SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF JOYFUL RESISTANCE: HIP HOP, TIKTOK, AND BI+ WOMEN'S IDENTITIES

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Lay Abstract

This research explores how bisexuality is represented in today's music videos and online spaces, especially focusing on bi+ hip hop artists who challenge stereotypes about bisexual people. It examines how bisexual women use social media platforms like TikTok to create supportive communities, express their identities, and resist traditional expectations. By studying artists like Princess Nokia, Ashnikko, and Snow tha Product, it shows how digital media helps bisexual women celebrate their identities, form communities, and construct alternative representations to negative stereotypes. Overall, this study highlights how these creative expressions reshape conversations about gender and sexuality, demonstrating that bisexual representation is a powerful tool for feminist activism and positive social change.

Sights and Sounds of Joyful Resistance: Hip-Hop, TikTok, and Bi+ Women's Identities

Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of women's bisexuality in contemporary North American popular music and digital spaces, addressing how bi+ hip hop artists challenge reductive portrayals that contribute to bisexual erasure and stereotyping. It pursues three interrelated inquiries: how diverse women-identifying performers craft transgressive representations of bisexuality; how online affective archives on platforms like TikTok empower bisexual women to negotiate "third spaces" of resistance; and how redefining bisexuality as a transgression of normative boundaries can expand discourses on authenticity in queer and hip-hop studies. These inquiries are vital for understanding the ways in which people with marginalized identities can reconfigure cultural narratives and contest dominant media frameworks.

Employing a mixed-methods design, the study is built around case studies of three artists, Ashnikko, Princess Nokia, and Snow tha Product. Synthesizing close readings of music videos, discourse analysis of digital fan interactions, and multimodal assessments of self-representation (analyzing visual, sonic, and textual elements across various media), each case study examines how artists and fans create affective archives on digital platforms (Cvetovich, 2003). In these alternative spaces, bi+ identities are historicized, validated, and reimagined as acts of *joyful resistance* – a process marked by playful self-celebration and a deliberate repudiation of heteronormative constraints on queer/bi+ people.

This study finds that these cultural productions (including music, music videos, and social media content) not only subvert reductive narratives but also actively construct resilient counter-narratives, reframing contemporary discourses on sexuality, gender, and authenticity via a "bi+ worldview" (Nelson, 2023). In doing so, this dissertation contributes to feminist media studies, queer theory, and cultural studies by positioning bi+ representation as a dynamic form of feminist work, offering critical insights for ongoing discussions in both academic contexts and digital activist spaces.

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Introduction

Bi-Gone Information: Popular Media and Hermeneutical Injustice in Bi+ Lives

Someone once wrote to me in an email exchange, "If you're genuinely bisexual, and not just trying it out, then enjoy the wealth of sexual experience it allows you and stop prevaricating about it." I had to laugh because the use of 'prevaricating' in an ostensibly casual exchange seemed like such a *British* thing to do (he was born and raised in London), but it stung a little, too. The notion of having a "wealth of sexual experience" struck me because it suggests a particularly unrelenting belief about bisexual people: that they are inherently promiscuous. On one hand, this stereotype makes them the butt of countless tired jokes in popular culture. On the other, it leads to real-world consequences, like being overlooked as potential partners because non-bisexual people often perceive them as untrustworthy or not "serious" (Ess, Burke & LaFrance, 2023).[1]

Coming of age in the early 2000s, I was largely exposed to representations of bisexual people in popular media that were steeped in stereotypes and often marked by dismissal or ridicule. Popular culture has contributed significantly to stereotypes of bisexual people as inauthentic, promiscuous, and unreliable. On television, MTV's *A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila* (2007) and the Showtime drama series *The L Word* (2004-2009) could be viewed generously as attempts to begin normalizing bisexuality in Western cultural imaginary, but they mostly ended up adding to its denigration and delegitimization (Cocarla, 2016). I remember thinking that the treatment of bisexuality in the first series run of *The L Word* was particularly hurtful because bisexual identities were

[1] Perhaps not surprisingly, this study found that bisexual *men* experienced the most binegativity, primarily from heterosexual women.

routinely undermined through characters like Alice Pieszecki,[2] who initially identifies as bisexual but is mocked by her friends and gradually absorbed into a lesbian label without meaningful exploration of her fluidity. Meanwhile, Jenny Schecter's shifting attractions from men to women are framed not as expressions of bisexuality, but as symptoms of trauma or instability, reinforcing harmful tropes about bisexuals as untrustworthy or unserious. Jokes about bisexuals being "greedy" or "confused" were common (particularly in the pilot season) and bisexual characters were rarely allowed to define their own identities without ridicule. Despite its cultural significance, *The L Word* often reproduced reductive stereotypes about bisexuality, limiting the scope of its otherwise groundbreaking queer representation.

The same could be said for popular music. I unironically enjoyed Katy Perry's "I Kissed a Girl" (2008) and Lonely Island's, "3-Way (The Golden Rule)" (2011); however, it is hard now to overlook how they so unabashedly leaned into stereotypes while more nuanced portrayals of bisexuality remained scarce. Bisexuality was, almost without exception, caught in an in/hypervisibility trap: either entirely absent (especially for men) or reductively portrayed, especially when bisexual women were treated as props for men's heterosexuality. This thesis emerges from a desire to challenge and complicate these narrow cultural representations by exploring how bi+ artists in hip hop are actively reshaping the discourse around bisexuality through their music, public personae, and fan engagement. By foregrounding artists who refuse to flatten or apologize for their sexual

[2] The 2019 - 2023 run of *The L Word: Generation Q* made significant strides in addressing and ameliorating the series' earlier shortcomings in its representation of bisexual and transgender people.

and cultural multiplicity, I aim to trace how bisexuality can function not only as an identity but also as a creative and political practice. This chapter's opening reflections on media tropes and personal encounters help establish the cultural context in which these artists operate – and from which they diverge. Through case studies of three bi+ hip hop artists – Princess Nokia, Ashnikko, and Snow tha Product – I examine how each artist navigates, subverts, and sometimes strategically engages the very stereotypes that have long marginalized bisexual people. These artists were selected for the ways they bring race, gender, and queerness into dynamic interplay, offering a textured alternative to dominant narratives and signaling what bisexual visibility might look like when it is self-authored, culturally rooted, and politically aware.

This study reaffirms that music and other forms of cultural production are not simply mirrors reflecting social realities but active forces shaping the lived experiences and identities of bi+ people and marginalized communities at large. Just as mid-20th-century scholars challenged the notion of music's autonomy by embedding it within social, political, and cultural frameworks, contemporary analyses reveal how genre, race, gender, and sexuality remain deeply entangled in the structures that govern who is heard, how identities are constructed, and which voices are marginalized or erased. Recognizing these dynamics is essential to understanding both the persistence of exclusion and the transformative potential of music as a site of resistance, identity formation, and cultural negotiation for bi+ individuals and other marginalized groups.

Throughout the thesis I follow Rosie Nelson's (2023) lead in using *bi+* as an inclusive umbrella term for identities characterized by attraction to more than one gender

(2-3). I also draw on Robyn Ochs' widely cited definition, which describes bisexuality as "the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree" (Ochs, 2019). While acknowledging that sexual identity cannot fully capture the complexity of desire or behaviour, I adopt *bi+* to foreground the lived, self-defined identities of those who name and navigate their attractions in socially meaningful ways. This term encompasses bisexual, pansexual, queer, and other multigender-attracted identities, while recognizing the shifting, context-dependent nature of sexuality.

Representation of bi+ people in the media remains a contentious issue within bi+ community spaces, and it is a growing topic of analysis among sexualities scholars. Some research has found that, when bi+ individuals are represented in the media, the portrayals tend to be negative and reinforcing of stereotypes (Bailey et al., 2016; Diamond et al., 2017; Hintz, 2020; Hayfield, 2020; Maimon et al., 2019; Nelson, 2023). Music videos are particularly useful objects of study for how women's bisexuality manifests in the cultural imaginary because they have deep roots in the visual language of film, and they often draw upon the cultural myths and visual tropes that evolved out of the Hay's Code era of Hollywood filmmaking.[3] Feminist media scholar Maria San Filippo (2017) asserts that music videos have deployed bisexual representations to convey a laundry list of negative

[3] This was a colloquial name for a decades-long practice (1930-68) that, among other things, banned any "perversion" of sexuality on screen. Because bisexuality was considered to be "deviant", the code required bisexuality to be portrayed in a negative light if it was to be included in films at all (Bryant, 1997: 60).

traits such as hedonism, immaturity, perversion, sociopathology, and even white privilege (71-2).

Suspicion of bisexual people and the persistence of negative stereotypes about them are deeply rooted in gender normativity and the enforcement of the gender binary—what Judith Butler (1990) describes as the performative production of stable gender and sexual identities through "repeated stylization of the body" (45). Within this binary system, *monosexism* – the assumption that legitimate sexual attraction is directed toward only one gender – functions to delegitimize bi+ identities and uphold hetero- and homo-normativity (Yoshino, 2000). This investment in categorical clarity contributes to a systemic *hermeneutical injustice*, or the structural gap in interpretive resources that makes it difficult for bi+ individuals to understand and communicate their experiences (Fricker 2007). As José Medina (2017) argues, addressing hermeneutical injustice demands *hermeneutical resistance*, a form of "exerting epistemic friction against the normative expectations of established interpretative frameworks and *aiding dissonant voices* in the formation of alternative meanings, interpretations, and expressive styles" (48, emphasis mine). This resistance becomes especially vital in cultural spaces, where dominant narratives continue to frame bisexuality through tropes of confusion, instability, or excess. The persistence of reductive and stereotyped portrayals is not just a symptom of misrecognition but a mechanism through which bi+ people are actively misread, erased, or excluded from the cultural imaginary (Feinstein & Dyar, 2017; Israel, 2018; Turrell, Brown & Hermann, 2018).

One aspect of the hermeneutical injustice in bi+ lives is shaped by what Breanna Fahs calls *compulsory bisexuality*, which further complicates the experiences and representations of bi+ women. *Compulsory bisexuality* describes the pressures for women to perform as bisexual not out of their own desire for sexual exploration, but to satisfy the fantasies of their male partners. This term adapts Adrienne Rich's (1980) notion of *compulsory heterosexuality*, a form of oppression that emerges from the subjection of women to men that aims to reinforce the idea that heterosexuality is the only legitimate form of romantic or sexual compatibility. Through *compulsory bisexuality*, heterosexuality is presented as the only legitimate form of relationship *unless* women's same-sex eroticism is performed for the pleasure of straight men. Fahs (2009) has pointed out that the exploitation of women's same-sex eroticism has led to struggles for women forging bi+ and lesbian identities in a more sustained sense, arguing that when same sex eroticism becomes fetishized and appropriated into the male gaze, "there leaves little room for exploration of same-sex desire in a multifaceted way" (446).

Compulsory bisexuality might take shape in popular media in the forms of *performative* and/or *commodity bisexuality*; both are starkly evident in the realm of music videos. In the mid-2010s, a growing body of online and academic discourse highlighted this trend, critiquing the exploitation of bisexuality for entertainment and profit. For example, Nicki Minaj's lyric from the remix of Doja Cat's "Say So," where she raps, "Used to be bi, but now I'm just hetero," has sparked significant discussion about the concept of performative bisexuality in popular culture (Milton, 2020). On one level, the lyric can be read as a playful nod to fluidity in sexual identity, but on another, it

underscores the persistent cultural suspicion and trivialization of bisexuality as a genuine orientation. Julia Shaw, in *Bi: The Hidden Culture, History, and Science of Bisexuality* (2021), highlights how mainstream media often frames bisexual, femme-presenting women through a performative lens designed to appeal to heteronormative expectations. Similarly, Maria San Filippo (2017) critiqued Lana Del Rey's "Summertime Sadness" (2013) for the way it "re-brands Del Rey as sexually fluid, commodifying bisexuality as a means to expand her marketability through representations that are titillating, depoliticized, and unthreateningly ephemeral" (72). Such portrayals run the risk of reducing bisexuality to a fleeting phase or a spectacle, further undermining its legitimacy in the popular imagination.

Emerging bi+ artists, particularly femmes, thus face a troubling paradox: even as they strive for authentic representation, they often seem to replicate the aesthetics and mechanisms of performative bisexuality to achieve visibility. Rita Ora's "Girls" (2018) presents an even more recent example of this dilemma: Despite Ora's identification as bisexual for many years, the video's lyrics and visuals were criticized for trivializing bisexuality as a playful gimmick. This reaction calls attention to a deeper issue in the representation of bisexuality, namely its "cultural and representational '(in)visibility' [and] simultaneous ubiquity and spectrality, [which] stems from the concurrent fascination and anxiety it provokes" (San Filippo, 2017: 71). Queer theories often emphasize the politics of visibility and the queer body, yet Judith Butler (1993) notes that such visibility assumes a political value where "theatricality itself becomes politicized"

(233). However, the complexities of bi+ representation become apparent when visibility is co-opted into consumerist practices or reduced to patriarchal fantasies.

Nowhere is this challenge more evident than in the cultural formations of hip hop and rap – movements that have long served as sites of both resistance and re-inscription of dominant social norms. Originating as expressive practices grounded in the lived experiences of marginalized communities, hip hop and rap have developed into enduring cultural and commercial powerhouses, yet they continue to grapple with complex and often contradictory representations of gender and sexuality. As an enduring cultural and commercial linchpin of the music industry, hip hop cultures and rap music continue to demonstrate a complex relationship with women and queer representation: for example, we are seeing queer pop/hip hop artists like Lil Nas X gaining visibility and popularity, and, yet, the genre still struggles with its highly masculinized and often misogynistic undertones, which frequently perpetuate anti-queer ideas (Kolarič, 2020). The issue of bisexuality is particularly fraught for both women and men, especially women of colour. Multiply marginalized people like Black bisexual women face additional stressors such as increased racial, gender, and sexual discrimination due to their multiple minority identities (Watts and Thrasher, 2023). Belonging to identity-based communities is identified in recent literature as crucial for mental health and coping with discrimination. However, Black LGBTQ+ individuals often experience stigma within both racial and sexual minority communities, prompting the creation of Black LGBTQ+ spaces to access necessary support (ibid).

Artists like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B, for example, frequently have their same-sex desires dismissed as "queerbaiting" (Kehrer, forthcoming 2025), while the bisexuality of Tyler, the Creator, often pushes him to the other side of the binary, erasing his heterosexual desires and relationships. Megan and Cardi's challenges with acceptance extend to official listings that intentionally exclude them. Luminate's 2022 "*Power of LGBTQ+ Music*" report listed Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B – who have both publicly and, in Cardi B's case, repeatedly identified as bisexual – as women rappers who support but "do not belong to the community" (Luminate, 2022: 16). This misrepresentation underscores a persistent combination of cultural and industry practices that complicate and constrain the authentic expression of women's bisexuality in the music industry, functioning as a form of bisexual erasure for Cardi B and Megan thee Stallion (Kehrer, forthcoming 2025).

Such a representational crisis arises because bisexuality inherently disrupts binary constructions of gender and sexuality, complicating conventional narratives (Ochs, 2019). San Filippo (2017) describes bisexuality as a "pluralistic construct rather than a totalizing essence" (78). Rosie Nelson (2023) similarly frames bisexuality as embodying a "queer suspicion of categories" (180). This resistance to rigid definitions makes bisexuality a vital, yet challenging, subject for intersectional representation and an essential cornerstone of queer theory. This project builds on such insights by examining how bisexuality's resistance to categorical fixity not only challenges dominant narratives but also invites new modes of cultural production and engagement. In particular, the co-creative dynamics of music video culture – especially within hip hop – offer a compelling

site where bi+ identities are not merely represented but actively negotiated, contested, and reimagined. By centering bisexuality as a disruptive force within both identity politics and media aesthetics, this study positions it as a generative lens through which to explore the evolving relationship between representation, authorship, and community.

Bi+ Identity: Early Debates and Present Context

Instances of bisexuality being recognized in human society and the natural world can be traced back to antiquity (Shaw, 2022). Mid-twentieth century sexualities scholars Alfred Kinsey and Wardell Pomeroy (1948) first posited the idea of sexuality as a continuum rather than a fixed binary, acknowledging (with some notable flaws in their methods) that bisexuality constitutes a point along that spectrum.[4] But, as bisexual studies scholar Clare Hemmings (2002) asserts, it wasn't until the 1990s that serious consideration of bisexuality entered academia (19). The etymology of the prefix "bi" ostensibly supports Kinsey and Pomeroy's even-split conception of bisexual attraction, but this is a limiting definition that elides the possibility of attraction beyond the two-gender binary. Much of this early theorizing around bi+[5] identity takes shape in debates on the self, sexuality and subjectivity. A post-structuralist approach articulated by Mariam Fraser (1999), for instance, focused on the way that, "while aspects of the self have been rendered relational… many of the boundaries, not least the boundaries of the human body itself…remain intact" (46). Fraser engages with Foucault's and Butler's

[4] James D. Weinrich (2014) notes that it was interviewers who assigned respondents their respective ratings after interviewing them, rather than having them assign themselves a subjective rating.
[5] I use the terms "bisexual" and "bi+" in the specific contexts that they emerged in; bi+ is a relatively new term that I did not believe would be productive or reasonable to apply anachronistically.

reflections on processes of subjectification, specifically couching her synthesis of their ideas in the concept of *desire* as being unbounded in a physical or identity-laden sense. As Fraser puts it, "the body without organs of bisexuality...reterritorializes the very theory which seeks to explain narrative identities" (161). Fraser argues that this 'body without organs' is thus a useful way to understand how and why bisexuality becomes displaced and erased in sexualities literature and beyond – precisely because bisexuality does not conform to "notions of 'boundedness' that are a necessary feature of intelligible selfhood" (32-3).

These studies marked a significant departure from bisexuality's previous marginalization. Still, while the field of sexualities studies in the West grew exponentially between 1990 and 2015, it lacked substantial attention to the bi+ experience and identity, particularly in the United Kingdom and Canada (Monro et al., 2017; Ferguson et al., 2020). A lack of representation in academia is in part attributable to assumptions that bisexual peoples' experiences are, in essence, "the same" as those of lesbians and gay men (Flanders, Anderson & Tarasoff, 2020), as well as the dominance of binary views of sexual orientation that only recognize homosexuality and heterosexuality (Rehaag, 2009; Greensmith, 2010; Rodriguez, 2016). In Canada, for instance, a brief presented to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health in Toronto, Ontario, found that "many studies on LGBTQ2S people using 'bisexuality' in their titles or keywords contained little or no focus on bisexuality" (Ferguson et al., 2020: 4). Many of these studies' findings instead focused on gay men and lesbian women, resulting in some 75% of bi+ or two-spirit mental health research excluding any bi+ or two-spirit specific results

(ibid). This tendency to eclipse the bi+ experience, and all of its nuanced cultural embodiments, continues to limit our understandings of the 'B$^{(+)}$' in the LGBTQ+ umbrella.

Hemmings' seminal book, *Bisexual Spaces* (2002), while grounded in more postmodernist and psychoanalytic feminist theories, advocated for "more meaning, more presence, more bisexuality" (20) in sexualities literature. Furthermore, Hemmings contended that there remained "too much focus on the empirical structural sociology and psychology, rather than an interrogation of bisexual meaning *per se*" (19-20). Here, Hemmings is clearly calling for a shift in focus toward a more direct examination and questioning of the meanings associated with bisexuality itself and suggests a need for research that examines the subjective experiences, identities, and cultural contexts specific to bisexual+ identity.

Online cultural spaces, especially archival and community based, have emerged as vital in shaping, preserving, and amplifying the affective and ephemeral narratives of queer and bi+ identities. Unlike traditional media, online platforms offer personalized experiences where algorithms curate content based on individual preferences, fostering a sense of intimacy between the artist and the audience (Kurtin, 2019). Moreover, these platforms facilitate community-building among fans who share similar interests or identities, creating spaces for dialogue and collective interpretation (Jenkins, 2006).

This shift from the television screen to the digital realm has, some argue, democratized the way we experience music by breaking down geographical and cultural

barriers (Burgess & Green, 2018). Platformization of the internet has also, for better or worse, made its mark on the promotion and distribution of music, allowing independent artists to gain visibility without traditional industry gatekeepers, as evidenced by the meteoric rise of TikTok stars like Lil Nas X, Doja Cat, and Olivia Roderigo. In any case, such an intense diffusion of the music landscape has challenged a once monolithic industry, and streaming platforms are filled with an overwhelming plethora of artist, genre, and playlist options to explore.[6]

The proliferation of digital media platforms presents an opportunity for scholars to investigate their potential to act as a vehicle for reclaiming history, hearing voices of marginalized groups, and challenging mainstream narratives to reshape cultural memory. More precisely, the intentional use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) / platforms as an extension and expansion of their creative output has enabled artists and fans to create meaningful spaces to enact confrontations with pervasive industry and cultural forces (Das and Farber, 2020: 4).

In their studies of community-based, feminist, and queer music archives, Cantillon et al. (2017) argue that archival spaces and practices are central to queer feminist cultural production, activism, and knowledge-making (41). Moreover, they contend that "there needs to be alternative, unorthodox approaches to archiving and documentation to cater to the deeply affective and ephemeral nature of the materials and stories produced by queer people" (47). This emphasis on affective and nontraditional archives has deeply

[6] An mind-boggling average of 120,000 ISRCs (i.e. new music audio files) were added to music streaming services – across audio and video platforms – *per day* in Q1 2023.

influenced how I conceptualize online digital media and platformed feminisms as forms of affective archival work – practices that document and circulate marginalized voices through engagement, performance, and remix. Within this framework, *hip hop feminism*, as theorized by Joan Morgan (1999), provides a crucial lens for understanding how intersectionality operates within pop culture. By centering hip hop and rap music videos as my primary cultural objects, I illustrate how these digital spaces function as sites of feminist meaning-making, where affect, identity, and resistance become part of a queer/bi+ 'repertoire' that is dynamic, fluid, and negotiated in real time.

For bi+ individuals, navigating these spaces involves strategic efforts to combat erasure rooted in monosexism and cisgenderism. Campaigns like #StillBisexual exemplify how bi+ people narrate their experiences to challenge myths and promote visibility, asserting bisexuality as a legitimate and stable identity irrespective of a partner's gender (Gonzalez et al., 2017). Nora Madison (2017) highlights how online platforms validate bisexual identities through practices like reappropriating symbols, text, and hyperlinks to construct culturally intelligible notions of bisexuality (147). Music clips and lyrics, in particular, have emerged as valuable tools for resistance, complicating dominant narratives about racism, heterosexism, and misogyny. In this context, the ever-more "online-ness" of music videos, while a direct hit to the so-called 'monoculture', affords new opportunities for connection and meaning-making and lend themselves to the notion of the music video as part of an online *affective* archival practice (Cvetovich, 2003).

Despite these opportunities, digital activism has limitations (Simpson, 2018; Storer, 2020). The widespread uptake of social justice movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp demonstrate that online campaigns can effect meaningful change (Nenoff, 2020), yet we must remain critical of how visibility and traction can sometimes result in performative rather than transformative actions (Cabrera et al., 2017). This thesis takes a cautiously optimistic view somewhere in-between the two realities, arguing that power can be exercised not only through overt action but also through the act of "seeing and being seen" (Cantillon et al., 2017). As I discuss at length in Chapter II, the concept of a "critical periphery" (Barberá et al., 2015) is central to understanding how marginalized groups use digital platforms to expand their visibility and influence and play a vital role in shaping the political and cultural significance of bi+ representation.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the rapid expansion of music production and modes of consumption and interaction in the digital sphere, scholarly attention has predominantly focused on film and television when examining bi+ representation (Austin, 2024; Corey, 2017; McDonald, 2013), leaving music significantly underexplored as a medium for bi+ self-expression.[7] Popular music scholarship has long been sidelined due to entrenched biases in both academia and broader cultural discourse that privilege certain forms of music and ways of knowing over others. Historically, Western musicology has been rooted in the

[7] While music videos as cultural objects worthy of serious study have been increasingly represented in academic literature, there remains a paucity of studies about bi+ representation specifically in these contexts save for recent contributions by San Filippo and Smith's (2017) and Chickerlla et al. (2021).

study of "serious" classical music ('high art'), treating it as the apex of artistic achievement while dismissing popular music as commercially driven, ephemeral, and unworthy of serious intellectual engagement (so-called 'low brow' entertainment) (Frith, 1996; Tagg, 2011; Bjerstedt, 2013). This hierarchical distinction between "high" and "low" culture marginalized popular music studies, relegating it to the periphery of music scholarship and institutional recognition.

One major reason for this sidelining is the association of popular music with mass culture and consumerism (Bourdieu, 1984; Cook, 2001; Coates, 2003; Warwick, 2007; Müller, 2023). Traditional academic frameworks often view mass-produced cultural forms as lacking artistic merit or ideological complexity, treating them as mere commodities rather than sites of aesthetic, political, and social significance. This perspective is influenced by critical theorists like Theodor Adorno, who saw popular music as a tool of capitalist standardization and ideological control, rather than a legitimate form of cultural expression (Adorno, 1941; 1960). While scholars today recognize the richness of popular music as a site of resistance, identity formation, and meaning-making, the field continues to grapple with the legacy of these dismissive attitudes (Church, 2015; Müller, 2013).

