss problems in our society and gives marginalized groups a strong community to stand with. The role of mothers and women in Hip-Hop continues to grow and through this book, we get a look at this male-dominated industry and where women

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are involved. Hip-Hop culture has given a chance for women to share their experiences, change the narrative on what it means to be a good mother, and how to come together and promote sustainable changes in the industry and communities.

This book provides an unbiased look at both side of the Hip-Hop culture equation with the benefits that it gives, and also the progress that is yet to be made. Motapanyane does a in-depth job at bringing together a wide range of perspectives from scholars and those who have experienced Hip-Hop culture first-hand. Further research into specifically the fabric of and role of a Hip-Hop community would be interesting to see. As well, perspectives on the commercialization of Hip-Hop music into rap as a genre and how that's led to different dialogue that is further from the original role of Hip-Hop could be further explored. This book is a great resource for anyone interested in what effects music can have on building community bonds and promoting social issues. It relates to disciplines of sociology, specifically with regards to woman's studies, and would also be interested in by individuals in the fields of history, psychology, culture studies, and anthropology, to name a few. The book provides a fascinating perspective on music as a vehicle for collective experience, community, and conversation. I found "Mothering in Hip-Hop Culture" to be not only a diverse and exciting read with eight different works exploring different topics, but I also found the book to be an important read to gain insight into what Hip-Hop means for so many, through the lens of motherhood.