Gendered and class-based biases also contribute to the marginalization of popular music within academia. Entrenched social constructs that delineate binaries such as speaking/listening, noise/silence, and public/private as masculine/feminine, respectively, serve to devalue forms of musical expression associated with femininity, domesticity, and the everyday (Schafer, 1977; Rodgers, 2020). Feminist perspectives emerging from the

"new musicology" turn of the 1990s brought important critiques of how "light" musical forms such as pop are often associated with feminized or working-class audiences, and are consequently devalued in comparison to classical or experimental genres (Brett, Wood & Thomas, 1994; McClary, 1991; Stras, 2011; Warwick, 2007). By positioning music as both a commodity and a cultural force, Western societies paradoxically amplify its social impact while undermining its legitimacy.

Popular music thus occupies a contradictory space in Western societies: coveted for its ability to influence emotions, shape identities, and persuade audiences, yet it is often trivialized as mere entertainment unworthy of serious study. In advertising, for example, music is a tool of emotional manipulation, crafting brand identities and eliciting desired consumer responses (Deaville, 2022; Taylor, 2016). Similarly, in propaganda, music has played a central role in mobilizing populations, fostering collective identities, and inspiring action (Fauser, 2014; Howerton, 2020; Qin, 2024). Theodor Adorno (1960) explored this in his analysis of music under fascist regimes, where it became an instrument for consolidating ideological power. Popular music's power to move people – literally and metaphorically – has made it a potent weapon in the arsenal of persuasion. Yet, its integration into leisure and commercial spheres strips it of perceived seriousness, reflecting broader contradictions in capitalist and consumer cultures.

Notably, and most relevant to this thesis, these contradictions extend to the tension between music as a form of social resistance and its co-optation by capitalist structures. Throughout history, music has been a tool for political dissent, from labour movement songs to hip hop's critiques of systemic oppression. Yet, capitalist systems excel at

neutralizing these subversive potentials by repackaging and selling them back to the public. Music genres rooted in anti-establishment sentiment such as punk, hip hop, and even protest folk, have all been absorbed into mainstream commercial circuits, often stripped of their radical edge in the process. This reflects a broader pattern in consumer culture, where elements of resistance and authenticity are commodified to generate profit while the underlying social critiques are diluted or ignored (Brackett, 2012; Taylor, 2016; Glick, 2023).

Late-stage capitalism also fosters a paradox in the valuation of artistic labour. While music is a multibillion-dollar industry for record labels and executives like Daniel Ek (the current owner of Spotify), musicians themselves frequently struggle to earn a sustainable income. This struggle is particularly salient in an era of digital streaming and corporate monopolization of creative industries, where we are contending with the widespread expectation that music should be freely accessible, or that artists should create out of passion rather than financial necessity. Each of these beliefs underscores the broader devaluation of cultural labour in consumer society. Moreover, this tension reveals a fundamental inconsistency: music is indispensable to entertainment, advertising, and political messaging, yet those who produce it often face economic precarity (Miller, 2010; Baade, 2018).

In recognizing these contradictions, I have sought to engage with studies that take seriously the role of music cultures as sites for both the reinforcement and the subversion of dominant ideologies. My particular interest lies in how music and music videos function as vital tools for bi+ women online spaces, enabling the cultivation and

articulation of bi+ self-identity, especially as these identities emerge within dynamic and evolving digital contexts. Several noteworthy studies on representations of bisexuality in audiovisual contexts have emerged in the last decade that provided a corpus from which to shape the research questions guiding this dissertation (Nutter-Pridgen, 2015; Cocarla, 2016; San Filippo & Smith, 2017; Hintz, 2020; Kehrer, forthcoming 2025; Chickerella et al., 2021; Nelson, 2023; Wood, 2024). While these projects contribute valuable perspectives to subject areas like bi+ representation in music videos, erasure in popular music discourse, and the mental health impacts of bi+ representation in music videos, few delve into the role of music and video as means of authentic representation and cultivating bi+ identity. This gap is particularly critical in the context of bi+ individuals, whose representation challenges binary constructions of sexuality and disrupts conventional narratives. Academia's continued neglect of music as a medium for bi+ self-expression has precluded significant insights into how bi+ individuals experience and shape popular culture, especially in digital and audiovisual spaces.

Expanding the Framework: Joyful Resistance and (Bi)passing the In/Hypervisibility Paradigm

Throughout this thesis, I examine how the interplay between music consumption, social media engagement, and collective identity formation functions as a process of joyful resistance. This dynamic allows fans to create politicized spaces that are not necessarily overtly political, demonstrating how music facilitates both personal and communal expressions of identity. Unlike visual media, such as film or television, music operates as a cultural artifact with a unique immediacy, evoking shared emotions and experiences through its sonic qualities, physiological impact, and capacity for collective

participation (Juslin and Slaboda, 2010). This is not to suggest that visual media cannot also elicit emotions, foster community, or produce physiological responses – however, music engages these dimensions in a fundamentally different way. Whereas a film or television show often builds emotional resonance through narrative world-building and character investment, music distills emotion to its sonic core, bypassing the need for backstory or imagery (Tan, Spackman, & Peaslee, 2007). Through melody, rhythm, and harmony, music can generate profound affective responses instantaneously, influencing physiological states by triggering dopamine release and synchronizing heart rates among listeners (Blood & Zatorre, 2001; Koelsch, 2014). Additionally, its embodied nature encourages movement – whether through unconscious gestures like tapping a foot, communal practices such as singing in crowds, or structured forms of participation like protest chants (Fritz et al., 2013). Music's ability to synchronize listeners' physiological and emotional states reinforces its role as a deeply participatory and communal medium (Clayton, Sager, & Will, 2005; Tarr, Launay, & Dunbar, 2014).

The advent of social media and parasocial interaction extends these qualities even further, providing interconnected platforms where bi+ identities and marginalized communities can flourish beyond conventional visibility paradigms (Schramm et al., 2024; Click, 2013; Kurtin et al., 2019). Through genre play, reappropriation, recontextualization, and the cultivation of distinct cultural aesthetics, music becomes a site of resistance and identity formation in digital spaces (Duguay, 2023; Lee & Abidin, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2020). In this thesis, I explore how bi+ fans use music videos and other short audiovisual media such as TikTok posts and YouTube shorts to curate

affective archives – collections of emotionally resonant content that reflect and reinforce shared identities. I analyze how these archives emerge through musical fandoms, particularly in relation to musical genre conventions, platform affordances, and the politics of visibility.

Sapphic Pop

An online article published by the outlet *The Pink News* boldly declared that "2023 belongs to queer women" in the music industry (Wratten, 2023), while public declarations of identity by high-profile artists like Miley Cyrus and Demi Lovato have brought non-binary sexualities specifically into mainstream (mostly online) conversations. Miley Cyrus's 2015 announcement of her pansexuality garnered widespread media attention, while Demi Lovato's 2021 declaration of their non-binary identity sparked significant public discourse, particularly online (Time, 2015). These moments, coupled with the emergence of a new subgenre affectionately dubbed 'Sapphic Pop,' signal a shift in how queer women's experiences are celebrated within the music industry. This section examines how 'Sapphic Pop' functions both as a musical subgenre and a cultural formation. I begin by situating it within the broader literature on musical genre and identity formation before turning to the role of audiences and streaming platforms in shaping its circulation and reception. I then analyze how fans use these platforms to build community, share affective experiences, and contest normative representations of sexuality and gender.

'Sapphic Pop' is characterized less by its musical characteristics and more by its social dimensions and contours: it is a celebration of women's empowerment, love, and

desire, with a marked lyrical and visual focus on the experiences and perspectives of queer women. Popular music scholar David Brackett (2016) has written extensively on the long, popular (as well as scholarly) tradition of homologies between musical tastes and social groups, noting that "genres are not static groupings of empirically verifiable musical characteristics, but rather associations of texts whose criteria of similarity may vary according to the uses to which the genre labels are put" (4). Brackett posits that "homologies are the patterns of relationships between musical and extra-musical elements that come to characterize a genre, and that often provide the basis for the formation of subcultures" (ibid, 35). These homologies establish a sense of shared identity among the creators and consumers of a specific genre, thus allowing for the formation of communities around certain musical styles. Brackett underscores the importance of understanding popular music within its cultural, historical, and social contexts, and asserts that "popular music is a site where various social groups negotiate their identities and attempt to establish a sense of community" (Brackett, 1995: 25).

Jennifer Lena's (2012) work on the concept of genre as a dynamic and community-based process also sheds light on the development of Sapphic Pop. She asserts that genres are "not static entities, but rather the product of the ongoing interactions between creators, audiences, and industry actors" (7). The rise of Sapphic Pop is clearly an outcome of this interactive process, where artists, listeners, and the music industry have somewhat serendipitously come together to forge a distinct musical identity that the industry itself has recognized and, in its own way, "legitimized". This process has worked, concurrently, as part of a larger landscape of fourth-wave feminist

activism[8] that aims to foster a sense of community built upon shared identities and experiences. As Lena demonstrates, these processes are not only essential to a genre's formation, but its ongoing *sustainability* (ibid).

Fabian Holt's work in genre theory was pivotal in tracing how genre formation in popular music is intertwined with institutionalized power structures, which heavily influence how artists are categorized *and* how audiences engage with them. Holt (2007) built on the observations of early music sociologists like Simon Frith and Theodor Adorno, establishing that music genres are highly socially constructed and dynamically shift in response to cultural and commercial forces (65). Media institutions with investments in maintaining power are crucial in shaping how music is marketed and consumed, reinforcing or disrupting prevailing norms (ibid, 37). Spotify and Apple Music, while valuable platforms for the discovery of new music and the formation of new genres along socially constructed lines, perpetuate the marginalization of Black artists and Black feminist voices under the guise of "industry democratization" while continuing to reproduce the same racialized ideas of genre that defined broadcast radio (Johnson, 2020; Werner, 2018).

These platforms claim to democratize the industry by offering algorithm-driven discovery and access to independent artists, yet their recommendation systems and playlisting structures often reinforce existing racial hierarchies rather than dismantling

[8] Fourth-wave feminism is often characterized by its emphasis on intersectionality, digital activism, and the use of social media platforms for consciousness-raising. Katie Blevins (2018) highlights the power of social media platforms in amplifying marginalized voices and fostering a sense of community through shared experiences.

them (Johnson, 2020). Black feminist artists, whose work often challenges dominant genre conventions and industry expectations, frequently find themselves excluded from major promotional playlists or categorized in ways that obscure their political and cultural significance. As Johnson (2020) notes, streaming services operate under a veneer of neutrality but rely on data-driven mechanisms that privilege commercially viable, mainstream-friendly content, often marginalizing voices that resist easy categorization. By emphasizing metrics such as engagement rates and stream counts – figures that reflect historically unequal access to media visibility – these platforms reproduce the very power imbalances they claim to disrupt. In effect, the purported democratization of music streaming serves to reinforce the exclusion of Black feminist artists, maintaining genre boundaries that limit their reach and influence while benefiting corporate stakeholders invested in a depoliticized, market-driven music landscape.

The formalization of Sapphic Pop as a category elucidates how genres so often extend beyond the music's sonic qualities to encompass cultural and social situatedness. Bizarre genres like "Post-Brexit new wave" (Unpublished Zine, 2025), "Simpsonwave" (Reddit, 2025), and "Goblincore" (DailyMusicRoll, 2025) all exemplify the interconnected cultural realms that influence the development of a new subgenre in music.[9] Sapphic Pop is especially exciting because it is inextricably linked to community-building, the establishment of homologies, and the broader cultural context of the fourth-

[9] All three subgenres – Simpsonwave, Goblincore, and Post-Brexit New Wave – share a foundation in nostalgia, subversion, and reaction to cultural anxieties. Despite differing visual aesthetics, all three reflect a countercultural response to societal change and develop reinterpretations of familiar cultural artifacts.

wave feminist movement – all of which have contributed to the empowerment and celebration of queer women's voices within the music industry.[10] Playlists that are created by everyday users on the platform participate in discourses that can be used as a means of curating subjectivity,[11] and reflect an emergent multi- and transmedia discourse.[12] These digital practices reconfigure traditional paradigms of representation, providing a first glimpse into how these processes can be understood as a form of *joyful resistance* by fostering spaces where queer women's voices can thrive through emotive/affective connections.[13]

Research Aims and Contributions

Understanding the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by bi+ individuals in navigating popular culture offers critical insight into how they negotiate visibility, representation, and identity in a world increasingly shaped by digital media. This dissertation responds to the need for a more nuanced exploration of bi+ identities beyond

[10] The TikTok trend centered around Norwegian artist Girl in Red further illustrates the transformative potential of music in queer spaces. The phrase "do you listen to Girl in Red?" became synonymous with queer identity, with hashtags and videos embedding this coded language in everyday interactions.

[11] It seems significant that bisexual women have gravitated toward the 'sapphic' label. It could be a reflection of the speculation that Sappho herself was bisexual, but I think it also offers some distance that is more comfortable for bisexual people in that the term "sapphic" is a placeholder for a woman's *desire* of other women, which does less to preclude the possibility of attraction to a man than the term 'lesbian' does.

[12] There is a popular subreddit called r/SapphoandHerFriend, where users mainly post instances of lesbian erasure and memes about the historical debate over Sappho's contested sexuality. The term "Sapphic" appears frequently in this space.

[13] While Sapphic Pop offers a vibrant space for queer women's representation, it is not without limitations. As journalist Emma Madden points out on the Switched on Pop podcast, the genre often skews "very white and cisgender" by embodying the sonic markers of that identity (Switched on Pop, 2022). This narrow representation can inadvertently exclude queer women of color and those who do not conform to cisgender norms, thereby perpetuating a limited perspective within a genre that aims to celebrate diversity. Expanding the genre to encompass more diverse narratives would further its potential as a site of joyful resistance, as I discuss in Chapter III.

the binary logics traditionally reinforced by mainstream media. It emphasizes the dynamic interplay between societal perceptions, mediated depictions, and the agency of bi+ artists who resist erasure and embody the practice of *joyful resistance* through their cultural production. In this section, I turn to my case studies of Ashnikko, Princess Nokia, and Snow tha Product, whose work intervenes in media landscapes that have long marginalized bisexuality/bi+ identity. Their creative practices demonstrate how bisexuality can function not merely as an orientation but as a critical mode of engagement that challenges entrenched stereotypes in popular music representations, reconfigures genre boundaries in bold and confounding ways, and cultivates alternative forms of visibility and belonging for bi+ people.

What follows is a roadmap for the thesis. I introduce the three research questions that shape this project, outline the theoretical frameworks and methodological tools that inform my approach, and situate the study's key contributions within ongoing scholarly conversations. I then describe the case study structure and preview the content of each chapter. Each of the case study chapters is shaped by the following central research questions:

1. How do online "affective archives" on platforms like TikTok and YouTube empower bisexual women to articulate and negotiate "third spaces" of resistance?
2. How do diverse women-identifying performers construct transgressive representations of bisexuality online and in music?
3. How does understanding women's bisexual identity as a transgression of normative boundaries expand notions of authenticity in queer and music discourses?

Methods and Case Studies

Adhering to an insistence that *all research is subjective,* I chose a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to cultural analysis because it enables me to provide nuanced insights into bi+ representation. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of marginalized perspectives, embracing subjectivity and reflexivity while challenging positivist notions of objectivity (Lopez & Tracy, 2020). These methodologies are deployed in the thesis as means of critiquing static understandings of culture, namely by emphasizing the importance of context, power dynamics, and interpretative multiplicity.

In this thesis, I employ a case-study methodology to analyze three selected artists. Political scientist Yves-Chantal Gagnon has observed that the case-study approach, while carrying risks of generalization, "can enable in-depth analyses of complex phenomena, contexts, and histories, and they can serve as the basis for meaningful theory building" (Baade & Deaville, 2016: 6). These artists were selected for their prominence and their engagement with themes of identity, sexuality, and feminist resistance in both their music and online personas. By examining their creative practices within specific cultural and social contexts, this research sheds light on how they subvert restrictive notions of identity and sexuality while fostering inclusivity and promoting intersectional understandings of feminism.

Primary sources for this research include online and audiovisual materials found on the video streaming platforms YouTube and TikTok, as well as the social networking site Twitter/X. These digital spaces are instrumental in contemporary music distribution and fan engagement, particularly for artists who are continuing to build out their fanbases

and establish a presence. Audiovisual analysis techniques drawn from the works of Carol Vernallis (2013/2016) and Ciara Barrett (2017) guide the close readings of the artists' audiovisual and lyrical performances to reveal how bisexual identity is constructed and presented as sonically and visually resistive. Additionally, the research builds on insights from platform studies (Helmond, 2015; Anable, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018), online ethnography (Pink et al., 2016), and online communication theories relating to celebrity authenticity and online activism (Hunting & Hinck, 2017; Kurtin et al., 2018/2019). This analysis situates bi+ representation within the broader cultural dynamics of fourth-wave feminism and queer studies, emphasizing the interplay between individual agency, media institutions, and audience reception.

My case studies on Nuyorican rapper Princess Nokia, Alt-rapper Ashnikko, and Mexican-American rapper Snow tha Product demonstrate that participating in online campaigns and other peripheral / less explicitly political means of advocating or facilitating social change can be examples of exercising agency and power when viewed as part of a distinctly fourth-wave feminist landscape. Each chapter builds on existing interdisciplinary scholarly and public dialogues, particularly popular music and SNS studies, as well as the wider conversation surrounding bi+ representation in new media formats.

While each case study I have undertaken utilizes a diverse set of analytical tools, this thesis is underpinned by several overarching themes and conceptual frameworks that work to unfold the concept of *joyful resistance*. Through this interdisciplinary framework I aim primarily to advance theories on community formation around shared identities and

interests. Centering a popular music studies approach specifically provides an under-researched perspective to sexualities studies by addressing music's overlooked role in bi+ representation and identity formation through and within popular culture.

1) Intersectionality

Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality has been a crucial lens for examining the structural processes and practices that disadvantage marginalized groups, particularly women of colour. Both earlier waves of feminism and online feminisms have been criticized for being "rooted in whiteness" (Daniels, 2016: 4), with digital feminism being critiqued for reproducing the failures of earlier feminism (Hackworth, 2018: 55). Brittney Cooper (2016) emphasizes that for intersectionality to be applied productively, it must extend beyond the mere acknowledgment of multiple identities along a single-axis framework. In other words, intersectionality as a critical lens not only highlights the nuanced nature of lived experience while reinforcing a core tenet of feminist scholarship: recognizing the diversity that exists among women. As Edwards and Esposito (2019) put it, intersectionality as an interpretive lens is, "a framing – a conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power…" (36).

Rooted in the lived experiences of Black women, *hip hop feminism* addresses the intersections of race, gender, and class within both feminist theory and hip hop culture. Importantly, it critiques the sexism and misogyny often found in hip hop while simultaneously embracing the genre as a site of empowerment and resistance. Chapter IV

situates this framework culturally, invoking Latinx, Indigenous, and Chicana feminist scholarship. Scholars in these fields have argued that the music industry has a long history of appropriating Latinx cultural elements while failing to engage with the deeper political and social struggles they signify. *Chicana feminisms* are thus often characterized by "identifying absences and exclusions and arguing from that standpoint", often described as a 'third space' to contest silencing and for "talking back" (Zavella et al., 2003). Through these distinct cultural lenses, both Black and Latinx/Chicana feminist theories are applied in a popular media context to critique how institutions and platforms dictate which voices are amplified and how narratives of authenticity are constructed.

2) Expanded theories of gender and sexuality

Butler's (1994) foundational theory of *gender performativity* was pivotal in establishing the understanding that gender constructions are not fixed but rather constituted by an ongoing performance shaped by social expectations and interactions. Sexualities scholars Kessler and McKenna (2006) also understand binary cultural conceptions of gender in a somewhat Butlerian sense, in that they assert that the fixture of ideas about "two genders only" is "an accomplishment" of social interactionist work (Golden, 2000: 30). Their research weakened the conventional binary perception of sex as a natural dichotomy, and advocated instead for a nuanced theoretical framework that offers "alternative possibilities for understanding the meaning of gender" (Kessler & McKenna, 2006: 181). This notion extended post-modernist and post-structural discussions of identity by questioning the objective reality of sex, shifting the focus towards the fluid psychological and social dimensions of gender (Crawford, 2000: 7).

These shifts in how we embrace plurality and contingency in terms of gender identity should therefore also hold some significance for how we contend with processes of constantly negotiating sexuality in the twenty-first century.

Culturally informed understandings of bisexuality as a fluid, unfixed point along a gender and sexuality spectrum must necessarily extend our understandings beyond entrenched binary categorizations. As Butler (1990) wrote in *Gender Trouble*, "Th[e] imperative for repetition introduces the possibility of variation into queer and trans people's performative enactments of gender and ultimately establishes the instability of gender categories" (185). I extend this to performances of bisexuality and other nonbinary identities, particularly as they are inscribed in dynamic and evolving digital and audiovisual contexts, which work to intervene in queer theory's investment in binary cultural conceptions of gender and sexuality. One of the most cited critiques of queer theory's binary tendencies comes from bisexual theorists like Shiri Eisner, who argues that queer discourse often constructs bisexuality as a "contaminated" or "compromised" identity because it does not fully reject heterosexuality or engage in strict opposition to it (Eisner, 2013: 102). As Marshall (2009) demonstrates, bisexuality complicates Butler's model by existing outside the framework of "melancholic foreclosure", exposing the limitations of performative gender as an accomplishment solely predicated on rejection.

Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) also highlights the limitations of strict heterosexual/homosexual binaries, but notes that the binary logic remains dominant in both mainstream and queer discourses, making bisexuality and the "performative spaces of contradiction" within these boundaries a destabilizing force that

is often ignored (Sedgwick, 1990: 47-8). Similarly, Kenji Yoshino critiques the "epistemic contract of bisexual erasure," which occurs in both heteronormative and queer theoretical spaces where bisexuality is dismissed as either a phase or as politically incoherent (Yoshino, 2000: 392-5). Rather than reinforcing binary identity formations, bisexuality – as represented in literature, music, and digital spaces – reveals how nonbinary modes of desire and identification refuse stable categorization. These evolving performances, shaped by cultural and technological shifts, challenge queer theory's historical erasure of bisexuality and demand a more nuanced framework that accounts for fluidity, contradiction, and multiplicity in identity construction.

3) Mediated/platformed feminisms

Digital spaces like social networking sites (SNS) (e.g. TikTok and Twitter/X) as well as streaming platforms (e.g. YouTube and Spotify) can serve as critical sites for feminist expression, activism, and community building. By analyzing how bisexual women artists utilize these platforms, I have strived to illustrate how they challenge heteronormative narratives and foster inclusivity. The mediation of feminism through channels like music and other popular media, while complex, can be useful for advancing feminist goals within wider public discourse. Part of the project of mediated feminism is to demonstrate how media can facilitate feminist ideas and attend to the preservation of marginalized voices on so-called 'neutral' platforms.

Far from being neutral, platforms have the power to "steer user interaction [and] simultaneously shape social norms" (van Dijck, 2018: 11). By increasing visibility,

shaping public opinion, and fostering engagement, mediated feminism plays a significant role in bringing ongoing sociopolitical issues for women into a practical register. While there is a risk of mediated feminism becoming watered down or essentialized, this thesis aims to demonstrate that it can also serve as a bridge between the loftiness of feminist theory and the real-world challenges of everyday life by making feminist ideas more accessible and actionable.

4) Affective relations / affective archives

This thesis leverages and builds on foundational insights from affect scholarship to better understand the ways in which popular music and fandom serve as dynamic arenas where culture is created, preserved, and mobilized through the power of affect (Ahmed, 2004; Cvetovich, 2003; Sedgwick, 2003). Long et al. (2017) and Grossberg (2002) provide a conceptual framework that places affect at the heart of popular music and fandom studies, arguing that emotional engagement is not merely a by-product of cultural participation but a generative force shaping identity, memory, and agency.

Music videos have become a key modality through which contemporary artists tell their stories and are thus a powerful expressive form animating fourth-wave feminist activism (Vernallis, 2004; 2013; 2016). Much like advertisements, they are densely packed with rich symbolism, excess, and affective charge, privileging *truth in subjectivity*. This aesthetic emphasis on emotional authenticity, as I take it, is rooted in Romantic ideals that emerged in nineteenth-century European art music, when composers like Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, and Cécile Chaminade rejected Enlightenment

rationalism in favour of personal expression and raw emotion – a shift reflected in the poetic and musical richness of the Lied as a genre that became concerned with gendered experience and subjective intensity (Kenny & Wollenberg, 2016: 2; Lowe, 2007). Through sweeping melodic lines, dramatic harmonies, and dynamic contrasts, Romantic composers sought to communicate the ineffable, such as feelings of longing, loss, and the sublime (Taruskin, 2010).

In much the same way, contemporary music videos that engage with queer, feminist, or countercultural aesthetics can operate as sites of affective intensity, where personal and performative subjectivity becomes a mode of "truth-telling". The digital age offers new ways to blur the creative boundaries between art and identity, echoing the Romantic fascination with the artist as both creator and persona. Just as Clara Schumann wove together virtuosity and interiority to craft compositions that resonated with both technical brilliance and profound personal expression (Stefaniak, 2017), today's artists construct intricate audiovisual narratives across genres and platforms that merge self-expression with spectacle in ways that engage audiences in novel and powerful modes of meaning-making (Austin, 2024). Through music and its increasingly concentrated visual forms, we can attend to Hemmings' call for an understanding of bisexual "meaning" in a supremely subjective sense. More precisely, understanding the contours of co-created meaning through *affective relations* reveals how inter- and intra-personal identities "take hold and reshape themselves" (Kassabian, 2013: 22) through the integration of audiovisual stimuli – stimuli that are deeply tied to how we relate to and make sense of the world around us.

The emphasis on emotional symbolism, subjective truth, and aesthetic excess embodied in the music videos I have centered in this thesis circulate within broader cultural and digital ecosystems, where these videos function as *affective archives* (Cvetovich, 2003), preserving not only emotional expression but also feminist and queer cultural memory. Understanding how these interconnected realms function as repositories for feminist cultural production and knowledge-making is central to this thesis. Cantillon, Baker, and Buttigieg (2017), for example, argue that "feminist and queer music archival spaces and practices are central to feminist cultural production, activism and knowledge-making" (41). By framing platform-hosted music videos and the social interactions held therein as affective archives, I highlight their significance in preserving and disseminating the ephemeral content created by bisexual women artists.

Chapter II – Princess Nokia: The Puerto Rican-born, New York-based hip hop artist Princess Nokia advances her vision by queering hip hop sound, embracing genderqueer aesthetics, and insisting on multiplicity. This chapter examines her articulation of a *hip hop feminist vocabulary* that challenges gender normativity, racial essentialism, and respectability politics. Using a scavenger methodology (Halberstam, 1998), I analyze Nokia's lyrics, music videos, and spiritual activism, highlighting her engagement with what I call *messy feminism*. Ultimately, it argues that Princess Nokia's cultural work functions as part of a queer feminist vocabulary that expands hip hop 's legacy of storytelling and self-expression.

Chapter III – Ashnikko: UK-based alt-rapper Ashnikko uses musical performance and social media as a key locus of her resistance to bisexual erasure and essentialization.

By enacting an oppositional "queer gaze" that troubles culturally entrenched binaries, she engages in queered reclamation practices and challenges heteronormative views of the feminine. Utilizing the concept of "merged fan intimacy" (Hunting & Hinck, 2017), I examine the parasocial interactions between Ashnikko and some of her online fans, situating these online interactions as part of a "critical periphery" to the bisexual acceptance movement (Barberá et al., 2015).

Chapter IV – Snow tha Product: Chicana rap artist Snow tha Product exemplifies the interpretation of hip hop performance as a process of *cultural translation*. Her music and lyrics locate her at the nexus of multiple borderlands, enabling her to claim a distinct group of identities that are encoded and translated for global audiences. In this way, Snow articulates a "knowledge of the self" (Gosa, 2014) that is central to the empowerment ethos of women's hip hop. My analysis elucidates how Snow's music and online vlogging act as cultural sites for reimagining binary and colonial conceptions of Latinx women's sexual identity and social roles as mothers.

Positionality

My first experience of hip hop music was in the back seat of my oldest sister's car, the diss-track "Takeover" from Jay Z's *The Blueprint* (2001) pounding through the aftermarket stereo speakers (it seemed so cool to 11-year-old me but was undoubtedly obnoxious to everyone else). The first hip hop album I ever *personally owned* and listened to cover to cover was Eminem's *The Eminem Show* (2002). Eminem was, for all intents and purposes, my first real foray into learning about the rage that this kind of music could embody; I enjoyed the hard-hitting sounds and raw lyrical poetry, but I was

too young to have a technical appreciation of what made rap so innovative and culturally significant. Yet, while Eminem's music gave me a glimpse into hip hop's raw intensity and rebellious spirit, it did not expose me to the lived realities that shaped the genre – realities deeply rooted in the experiences of Black and Brown artists and communities.

While my appreciation for the rap genre's progression and hip hop's historical roots has deepened over the years, I am no closer to understanding those lived experiences. My interest in hip hop and, more recently, Latinx studies, while approached with curiosity and a genuine desire to learn, nonetheless impels me as a human and aspiring scholar to approach my research with an awareness of the privileges and power dynamics that accompany my identity as a white woman. Over the course of writing this dissertation, reflexivity has become central to my practice; I am cognizant of the fact that the research process is not a neutral endeavour but one that is shaped by the interplay of my own social location and the diverse, intersectional identities of the artists I study and the communities they claim. The practice of *intersectional reflexivity*, as laid out by Rodriguez and Ridgway (2023), provides a moral imperative for me to interrogate how socially constructed categories of difference are mobilized in my research exchanges and practices, often in ways that co-create moments of privilege and disadvantage both for myself and the communities whose lives and cultural production I am inspired to learn about.

My positionality as a white researcher carries both systemic privilege and the risk of perpetuating power imbalances, particularly in cross-cultural settings where histories of colonialism and academic imperialism may continue to reverberate. While biases can

never be completely mitigated, I am committed to doing the reflexive work of recognizing the fluidity of privilege and disadvantage (Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2023: 11) and the relational dynamics that shape the co-construction of knowledge. In the context of this dissertation research, I have worked to critically examine how I invoke and navigate my identity to elicit narratives and interpret findings. Understanding that reflexivity must go beyond self-awareness to address systemic power structures (Choo & Ferree, 2010), I often reflect on how my research questions, interactions, and analyses are embedded in broader hierarchies of power.

My aim is to engage in research that is not only ethically accountable but also actively works to challenge the silences, exclusions, and normative assumptions that often accompany scholarly inquiry. This work, like the audiovisual texts I engage with, is messy and involves balancing sensitivity with humility to recognize that I may not always get it right. As I have carried out this work, I have strived to take seriously my responsibility to always be listening and learning in my role as both a knowledge producer and a participant in ongoing dialogues about equity and justice. This ethic of care and reflexivity informs not only how I conduct research but also how I interpret the cultural texts at the heart of this study. By approaching audiovisual media with attentiveness to both their political stakes and their affective resonances, I seek to honour the complexities of bi+ lived experience as they unfold across digital and cultural landscapes.

This study positions bi+ cultural expression as a vital site of feminist resistance, where identity, affect, and community are negotiated through digital and musical forms. This is

to say that bi+ cultural labour itself is a site of struggle, wielding music's affective power, digital intimacy, and feminist futurity. This study thus affirms the transformative potential of cultural production to craft spaces where bi+ identities can not only exist but thrive on their own terms. Ultimately, this thesis positions *joyful resistance* as a critical mode through which bi+ artists reimagine visibility not as a capitulation to legibility within existing patriarchal frameworks, but as an affective and epistemic challenge to them. It foregrounds how pleasure, play, and excess are mobilized as political acts, made both audible and visible in the creative expressions of bi+ identity. Whether in the sonic innovations of hip hop or the visual vernaculars of TikTok, the sights and sounds of *joyful resistance* refuse containment, instead amplifying forms of resistance that are felt as much as they are seen and heard.

Chapter I – Exploring Princess Nokia's Hip Hop Feminist Vocabulary

A Note on Methodology

At certain moments throughout this case study chapter, I have embraced a writing style that is intended to mirror the narrative-driven and immersive voice often found in music journalism. This approach is in equal parts a stylistic choice and an academic tool: I hope to provide an engaging analysis that also embodies a methodological stance which values the power of storytelling and honours the subjects of my study. This has become particularly pertinent to me as I have been exploring the intersections of identity, culture, and resistance in hip hop music, where the traditional academic voice may fall short of capturing the lived realities and the emotive potency embedded within this genre's themes and history.

This chapter is, of course, an academic venture, but it is also an attempt at a balanced exploration and appreciation of Princess Nokia's work as an artist and activist in the contemporary hip hop and feminist landscape. The various voices I deploy throughout the chapter are thus meant to reflect my commitment to a form of academic writing that is as multifaceted and impactful as the subjects it seeks to explore, aiming above all to contribute to a more accessible and empathetic scholarly dialogue.

Introduction: Who is Princess Nokia?

There is a kind of charge to Princess Nokia's presence that resists easy description; it comes through on-camera as easy and soft-spoken but with the self-assured confidence of someone who has worked hard to earn their place. Destiny Frasqueri, known by her stage name as Princess Nokia, is a Puerto Rican rapper, actor, and cultural

shapeshifter from Harlem whose body of work has long refused containment. Her discography, sprawling and nonlinear, fuses vulnerability, genre disruption, and a kind of unruly, "freak flag" charisma that has become signature to her style. She is just as likely to rap over a house beat as she is to scream through a nu-metal breakdown, and there is little interest in asking permission for either.

Nokia's path into the music industry didn't follow the predictable route. After a series of personal tragedies in her formative years, Nokia began seriously writing music as a teenager while living with her grandmother in East Harlem and the Lower East Side. She released her first track, "Destiny," on SoundCloud in 2010 under the moniker Wavy Spice – early material that picked up traction in queer nightlife circuits across New York City, especially in gay clubs where she has said she felt most embraced (Moran, 2017). These spaces would go on to shape the tone and energy of her sound: gritty, experimental, sometimes campy, often chaotic, and always personal.

Her live performances and music videos draw from an eclectic lineage of hip hop pioneers like MC Lyte and Queen Latifah, who all sit comfortably alongside pop and nu metal legends like Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, Korn, and Slipknot. The result is a sonic vocabulary shaped by rave, punk, reggaeton, and emo, with an unmistakable DIY sensibility (Starling, 2016). That experimental instinct became known to a wider audience with the release of *Metallic Butterfly* (2014), a project that, while not her most commercially successful, signaled the emergence of an artist already fluent in her own mythos - indeed, the album's fusion of hip hop, electronica, and goth references helped solidify her as "one to watch" in the early 2010s (Trimboli, 2015).

The release of her debut studio album two years later, *1992 Deluxe* (2016), would sharpen her lyrical lens while expanding her reach. The album, which she called her "love letter to New York," offered something equal parts nostalgic and confrontational (Petridis, 2017). It climbed to #25 on Billboard's Heatseekers Album chart in 2017, marking a turning point in her mainstream visibility. Songs from the record combine braggadocio with confession, family history with friendship, and personal resilience with unapologetic social critique. At the center of it all is a distinctly hybrid voice attuned to both inner life and street-level politics.

Across her catalog, Nokia holds space for her Nuyorican[14] and Afro-Indigenous (Taíno) heritage, for queerness, and for what it means to be feminine in ways that do not always align with North American culture's dominant scripts. She has spoken publicly about the scrutiny that often accompanies this self-positioning, but she has also been unwavering in her commitment to it. "I will never change my voice for nobody," she once told *Refinery29* (2016).

Roadmap

This chapter mobilizes a 'scavenger methodology' (Halberstam, 1998), drawing together a constellation of theoretical frameworks to engage with figures and practices that have been "deliberately or accidentally" overlooked (13). Rather than privileging a single disciplinary lens, this approach embraces a kind of methodological promiscuity as a means of capturing the complexity of identities in contemporary hip hop culture. The

[14] This term is a portmanteau of "New York" and "Puerto-Rico", used as a way to identify the culture and language
of members of the Puerto Rican diaspora specifically located in and around New York City.

chapter is organized around four pivotal aspects of Nokia's creative expression that are unfolded through a multimodal exploration of her audio/visual works and media interviews, informing how I develop my overarching concept of a "hip hop feminist vocabulary". In this way, I aim to mirror the dynamism of Nokia's self-identified queer presentation, underscoring her role as a vital, resistive force in the artistic landscape of fourth-wave feminist politics.

Part I begins by explicating the notion of "messy feminism", a concept that emerges from the overlapping epistemologies of Black feminist thought, queer world-making, and embodied experience. Messy feminism thus is a refusal of perfectionism, and a way of holding space for contradiction and complexity without collapsing into incoherence. For Joan Morgan (1999), "More than any other generation before us, we need a feminism committed to 'keeping it real.' We need a voice like our music – one that samples and layers many voices, injects its sensibilities into the old and flips it into something new, provocative, and powerful" (62). This chapter takes that invitation and puts Princess Nokia's self-defined "urban feminism" in conversation with Durham, Cooper, and Morris' formulation of "percussive feminism" (2013), which insists on a feminism that is both "disruptive and generative through its affective and vernacular means (724). Both concepts challenge sanitized forms of empowerment discourse, instead insisting that feminism, when filtered through hip hop's aesthetic and political modalities, gets louder, wilder, and more unapologetically rooted in lived experience. *Messy feminism* thus becomes useful in this chapter as a lens through which to interpret Nokia's sonic textures, video aesthetics, and lyrical defiance.

Part II shifts toward foundational ideas of gender theory to examine how Nokia confronts normative constraints around gender and sexuality within a genre historically structured by heteromasculine codes and logics. Hip hop, while rich in subcultural resistance, has also been a site of gendered policing, where deviation from cis-hetero norms is often rendered invisible or punished. Drawing on her music videos, interviews, and performative choices, I consider how Nokia articulates a non-binary, femme-assertive mode of expression that resists the compulsory masculinity embedded in much of hip hop's history. This section foregrounds not only what Nokia critiques, but what she makes possible: new forms of queer visibility, desire, and self-styling that are playful, irreverent, and resistant to flattening.

Part III turns to the fraught terrain of racial and ethnic identity as navigated in Princess Nokia's public reception. While she has consistently spoken about her Afro-Indigenous heritage, these self-identifications have drawn both affirmation and critique. This section does not seek to adjudicate questions of legitimacy, but rather to explore what these debates reveal about the politics of authenticity, visibility, and racial legibility in contemporary music culture. Through an analysis of fan commentary, media coverage, and her lyrical claims, I situate these tensions within broader conversations about the surveillance of racial identity, especially for artists whose identities traverse rigid taxonomies. The aim here is to complicate rather than resolve these tensions – to show how Nokia's performances of self are entangled in larger systems of power that police who gets to speak, and on whose behalf.

Part IV investigates the role of syncretic spirituality in Princess Nokia's artistry by drawing on Beliso-De Jesús's (2021) theorization of brujx as a queer, Afro-Latinx mobilization of ritual and spiritual practice that enacts political resistance through "Afro-Latinx activist magic and warfare" (529). Like the brujx who combine ancestral cosmologies, feminist scholarship, and decolonial praxis, Nokia engages ritual not as aesthetic embellishment but as a vital modality of self-making and refusal within oppressive systems. Her spirituality, like her feminism, is "messy" – in that it is hybrid, contested, and dynamic, becoming a generative space where racial, gendered, and spiritual lineages intersect. These practices also link back to longer Black feminist traditions of reclaiming spiritual knowledge systems as part of a broader epistemological resistance to white Western frameworks (hooks, 1990; Collins, 2000).

Taken together, these four sections offer a textured account of Princess Nokia's artistic and political project. Rather than impose coherence where there is contradiction, this chapter embraces the tensions that animate her work and that speak to the paradoxes of representation, belonging, and resistance in a world still shaped by post-colonial and capitalist logics of power. Ultimately, I argue that this messy feminism constitutes a core element of Princess Nokia's hip hop feminist vocabulary, holding space for non-linearity, contradiction, and the ongoing work of becoming.

Theory in the Flesh: Black Feminist and Hip Hop Feminist Frameworks in Practice

Hip hop feminism emerges from a generation shaped not only by the cultural force of hip hop but also by the contradictions it lays bare, especially for Black and Brown women navigating a genre that both reflects and erases them. As Joan Morgan has

argued, hip hop feminism does not seek resolution or purity, but holds space for contradiction, ambivalence, and pleasure as forms of political expression. In this sense, hip hop feminism operates as a *theory in the flesh* – what many intersectional feminist theorists describe as a mode of theorizing that emerges from lived experience, from the body as a site of knowledge, pain, and transformation.

Foundational Black feminist literature produced by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), bell hooks (1992), Tricia Rose (1994), and Joan Morgan (1999) offers crucial insight into evolving configurations of identity and power within both feminism and hip hop. Though feminism and hip hop have often been positioned as antagonistic spheres, the sustained interventions of Black and Brown women have exposed the mutual logics of resistance, survival, and self-definition that run through both traditions (Morgan, 1999; Rose, 1994). These frameworks continue to offer fresh ways of understanding how race, gender, class, and sexuality interlock in cultural production, shaping not just lyrical content but also aesthetic choices, reception, and cultural circulation.

More recent work in this field continues this trajectory, particularly by centering Black feminist perspectives in the entertainment industry and digital space and how women of colour encounter and contest longstanding patterns of anti-Blackness, surveillance, and devaluation within these arenas (Thompson, 2020; Johnson, 2018; Baade et al., 2021). The rise of "Beyoncé Studies," too, has elevated critical attention toward the labour Black women artists perform, even as their cultural capital exists in fraught relation to the economic and symbolic capital traditionally prized by institutions (Bourdieu, 1986).

At the heart of this work lies intersectionality, a framework introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to explain how overlapping systems of oppression create distinct forms of disadvantage for people situated at multiple axes of marginalization. While often associated with identity politics, intersectionality originated as a method for understanding how power operates through legal and institutional structures to obscure the compounded experiences of Black women. Crenshaw's (2017) traffic intersection metaphor remains a powerful illustration of how these forces converge: "It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things." Though intersectionality has since become a touchstone of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and EDI discourse, scholars like Nash (2019) have cautioned that its institutional uptake risks flattening its radical potential. Others, like Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020), critique its fragmentation of political solidarities. Yet despite these tensions, intersectionality endures as a powerful analytic in this chapter for understanding how systemic power is reproduced, resisted, and reimagined in the terrain of popular music – particularly in the era of algorithmic curation and social media virality.

Brittney Cooper (2017) has extended Crenshaw's work to examine how Black women contend with interlocking systems of domination in public discourse, with particular attention to intellectual labour and cultural production. Moya Bailey's term *misogynoir* names the specific kind of racialized misogyny directed at Black women, especially in digital contexts (Bailey, 2010; 2021). Her intervention, taken up by scholars

like Kyra Gaunt (2015), clarifies how networked platforms not only reflect but amplify structures of appropriation and cultural erasure. Gaunt's concept of "context collapse" describes how Black girls' musical play is often stripped of its social and cultural referents when circulated in decontextualized forms online – a dynamic that is deeply relevant to understanding how Nokia's work travels and is taken up (or misread) across digital spaces.

Hip hop, with its roots in Black diasporic oral traditions, resistance aesthetics, and community storytelling, offers a particularly charged field for such analysis. Tricia Rose's Black Noise (1994) established hip hop as a "hidden transcript" of urban Black life – an arena shaped as much by contestation and critique as by commodification. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s (1988) work on signifying in black cultural forms like Jazz music laid important groundwork for interpreting hip hop as a semiotic system rife with coded language, irony, and subversion. Women scholars expanded this view by highlighting the work of artists like Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and Salt-N-Pepa, who articulated alternative modes of power and pleasure often ignored by masculinist critics and mainstream media alike. Edited volumes like *That's the Joint!* (Forman & Neal, 2004) helped consolidate this scholarship, offering theoretical and historical frames for studying hip hop as a site of gendered and raced meaning-making.

Building on these foundations, contemporary Black feminist scholars have developed what are now referred to as "hip hop feminist" methodologies (Chepp, 2015; Durham, 2016; Hill, 2021; Harper, 2019). These approaches foreground agency, sexuality, and the politics of pleasure, frequently challenging respectability frameworks

that have historically constrained Black women's self-representation. Visual and sonic authorship by women, and especially queer women of colour, functions not merely as self-expression but as cultural intervention (Barrett, 2017; Johnson, 2019). Importantly, hip hop's queer genealogy is gaining critical traction. The work of scholars like Smalls (2018) and Kehrer (2022) has traced how queer and gender-nonconforming artists, whose contributions are often invisibilized within dominant histories, have long been integral to hip hop's evolution. Their interventions reveal that queerness is not an aberration within hip hop but part of its foundational grammar.

Women in hip hop have had to navigate not only marginalization but also a paradox embedded within colonial-capitalist structures: they are encouraged to perform sexual visibility while simultaneously shamed for doing so (Duan, 2016; Edwards & Esposito, 2019). Respectability politics, rooted in white bourgeois norms of feminine behaviour, continue to regulate Black women's bodies and aesthetics – particularly when those aesthetics circulate through visual culture. For queer women of colour, these dynamics are further intensified by intersecting systems of surveillance and neoliberalism (Cooper, 2017). These structures operate powerfully through music videos, press coverage, and fan discourses, often disciplining expressions of gender and sexuality in ways that mask their racialized underpinning. These dynamics play out in the over-scrutinized sexual aesthetics of artists like Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, and even Nokia herself, whose visual strategies are often read either as excessive or illegible depending on the lens through which they are interpreted.

This chapter aims to contribute to a still-emergent field of interdisciplinary scholarship that foregrounds queer and bi+ women of colour in hip hop not as "anomalies" (Djupvik, 2007), but as central architects of the genre's evolving vocabulary. By attending to the layered identifications these artists inhabit, I explore how they mobilize symbolic and rhetorical strategies across music video performances, lyricism, and social media to articulate alternative ways of being and belonging by remaking the terms on which recognition and power are distributed. Drawing on theoretical contributions from scholars like Railton and Watson (2010), Woods (2011), Cooper (2014), Smith (2014), and Baade et al. (2021), this analysis positions Princess Nokia within a tradition of Black feminist cultural production that insists on visibility, multiplicity, and *joy* as an act of resistance.

Here, I foreground hip hop feminism and intersectionality as the primary critical frameworks from which the idea of *messy feminism* emerges, not simply because they are widely applicable, but because they offer the most generative tools for making sense of Princess Nokia's body of work. Her catalog and persona operate at the complex intersection of racial, gendered, sexual, and cultural identities – territory that these frameworks are specifically attuned to navigate. Together, they help illuminate how Nokia challenges dominant narratives and articulates new modalities of selfhood, particularly as a queer woman of colour negotiating the aesthetics and politics of hip hop.

Cultural Context: Respectability and Refusal

To fully grasp the complex position occupied by Black and other women of colour in hip hop, it is crucial to consider how respectability politics has historically functioned to both constrain and shape their cultural production. This section builds on the previous discussion of hip hop feminism and intersectionality by turning more explicitly to the regulatory structures that have long coded Black women's self-presentation in deeply racialized and gendered ways. In doing so, it frames the broader project of *messy feminism* that animates Princess Nokia's work as a deliberate and defiant strategy that exposes and resists the very systems that have sought to contain Black and Brown women's expressive possibilities.

Respectability politics refers to the strategic performance of behaviour and appearance that aligns with dominant (i.e. white and bourgeois) standards of morality and femininity that have historically been deployed in attempts to counteract racist stereotypes and to facilitate upward mobility within a white supremacist society (Higginbotham, 1993). But these strategies often demand that Black women downplay or disavow parts of themselves that do not fit into these narrow frameworks, including not only race and class, but sexuality and gender expression. As later scholars have noted, the politics of respectability is not only racialized but also deeply heteronormative, privileging heterosexuality and cisnormativity as preconditions for social legitimacy. This pressure to conform is compounded by what Elizabeth Grosz (1994) described as the tension between the public visibility of women's bodies and the idealized, private notions of white femininity (15–18 qtd in Bartleet, 2005: 239), producing forms of discipline that punish those whose embodiment or desire refuses containment.

This disciplining was especially pronounced in early musical genres like girl group pop, where acts like The Ronnettes and The Supremes were carefully curated through appearance, choreography, and lyrical themes in order to project an idealized, hyper-feminine image that aligned with dominant norms of racialized and heteronormative respectability (Stras, 2011). Jacqueline Warwick (2007) demonstrates how 1960's girl groups were marketed to embody highly curated, heteronormative femininity – teaching audiences "particular ways of being girls" and enforcing bodily norms as part of the performance of 'girlness' (57). From posture to gesture, singers were expected to showcase themselves in ways that reinforced dominant ideas about what a respectable woman should look and act like. Yet even in these highly controlled spaces, Black girl performers became key figures in shifting discourses around autonomy, desire, and femininity. The legacy of these tensions surfaces in the uneasy space between containment and expression, where even tightly choreographed performances left room for shifts in how femininity, autonomy, and desire could be imagined and felt (Warwick, 2007; Stras, 2011).

When Black women's bodies are on display, they are caught in a double-bind: simultaneously fetishized and degraded, hypervisible and disavowed (Duan, 2016). In hip hop, where visibility is often the currency of success, this tension becomes especially pronounced. Women who deliver raunchy lyrics or match male rappers in confidence and aggression are often labeled as "problems" both within the genre and in broader cultural reception. The backlash to artists like SexyyRed is just the most recent iteration of this long-standing dynamic. Her debut studio album *Hood Hottest Princess* (2023) prompted a

torrent of online derision, some of it aimed not at the music itself, but at the fact that a white male critic, Anthony Fantano, dared to praise it (fantano, 2023, min 1:42). Fantano's own response underscores how familiar tropes of hypersexuality and "low-brow" femininity are selectively mobilized to discredit Black women artists, even when their work is no more explicit or confrontational than that of their male peers (Duan, 2016).

This cultural duplicity, which celebrates raunchines and bravado in men while shaming it in women, illustrates precisely why *messy feminism* can be useful as a critical lens. Princess Nokia's public refusal "to be assimilated" (Selvin, 2017) reads as a deliberate and sharply critical act – what Brittney Cooper and Montinique McEachern (2017) might call a "ratchet politics of respect" – that confronts not only the internal norms of hip hop but also the broader cultural systems that police women's expression. Her open bisexuality, combined with her fluid gender presentation and confrontational lyrical style, positions her within a lineage of queer femmes who use their erotic labour and aesthetic choices not simply to provoke, but to destabilize the logics of legibility themselves. As Glover & Glover (2019) argue, Black queer women's "mobilization of ratchetness… and play labour featuring *lesbian and bisexual play*" constitutes a strategic creation of "interstitial Black queer geographies" – spaces where binary identities are actively refused and bisexuality becomes a site of erotic and political sovereignty (175). In carving out space for unruly, nonconforming identities, Nokia extends the promises of hip hop feminism, making it a space where queerness, racialization, and womanhood are not liabilities to be managed but sources of creative and political power.

Part I: Toward a Hip Hop Feminist Vocabulary

In this section, I focus on intersectionality and hip hop feminism because they provide the most relevant and robust frameworks for understanding the politics of identity, embodiment, and resistance in Princess Nokia's work. Her music and visual aesthetics foreground racialized gender performance, queer identity, and mixed cultural heritage in ways that resist static representations and instead revel in the multiplicity, contradiction, and affective excess that intersectionality and hip hop feminism captures. Building on these frameworks, my analysis brings together three overlapping concepts – urban feminism, hip hop feminism, and percussive feminism – that, taken together, help bring into focus what I refer to as a "hip hop feminist vocabulary": a set of expressive strategies, embodied practices, and politicized aesthetics through which feminist narratives are made legible in and through hip hop. This vocabulary enables artists like Princess Nokia to use music and visual culture as political tools of empowerment, critique, and self-fashioning. By situating her work within this particular lineage of queer feminist women of colour in hip hop, I show how Princess Nokia contributes to a broader, evolving discourse that frames hip hop not only as a cultural form but also as a potent feminist methodology (Durham et al., 2013).

1. *Urban Feminism*: Through her music and projects like her Apple radio show *The Voice Inside My Head*, as well as more informally through her interviews and social media presence, Princess Nokia channels her experiences into advocating for a more inclusive and accessible version of feminism that she calls "urban feminism".

In her own words, urban feminism is:

> "a tangible form of feminism that is accessible [to those] who do not have access to the institutionalised forms of feminism that are largely represented in higher education, the women's liberation movement and women's studies. It does not require a class, degree or the reiteration of author or a textbook, but is happily accepted and studied. It is feminism for the oppressed ghetto woman of the inner city who knows not the word, but knows she deserves to be free of all patriarchal limitations" (Frasqueri 2017b: 29 min 47-30 min 12, cited in Elmi, 2022).

It would seem that Princess Nokia has embraced the term "urban" as representative of her experience as a woman of colour living in New York City. The term has, however, encountered significant scrutiny for a multitude of reasons, namely due to its use as a euphemism to denote racialized and socio-economically marginalized people (Raibaud, 2011). As a music genre category, "urban" was initially created as a marketing category that encapsulated music styles originating from urban landscapes primarily inhabited by Black Americans – such as hip hop, R&B, and certain strands of jazz and soul (Radano, 1993; Bennett, 2015; Osborn, 2021). The label has increasingly been criticized for its vague and encompassing application, in addition to its underlying racial undertones (Johnson, 2010; Barrette, 2017). The saliency of these critiques is further underscored by studies that reveal the term's enduring association with criminality and the commodification of street culture (Ilan, 2012).

In non-American settings such as Croatia, the persistence of urban/rural dichotomies, class differences, and identity formation around the term further complicate this discourse (Vukobratović, 2018). The Canadian music education scholar Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2011) also advocates for a reconceptualization of "urban" towards a more inclusive and culturally relevant urban music education, challenging the term's narrow conceptions. Indeed, its complexity as a socially constructed category that

is both embraced and rejected seems to suggest a necessity for broader examination of the term within interdisciplinary scholarship that transcends its historically charged and broadly applied connotations.

2. *Hip hop feminism*: Nokia's conceptualization of non-white, non-academic feminism fits within the intellectual trajectory of hip hop feminism, a mode of Black feminist thought that privileges affective, embodied, and culturally embedded knowledge practices, especially those articulated by women and femmes whose lives resist easy legibility within dominant feminist or academic frameworks (Durham, Cooper, and Morris, 2013: 722). Hip hop feminism insists that contradiction, pleasure, sexuality, and vernacular aesthetics are central to how political meaning is made (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004). Its refusal to separate critique from cultural participation marks a distinct challenge to the logic of respectability politics, which has long demanded that Black women manage their bodies, voices, and desires to appear deserving of protection or rights (Durham, Cooper, and Morris, 2013).

As hip hop feminism carves out space for the lived experiences of marginalized communities, it simultaneously presents opportunities for re-evaluating "white feminist" strategies in the face of its commodification and neoliberal co-optation. These particular challenges are highlighted by feminist scholars Andi Zeisler and Nancy Fraser, who show how these forces have worked to threaten the authenticity and transformative potential of feminist movements. Zeisler's (2016) examination of "marketplace feminism" is particularly incisive in its critique of the dilution of feminist activism into consumerist

slogans and celebrity endorsements, a trend that she argues depoliticizes the movement and diverts focus from addressing systemic gender inequities.

Fraser articulated similar critiques seven years earlier, arguing that feminism, in its current popular form, has inadvertently supported a capitalist order that exploits feminist rhetoric for economic gain while sidelining collective social welfare and solidarity (Fraser, 2009). These critiques converge on a shared concern that necessarily implicates performances of feminism in music and other audiovisual media that dominate our social media landscape – namely, the reduction of feminism to either a brand or an individualist ethos that can be easily captured by neoliberal, capitalist ideology, thereby detaching it from its radical roots and the broader struggle for systemic change, which requires a sustained, collective, "bottom-up" effort.

While these critiques articulate the need for a vigilant reappraisal of feminist goals and methodologies, it might go too far to say that "popular feminism" found in media forms like music videos is edging into a post-feminist territory. The "broader matrices of cultural and economic power," as Mélisse Lafrance (2002: 12) described them, do, by nature of their machinations, threaten feminism's alignment with principles of equity, justice, and systemic transformation.[15] These mechanisms operate through the commodification of feminist language, the professionalization of feminist labour, and the regulation of dissent in ways that privilege superficial visibility over structural change. As

[15] I'm referring here in an all-encompassing sense to the processes through which neoliberal capitalism, institutional co-optation, and market-driven logics shape the terrain of feminist engagement.

Brittney Cooper (2017) has argued, mainstream feminism's increasing entanglement with corporate culture and state institutions often leads to a depoliticized, palatable feminism that upholds rather than dismantles dominant hierarchies. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2017) warns that when feminist critique is absorbed by institutions, it can be neutralized through diversity rhetoric and bureaucratic protocols that mask rather than challenge systemic inequity.

And, of course, by participating in homogenizing and exploitative systems like the popular music industry, artists like Princess Nokia who seek to convey a sense of authenticity will inevitably bash up against these forces. It takes a certain kind of resilience to embody the disruptive quality necessary to refuse to be just "passive producers of socialization" (Smith, 1990: 161); through this method of refusal, Princess Nokia, and others like her, participate in these industries to "active[ly]… create themselves" (ibid). Our experiences with these artists – through their music, certainly, but also increasingly through their parasocial connections to audiences – can create profound moments of being deeply moved, educated, and "awakened" to the radical potential of feminism.

3. *Percussive Feminism*: While the broader concept of hip hop feminism informs how I am developing my attendant concept of a "hip hop feminist vocabulary", I seek to sharpen this concept further by putting 'urban feminism' in dialogue with Durham, Cooper and Morris' (2013) concept of 'percussive feminism' – a concept that aims to capture, "the creativity that ensues from placing modes or objects of inquiry together that might not traditionally fit, [with] hip hop and feminism being only the most obvious

example" (724). The term 'percussive feminism' itself brings forth the rhythmic, vibrant, and dynamic aspects of intersectional feminism, offering a musically rich canvas for Nokia's notion of "urban feminism" to manifest. In short, it makes space for the grounded realities of survival through an artistic feminist praxis; by finding expression in the narratives of lived experiences that hip hop has always given voice to, "percussive feminism" offers a potent site for rhetorical resistance through music that viscerally reflects the unique intersection of hip hop culture with feminist ideology.

In feminist hip hop, language is a tool that has been deployed strategically and with intention. In particular, by repurposing language that has been used to marginalize and silence women, many artists have worked to assert their autonomy and affirm their right to define their own identities on their own terms. The reclamation of language, as I discuss in the next section, is thus both a reflection of and a response to the themes encapsulated in these definitions of feminism and can offer insights into the transformative potential of resignification in broader feminist discourse.

Reclaiming Oppressive Language

Princess Nokia's lyrical practice challenges conventional understandings of reclamation in hip hop, particularly as it pertains to language historically wielded as a tool of *misogynoir*. Rather than offering a straightforward reversal of meaning, her deployment of terms such as *hoe* and *bitch* is characterized by strategic ambivalence, contradiction, and multiplicity. These rhetorical gestures exemplify what I refer to as a "messy" feminist praxis – one that resists linear interpretation and embraces the contradictory demands of visibility, subversion, and survival.

This mode of rhetorical play is neither unprecedented nor isolated. A lineage of women-identified hip hop artists has long engaged in the strategic reappropriation of gendered slurs. In "Barbie Dreams" (2018), Nicki Minaj uses the term *bitch* both playfully and assertively, blurring the line between insult and empowerment. Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage" (2020) embraces formerly derogatory labels as markers of sexual and economic autonomy. Similarly, Cardi B's "WAP" (2020), featuring Megan, incited intense public discourse through its unabashed reclamation of female sexual agency, with terms like *whore* recast as self-ascribed, empowered identities. These examples underscore the extent to which feminist interventions in hip hop often operate through tactics of linguistic revaluation that trouble respectability politics.

Princess Nokia's work builds on, but also complicates, these tactics. Her performances frequently oscillate between gestures of respectability and defiance, embracing contradiction as a form of cultural resistance. In "Tomboy" (2016), for example, the line "Who that is, hoe? That girl is a tomboy" invites multiple readings. The term hoe – a word that has long served as a racialized epithet within hip hop, especially against women of colour (Rose, 2008) – is redeployed here with ambiguity. It is unclear whether it is directed at a friend, an adversary, or at herself, but its placement within a self-affirming refrain suggests a calculated reworking. This aligns with what Inniss (2009) describes as "the contestative, counter-hegemonic aspects of gangsta rap discourse" (45), where stigmatized language can be refunctioned as a "term of endearment, a weapon of empowerment, and a means of creating sisterhood among kindred souls" (Woldu, 2006: 92).

The term *bitch* offers an even more complex genealogy. Its etymological origins in the Old English *bicce* date back to its use as a descriptor for a female dog, but by the 18th century it had already acquired gendered connotations of impropriety and disobedience (Stollznow, 2024: 9–13). Though occasionally applied to men (ibid), the term became increasingly codified as a slur directed at women who transgressed normative gender roles. Within hip hop, bitch has been a site of intense debate – simultaneously reinforcing and subverting misogynistic norms. By the late 1980s, the term had become entangled with archetypes such as the "gold digger" and the "difficult woman" (ibid, 46, 153). Yet, as Iandoli (2019) demonstrates, artists like Da Brat, Yo-Yo, and Lauryn Hill actively contested its derogatory implications, opting instead to identify as "The Baddest Bitch" or "Queen Bitch." These self-ascriptions, Iandoli argues, rendered the ongoing debate over the term's legitimacy within hip hop "almost a moot point" (ibid, 97).

Nokia's "Harley Quinn" (2020) provides a compelling case study in this regard. Within a single stanza, she declares, "my bitches came to rage, we do this every day," only to follow with the line, "so just stay up in your lane, bitch." The chorus continues: "Harley Quinn, bitch I've been… the bitch is back." Here, bitch functions simultaneously as a term of camaraderie, self-identification, and antagonism. This convergence of meanings, within the temporal span of a single verse, suggests a deliberate refusal to resolve the word into a singular definition. Instead, Nokia mobilizes its semantic instability as a critical resource, reappropriating the term in real time.

Elsewhere in her discography, Nokia articulates competing modes of self-presentation that toggle between respectability and its explicit rejection. On *1992 Deluxe*

(2016), she boasts, "My manners impeccable, I'm always respectable" ("Excellent," 2016); yet on *Everything Sucks* (2020), she asserts, "I'm disrespectful, offensive, and I've got nothing to prove" ("Harley Quinn," 2020). This rhetorical inversion is not a contradiction in need of resolution, but a performative refusal of imposed coherence. It evokes what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Melissa Harris-Perry (2015) theorize as an *alternative model of authenticity* grounded not in compliance with dominant norms, but in fidelity to lived experience, emotional truth, and cultural specificity. By invoking and reworking these contested terms, Princess Nokia offers a sustained critique of the discursive and institutional forces that have historically pathologized Black women's identities. Her use of linguistic ambivalence that is at once layered, contradictory, and self-aware functions as both provocation and intervention. In doing so, she carves out space for unruly, queer, non-normative forms of womanhood that resist both erasure and containment. Hip hop, in this context, becomes a generative site for queer feminist cultural work – a space in which language itself becomes a terrain for political struggle, affective expression, and epistemological reimagining.

Part II: Gender and Sexuality Normativity in "Tomboy"

Frasqueri has publicly spoken about her self-described androgyny as a point of pride, sharing with one interviewer, "I love … how boyish and how manly I can appear. I love being androgynous. I feel beautiful like that. It's just another beautiful side of me" (Jackson, 2019). In a separate interview with *Playboy* magazine, she described how she came to the realization of being a gender nonconforming person: "Every day I feel different. Every day is either masc or femme or in between" (ibid). She has also identified

as bisexual (bi.org, 2025) and "sexually fluid" (Hill, 2018), and she seeks to empower the "undervalued, uncelebrated and unspoken aspects of her feminist aesthetic" (Lee, n.d).

In this section, I aim to dissect and understand Princess Nokia's engagement with gender nonconformity and bisexuality in the music video for "Tomboy" (2016). Although it is not explicitly about bisexuality, her song "Tomboy" (2016) offers a window into her perspectives on gender nonconformity, which fits under the bi+ label. The song and music video can be read sonically, visually, and lyrically as a form of social critique that affirms the motivations and goals of bi+ activism by resisting binary cultural conceptions of gender and sexuality that extend from monosexism (Roberts et al., 2015). Monosexism and other restrictive notions of gender can impede positive identity development for bi+ individuals (Chickerella et al., 2021). Indeed, it is Nokia's refusal of any rigid binaries that makes her music so uplifting for women seeking to affirm their individuality, whether they are bi+ or not.

In order to situate these practices as an integral part of Princess Nokia's 'hip hop feminist vocabulary', my analysis in this section employs a methodological and theoretical framework grounded in the seminal works of Jack Halberstam and Judith Butler on female masculinity and performativity, respectively. Halberstam (1998) asserted that masculinity should not be reduced to the male body and its effects and that female masculinity should not to be understood as an imitation of maleness; rather, "female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed *as*

masculinity" (1).[16] By adopting Halberstam's (1998) notion of 'female masculinity' as a primary lens in this dual-pronged analysis, we understand Nokia's performances not as a superficial imitation of maleness, but as a distinct expression that illuminates the constructed nature of masculinity itself.

As concepts emerging from sexuality studies, both female masculinity and performativity are grounded in longer genealogies of feminist and queer thought. Halberstam and Butler's theories build on foundational ideas like Simone de Beauvoir's notion of "becoming" (1968), which challenged the essentialist view of gender, and Rubin's (1975; 1984) social repression theory, which critiques the regulatory mechanisms that structure sexual expression. Performativity, in particular, has proven durable as a framework for interrogating how cultural assumptions around gender and sexuality are produced, maintained, and contested at both the interpersonal and structural levels. Its utility lies in how it conceptualizes gender not as something one is but something one *does* – a reiterative act shaped by cultural scripts, but also one that can exceed or rewrite them.

Framed through this lens, Princess Nokia's "Tomboy" becomes a visual and sonic intervention into dominant narratives of gender, where performances of female masculinity in turn become critical acts of world-making that trouble the presumed alignments of masculinity and femininity. By foregrounding embodiment, contradiction, and refusal, Nokia makes visible how gender is always already a performance, and how

[16] The term 'female masculinity' emerges out of a school of feminist thought which understands the performance of stereotypical/hegemonic traits as a deconstruction of masculinity itself.

those performances can be reclaimed as tools for subversion and empowerment. In doing so, she offers bi+ and gender-nonconforming audiences a set of representational strategies that affirm complexity without apology. Through "Tomboy," Nokia does more than reject gender norms; indeed, she revels in dismantling them, refusing the binary logics that have historically marginalized queer women of colour in hip hop.

Visual Style

The "Tomboy" video showcases a range of sonic, lyrical, and visual performances that demonstrate a more expansive and dynamic cultivation of identity, agency, and sense of belonging, which can emerge when marginalized actors (and artists) deploy alternatives to protest-oriented approaches by embracing a praxis of refusal (Campt, 2019; Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014). These elements come together as self-determined expressions of nonconformity and the "insider/outsider" status of Puerto Rican descendants and of bisexuality.

The video, directed by Milah Libin,[17] presents a series of urban vignettes that celebrate individuality and gender nonconformity. These visuals are emblematic of Nokia's articulation of *urban feminism*, a framework that foregrounds the lived realities and creative agency of racialized women in metropolitan environments where struggle, survival, and style are intimately entwined. For Nokia, the city is both a familiar place to form the backdrop of her music video's narrative and a living, breathing co-conspirator in

[17] Milah Libin has collaborated with Princess Nokia on numerous projects, playing a significant role in bringing Nokia's artistic vision to wider audiences.

acts of resistance, where everyday spaces like basketball courts, stoops, and sidewalks become stages for feminist world-making. The video features Princess Nokia as the central figure, navigating various cityscapes that include basketball courts, rooftops, and streets. The settings are predominantly outdoor, showcasing elements of New York's multicultural spaces and communities. Princess Nokia and her friends are depicted engaging in activities such as skateboarding, dancing, and socializing, conveying a sense of camaraderie and freedom.

The video's urban settings, combined with its focus on friendship and individuality, contribute to a powerful visual statement on gender fluidity and acceptance. For instance, Nokia appears in this video sporting a typical "skater" look, wearing little (if any) makeup, round framed glasses, long straightened hair, sweatpants and an oversized sweater. This attire constitutes a form of hegemonic masculinity (Ricciardelli, Clow, and White, 2010) characterized in men's advertising by a typically fit physique and "extreme casual wear" that advertises a "carefree" look (75-6). This "carefree" attitude is simultaneously communicated by her refusal to acknowledge the camera in the video's opening shot as it pans beneath her and two of her similarly dressed friends. Interestingly, these women do acknowledge the camera, and follow it with their eyes almost threateningly as it moves between them and transitions to the next scene. The masculinity performed by Princess Nokia's character in "Tomboy" calls attention to the associations of "tomboyism" with "a sign of independence, and self-motivation" (Halberstam, 1998: 6). As Lee (n.d.) notes, this track "encourages a celebration of self because, not in spite of, [Frasqueri's] averageness. It's not the clean, obedient, and 'pretty' features of Princess

Nokia that make her attractive or inspirational, it is her average, 'boyish', unapologetic confidence".

[*Princess Nokia and her (real-life![18]) friends stand on a basketball court, exuding effortless confidence through oversized streetwear and a defiant stance. Their androgynous, skater-inspired aesthetic rejects hyper-feminine beauty norms, embodying tomboyism as a marker of independence and self-assurance.*]

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Princess Nokia clearly understands her ability to embody traits of masculinity and femininity in confounding ways as a form of empowerment. Black feminist theorists like bell hooks also advocate for the reclamation and redefinition of female identity – particularly Black female identity – in ways that are not easily captured by binaries nor Eurocentric ideals of beauty and respectability. hooks's (1992) concept of the "oppositional gaze" is a pertinent framework that can be applied fruitfully within cinematic feminism because it allows the scripting of marginalized individuals as resisting dominant narratives such as those imposed by heteropatriarchy. This is vividly

[18] According to an article by Hunter Richards in the *Harvard Independent*, the Tomboy music video features her real-life friends and family, showcasing her home territory of Alphabet City (see Harvard Independent, 2017).

illustrated in the opening shot of the video: while Nokia herself refuses to acknowledge the camera, her friends fix their eyes directly on the lens with defiant expressions, asserting their presence and autonomy.[19] In this moment, their gaze becomes oppositional because it refuses passivity and instead confronts the viewer, asserting power through visibility and refusal (hooks, 1992: 115–3; McGranahan, 2016). Though Nokia does not directly call out these interlocking systems of oppression by name, this song represents an act of defiance that can be read as a clear and explicit commentary on oppressive ideologies and stereotypes. By embracing and showcasing a non-traditional form of femininity, Princess Nokia not only asserts her own identity but also offers an alternative vision of what it means to be feminine and femin*ist*. It suggests that the value of femininity lies not in one single, essentializing form deemed acceptable by patriarchy, but in its capacity for diversity and self-determination as proffered by feminism. The "Tomboy" music video thus emerges as a powerful testament to the complexities of gender performativity and reflects Nokia's personal quest for self-determination within the queer community in her home of New York City.

Vocal Expression and Articulation

Sonically, the track opens up with a kind of interplay between the diegesis of the video's soundscape, featuring an airy vocalisation that mimics the sounds of distressed breathing, followed by clean snare drum hits and finger snaps that align with Princess Nokia's steps as she enters a basketball court accompanied by her two friends. This

[19] This moment occurs roughly between 0:20 – 0:25s of the video.

technique serves as a powerful audio-visual synchrony that not only emphasizes her presence and dominance in the scene but also reflects a common technique in hip hop where rhythmic elements of the music are closely tied to visual elements in the video.

The drum hits and rolls also bring in the melodic ostinato of the track, a high-pitched whistled dual-note theme, played as an eighth-double sixteenth rhythmic motif that repeats for the first three beats and then drops by perfect fifth on the last beat. This initial musical theme (E6–A5) is then looped and accompanies the entire track's verse and chorus delivery as the main musical pattern. The sounds of engines revving build up to a pause before the introduction of the first verse drops, reintroducing the beat. In hip hop, the simplicity and repetitiveness of a motif serves to provide a steady and engaging rhythm that supports and emphasizes the vocal performance – what Adam Bradley (2009) describes as a "poetics of flow," where rhythm, timbre, and articulation are mobilized not just for aesthetic effect but as cultural signifiers in their own right.

Princess Nokia's vocalization in "Tomboy" exemplifies what Elisabeth Wood (2007) describes as *bivocality*: the fluid shifting between vocal registers and tonal modes that signal culturally coded masculine and feminine expressions. In Nokia's performance, this oscillation is not merely stylistic but deeply political, given her ability to inhabit both abrasive, low-pitched growls and higher, more melodic intonations confounds gendered expectations of voice, echoing what Wood (2007) terms "Sapphonics". This practice operates through a kind of sonic drag that refuses to stabilize gender or sexuality, producing a voice that is "powerful and problematic, defiant and defective" (28). Much

like the Sapphonic singers who traverse and exceed the conventional boundaries between chest, head, and falsetto registers, the tonal dissonance in "Tomboy" becomes not a failure of technique but a site of embodied resistance, wherein Nokia channels both "butch authority" and "femme ambiguity" (ibid, 32).

The articulation of the verses demonstrates a "percussion-effusive style" (Krims, 2000, cited in Woods, 2010: 269), bringing her lyrical flow front and center as the sole accompaniment to the whistled motif. According to Kyle Adams (2015), articulation is one of the vocal techniques that create affective states in hip hop and "augments the existing affect" by mimicking types of instrumental articulation that listeners already associate with specific emotional tones (124). This is especially potent here, as Princess Nokia's voice carries the affective and political weight of the track. Her confident delivery in both registers – gritty and bratty – allows her to navigate gendered sonic codes with fluency and defiance, performing identity not through coherence, but through multiplicity and refusal.

Lyrical Themes

Lyrics are central both in rap vocal practice and the communication of an artist's message. Through the subtle and often humorous lyrical interventions in "Tomboy", Princess Nokia not only asserts her own identity but also participates in the larger project of challenging and reshaping the apparatuses of gender intelligibility, offering an alternative vision of femininity that is unapologetically diverse, self-determined, and empowering. The track's lyrical and visual themes balance silly humour with biting

satire, which is conveyed by deploying a blend of conventionally "masculine" and "feminine" tropes.

In the final line of the first verse, for example, Nokia wastes no time playing with listeners' expectations while also asserting a gender non-conforming identity through the line, "big pants and some scuffed shoes, bow-bow-bow, Blues Clues". This line alludes to the main character of the famous children's television show *Blues Clues*, who is often mistaken for being a boy, likely due to the way Western boys are socialized with the colour blue. This kind of gender play aligns with what Finlay (2017) calls "non-binary performativity", a practice in which queer and trans individuals generate new possibilities for subjectivity not by rejecting gender entirely, but by "refusing to stabilize meaning" through conventional identity categories (pn?). In this view, performativity is not only a citation of norms but also an opportunity to break them open. Princess Nokia's use of lyrical absurdity and tonal switches in "Tomboy" thus becomes a deliberate act of Butler's "gender trouble" in that it questions who gets to be legible, and how.

The way these tropes are presented in "Tomboy" is, to me, reminiscent of a child playing pretend with toy cars, giving the track a socially critical edge not unlike one might expect from an episode of Matt Stone and Trey Parker's long-running satirical animated television show, "South Park" – all revving engines, crashing together, and performing exaggerated voices to create an entire world of make-believe. But in this case, the play is sharply self-aware and yet completely irreverent: think pairing Barbie with a monster truck to show up to the tea party. This video sees Nokia pulling the same kind of tongue-in-cheek stunt, turning gender scripts on their head while laughing at their rigidity.

Like the best episodes of South Park, “Tomboy” stages these juxtapositions with enough winking irony that it never collapses into pure parody, but it pushes just far enough to expose the strangeness of the rules themselves.

Rather than rejecting gender roles outright, Nokia exaggerates and distorts them until they become unfamiliar. This aligns with Finlay’s reading of Butler, where the instability generated through repeated gender performances does not offer a way out of the system, but a means of subverting it from within. Her use of “pretend” operates less as denial and more as a critical tactic that exposes the constructed nature of the “real”. In “Tomboy”, repetition becomes a vehicle for mischief, resistance, and play, mobilizing contradiction rather than coherence. The performance does not seek to resolve tension but to dwell in it, disrupting the frameworks that govern authenticity in both hip hop and queer discourse. By folding satire into sincerity, and moving fluidly between masculine bravado and femme affect, Nokia renders gender a deliberately unstable terrain. In doing so, she invites a reconsideration of how legibility and credibility are produced, challenging the norms that define what is seen as real or legitimate in cultural and identity formations.

Authenticity Discourse

While the hip hop genre often traffics in dominant scripts of toughness and street credibility, Nokia bends those signifiers toward something far more slippery and self-possessed. In the “Tomboy” video, we see her playfully staging the iconography of street masculinity: a friend leans out of a car window, finger-gun cocked, echoing classic hip

hop posturing. Yet the mood remains offbeat, even joyful. Nokia swaggers through urban backstreets not as a hardened 'gangsta', but in oversized shorts, crop tops, and a mischievous grin. Her toughness is theatrical, underscored by edits and sound design that highlight absurdity rather than aggression. This moment – visually stylized and clearly self-aware – signals that while she's fluent in the codes of gang culture, she wields them with camp sensibility, refusing to submit to their totalizing grip.

Notwithstanding the commercialization and mass production of hip hop, authenticity remains a highly policed category within the genre, often tied to spatial, racial, and gendered markers of legitimacy. As Brummett (2008) and Forman (2002) note, early ideals of "keeping it real" linked value to the working-class Black urban experience, with particular emphasis on "the 'hood" as a site of struggle and cultural authority. With the rise of gangsta rap in the 1990s, authenticity became tethered to the "thug ethos," a stylized performance of violence and masculinity (Kubrin, 2005; Quinn, 2005). Women rappers like Foxy Brown, Cardi B, and Nicki Minaj responded by blending glamour and grit, referencing mafia ties or gang affiliations as a way to assert dominance in a genre where toughness is coded as male (Drake, 2015; Rose, 1994).

Princess Nokia draws from that same palette but flips the canvas. Instead of projecting dominance through fear, she destabilizes hypermasculine tropes with contradiction and eccentricity. The line "we gone spit that brazy track" in Tomboy references a Bloods-affiliated speech pattern, but Nokia doesn't use it to establish street credentials – instead, it sits alongside references to hanging out with "ladies that shake it fast," collapsing gang-coded language with queer femme pleasure. This juxtaposition

typifies the kind of aesthetic dissonance that queers the logic of authenticity from within, unsettling the genre's foundational norms. As Smalls writes, "Calling hip hop 'queer' is certain to irritate, or even enrage, some hip hop artists and fans… 'Queer' is deployed here as a denaturalizing and destabilizing force – the *coitus interruptus* into hip hop heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy, and racial authenticity" (Smalls, 2018: 124).

[*Princess Nokia's friend in this scene strikes a casual yet deliberate posturing— leaning out of a car window, she extends a finger-gun toward the camera in a gesture reminiscent of classic hip hop iconography tied to urban grit and street culture.*]

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Indeed, such gestures demonstrate that authenticity in hip hop (like gender and sexuality) is a performance that is continuously constructed, reiterated, and open to contestation, particularly of the masculinist codes through which it has historically been defined. Butler's theory of performativity (1990; 1993) reminds us that identity does not precede expression but is *produced through it.* Nokia's use of gang-affiliated language and iconography, then, is not a claim to realness in the documentary sense but a performative act within a symbolic economy, one in which toughness, queerness, and pleasure coexist.

As with gender, where masculinity or femininity only materialize through repetition, hip hop authenticity is tethered to historically contingent codes. Charis Kubrin (2005) and Eithne Quinn (2005) both note how lyrics depicting violence or criminality operate as narrative postures rather than autobiographical facts – a point tragically ignored when such lyrics are treated as admissible evidence in courtrooms.[20] For decades, scholars have illustrated how the use of rap lyrics in criminal trials reflects a racialized double standard wherein hip hop's expressive conventions are stripped of their genre context and weaponized against Black artists (Dennis, 2007; Nielson, 2016). Unlike country or rock lyrics where metaphor and lyrical affectations are assumed as part of the conceit of the song, rap lyrics are too often read as confessional. Against this backdrop, Nokia's playful gesture toward "brazy" becomes part of a broader disruption of what "authenticity" has come to mean in a genre shaped by racialized surveillance, commercial co-optation, and gendered gatekeeping.

Gender-nonconforming and bi+ individuals are often subjected to cultural and institutional misrecognition that impairs their capacity to live and be seen on their own terms (Morgan & Davis-Delano, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2020). Whether through rhetorical dismissal, invisibility, or outright violence, cultural norms penalize deviation from binary logics. To live authentically, then, is not simply to be honest or expressive, it is to persist in the face of systemic barriers that seek to flatten, silence, or correct. As Banet-Weiser (2012) and Schoenebeck et al. (2016) argue, digital authenticity

[20] This has occurred as recently as the 2023 Young Thug/YSL RICO trial, in which a judge "conditionally" allowed the use of rap lyrics as evidence. See Zaru, 2023.

is not about uncovering a "true self" but about constructing a version of selfhood that appears coherent and meaningful within highly mediated spaces. For artists like Princess Nokia, authenticity is a relational achievement built through acts of performance, recognition, and strategic resistance.

Ultimately, Princess Nokia's work invites us to rethink what authenticity in hip hop can look like when it is decoupled from male coded violence, dominance, or the fetishization of trauma. Her performances do not abandon toughness but reconfigure it through play, queer desire, and self-stylization. In doing so, she contributes to a broader reimagining of authenticity not as rooted in fixed truths or inherited dominant codes, but as a dynamic, iterative practice of claiming space, negotiating visibility, and rewriting the terms of legibility itself.

Part III: Mixed Identity and the Surveillance of Legibility

A full understanding of Princess Nokia's public identity is not complete without undertaking a discussion of some of the ways she has talked about her mixed racial identity, which have at times been viewed as problematic (Lenzen, 2020; Herreria, 2020). These controversies, rather than undermining her identity, underscore the challenges and negotiations inherent in asserting a mixed racial identity in the public eye. Her engagement with these tensions, particularly the skepticism over her Afro-Indigenous claims, offers a critical lens through which to examine the fluidity and complexity of racial identity within the Latinx community in New York. Part of my framing of this discussion includes an adaptation of Jillian Hernández's (2021) notion of "place making potential" (450), which describes a process of communal recognition and affection as "concrete strategies of

resistance and disturbance that disrupt, however momentarily, the exclusionary coherence of spaces assumed to be white and/or straight" (Bacchetta et al., 2015: 775). As a strategy for asserting queer Nuyorican identity, I argue that the multiplicity Princess Nokia insists on paradoxically promotes the potential of "placelessness", which establishes alternative strategies for resistance couched precisely within an instability akin to bisexuality, gender nonconformity, diaspora, and racial ambiguity. In this way, her embrace of multiplicity is not just expressive but strategic, allowing her to inhabit spaces that might otherwise exclude her.

While Frasqueri generally refers to herself as a woman of colour, she has also been frequently described as Nuyorican' or Afro-Boricua (Spinelli, 2022). Her claims to Afro-Indigenous ancestry have previously made her a controversial figure of identity politics, putting her under particular scrutiny because she has repeatedly claimed an Indigenous (Taíno) heritage and upbringing, but she does not seem to have been officially claimed back by Taíno people. Her references to Taíno heritage, although contested, nonetheless signal a desire to affirm cultural memory and spiritual continuity rather than a fixed or genealogically proven origin. In a now-deleted Twitter thread, Nokia references being raised with Taíno traditions and culture and participating in ceremonies, emphasizing that Puerto Ricans often face complexities in negotiating their mixed-race identities (Brown University, 2017).

For people of Puerto Rican descent, "factors other than skin colour influence their racial classification, like skin tone, facial features, hair texture, language use, and demeanor" (Landale and Oropesa, 2002: 233). The transatlantic slave trade's impact

extended well beyond the United States, with many people being transported to the Caribbean, Latin, Central, and South Americas (Lovejoy, 1989: 373). Indeed, according to Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (2004), "Puerto Ricans face a particular relationship to U.S. racial and ethnic categories", adding that "racialization is a process that unifies Puerto Ricans' racial experiences in the U.S. while skin color still operates as a distinct marker of access and treatment" (517). Hispanic studies scholars Landale and Oropesa (2002) further explain, "Construction of a racial and ethnic identity is an ongoing process that involves negotiation between an individual and others…in the course of their everyday lives, individuals may emphasize a certain identity in one situation and a different identity in another…self-definitions shift over time and across social contexts…(ibid).

Claiming mixed identity can carry painful histories of distancing from the Black community; the term speaks directly to the difficulties that many Puerto Rican people have with accurately identifying their race, but it can also implicitly connect with a "preference for whiteness and its twin flight from Blackness" among the broader Latinx community, particularly in the United States (Hernández, 2021: 362). Her claim to Puerto Rican and Cuban heritage reflects a specific intersection of race and ethnicity, where 'Afro-Latina' denotes her racial identity as Black and her ethnic identity as Latina.[21] Still, some critics insist that her light-skinned appearance in younger photos contrast suspiciously with more recent photos, which they attribute to her growing desire to

[21] As I note earlier, for at least 20 years, scholars have called attention to the problematic construction of non-white identities in terms like "urban", "Latina", "people of colour", etc. as "social processes not primarily directed by individuals themselves" (Schutte, 2000); I use them here because Princess Nokia frequently embraces such identifications as positive, empowering terms.

emphasize her darker-skinned traits.[22] Critiques of her light skin tone and perceived shifting appearance point not just to personal inconsistency but to the broader surveillance of Black and brown women whose racial identities fail to neatly align with visual expectations. Colourism, as Davis (2021) argues, continues to structure intracommunal hierarchies, often erasing the lived experiences of Black women and complicating the politics of recognition (66).

In a 2017 Teen Vogue article, Nokia answered a question posed by a self-identified Afro-Indigenous journalist about her claims to Afro-Indigenous identity, to which she responded, "[Being Afro-Indigenous] was a big part of my identity growing up, and the people who raised me wanted to reinforce it. My foster mother, despite my feelings I have about her, was a very proud Black, Afro-Indigenous, Puerto Rican woman" (Lewis, 2017).[23] This affirmation appears consistently across her work, including her now-defunct podcast *Smart Girl Club*, [24] social media posts, and especially in her song "Brujas" (2017) where she names Yoruba, Arawak, and Afro-Caribbean lineages:

"I'm that Black a-Rican bruja straight out from the Yoruba
And my people come from Africa diaspora, Cuba
And you mix that Arawak, that original people
I'm that Black Native American, I vanquish all evil
I'm that Black a-Rican bruja straight out from the Yoruba

[22] It is worth noting that this particular criticism of Princess Nokia engaging in 'Blackfishing' has come solely from gossip websites in critiques made by unsigned commenters (Lipstick Alley, 2020).
[23] In interviews from her breakout period – between 2016 and 2020 – she spoke frequently about cultural and spiritual affiliations with Yoruba and Santería being handed down from her mother and foster parents (Dyer and Mandel, 2016).
[24] This project has seemingly been replaced by a radio show hosted by Apple called "The Voice in My Head with Princess Nokia" (Apple Music, 2025)

And my ancestors Nigerian, my grandmas was brujas
And I come from an island and it's called Puerto Rico
And it's one of the smallest but it got the most people" (Princess Nokia, 2017 "Brujas")

[*A woman is seated in the center of the frame, veiled in yellow, evoking imagery of Yoruba priestesses and Caribbean spiritual traditions. Two women in white approach barefoot, carrying sunflowers that honour and symbolize Oshun, the Yoruba orisha of love, fertility, and rivers*]

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Far from detracting from her authenticity, the controversies that have emerged around her identity claims provide a platform for discussing the nuances of racial identity, colourism, and the politics of belonging. This is where Nokia's queer politics intersect with her racial and ethnic claims. The "placelessness" she performs is not an evasion of identity but a confrontation with the insufficiency of dominant frameworks. Her references to Harlem, the Lower East Side, and Puerto Rico in interviews and lyrics construct a cartography of belonging that is dispersed, affective, and unstable. Nokia thus reimagines this 'placelessness' as not just an absence, but a strategic positioning; it allows her to craft a narrative and identity that challenges the coherence of spaces that are traditionally viewed as white/straight/male. By doing so, she leverages her public

platform and artistic expression to create a communal recognition of mixed racial identities as valid and significant forms of resistance.

These kinds of invocations complicate the way her identity is inflected on her music and the way that her music is interpreted. As Princess Nokia has become more visible in the music industry,[25] narratives about the ancestry she has claimed have shifted to how she has embraced her national identity as Puerto Rican. Her visual and musical catalog reflect her upbringing as a queer woman of colour in Harlem and the Lower East Side, extending the spatial claims of her recorded work. Sonically, albums like *Everything is Beautiful* (2020) are consciously imbued with the sounds of New York's multicultural population – a city that "lives and breathes art" – and one that Nokia has repeatedly stated inspires her music, uplifts her culture, and gives her an "authentic experience" to speak to (Selvin, 2017). Ultimately, Nokia's performance of her identity becomes a site of contradiction, becoming, and part of a political strategy. In this way, to embody 'placelessness' is not a flaw to be resolved but a refusal *itself* to resolve the very tensions that make her identity powerful. In Part IV, I offer a more in-depth analysis of how these identity tensions manifest in her music through spiritually hybrid imagery, sonic invocations, and lyrical themes.

[25] Frasqueri left Rough Trade records, through which she released her studio album *1992 Deluxe* (2017) and an expanded EP called *A Girl Cried Red* (2018). She signed with Sony's Arista Records in 2021, through which she released several stand-alone singles in the lead-up to her 7-song EP *I love you, but this is goodbye* (2023).

Part IV: Syncretic Spirituality

In this section, I explore the intersection of music, cultural heritage, and spiritual activism through the lens of Princess Nokia's work, with particular attention to the songs "Brujas" (2017), "YAYA" (2012), and "Bikini Weather / Corazón en Afrika" (2014). These tracks draw on a range of musical traditions including Yoruba spiritual chants, bomba, and reggaeton while layering in American hip hop aesthetics and experimental production choices. The result is a sonic landscape that is not merely hybrid, but deliberately syncretic, one that channels ancestral memory and collective struggle into a living archive of Afro-Latinx feminist resistance.

Puerto Rican music is deeply rooted in a rich history of cultural fusion that primarily involves the integration of Indigenous, African, and Spanish influences (Daniel, 2011: 47-8). Genres like bomba and plena, which emerged from colonial and post-emancipatory contexts, reflect complex social histories of resistance, ritual, and community-making (ibid, 30-2). These genre traditions form part of the inherited cultural memory that animates Princess Nokia's sonic palette. Through the use of traditional percussion, sacred chants, and audiovisual references to Orisha cosmology, Nokia collapses the distance between the sacred and the secular, between the ancestral and the futuristic.

Drawing on the framework of spiritual activism articulated by Beliso-De Jesús (2021), I situate Princess Nokia's invocation of Afro-Latinx spiritualities as a decolonial praxis that engages with spirituality not only as personal or cultural expression, but as a queer feminist act of resistance. According to Beliso-De Jesús, spiritual activism operates

through the "bioenergetic magic of words, rituals, and practices" that animate and politicize the everyday (529). Nokia's self-styling as a brujx and her explicit invocation of ritual aesthetics in "Brujas" aligns with this orientation. Her music becomes a site where cultural memory is mobilized to contest erasure, assert Black and Indigenous survivance, and imagine otherwise.

Witchcraft, Bitchcraft

Released via Rough Trade records as a lead up to her career-defining album *1992 Deluxe*, the song "Brujas" (2017) is saturated with sonic, lyrical and visual themes that invoke the West-African Yoruba religion.[26] In the music video version of this track, Nokia explicitly ties her lineage to the Yoruba religion and its pantheon of deities before the song even properly begins, fading into the establishing scene with a shot of her and several other women in white tunics, possibly Abaçá or Alá, singing an acapella version of a traditional chant that honours the Orisha Yemayá, a divine spirit known as the "goddess of the ocean" mother of all living things (Donohue, 2016). According to Yvonne Daniel (2011),

> "Yoruba […] worship of Orisha/Shango […] are important African-derived religions of Trinidad and Tobago, and these correspond to a paradigm most closely identified with Cuba. Both religions have been influenced dramatically by Anglican heritage, and Biblical texts guide religious practice in conjunction with African religious philosophies. Worship focuses 'ecumenically,' as dancer/scholar Molly Ahye describes transcendent African divinities who are aligned with Catholic and Anglican Saints, Protestant biblical verses, or both." (Daniel, 2011: 137).

[26] Yoruba is a spiritual practice originating from Nigeria that has had significant influence in Latin America, where it has shaped spiritual practices and worldviews including Santería and Candomblé (Udo, Emem M, 2020: 31).

[*A woman stands veiled in blue before the water in this opening scene depicting spiritual worship, evoking imagery of the Yoruba orisha Yemayá, the goddess of the sea and motherhood.*]

[*Women dressed in flowing white garments perform a ritual cleansing in the water, a gesture deeply rooted in Yoruba spiritual traditions and their diasporic manifestations in the Caribbean*.]

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Daniel contextualizes these practices within a broader 'ecumenical' framework, where Yoruba Orisha traditions are interwoven with Catholic and Protestant iconographies across the Caribbean, particularly in Puerto Rico, Trinidad, and Cuba (Daniel, 2011: 137). As dancer-scholar Molly Ahye notes, worship in this context often focuses "ecumenically" on transcendent African divinities, who are aligned with Catholic and Anglican saints, Protestant biblical verses, or both (ibid). In this way, "Brujas" participates in a long-standing syncretic religious tradition that affirms hybrid identity and polyvocal expression.

The track begins with the soft wash of a pan drum—an instrument resonant with Afro-Caribbean spiritual and dance rituals (ibid, 142). Nokia's vocals then enter on the offbeat, pitched down and echoing, repeating the phrase "I'm the supreme," a declaration that merges pop-cultural witchcraft – a likely reference to *The Craft* (1996) – with Yoruba spiritual hierarchy. Her lyrics fuse urban vernacular with sacred imagery: "We is some ghetto bitches, speaking in tongue bitches / four on the floor, got Sage on the door." Here, the sacred and the profane are not in opposition but in dialogue. Later, she invokes the cardinal directions ("four bitches, four corners, North, East, West, South shit") situating her coven within an elemental world order. This melding of witchcraft and "bitchcraft" performs multiple functions: 1) it asserts a form of erotic and political agency, celebrates unruly feminine energy, and 2) it aligns Nokia with *brujería* not as commodified trend but as diasporic inheritance. As Daniel (2011) observes, traditions like *brujería*, Santería, and Vodou continue to be redefined through performance and reinterpretation (141). Nokia's engagement situates her within that evolving lineage, using sound and lyric to foreground spiritual resistance as a form of cultural survival.

Other tracks like YAYA (2012) and "Bikini Weather / Corazon en Afrika" (2014), embody a dynamic mix of urban, hip hop, and traditional rhythms that sonically and visually "emphasize the fragmentation, deterritorialization, and struggles for reclamation that are parts of indigenous experience in most parts of the world" (Diamond et al., 2012: 39). In these tracks, Nokia blends call-and-response structures, melodic contouring, and spiritual chants with modern production, creating what Diamond et al. (2012) describe as music that "emphasizes the fragmentation, deterritorialization, and struggles for

reclamation that are parts of indigenous experience" (39). These sonic choices serve a pedagogical purpose in teaching listeners about the cultural specificity of Afro-Latinx spirituality while also inviting broader publics into those soundworlds without diluting their meaning.

Nokia's oeuvre illustrates how music, particularly when shaped by syncretic spiritual traditions, can function as a conduit for cultural preservation, pedagogy, and political resistance. By examining the rhythmic structures, lyrical content, and visual iconography of her songs, this analysis reveals how Nokia's music revitalizes Yoruba religious practices while adapting them to speak to contemporary struggles around race, gender, and identity. Her sincere and sustained engagement with Afro-Latinx spirituality is not a posture; it is a through-line in her work – one that anchors her queer, feminist, and decolonial commitments. Religious symbols have long been part of musical expression, but when artists like Princess Nokia reframe their music videos as rituals – invoking the Orishas, drawing sacred circles, and naming their magic – they transform those works into living archives of resistance, survivance, and spiritual imagination.

"Gross" and the (Still) Continuing Relevance of the Carnivalesque

The interplay of religious imagery and sexuality has long been used in popular music to expose how institutional religion has historically repressed women and queer people (McClary, 1991; Railton & Watson, 2011). But in "Gross" (2020), Princess Nokia's approach is not purely oppositional. Rather than critiquing religion outright, she harnesses spiritual iconography to explore the messy, bodily, queer sacred – what S. R.

Toliver (2020) might call an Afrocarnival practice: one that celebrates Black embodiment while simultaneously challenging the systems that seek to shame, contain, or commodify it. “Gross” is an emo-trap cut staged in a literal carnival, where spiritual possession, bodily transgression, and queer identity collide in a riot of spectacle and self-fashioning.

The video opens with burgundy curtains parting to reveal Frasqueri in a sequined bodysuit, swallowing a sword under harsh spotlights. Carnival sound effects like creaking wheels, clashing metal, and wet, visceral squelches announce the video’s title card. From the outset, the viewer is immersed in a space that echoes Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivalesque: a zone of theatrical inversion and grotesque realism, where binaries like sacred/profane, masculine/feminine, and clean/unclean are dissolved. As Renbourn Chock (2018) explains, the carnivalesque “embodies several meanings but is always the site of interplay between the low and the high” (117). Yet, Princess Nokia’s performance presents a distinctly Black speculative aesthetic that transforms carnival from “short-term liberation” (144) into sustained critique, reclamation, and futurity.

In Toliver’s framing, grotesque realism maps abstract forms of social control like racism, classism, and sexism onto literal bodies, transforming the material body into a political text (134). Nokia’s body, adorned with ritual symbols and marked by deliberate defilement, becomes a site of sacred distortion and disruption. Her performance does not aim to horrify but sanctify that which dominant culture renders monstrous: queerness, femme power, spiritual possession, and erotic unruliness. This is the logic of the Afrocarnival, where the grotesque is not simply aesthetic but political, where the abject body, rendered hypervisible, becomes a speculative vehicle for worldmaking and a

"second life" through which oppressed identities are exalted rather than erased (ibid, 144).

If the traditional Bakhtinian carnival ultimately reinstates the social order through sanctioned chaos, Nokia's carnival aims for rupture, not reset. "Gross" resists catharsis and instead insists on transformation. Her world is feral, excessive, and affirmatively grotesque – a performance of queered sacred defiance that resonates with Afrofuturism's larger project to reimagine futures, reclaim ancestral knowledge, and dismantle imposed binaries (Womack, 2013: 9). In this sense, "Gross" does not merely stage rebellion; it ritualizes it, transforming the music video into what Toliver calls a "second life" – a speculative space where minoritized identities are not hidden or sanitized, but exalted in their most ecstatic and unapologetic forms.

[*Princess Nokia lies on a stage surrounded by an array of blades, clutching a dagger to her chest in a pose reminiscent of religious martyrdom.*]

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Frasqueri uses grotesque realism in conjunction with allusions to various divine figures such as Catholic saints, witches, and prophets, not to parody the sacred, but to

stake a claim within it. In Chock's (2018) terms, this is not a simple rejection of the "high," but a strategic deployment of the "low" to expose its contradictions. As he cautions, "carnival often violently abuses and demonizes weaker, not stronger, social groups" (118), challenging any uncritical celebration of the carnivalesque. In "Gross", however, Frasqueri redirects that violence inward as a form of weaponizing the grotesque to confront patriarchal constructions of both the sacred and the self.

[*Princess Nokia appears as a mystical prophet in Gross, embodying both divine and occult symbolism. Her glowing halo and flowing garments evoke Catholic saint imagery, while the conjured flames and gothic styling reinforce her connection to witchcraft.]*

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The video's spiritual and aesthetic references are drawn from across multiple ethnic and cultural identifications that Frasqueri lays claim to. The lyrics and visuals honour this cultural multiplicity, particularly her self-identification as an "Afro-Indigenous witch" (Kuga, 2019). The Santería connection becomes especially salient in her fusion of Catholic sainthood and Yoruba spiritual practices. In the final verse, she proclaims, "I done called the Babalao, the priestess and the reverend" – layering Catholic, wiccan, and Yoruba authority figures in one line, collapsing any clear religious taxonomy. As noted in Genius annotations, a *Babalao* (or *Babalawo*) is a priest of the Ifá

oracle, whose work involves ritual sacrifice in exchange for insight or intervention (Genius, 2020).

Throughout the video, Frasqueri occupies liminal roles: saint, witch, martyr, prophet. One scene cuts from her appearing radiant and haloed in white lace – an image evocative of Catholic mystics such as Saint Lucy or Saint Gemma Galgani, whose ecstatic suffering and visible wounds have historically symbolized spiritual purity through female pain (Hollywood, 2001). These invocations of Christian martyrdom, particularly those of women mystics like Saint Gemma Galgani, are visually reimagined here not as penance, but as defiant spectacle. Rather than submitting to divine will, Frasqueri asserts her agency by performing her own self-sacrifice. In Chock's formulation, this is a carnivalesque inversion of spiritual authority, turning the divine gaze back on itself. The grotesque body, once a target of purification, becomes a site of unrepentant self-staging: "transgressions and their attempts to control them obsessively return to somatic symbols, for these are the ultimate elements of social classification itself" (Chock, 2018: 119).

[*In the top image, Nokia clutches a dagger, her white lace gown and radiant halo evoking saintly innocence, here a visual allusion to the purity of traditional sacrificial figures. In the image below, a man drives a crown of thorns into her head, causing blood to trickle down her face, an unmistakable reference to the suffering of Christ.*]

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Gender fluidity also runs through the core of "Gross". Frasqueri refers to herself as a prophet, parting waters "like I'm Moses," while also conjuring quarters, casting spells, and invoking witchcraft. Her aesthetic presentation moves between what Renbourn Chock (2018) calls "classical" and "grotesque" bodies: at once composed and disordered, saintly and profane (119). As the camera flashes between black-and-white versions of her dress, she embodies both the divine feminine and the spectral witch, invoking and disrupting tropes of purity and corruption, enlightenment and heresy.

While the carnival has often been positioned as a space "outside the realm of politics" (Chock, 2018: 116), Gross collapses that boundary entirely. Frasqueri stages her

politics through flesh, spectacle, and spiritual audacity, rendering the personal and spiritual irreducibly political. In "Gross", to be grotesque is to refuse containment, and to claim power in the very forms deemed abject. Ultimately, by embracing the "gross" as Frasqueri presents it here, she consecrates the unruly body as holy ground, redefining the carnival not as escapism, but as reclamation and revelation.

Conclusion: 'My Body Little, My Soul is Heavy'

Queer women's bodies have long been sites of scrutiny, shame, and symbolic regulation – straightened by the rigid architectures of respectability, erased from dominant histories, and policed through neoliberal ideals of self-discipline and upward mobility (Pitcan et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, Princess Nokia's work emerges not just as personal expression but as insurgent feminist praxis. While the sonic language of empowerment – assertions of feminine strength, sexual agency, defiance – may not always register as overtly political, this chapter has argued that her music exemplifies a hip hop feminist vocabulary: a set of performative strategies and aesthetic gestures that construct meaning in excess of the narratives imposed upon queer women of colour. If, as Pitcan et al. suggest, respectability politics "rel[y] on a degree of control over oneself, and a sense of personal responsibility for how others perceive you," then Princess Nokia's refusal to adhere to these expectations becomes, in itself, a political act of self-definition and resistance.

This analysis has explored Nokia's gender play in "Tomboy," her spiritual self-fashioning in "Brujas," and her grotesque, theatrical excess in "Gross." Across these case studies, she persistently refuses the reductive terms set by genres like hip hop, which

often conflate authenticity with racialized and gendered fixity. Rather than offering a single, coherent self, Nokia crafts a politics of multiplicity – an aesthetic strategy that values contradiction as generative rather than deviant.

At the same time, her navigation of a mixed racial identity within the United States hip hop landscape is both fraught and illuminating. Her Afro-Indigenous and Puerto Rican heritage, which are prominently featured in lyrics and interviews, has been met with celebration and skepticism alike. Hip hop's investment in "the real," often mapped onto Black urban masculinity, complicates the reception of artists like Nokia whose positionalities are femme, queer, and multiracial. Yet it is precisely this in-betweenness that gives her the tools to stretch hip hop's ideological borders. Her performances traverse the sacred and the profane, the hard and the vulnerable, refusing to conform to the industry's demand for branded coherence. Rather than resolve these tensions, she mobilizes them as hip hop feminist strategies of self-fashioning, using contradiction not as a flaw, but as a form of resistance and redefinition.

Still, Nokia's assertion that "underneath every woman of colour is a feminist" reveals an uneasy tension. While the sentiment gestures toward shared histories of resistance, it risks flattening the heterogeneity of women of colour's relationships to feminism. As scholars like bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and others have insisted, mainstream feminism has often failed to account for structural difference, producing frameworks that marginalize the very subjects they claim to center. Womanist, Chicana, and Indigenous feminisms emerged as responses to the exclusions of white liberal feminism. In this light, Nokia's feminism should be understood not as a singular

ideology but as a situated, improvisational praxis that is contradictory, evolving, and deeply rooted in her syncretic blend of spirituality, ancestry, and sonic experimentation.

As Hodon Omar Elmi (2022) aptly puts it, "[Nokia's] success is a testament to the liberatory work conducted by marginalized artists and thinkers operating in this field …" (163). Her distinctive DIY sounds construct a percussive, disruptive language of resistance and place making – what I have described in this chapter as a "hip hop feminist vocabulary". The concept of a hip hop feminist vocabulary, then, emerges not from coherence but from contradiction. It exists in the tension between Nokia's glittery sword-swallowing and her sacred chants to *Yemayá*, between her gang-affiliated slang and her queer femme covens, between her critiques of racial erasure and her moments of rhetorical overreach. These contradictions, while ripe for problematizing, are part of a grammar of embodied resistance that insists on multiplicity over easy definitions.

All of this matters not just for understanding Nokia as an artist, but for what her work reveals about the landscape in which she performs. As we will see in the next chapter, her collaborative efforts with other bi+ artists like Ashnikko – an artist often celebrated for her genre-bending play – raises further questions about who gets rewarded for transgressing genre and gender norms. Nokia's labour to hold multiple identities at once is not always legible or lucrative in the same way. If this chapter has argued that Nokia models a kind of hip hop feminist vocabulary, the next will consider how that grammar is received, reappropriated, and re-signified by audiences as a part of their own lexicon of feminist fieldwork in the digital age. In essence, it asks how feminist meanings

are collaboratively made, mediated, and contested through strategic engagements with cultural forms like the music video in a networked digital culture.

Chapter II – Between Stage and Screen: Fandom at Work in Ashnikko's Transmedia World

Introduction

Juxtaposing the slick and shimmery high-production of conventional pop videos against a dystopian and sterile industrial environment, UK-based alt-rap artist Ashnikko[27] offered her music video for "You Make Me Sick" in early 2023 as a teaser for her upcoming debut album (Knight, 2023). Crafted under the direction of Saam Farahmand, the Iranian-British filmmaker renowned for his socially and technologically challenging work (Lark Creative, 2023), their collaborative effort is a vivid manifestation of Ashnikko's 'personal rage room' (Gallagher, 2023). "You Make Me Sick" is as heavy as it gets for pop-rap; a brutal, industrial-laced, scorched-earth banger that opens with a "nu-metal inspired" guitar riff marked by its warped textures and detuned unease (Rincon, 2023). The beat drops on the second bar, heavy with clicky percussive pulses that heighten the track's visceral lyrics – think if a Nine Inch Nails track were produced by SOPHIE on a revenge bender. Although Ashnikko is no stranger to transmuting her rage into music, this track showcases the pure venom of her vocal performance, alternating between mocking sweetness and unhinged fury. There is a confrontational theatricality to her delivery, but one that is rooted in sincere affect; we get the sense that Ash is not just playing angry or mourning a breakup – she is ritualistically dismembering the memory of this person. The chorus is hooky but abrasive, with a deliberately destabilizing sense of harmony: everything is pitched just slightly off, lending the track a dizzying, *unwell* quality that mirrors the song's themes of physical revulsion and violent spectacle.

[27] Ashnikko also goes by Ash, so I alternate between these two names for ease and clarity.

Jarring moments of the video showcase scenes of Ash surrounded by dancers positioned in a primal stance within a pool of murky water,[28] while the unexpected eroticism of these scenes serves as a dramatic counterpoint to the otherwise disquieting backdrop. The emergence of black, viscous anomalies that appear perilously close to erupting from her face add an element of grotesquerie that further amplifies the overarching themes of discomfort and unease that permeate the song's audiovisual landscape. Amongst the panned-out shots of Ash's intensely physical performance, a particularly eye-widening moment comes when her dancers are hooked up to her via a series of translucent tubes that force them to consume an oily black liquid spewing from her mouth. The whole video is disturbing, vicious, and raw, with Ash describing the cut as her "angriest, most cathartic song to date" (Gallagher, 2023).[29]

[*Ashnikko is staged centre amongst dancers in a choreographed sequence*]

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[28] The raunchy gestures in these moments of the video feel reminiscent of the potent sexuality embodied in Christina Aguilera's iconic 2002 "Dirrty" music video, but perhaps more explicitly references the water twerking scene in the now infamous "WAP" (2020) video by Cardi B and Megan thee Stallion.

[29] While not a salient concept for this chapter, I was drawn to Sianne Ngai's (2005) notion of "ugly feelings" while researching this music video, a concept from a book of the same title in which she notes that "the disgusting itself has the power to allure". This feels relevant to mention, given the overwhelmingly *positive* response that the music video for "You Make Me Sick" has received from fans (and even some critics).

This chapter examines Ashnikko's transmedia presence, particularly her audiovisual work and digital persona, through the lens of queer feminist cultural critique. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Black feminist thought, hip-hop feminism, and platform studies, I argue that Ashnikko's work not only disrupts dominant gendered and racialized aesthetic norms but also mobilizes spectacle as a vehicle for queer feminist visibility and resistance. Through close readings of music videos, social media performances, and fan interaction, I explore how Ashnikko navigates, and at times exploits, the contradictions of platform capitalism, audience expectations, and feminist politics.

Ashnikko (real name Ashton Casey) has been variously categorized as a "Sapphic"[30] alt-rapper who frequently references her experiences as a bi+ artist through her music, music videos, social media, and in interviews. A powerful vocalist who embodies unbridled feminine rage and raw, emotional potency, Ashnikko's biting and irreverent music has made her a highly successful but not yet "mainstream" artist. Her music, while fetching millions of YouTube views, hovers just below the surface of pop radio anthems, rarely breaking through (with the exception of "Deal With It" in 2021). Her "sound" itself is also difficult to categorize, reflecting a plethora of musical influences from bubble gum pop to hip hop and nu metal, and employing a wide range of vocal styles and song structures. What unites the music, however, is her consistently aggressive, empowering, and *fun* lyrics, grounded in a relentlessly queer and feminist political stance that is complemented by a hard-hitting visual style just as difficult to pin down or predict as her music is.

Long-time fans will not have been surprised by the somewhat psychotic and outrageous moments of "You Make Me Sick!". As I watched, I was reminded of my ambivalent reaction to Die Antwoord's music video for "I Fink You Freaky" in 2012, which, while carried by its

[30] A more detailed discussion of the term "Sapphic" as a musical subgenre is undertaken in the introduction of this thesis.

infectious dance beat and sticky lyrics, left me rather bewildered. Something about the deliberately grotesque and disorienting visuals pulled me in. At the time, I couldn't explain why.[31] Now, encountering Ashnikko's similarly chaotic, hyper-stylized videos, I recognize a familiar pull, but also a clearer rationale. In an industry that prefers pigeon-hole friendly artists, Ashnikko's raunchy and jarring aesthetics combined with catchy song-writing and a charmingly unrefined celebrity persona serve a purpose that is both personal and political.[32]

Ashnikko's Relationship to the Music Industry

To understand Ashnikko's place in contemporary pop and hip hop landscapes, this section outlines her rise within the shifting structures of the music industry, offering an overview of her negotiation of major label representation, digital virality, and racialized authenticity in hip hop. These industry and cultural tensions illuminate how her identity as a bi+ white woman is simultaneously constrained and enabled by these evolving dynamics. Born into a suburban middle-class family in North Carolina, Casey and her family relocated to Latvia when she was a teenager, and at eighteen she moved on her own to the UK to pursue her musical career. Initially publishing her mixtapes on Soundcloud in 2016, Casey released her first EP under Digital Picnic Records in 2017, and secured a record deal with Parlophone, a subsidiary of Warner Music Group, that same year. At the time of this chapter's writing, Ashnikko's official social media presence spanned millions of followers across multiple digital platforms, with her breakout moment arriving in 2019 when a viral TikTok clip of Miley Cyrus dancing to her alt-rap hit 'STUPID' catapulted her into wider public recognition.

[31] This was long before the recent (May 2022) allegations of sexual abuse against the duo's adopted son, Tokkie – who became the face of the "I Fink You Freaky" video – were disclosed.
[32] Ashnikko has publicly attributed discovering intersectional feminism through the microblogging website Tumblr as a teenager, and identifies it as a turning point for her as a woman.

Ashnikko's ascent to success with her music in the late 2010s came during a relatively turbulent time for the music industry. With the broadcast model of music video programming firmly left in the early aughts (Schmidt & Neumann-Braun, 2010: 80-1, 85), the continuing rise of streaming music platforms like YouTube and Spotify along with the popularization of ByteDance's Musica.ly/TikTok application had far-reaching effects on conventional industry models of artist marketing, consumption, and fan-artist interaction (Stokel-Walker, 2021). Schmidt and Neumann-Braun (2010) characterize this shift from broadcast to user-generated as one that "fragmented and differentiated" the reception of music videos, arguing that "ways of linked reception have been expanded and popularized" in the user-generated era (87). This situates music and the user-generated aesthetics and mechanisms of modern music video as part of a "culture of connectivity" (cf. van Dijck, 2013), which entails the "expansion of music as a complex interlinkage of tech and social circumstances … that lead to enquiries about the challenges and possibilities opened up for listeners" (Johansson et al., 2017: 45).

Amid the turbulent shifts in the music industry brought on by digital disruption and the declining authority of legacy gatekeepers, Ashnikko embodies a hybrid trajectory that, at one time, leveraged the grassroots autonomy of platforms like Soundcloud, while ultimately entering into the traditional structures of a major label contract. While Casey's affiliation with capitalist institutions like Warner situates her resistance within a constrained framework, she performs a deliberate duality by both condemning and participating in the patriarchal structures of major label representation simultaneously. Her resistive audiovisual aesthetics, alongside affectively charged social media posts, stage a kind of performative conformity that foregrounds this tension rather than erasing it. In doing so, Casey exercises agency not only to navigate but also to disrupt and reject the dominant discourses these institutions seek to uphold.

Casey's affinity for writing within the hip hop genre also puts her in a contested position, given her status as a white, middle-class woman. Indeed, her participation in a historically Black genre recalls debates about authenticity and appropriation. Kajikawa's (2009) critique of Eminem's career highlights how white artists often rely on visible signifiers of whiteness to navigate hip hop's racialized terrain (348–57). While still entangled in the racialized complexities of hip hop, Casey's negotiation of these tensions reflects a more self-conscious engagement with her positionality that forgoes mimicry in favour of a deliberately situated and ostensibly more "authentic" artistic identity (Hobbs, 2020).[33]

Crucially, Ashnikko's identity as a bi+/pansexual woman places her at the intersection of visibility and marginalization. Bi+ erasure, in particular, is a persistent issue for bi+ activists (Gonzalez, 2021; Nutter-Pridgen, 2015; Berbary & Guzmán, 2018; Monro, 2014; Robards et al., 2022). In the music industry, bi+/pan erasure is enacted through not only the subjugating male gaze, but through what Morgan and Davis-Delano (2016) call "binary cultural conceptions of sexual orientation." This marginalization and oversimplification of diverse sexual orientations has a profound effect on both artists and their audiences. For many who consider themselves part of Ashnikko's queer audience, her music has been taken up as an opportunity to construct a collective identity, as well as for Ashnikko herself to creatively express her experiences and beliefs as a bi+ woman in a highly exploitative industry. In this way, Ashnikko's industrial and aesthetic choices cannot be divorced from her political stakes. Her audiovisual and social media presence represents a queer worldbuilding project that works within and against the constraints of the industry to center fluid, defiant identities.

[33] Artists like Iggy Azalea, for example, have been criticized for their "mimicry of sonic blackness" and adopting a performative "Blaccent" (Hobbs, 2020) .

Bi+ Visibility and Queer Worldbuilding in Ashnikko's Transmedia Universe

On September 23, 2019, Ashnikko posted to Twitter: "happy #BiVisibilityDay !!!!! being bisexual is fabulous but bi erasure is not !!!!" (Ashnikko, 2019). While seemingly offhand, this post exemplifies the way she fuses her digital persona with her artistic practice, drawing bi+ visibility into the foreground of both. Rather than treating social media and music as discrete domains, Ashnikko collapses the boundary between them, building a transmedia presence in which queerness is not simply expressed, but aestheticized, staged, and circulated. Her Twitter/X[34] presence, like her videos, is marked by a deliberate refusal to sanitize or compartmentalize bi+ desire. Instead, it functions as part of a broader worldbuilding strategy in which queer sexuality, and feminine rage operate in tandem.

To contextualize Ashnikko's approach, I draw on visibility politics as articulated by theorists like Michel Foucault and Patricia Hill Collins. Foucault (1975) showed how power and knowledge intertwine to produce categories of deviance that legitimize control, such as the 'criminal' or the 'deviant body'. Collins (2008) extends this analysis through her concept of "controlling images," which are pervasive stereotypes that dehumanize Black women and frame them as deviant or "other". Images such as the 'mammy' and the 'Jezebel' operate as systematic tools of oppression, and have served to justify and uphold intersecting forms of social injustice, including racism, sexism, and classism, by presenting Black women as inferior, hypersexualized, or inherently problematic (ibid). In conversation with Collins, the Foucauldian view of power and social relations continues to be useful in this chapter for understanding how power operates not only through the overt pressures of the music industry, but also through the circulation of images

[34] Twitter (now X) was a central hub for fan discourse up until its takeover by Elon Musk in 2022, where shifts in platform governance and user migration have altered the terrain of queer feminist engagement online. Still, the digital traces left behind from 2021 offer a valuable snapshot of the bi+ community's relationship with Ashnikko's work during that cultural moment.

and narratives that define who is seen and how they are seen – if they are seen at all. These frameworks are key to understanding how bi+ women have been stereotyped or rendered invisible in mainstream media, often appearing as unstable, manipulative, or only temporarily queer.[35]

Music and music video have long served as powerful tools for articulating queer feminist resistance, especially in forms that challenge normative representations. As both subcultural markers and emotionally resonant media, music offers fertile ground for meaning-making among young people (Williams, 2007, qtd. in Taylor, 2013: 197). Within this terrain, the politics of visibility become particularly acute, raising complex questions about the representation of bisexuality – especially for women, whose identities are often erased or hypersexualized. When paired with provocative visual aesthetics, music becomes not only a mode of self-expression but also a means of community formation and political intervention. In the digital age, platforms like TikTok and Twitter/X have amplified this potential. These spaces now function as unexpected but potent arenas for bi+ feminist expression, where users transform moments of affective resonance into shared political meaning (Blevins, 2018; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Focusing on "Slumber Party" (2021), one of Ashnikko's most explicitly queer and collaborative works, I explore how both the original music video and its reinterpretations function as sites of aesthetic and discursive resistance for bi+ women. Drawing on theories of digital archiving (Varela, 2016), hybrid ethnography (Przybylski, 2021), and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), I analyze the ways young bisexual women use these platforms to contest normative portrayals of bi+ sexuality, signal belonging, and engage in collaborative worldbuilding. I frame these practices through the concept of *joyful resistance*, a strategy that

[35] While Foucault's criminal is "already outlined in advance and waiting for the law to recognize him" (1975: 202), the bisexual woman on screen is frequently devious and manipulative (Villanelle in *Chasing Eve*), confused or indecisive (Tina in *The L Word*), erased or invisible (Marissa in *The O.C.*).

does not abandon seriousness but rather reclaims pleasure, eroticism, and creative play as valid, critical sites of political action. In this context, joy is not the opposite of resistance but a modality of it: an affective stance that insists on the right to pleasure and complexity in the face of narratives that would render bi+ lives as deviant, confused, or invisible.

This affective mode enables the cultivation of what Barberá et al. (2015) describe as the "critical periphery", where bi+ self-expression and cultural labour unfold outside of traditional protest frameworks yet engage in equally potent forms of rhetorical and symbolic activism. TikTok users in particular play a crucial role in extending the reach of Ashnikko's work. Through stylized lip-syncs, dances, and fan-created remixes, "Slumber Party" extends its reach through vernacular, queer-feminist forms of worldmaking. This co-construction of meaning affirms bi+ existence not through direct confrontation but through sensuous, often humorous, engagement with the very tropes that historically marginalize them.

These co-constructed meanings challenge dominant narratives through what ethnomusicologist Liz Przybylski (2021) calls a *hybrid ethnography*: a method that captures the blurring of boundaries between creators, participants, and critics. By attending to these practices, we can better understand the contours of digital bi+ visibility as they manifest through aesthetic, emotional, and collective labour performed and carried out online. Additionally, this process acknowledges the potential blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers, as well as artists and audience, highlighting the fluid nature of these roles (ibid, 6). Ultimately, this hybrid, participatory field of engagement highlights how Ashnikko's fans co-conspire with her to help build a queer feminist world. These acts of remixing, reinterpreting, and emotionally investing in Ashnikko's media thus work as tools of survival, affirmation, and joy.

"Who's Your Favourite Artist?": Parasocial Relationships and Participatory Culture in the 21st Century

This section turns to examining the role of fans in shaping, circulating, and co-creating Ashnikko's queer feminist politics. Cultural objects like celebrity and music are increasingly being understood as part of intertextual transmedia landscapes (Hutton & Burns, 2021) and are a conduit of access for the public to engage with social issues (Ahmed, 2004). The participatory practices explored in this section cultivate a sense of proximity between fans and the artists they follow (Tukachinsky, 2018; Kurtin, 2019); this dynamic, at once empowering and unstable, raises questions about how parasocial attachments can function in the era of constant online visibility.

What began as the Beatles' playful vinyl inserts in 1967 has evolved into a more immersive and complex mode of digital engagement. In the current digital landscape, this impulse toward closeness has evolved into what is now termed "stan culture", a much more complex (and sometimes controversial) mode of fan-artist interaction.[36] While "stan" originally described dangerously obsessed fans, the term has since expanded to encompass more collective, participatory forms of fandom. Bermudez et al. (2020) argue that stan culture now signifies a communal phenomenon in which fans collaboratively express admiration for artists, groups, or other public figures (1). This reconceptualization emerged alongside the decline of the broadcast era and the rise of participatory platforms like Twitter/X and TikTok: whereas older media forms positioned audiences as passive consumers, many popular social media platforms foster dynamic parasocial relationships (Gabriel et al., 2023: 23; 255-7; Dean, 2017; Jones, 2011; McEwan, 2022).

[36] The HBO series Swarm (2023) and Eminem's "Stan" (2000) both dramatize 'stan' culture's darkest potential, depicting fans whose obsessive attachment turns violent – though such portrayals represent one extreme on a much broader spectrum of fan behaviour.

Ashnikko's engagement with stan culture offers a compelling counterpoint to the narratives of toxicity and obsession that abound in discourse about fan groups such as the BTS Army, Swifties [Taylor Swift fans], and the Barbz [Nicki Minaj fans], for example (JoVonn, 2024; Cheung, 2021; Gee, 2023). Ashnikko's Twitter/X interactions counter these associations, showing how artists can leverage fan intimacy to promote dialogue, and even action, on important social issues. Her Twitter/X posts often blend personal vulnerability with political commentary, sharing frustrations about sexism (Ashnikko, 2020a), candid reflections on mental health (Ashnikko, 2021a), and explicit support for LGBTQ+ initiatives like Nonbinary TranSanta (Ashnikko, 2020c). These posts frequently catalyze dialogue among fans, inviting them to share stories, circulate resources, and participate in community-driven acts of care.

This affective reciprocity reflects what Hunting and Hinck (2017) term "merged fan intimacy", a participatory dynamic in which boundaries between artist and audience blur in productive ways. As Beer (2008) notes, such intimacy tends to "wear away" the mystique of celebrity, positioning artists more as "familiar friends" (qtd. in Johansson et al., 2017: 52). Ashnikko cultivates this atmosphere by responding to fan art, amplifying queer causes, and addressing her followers as if they are co-conspirators in a shared feminist vision. This encourages a phase of 'relational intensification', described by Stever and Tukachinsky (2019) as a stage in which fans seek meaningful engagement and emotional exchange with the media figure (299).

Among Ashnikko's LGBTQ+ fanbase, this intimacy becomes even more politically potent. For bi+, trans, and nonbinary fans, her candidness and engagement with LGBTQ+ issues offers both a form of representation and a space for refuge. Fans often address her simply as "Ash", collapsing the boundaries between persona and personhood. This blurred identity space – part performance, part confession – creates fertile ground for connection. Ashnikko's consistent

centering of bi+ identity, feminist resistance, and queer joy becomes a lifeline for those seeking visibility and validation in a hostile social climate. Indeed, these blurred boundaries, far from erasing difference, often create a kind of digital commons for collective care and cultural resistance.

Henry Jenkins (2006) theorized participatory culture as a shift from passive consumption to active creation. Ashnikko's fandom embodies this ethos, with stan culture functioning as a grassroots mechanism for visibility and empowerment (Bermudez et al., 2020). TikTok videos, memes, remixes, and visual tributes amplify her messages and circulate them across queer networks, sustaining a form of dispersed but cohesive activism. "Slumber Party", both as a video and a viral artefact, exemplifies this dynamic. Fans do not simply react to but extend its possible meanings through humorous remixes and erotic celebrations, often destabilizing the binaries imposed on queer identities like bisexuality. These practices resist normative scripts not by negation but through pleasure, affirmation, and play – all of which are hallmarks of what I have called *joyful resistance*. As digital platforms continue to expand, these forms of engagement continue to illustrate that fandom is no longer simply a site of celebrity obsession, but has the potential to create spaces where social, political, and cultural conversations take shape.

Ashnikko's music and videos tap into a kind of queer joy punctuated by moments of feminine rage, embodying both a cathartic expression and political provocation. Alternating tones of joy and rage capture a lived truth for many queer fans navigating systems of marginalization. Her performances thus become cathartic rituals and political provocations, staging a refusal to compartmentalize or tamp down emotion and self-expression. As scholars like Yoshino (2000), Hemmings (2002), and Eisner (2013) argue, bi+ identity is not liminality but an active disruption – is a refusal of closure, and a logic of simultaneity. Within this context, Ashnikko's multimodal navigation of her bi+ identity is both a reflection of many others' experiences and an enactment of

bisexuality's epistemological challenge, which is to say it is a noisy, affective, and deeply embodied critique of the cultural systems that attempt to stabilize identity through opposition. Thus, her music videos and fan cultures together construct a queer commons where affective labour, aesthetic resistance, and parasocial intimacy become tools for survival and solidarity.

Hashtag Activism

Expanding on the role of digital platforms in constructing affective and political communities, this section shifts focus to the role of Twitter/X as both an archive and amplifier of queer feminist expression. Tracing the history of hashtag activism, from early uprisings to queer fan engagement, I show how Ashnikko and her followers mobilize these digital signifiers to assert visibility, build solidarity, and reshape cultural narratives around gender and sexuality (Simpson, 2018; Varela, 2016). Launched in 2006, Twitter (now X) quickly evolved into a vital node for activist communication and participatory fandom (Kreiss, 2016). The introduction of the hashtag in 2007 transformed it from a microblogging site into a dynamic infrastructure for organizing, allowing users to cluster around shared issues, identities, and causes (Zappavigna, 2018; Brock, 2012). In this context, hashtags transcend being metadata and become tools of affective community-building and queer feminist expression (Simpson, 2018; Varela, 2016).

Despite ongoing criticism of and ambivalence about social media, it has played and continues to play a significant role in areas like education (Greenhow & Lewin, 2015; Ansari & Khan, 2020), social norms (Pitcan, Marwick & Boyd, 2018), and even lawmaking (Nenoff, 2020). From its founding in 2006 to 2022, when it was taken over by Elon Musk (Zahn, 2022), Twitter emerged as a powerful tool for communication and organizing, which sparked optimistic discussions about its potential to facilitate social justice movements. The Arab Spring, for example, was a series of pro-democracy uprisings in 2010 within primarily Muslim countries that sparked several online feminist protests using hashtags around women's issues such as the right to

drive (#Women2Drive), sexual harassment (#HarassMap), and police mistreatment of women during protests (#BlueBra) (Le Renard, 2014; Tufekci, 2014, Radsch & Khamis, 2013). The platform's rise democratized the flow of information in unprecedented ways, allowing politicians and political entities to bypass traditional media and engage directly with the public (Kreiss, 2016).

Movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo leveraged Twitter as a mobilizing tool, turning it into a nexus for activism and social advocacy (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019). Well into the 2020s, Twitter/X continued to be used as a platform for executing online awareness campaigns for queer feminist issues such as the #SayBisexual and #Still Bisexual campaigns, which run every year in September and address issues such as representation, erasure, acceptance, and mental health. The significance of these campaigns for bi+ individuals themselves, regardless of any direct outcome, demonstrates the importance of online activism and the use of hashtags as an organizing semiotic principle. A case in point is Gonzalez et al.'s study of the 2016 #StillBisexual campaign, which found that participants implemented bisexual marking approaches as a way to affirm their identities and counteract bi-erasure (Gonzalez et al., 2017: 512).

While hashtags are most commonly used for social justice and organizational functions on Twitter, tags like "bi", bisexual", "bisexual pride", and "bisexual awareness" also attract substantial engagement on other platforms. Gender-oriented hashtags like "enby", "mascfem", "thembo", "queer", "nonbinary", "androgyny", and "genderfluid" accompany many of the videos I collected for the sample discussed in this case study of audience responses to Ashnikko's "Slumber Party" (2021) on Twitter and TikTok, with media collected between 2021 and 2023. I anonymized all cited Twitter posts to protect user privacy by removing direct identifiers such as usernames, real names, and profile images from both citations and quoted material. In cases

where the Tweet's author was a non-public figure, I referred to the author generically as "Twitter user". This approach is consistent with guidance on anonymizing social media data and best practices for ethical citation (Chicago Manual of Style, 2017; Purdue OWL, 2023; LibGuides CSUDH, 2018).

Collectively, these posts invoked a swath of identities that are altogether absent from mainstream representations of bi+/pansexuality. Their use allows other users who identify in divergent ways or are interested in learning more about non-binary sexualities and genders to easily find and engage with these creators and their videos. Hashtags can therefore be an integral part of online organization and resistance to normalizing discourses and are a significant piece in understanding the creator video responses in this case study as political interventions. As semiotic technologies wrapped up in the articulation of counternarratives and non-normative identity representation, hashtags function as part of the *queer repertoire* that music and creator response videos enact, becoming one part of what Miguel Escobar Varela (2016) calls "the archival bond". Specifically, words, images and sounds that circulate the app in these subcultural spaces become part of a rhetorical practice that offers alternate, non-normative readings of women's bisexuality.

Building on Merlyna Lim's conception of online activism as a movement between material and immaterial realms that can "manipulate the power projected in space" (Kouchakji & Buel, 2020: 178), Ashnikko's tweets and visual aesthetics function together as dynamic, multimodal interventions. Fans responding to these gestures often share deeply personal reflections, interpreting her songs through their lived experiences and engaging in grassroots dialogue about gender, sexuality, and survival. During the period from January 2021 to March 2022, when I observed Ashnikko's Twitter account, fans appeared to engage meaningfully with the topics and initiatives that she shared. Ash's posts tended to address what her songs meant, or whom they were "meant for"; they frequently referenced the persistent struggles of women-

identified persons navigating patriarchal social structures within the music industry and society at large.

Hashtags are central to how Ashnikko sustains queer belonging across platforms. Hashtags function not only as mechanisms of discovery or sorting, but as connective tissue that "illustrate how culture shapes online social interactions" (531), linking artists and fans into emergent counterpublics – dynamic, digital spaces of visibility, belonging, and resistance (Brock, 2012; Simpson, 2018; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). This relational web is not only political but therapeutic, especially for marginalized users navigating isolation, dysphoria, or erasure (Bond, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2020; Battle & Harris, 2013). Some studies have shown that this sense of connection is closely linked with increased civic and sociopolitical engagement, particularly among bisexual and lesbian Latinas (Battle & Harris, 2013: 142). In this sense, hashtag participation can go beyond performative or symbolic gestures by facilitating a form of digital consciousness-raising that can support mental health, catalyze identity formation, and create spaces of care.

Ashnikko's own use of hashtag activism, in this case around #BiVisibilityDay and #TransDayOfVisibility, demonstrates how these digital signifiers operate as channels for both visibility and affective labour. Fans routinely respond to her tweets with personal narratives, testaments of recognition, and affirmations of identity. Some describe her as "the queen of bis and enbies" (Twitter User, 2021), while others cite her music and activism as pivotal in their own coming-out journeys (Twitter Users, 2019; 2021). In one illustrative exchange, a trans fan asked whether they were "allowed" to use "Slumber Party" in a TikTok video. Ashnikko's immediate response, "everyone is welcome!!!!!" (Ashnikko, 2021b), encapsulates the inclusive ethos her transmedia presence cultivates. These moments of digital care illustrate how hashtag activism

participates in queer worldmaking, namely in affirming and making legible non-normative desires and identities while extending an open invitation to those long excluded from the center.

On Bi+ *Joyful Resistance* in Music Videos: A Look at "Slumber Party" by Ashnikko ft. Princess Nokia

In a 2023 *Capital Buzz* interview, Ashnikko was asked about tackling more "serious" themes in her new music. She seemed to balk at this at first but recovered quickly, responding that "eroticism plays a huge role in healing – queer joy, play, sex, fun, happiness and hope" are all part of this process for her (Capital Buzz, 2023). For many of her fans, the music video for "Slumber Party" (2021) serves as an embodiment of this liberatory aesthetic and functions as a potent site of "resistant ideology" (Hall, 1980). Moreover, the video lends itself to both YouTube's broad and far-reaching audiences and TikTok's saturated, dance-centered aesthetics, amplifying its disruptive potential across platforms.

Numerous scholars have shown how music videos articulate alternative social discourses (Railton, 2011; Kramer, 2019; Westrup, 2023). As Railton (2011) suggests, music videos operate as complex cultural texts through which gender and sexuality are not just passively represented but actively negotiated and reimagined. Kramer (2019) builds on this by emphasizing their potential to foreground marginalized voices by disrupting normative narratives through visual storytelling and sonic experimentation. More recently, Westrup (2023) highlights how music videos' capacity to foster intimacy and moments of recognition create openings for identity affirmation and resistance against hegemonic norms. In this light, "Slumber Party" exemplifies how such audiovisual spaces can become a vehicle of *joyful resistance,* subverting audience expectations and affirming queer feminist identities through it playful, erotic, and visually provocative means.

The concept of *joyful resistance*, while not always named as such, has emerged in feminist scholarship that emphasizes affective and embodied forms of protest (Ahmed, 2010; Cvetkovich, 2003). For Audre Lorde (1987), joy functions as "energy for change" (87), a generative force that enables survival, creativity, and resistance under oppressive conditions. Joy, then, does not negate struggle, but rather transforms it into a method for asserting agency, reclaiming pleasure, and reconfiguring the emotional registers of activism. Similarly, Muñoz (2009) positions *queer futurity* as grounded in acts of playful world-making – a conception that is particularly resonant with Ashnikko and Princess Nokia's elaborately fantastical Rococo universe. Music videos, as Vernallis (2013) and Railton & Watson (2011) argue, are not only audiovisual texts but cultural artefacts that shape and are shaped by social discourse. "Slumber Party" offers fans a participatory site to engage in queer identification, visual pleasure, and expressive reinterpretation, especially through TikTok's ecosystem of dueting, lip-syncing, and remixed performance.

[*The grand, ornately decorated room and painting frame that becomes the entry point for viewers into Ashnikko's fantasy world features an Acanthus leaf ornamentation that was commonly used in architecture dated from Ancient Greece and Rome.*]

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The video's layered aesthetics carry cultural weight precisely because of who is depicted, and how. Ashnikko and Princess Nokia's own positioning as openly bi+ artists creates a public alliance between these two women that is significant for articulating a sense of authentic representation in an industry known for erasing, subjugating, and invalidating women's bisexuality. As ethnomusicologist Lauron Kehrer points out, racialized artists who claim the bisexual label continue to face erasure, particularly in the hip hop genre. Drawing on the treatment of Cardi B as an example, Kehrer (2022) observes that this erasure often comes in the

form of accusations of queerbaiting, which is "a term that originated in response to depictions of fictional characters especially in film and television … implying either in the text or in commentary same-gender desire between characters, but never following through on it by depicting a real relationship" (7). While the storyline of this video itself explicitly positions Nokia and Ashnikko's characters as lovers, both artists also engage queer communities in real life. Princess Nokia's longstanding ties to New York City's queer community and Ashnikko's queer advocacy in her music and public statements strengthen the status of "Slumber Party" as an authentic bisexual anthem rather than a performative gesture. This sense of legitimacy emboldens fans to embrace and celebrate their identities through creative response videos, further solidifying the song's cultural significance.

The "Slumber Party" music video (directed by Charlotte Rutherford, a longtime collaborator with Ashnikko) opens with an ornate, Boucher-esque painting that comes to life as the camera pans inward. Viewers are drawn into a pastel-hued fantasy world where Ashnikko and Princess Nokia preside over an erotic Rococo dreamscape. A group of women appear as nymph-like figures, their bodies twisting, bending, and entangling in stylized movements that mimic sexual acts while forming living sculptures embedded in the natural and architectural environment. As the synths rise and the song's first line, "I'm not shy, I'll say it, I've been picturing you naked," delivers its punch, the choreography erupts into a theatrical, exaggerated routine. Here, subtext is abandoned in favour of unapologetic sensuality. The scene is saturated with visual motifs like cherubs, floral embellishments, and acanthus-leaf columns that recall a lineage of gendered ornamentation often dismissed as frivolous or excessive, now reimagined as deliberate, expressive, and politically charged. The use of classical Greek and Roman visual codes, alongside mythological references, subtly aligns the video's aesthetic with queer feminist

reclamations of classical antiquity, including the often-contested legacy of Sappho as a symbol of women's same-sex desire.

This elaborate visual language draws directly from the expressive style of the Rococo and late-Baroque periods, where opulence, play, and visual excess served as both aesthetic and social commentary. François Boucher and Caravaggio, though distinct in style, shared a preoccupation with theatricality, sensual embodiment, and the dramatic interplay of light and shadow (Hyde, 2006: 64; Hibbard, 2018: 95). These themes go hand-in-hand with the song's over-the-top synths and wobbly drum beat, which underpin a fantasy world not unlike the psychedelic landscapes of Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" – here imagined as a queer feminist wonderland of erotic play.

[*François Boucher, Triumph of Venus, 1740*
National Museum, Stockholm]

[*Ashnikko (dir. Charlotte Rutherford), Group Dance Sequence [a] in a Fantasy World, "Slumber Party", 2021*]

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Constructing Bi+ Identity in Transmedia Contexts: Emergent Themes and 'Bisexual Aesthetics'

In this section I put the official music video for "Slumber Party" and an anonymized sampling of creators' responses into conversation with one another to make them legible as collective acts of *joyful resistance*. I further expound this notion by conceptualizing joyful resistance as a function of the "critical periphery to social protest" (Barberá et al., 2015). Barberá et al (2015) define a "critical periphery" as constituted by people whose collective activity, while not always explicitly political, establishes a significant difference in social movements. I thereby extend this definition beyond users who are "less active" and have fewer followers compared to "central users" (7) and apply it to fans and creators whose *joyful* and arguably *non-political* engagement with Ashnikko's music nevertheless holds real potential for helping the growth and visibility of the bi+ acceptance movement.

Fans on TikTok have been especially receptive to Ashnikko's music and presence on the app, engaging with and responding to her output in creative and socially progressive ways. While this study recognizes the broader concerns circulating during its research window (2020–2022) about TikTok's security and potential for harmful content (Lee & Abidin, 2023: 1), it focuses on

the platform's nuanced affordances – its evolving tools, cultural dynamics, and distinctive features that both echo and depart from earlier platforms (Duguay, 2023: 4). Audiences on TikTok represent crucial new territory for the study of knowledge exchange, community development and peer socialization. In demonstrating their deep resonance with Ashnikko's queer feminist message by engaging with her music, creators not only showcase their strong connection but are also creating "assemblages of networked publics and networked technologies" (ibid), thereby contributing to a growing effort to challenge dominant discourses of bi+/pansexuality by "constructing their own reality of meaning and identity" (Rosalind, 2010: 148).

The video's impact is evident in the digital responses it inspired. By June 2021, over 624,000 TikTok videos had used the song's audio (Wikimedia, 2023), contributing to a sprawling archive of queer fan engagement. To analyze these responses, I conducted a qualitative review of 30 TikTok videos posted between April 2021 and December 2022. From this sample, three dominant themes emerged: (1*) the reification of bisexual aesthetics as a form of visual community-building*; (2) *an embrace of gender multiplicity and androgyny that counters the spectacle of bisexuality for the male gaze*; and (3) *a gravitation toward specific lyrics that evoke nostalgia and queer intimacy.*

Each of the three themes reflects a key tension in contemporary bisexual representation. First, the reification of bisexual aesthetics in these response videos highlights the ways in which digital queer communities use visual culture to establish belonging and visibility. The pastel pinks, blues, and purples associated with bisexual pride, as well as the incorporation of camp, surrealism, and hyperfeminine-meets-androgynous aesthetics, are not just aesthetic choices but coded markers of community. Broader trends in queer digital spaces are invoked in these signifiers, where visual semiotics play a crucial role in fostering collective identity (Haimson et al., 2016). On platforms like TikTok, where queer micro-communities emerge in part through

algorithmic content curation, the conscious invocation of bisexual aesthetics operates as both an act of self-expression and a means of signaling solidarity. Additionally, the frequent references to "Bitok," a TikTok a space centered around bisexual identity on TikTok, call attention to how online engagement with music videos extends beyond passive consumption and instead becomes an active process of identity construction, community-building, and *joyful resistance* against bisexual erasure.

Second, the response videos' embrace of multiplicity and gender ambiguity works to challenge the persistent trope of bisexuality as a performative act meant to titillate the heterosexual gaze. Within dominant media discourse, bisexuality – particularly in women – has been framed as a spectacle, a temporary phase, or an identity adopted for male validation (McInnis et al., 2022: 358). As I discuss further in the section that follows, the response videos explicitly counter this by celebrating fluidity and ambiguity, showcasing an expansive range of gender expressions, aesthetic choices, and embodied performances that defy the male-gazey portrayals of bisexuality often seen in mainstream pop culture. By centering non-binary, gender-fluid, and androgynous presentations, these videos illustrate how "Slumber Party" provides a space for queer creators to assert bisexuality as an identity that is complex, self-determined, and necessarily resistant to external constraints.

Finally, the selection of specific lyrical moments that invoke nostalgia and bi/sexual themes aligns with a broader historical pattern of queer audiences gravitating toward coded language in pop music. Historically, queer listeners have often relied on subtext and double meanings to find affirmation in mainstream media (Bronski, 2011: 162). "Slumber Party", though explicit in its sapphic theming, echoes this tradition by weaving sensuality, intimacy, and intertextuality into a playful and evocative audiovisual framework that fans respond to. The song's refrain and imagery tap into a lineage of queer-coded pop music that invites reclamation

and reinterpretation, making it particularly resonant for bisexual audiences who have often been marginalized in both straight and queer cultural narratives.

Bi+ Aesthetics and Signaling Belonging

The use of non-normative language and imagery are prominently featured in the sample of creator videos I collected, a practice which has been observed in countless studies and non-fiction representations of queer lives within and beyond North America. Adopting this kind of visual language allows minority communities to speak to and express their experiences authentically (Rose, 2001). In this case, there is a particular focus on the invocation of so-called "bisexual aesthetics" like the bi flag colours pink, blue, and purple. These visual markers are an effective and easily replicated means of identity articulation as they are immediately identifiable and broadly claimed on the platform, making them instrumental in the assertion of what has historically been an erased and delegitimized identity within wider societal contexts.

[*A woman showcases her bi+ identity through aesthetics claimed by the online bisexual community. The pink, purple, and blue lighting evokes the bisexual pride flag, while the two-toned*

"bisexual bob" reinforces a visual marker of queer/bi+ identity. -- Original source removed; images anonymized and sourced before deletion]

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The role of dress in expressing identity is also evident in what has been dubbed the "bi girl aesthetic". In my sample, many of the women sported a half/half hair style cut into a short, often wavy bob (seen above) and pairing a tight crop top with high-waisted jeans (seen below). This phenomenon of community-specific styles echoes well-established cultural connections between fashion and visual language in identity performance within hip hop culture (Munson & Broome, 2020), implying that a similar process of identity formation and expression is at play here. As Joanne Entwistle (2015) argues, fashion is a "situated bodily practice" through which individuals negotiate cultural norms and personal identity (16). In this context, the "bi girl aesthetic" functions as what Davis (1999: 25) describes as a "visual metaphor" for bisexual identity (qtd. in Entwistle, 2015). Furthermore, the demonstration of clear affinity for "masculine" interests like anime, which we see as a graphic on one creator's t-shirt, recalls Butler's (1990) theories on gender performativity, namely that gender is not something that one is, but what one *does*. The "bi girl aesthetic" here is a playful, performative act that nonetheless politicizes its reconfiguration of gender norms – enacted through repeated stylizations on platforms like TikTok – and thus transforms these corners of the internet into a vibrant arena of *joyful* queer self-fashioning and *resistive* cultural formation.

[*These two contrasting poses visually encapsulate the "shy" / "not shy" dynamic in the track, a popular fan response to Ashnikko and Princess Nokia's "Slumber Party" music video. Anonymized, April 25, 2022*]

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Interpolation as Authorship and Resistance

One of the most widely circulated videos in the sample I collected, with 244,900 views at the time, features a creator who composed and performed an original rap verse that was inserted into the existing track. The result is a nearly seamless remix that extends and intensifies the song's explicitly Sapphic themes.[37] Hip hop has long been recognized as a genre grounded in practices of political and cultural resistance, and the act of interpolation in this context draws directly from its foundational tradition of sampling. Both sampling and interpolation are central to the formal and cultural logic of hip hop , reflecting its emergence within Black urban

[37] The lyrics of this verse are as follows: "Took your girlfriend to the Hills, she like the way I smell, Versace / Anything she wants, she gets, I licked her up just like a lolly / Then we took some body shots, I think she said she loves Bacardi / I'm addicted to her drug, I popped a pill of her like Molly / Slumber Party with the lights out, laying on this couch kissing on her with our tongues out / That shit make a good girl go wild, I think that she needs time out / Hey me, and Ashnikko gonna pull up to your house , we got bitches and some bottles so you know how it's going down" (@itsbricarter, 2021).

communities where the creative repurposing of existing cultural materials has functioned as a vital mode of artistic expression and social critique (Rose, 1994).

Within this context, the creation of a new musical text for the "Slumber Party" track by TikTok creators who gravitate toward its themes becomes interconnected with the challenges that are brought forth to mainstream representations of women's bisexuality, namely through their artistic participating in discourses about girlhood, sexuality, and belonging. With lyrics depicting an intimate and playful moment between the artist and a woman-identifying love interest that leans heavily into sexualized imagery of night life and seduction, the verse not only extends the discourse about girlhood, sexuality, and belonging in the song but also, in its very form as an interpolation, reflects the hip hop's tradition of innovatively reshaping and contesting dominant cultural narratives.

In positioning themselves as empowered subjects within and through such discourses, creators' influence on others – and perhaps more importantly their invitation to others to participate – situates their artistic responses as part of a practice of *joyful resistance*. These practices create alternative spaces, enable creators to assert agency, and help to build shared political consciousness that is celebratory yet can facilitate collective action. The act of creating and sharing these response videos can thus be seen as an important, if not critical, feature of the bisexual acceptance movement by functioning as a 'critical periphery' and working to help reshape discourse surrounding women's bisexuality.

Embodied Dance and Physicality

Creators whose posts focused on dance routines chose to adopt one of the major dance sequences from the music video, performing a short sequence that not only imitates but leans into the explicitly sexual representations and is synced to Nokia's rap verse. These performances

visualise and animate the song's queer erotic energy, where dancers accentuate moments like "I'm the Nelly in the party with some rocks for ears" with exaggerated gestures like tapping faux earrings or flipping hair, visually reinforcing the braggadocious self-fashioning of the verse. Moves tied to lyrics such as "I'm a slave for you, baby, Miss Britney Spears" or "Not an H-town girl but I rodeo / Yippee-ki-yay, welcome to the show" draw from iconic pop choreography and queer-coded gestures, some of which trace their lineage to Ballroom culture – most notably in the use of voguing-inspired handwork, dips, and pose-heavy transitions.[38] In doing so, these creators transform TikTok into a space of performative affirmation, where queer pleasure and bravado become visible and celebrated. The widespread replication and reinterpretation of this sequence not only amplifies the original video's joyful resistance but also reclaims participatory platforms like TikTok as dynamic arenas for queer world-building, where dance becomes both celebration and subversion.

Clearly there is an appeal to lesbian and bisexual women that engages with representational strategies which aim to be empowering and sexually liberating. The popular "remixed" intro (used as the backtrack to the next set of still shots) reveals how users have couched their responses to it within TikTok's particular forms and aesthetics (Granados, 2021). The most popular sections of the song used in the response videos were 1) the chorus (me and your girlfriend playing dress-up in my house / I gave your girlfriend cunnilingus on my couch), 2) a "remixed" intro that pairs the outro (I'm shy / I'm so shy) with the intro (I'm not shy, I'll say it), and 3) Princess Nokia's rap verse (Uh, it's getting hot in here / I'm the Nelly in the party with some rocks for ears (so hot in here) / I'm a slave for you, baby, Ms. Britney Spears/ I'm a Clover, she a Toros, bring it on for cheers / And I'm sexy like Christina when I dip it low / Not an H-town

[38] A brief history of voguing can be found online at the National Museum of African American History and Culture website (https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/brief-history-voguing).

girl, but I rodeo / Yippee-ki-yay, welcome to the show / It's an all-girl party, clothing optional). That the rap verse is steeped in cultural references – from Beyoncé, to Britney Spears, to *Bring it On* – would be especially salient to women who were teenagers in the early 2000s.[39]

The emphasis on dance routines and expressive physicality in these posts harkens back to a fundamental human tradition of dance as a form of self-expression and power. As Roberts (2021) argues, dance can be a powerful tool for communication, articulating not just emotions and narratives, but also sociocultural dynamics. While her study is rooted in the social dynamics of racialized bodies and relationships within the context of hip hop culture, the use of dance here parallels Roberts's (2021) observations of dance as a platform for the negotiation and "challenging [of] power through performance" (29). I understand these creators, through their incorporation of dance and physicality, as not just engaging in a form of artistic self-expression: they are participating in an embodied discourse to "act upon dominant forms of power" (ibid), ultimately asserting their autonomy and crafting their identities in an explicit and performative display of defiance and desire.

[*Ashnikko (dir. Charlotte Rutherford), Group Dance Sequence [b] in a Fantasy World, "Slumber Party", 2021*]

[39] The implicit bisexual themes are not lost on me, either: the "Dip It Low" (2004) singer Christina Milian came out as bisexual in a 2016 interview on the podcast *Allegedly with Theo Von and Matthew Cole Weiss*, and Britney Spears and Madonna famously shared a kiss at the 2003 VMAs. Although Madonna first kissed Christina Aguilera, it was the Britney kiss that held the attention of the public.

[*Two Dance Routines to "Slumber Party", Anonymized, 2022*]

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Taken together, these three elements – Sapphic lyrical declaration, multiplicity, and claiming of 'bisexual aesthetics' – are repeatedly seized upon in response videos because they reflect ongoing tensions in bisexual representation. Fans become co-authors in shaping the video's meaning, transforming Ashnikko's audiovisual fantasy into a shared space of queer worldbuilding. Through aesthetic pleasure, playful transgression, and collaborative remixing, "Slumber Party" becomes a site where bi+ identities are not only made legible but celebrated. These creative acts of engagement affirm bisexuality as something lived, performed, and visually articulated in community, offering a form of joyful resistance that is both affective and political.

In doing so, creators reclaim participatory platforms like TikTok as spaces of self-definition and solidarity, where new forms of queer visibility can take shape on their own terms.

From Creators to Consciousness Raisers: Bitok's 'Queer Repertoire' in the Bi+ Acceptance Movement

This section investigates how bi+ TikTok users, collectively referred to as 'Bitok', respond to Ashnikko's music through a form of queer repertoire. These audiovisual remixes, duets, discussions and dances function not just as fandom, but as consciousness-raising within the critical periphery of the bi+ acceptance movement. By situating TikTok within a lineage of queer fan intervention, I argue that Bitok creators engage in affective worldbuilding that reframes Ashnikko's work as a tool for identity exploration, community affirmation, and feminist critique. Ashnikko's bold, hyperfeminine, and confrontational style has sparked strong responses across platforms, but TikTok in particular has become a hub for bi+ expression. With its music-driven architecture and Gen Z user base, TikTok amplifies audiovisual identity work, providing space for queer users to inhabit and reinterpret Ashnikko's media as reflective of their own lives.

TikTok, along with platforms like YouTube and Spotify, has not only transformed the music industry but has reshaped the ways in which culture itself is produced and shared (Vizcaíno-Verdú, De-Casas-Moreno & Tirocchi, 2023). Jenkins (2006) describes participatory culture as one in which audiences do not simply consume content, but actively participate in its transformation. On TikTok, this participatory remixing takes the form of lip-syncs, duets, memes, and choreography, allowing users to stake affective and political claims over cultural texts. Duguay (2023) sees TikTok as inheriting the legacy of Tumblr's queer pedagogies, where aesthetic and emotional labour become forms of political participation. Its looping format, personalized algorithms, and informal modes of address cultivate what Granados (2020) calls

"ambient familiarity" (102), enabling forms of identity work that are emotionally resonant and socially visible.

Within this digital ecology, Bitok creators are not only affirming their identities but engaging in what McInroy and Craig (2016) call creative interventions: self-generated content that inserts marginalized experiences into dominant media landscapes. Bond's (2014, 2016, 2018) work with LGBTQ+ youth highlights the role of digital visibility in fostering resilience and community, but Bitok users push this further. Their remixes, duets, and commentary transform visibility into action by crafting responses that speak to specific experiences of erasure, desire, and joyful resistance. These practices challenge narrow understandings of bisexuality by creating a visual and emotional repertoire that affirms multiplicity and fluidity.

These interventions are part of a longer history of transformative fandom. In the 1960s and 70s, female fans of Star Trek circulated zines that reimagined relationships between characters like Kirk and Spock, producing queer narratives that mainstream media refused to acknowledge. Jenkins (1988; 1992) frames these fan practices as grassroots forms of cultural production – creative interventions that actively rework hegemonic texts from the margins. The speculative nature of this work, often romantic, erotic, and feminist in tone, laid the foundation for how fandom could function as a site of queer worldbuilding. What differentiates today's interventions is their scale and immediacy. Whereas zines circulated through mail networks and convention halls, TikTok allows for near-instantaneous distribution, multi-user collaboration, and direct interaction with artists – features that reshape the cultural power of fan labour.

By drawing a line from analog zines to TikTok remixes, we can better understand the persistent need for queer fans to challenge dominant narratives through creative means. These micro-performances of identification, play, and critique circulate both within and beyond the bi+

community, building what McDougall and Potter (2019) describe as "third spaces" – sites that are contested, negotiated, and political (see also Parry et al., 2020). In these spaces, users engage in critique, collaboration, and creative replication that not only reflect their identities but also shape broader sociopolitical discourses. In engaging Ashnikko's media through a repertoire of remix, commentary, and dance, Bitok creators participate in what Jenkins (2006) has termed participatory culture, where fans become co-producers of meaning. These interventions operate not only as expressions of bi+ solidarity but as strategies of resistance, reminding us that representation is not a finished product, but an ongoing negotiation, and that queer worldbuilding often begins at the periphery.

Community as Resistance: Becoming the Critical Periphery

Building on the previous discussion of remix and queer repertoire, this section turns toward the ways in which Bitok creators coalesce into a decentralized but impactful network of resistance. What begins as individual aesthetic expression becomes, through repetition and recognition, a kind of cultural infrastructure. These creators engage in more than fan labour; they participate in what Barberá et al. (2015) describe as a "critical periphery" – a diffuse but crucial formation that amplifies messages and generates cultural content at levels comparable to core actors (5). Through affective circulation, symbolic gestures, and networked intimacy, Bitok creators build a shared field of meaning that operates outside traditional activist channels but performs significant political and cultural work. For many bi+ women and nonbinary users, these TikToks function as participatory gestures in an ongoing challenge to heteronormativity. Through humour, sensuality, and embodied self-representation, creators construct alternative meanings from within the margins, effectively reworking Ashnikko's imagery into moments of recognition, desire, and critique. Online bisexual communities thus offer not only validation and belonging

(Ybarra et al., 2018), but also serve as distributed networks for visibility work, information-sharing, and participatory advocacy.

Following Varela (2016), these ephemeral videos can be understood as an "archive of the body and of oral knowledge" (18) – a fluid repository of gestures, affects, and signs that gain traction through collective repetition. While TikTok is built on the premise of constant content renewal, Bitok creators sustain visual and emotional continuity through recurring tropes: the bi flag colour palette, the "bisexual bob," bisexual lighting, hashtags like #bitok and #wlw, and the juxtaposition of shyness with bold erotic signalling. Though not archival in a traditional sense, these tools and strategies carry what Cantillon et al. (2017) call "felt value," anchoring identity through symbolic repetition and making meaning visible in ways that are immediately legible to community members.

Indeed, these aesthetic signifiers operate as nodes in a wider repertoire of bi+ signaling. They do not require explicit explanation because they circulate within a kind of subcultural grammar: whether through specific colours, sartorial choices, pop-culture references, or humour, creators contribute to a system of signs that functions both affectively and politically. In doing so, they extend Ashnikko's original visual language into a broader project of cultural reclamation, amplifying bisexual aesthetics while refusing narratives that frame bi+ identity as indecisive, performative, or peripheral (Gonzalez et al., 2021: 212).

The ability for everyday users to shape and circulate these visual codes reflects the importance of what Liew, Goulding, and Nichol (2020) call "community archives". These are spaces created by those who have been "hidden, ignored, underrepresented or misrepresented by mainstream institutions" (1300). Though TikTok's interface and algorithmic structures are imperfect, often reinforcing visibility gaps, they also enable what Buffone (2021) identifies as

"networks of care", where creators exert agency even without high production value. Bitok creators, through persistence and shared symbolic vocabularies, enact a mode of self-representation that resists erasure and reclaims narrative power on their own terms (Nelson, 2023).

Bitok is not a fixed community; rather, it is a dynamic and affective formation, where users engage in forms of creative labour that blend aesthetics, identity, and everyday politics (Munro, 2013). Through their engagement with Ashnikko's music and online presences, creators negotiate gender norms, claim erotic agency, and articulate new representational possibilities. As Baym (2018) and Munro (2013) both suggest, fans who engage these practices do not simply consume media but reshape it as part of broader cultural participation. In this context, digital aesthetics become tools of resistance and affiliation, where visibility is crafted not only through direct confrontation but also through play, recognition, and pleasure.

As music videos circulate within these networks, they shift from marketing products to mediums of mutual recognition and critique. While music videos have historically served to market a product (Vernallis, 2004: 3), Vernallis (2013) later observed that "the function of music video may be evolving out of the marketplace towards becoming a socially liberated medium of and for interactivity" (qtd. in Barrett, 2016: 42). Ashnikko's work, as received and remixed by Bitok creators, offers evidence of that evolution. In reframing TikTok contributions as a critical periphery, I propose that these decentralized, affective practices should be recognized as meaningful feminist labour because they refuse assimilation, reject invisibility, and build a queer feminist future not through confrontation alone, but through joy, recognition, and creative power. In doing so, they help reshape public understanding of bisexuality not as a transitional phase or spectacle of ambiguity, but as a vital identity, epistemology, and cultural force.

Conclusion:
Cyberqueer Convergences

Fourth-wave feminism, with its emphasis on intersectionality and digital engagement, creates space for a vast array of social justice issues and expressive forms. This chapter has examined how digital feminist resistance by bi+/pan women and nonbinary creators is articulated through audiovisual aesthetics and social media participation. By tracing fan practices on TikTok and Twitter, and grounding them in feminist theory, platform studies, and affective politics, I have illustrated how these practices form a living archive of *joyful resistance*: a queer feminist repertoire that works within and against the commercial structures of contemporary media.

Through the case study of Ashnikko, I have shown how bi+/pan creators and their fans engage in fourth-wave feminist worldbuilding via digital media. These practices are relational and agentive, offering not just representation, but the emotional and aesthetic infrastructure for visibility, belonging, and resistance. In this way, Ashnikko's oeuvre, taken up and transformed by her fans, becomes a platform for rejecting heteronormative scripts and celebrating bi+ multiplicity through unruly, affective, and pleasurable modes of engagement.

Across platforms, the technical affordances of TikTok and Twitter shape how this politics is expressed. From looping sounds and remixable formats to meme culture and hashtag assemblages, these digital tools help curate what a *queer repertoire* of symbolic and sonic practices. Though not always overtly political, they circulate within broader conversations around bisexual visibility, erasure, and joy, and transform fandom into a site of consciousness-raising, alliance-building, and imaginative resistance.

Ashnikko's participatory openness and deployment of bisexual aesthetics map onto what Kanai (2020) terms "popular feminism" – a digital mode of expression that is often fraught, but can also be expansive in its reach. Her fans, especially Bitok creators, are not passive spectators

but co-authors of a shared cultural project that takes on the intersectional feminist project that white feminism of the 2010s could not. Together, they generate a counterpublic grounded in affective labour, aesthetic innovation, and collective memory building. Visibility, in this sense, is not a monolithic destination but an active strategy, and the deployment of aesthetics not a surface but a site of political action.

While this chapter has acknowledged the extractive and uneven logics of platforms like TikTok (Barberá et al., 2015; Gillespie, 2018), it has also emphasized their significance for marginalized users. These often-dismissed spaces of online engagement carry real weight, especially for those whose identities are frequently sidelined or misunderstood. Fandom, long feminized and trivialized, is revealed here as a domain of meaningful cultural labour. Even when parasocial, fan-artist exchanges deepen public engagement with LGBTQ+ issues by tapping into generational values of authenticity, empathy, and connection. Queer Millennial and Gen Z performers like Ashnikko are at the forefront of this shift, using music, image, and platform fluency to push cultural boundaries in open and celebratory ways. Their work resonates with a lineage of queer meaning-making that stretches back to the sonic and visual codes of disco, where 2SLGBTQ+ communities turned to art as both sanctuary and strategy.

Ultimately, the convergence of queer art, fan practices, and digital platforms represents a vital and still-underexamined current in contemporary LGBTQ+ activism (ICONIQA 2023; Burkholder, MacEntee, and Thorpe 2023). Through *joyful resistance*, these creators and communities forge a critical periphery that is not defined by exclusion, but by creative expansion. The response to “Slumber Party” thus demonstrate how fan labour, aesthetic play, and affective engagement can coalesce into a queer feminist future made legible, audible, and visible in digital space.

Future Directions

Ashnikko's aesthetic of unfiltered rage, campy eroticism, and fantastical hyperfemininity operates as an audiovisual mode that pushes against the boundaries of genre, gender, and sexuality in ways that are here read as liberatory. Her ability to inhabit this confrontational and overtly sexual space, however, reflects her position as a white artist from a middle-class background, affording her a greater degree of freedom in how her performances are received and circulated. Ashnikko's whiteness, in particular, acts as a form of cultural insulation, whereby her expressions of queerness and sexual agency are less likely to be policed, pathologized, or sensationalized in the ways that similar expressions from Black and other BIPOC artists frequently are. These dynamics expose the structural advantages that shape who is granted space to perform unruly bisexuality, and critically, who is punished for it.

It is well known that the music industry is particularly oppressive to Black women's bodies (Sullivan & McHugh, 2009; Collins, 2000; Barrett, 2016; Brooks & Martin, 2019), an issue that remains a focus of much fourth-wave & intersectional feminist analysis today. Racialized artists who claim the bisexual label continue to face erasure (Kehrer, 2022), particularly in genres that remain overwhelmingly male, such as hip hop (Charity & Campbell, 2020) and electronic music (Farrugia, 2012). Janelle Monáe, for instance, has been open about her pansexual identity, yet much of the media coverage surrounding her early work framed her queerness as ambiguous, symbolic, or performative (Hassler-Forest, 2022; Spanos 2018). As with other bi+ artists, Monáe's self-definition is frequently sidelined in favour of more marketable narratives, demonstrating the continued need for fan-based cultural intervention and affirmation.

These disparities in reception are the predictable outcomes of an industry that rewards and even commodifies transgression when it comes in a palatable, often whitewashed form, and

punishes it when it emerges from the margins.[40] Ashnikko's queer defiance is allowed to be messy, loud, and grotesquely hypersexual because it does not fundamentally threaten the racial order of pop culture. For artists like Snow tha Product, who exists at the intersection of queerness, womanhood, and Latinidad, there is no such safety net. In the next chapter, I turn to Snow as a case study in what bisexual+ resistance looks like when it speaks bilingually, spits unapologetically, and refuses the industry's demand to soften, translate, or disappear for profitability.

[40] This dynamic was evident in backlash following Beyoncé's and, to a lesser extent, Kendrick Lamar's recent Super Bowl performances, where both were criticized for not being "radical enough." Detractors argued that their messages had been sanitized to meet the NFL's corporate standards, suggesting that even celebrated artists with massive cultural capital may temper their politics to maintain mainstream visibility and institutional approval.

Chapter III – Snow tha Product and Chicana Identity: Narratives of Queerness, Motherhood, and Liberation

Introduction

In a clever and humorous *Instagram* reel, the Mexican-American and out bisexual hip hop artist Snow tha Product (shortened to Snow throughout this chapter) stands on a San Diego stage before a dense, energetic crowd at an evening performance in September 2024. Holding a Mexican flag, she declares, "Regardless of what they tell you, NO, immigrants are not eating your dogs, and they're not eating your cats – we don't give a fuck about your dogs and your cats. But I, the daughter of immigrants, with this Mexican flag on my back, *will* eat your p—." (SnowThaProduct, 2024). The video cuts off strategically before she completes the statement, but the implication is clear, as is the intent to elicit laughter in spite of the absurd and unfortunately real moment to which it refers: the false claim by then-presidential candidate Donald Trump that Haitian immigrants were "eating the pets" of Springfield, Ohio, residents (BBC News, 2024). More importantly, though, it offers a window into the unapologetic and unflinching way that Snow expresses both her Mexican heritage and queer sexuality.

Claudia Alexandra Madriz Meza, more commonly known by her stage name Snow tha Product, first broke onto the scene performing under the moniker "Snow White" – a name that was quickly abandoned after learning that the Disney Corporation was "not too happy" about the name, leading her to consider alternatives (Wikipedia, 2025). 'Snow tha Product' emerged from those proverbial ashes, and she was briefly signed to Atlantic Records from 2012 to 2018 (ibid). She parted ways with the label after

several years of struggling with the constraints it placed on her artistic freedom and identity expression. Seeking to be unhindered by "men who were trying to tell [her] what to do" (Alannized, 2022), Snow started her own label, Product Entertainment, and has since become one of the few "successful" independent artists to garner global audiences while maintaining her artistic autonomy. The age of streaming and social media has redefined artist success, emphasizing direct fan engagement and diversified income streams. Artists now cultivate their own audiences through platforms like YouTube and TikTok, allowing them to reach listeners without traditional intermediaries. This shift has led to the emergence of a "middle class" of musicians who, while not topping mainstream charts, can sustain their careers through touring, merchandise sales, and fan support (D'Souza, 2023).

An ability to intertwine social critique with personal identity quite literally "sets the stage" for Snow's dynamic online presence. Behind-the-scenes glimpses of her personal life offer moments of levity and humour even as she reflects on her struggles as a queer Latina in the music industry, navigating multiple cultural expectations and social pressures. Like most other contemporary artists, Snow's music career is inextricably connected with her online audiences. She uses social media strategically to combine self-promotion with a technique she calls "putting medicine into the candy" (Respers, 2021), engaging her audience in candid discussions and humorous content on topics concerning bisexual identity, Latinx culture, and other topics like being on tour and raising her son. Given that she has so aptly named this technique "putting medicine into the candy", it is clear she is being intentional with these posts and conversations with her fans to provide

alternative narratives for queer Latinx women that contribute to their empowerment in society.

Latinx and Black feminist scholars have long emphasized the importance of embracing one's intersecting identities as a form of resistance and empowerment (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Crenshaw, 1989). For Snow, integrating her queer identity into her art and public persona has been a significant element of her efforts toward expanding the representation of Latinx women in media, particularly as Chican@s[41] are so often invisibilized (Román-Odio, 2011: 54); portrayed through the lens of Judeo-Christian traditions that focus on the sacrificial, nurturing, and devoted woman whose role is solely tied to traditional family values (Molina-Monreal, 2016; Herrera, 2008); oversexualized (Román-Odio, 2011: 50); or penalized for the un-apologetical awareness of their sexuality, especially in Latinx women of colour (Zavella, 2003). Snow further unsettles these reductive tropes by foregrounding her experiences as a single queer mother, refusing the notion that maternal and sexual identities must be kept separate. Her open embrace of motherhood – seen across her music, performances, and social media – positions maternal identity not as a contradiction to queerness, but as an extension of her political and creative agency. Snow both challenges these oppressive representations and illuminates how their persistence stems from colonial legacies of internalized racism and classism within Latinx communities. Indeed, these limiting media representations

[41] The use of the "@" or "x" symbol in "Chican@/x" replaces the gendered endings "-o" and "-a", serving as a visual representation that includes all gender identities. This linguistic modification responds to critiques about the exclusionary nature of gendered language, particularly how it can marginalize individuals who do not identify within the traditional gender binary. See Soto, 2010.

originate both from outside and within Latinx communities, which continue to grapple with the post-colonial effects manifested as internalized racism and classism (Nieves-Pizzaro, 2018).

Jotería studies, an interdisciplinary field within Chicanx/Latinx studies, provides a critical lens for understanding Snow's work within this broader landscape of representation and resistance. Jotería studies examines the lived experiences, cultural productions, and political activism of queer Chicanx/Latinx individuals, building on feminist, queer, and decolonial frameworks to challenge heteronormativity, racism, and colonial legacies. In this context, Jotería is centered as a site of resistance, identity formation, and community building (Alvarez, 2023).

In an interview on the Latino YouTube show *Alannized*, Snow revealed, "I wanted to put my culture [as a Mexican, queer woman] on major label representation, but they didn't know what to do with me" (Alannized, 2022). Speaking with NBC San Diego, she further explains

> "I am Mexican and I am representing a particular audience that has maybe always been underrepresented...and when we are represented, it's always the women who are oversexualized—especially a lesbian couple that is kind of femme or whatever, we [Snow and her then-girlfriend JuJu] both get oversexualized as a couple—and then you have Latinas that are also oversexualized [in general]. Being someone who doesn't try to do that, there's all these points against you in the industry. So, the best way that I can show young women, hopefully in the future, for those things not to be against you, is by representing" (NBC San Diego, 2019).

Snow positions herself as a purveyor of knowledge, confronting any sexist and homophobic beliefs that listeners may harbor. At the same time, she acknowledges the

difficulty and uncertainty that her commitment to authentic representation entails, and, thus, embodies the tensions and pains of hybridity within globalized, mass media contexts. Snow addresses (and is loved) by a global audience, but her listeners' positionalities play an important role in what they are able to "hear" and understand in the knowledge she conveys. Thus, it is important to address the methodological challenges and possibilities of taking positionality seriously in cross-cultural and collaborative research.

Positionality in/as Methodology

What Snow does through her music aligns with what Juana María Rodríguez (2003) describes as alternative community-based spaces of knowledge, such as "the chatroom, the bar, the street corner" (6), where identities are defined in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. In these informal spaces, subjects negotiate with site-specific cultural contexts, making sense of their personas and the ways they can represent and name themselves. It is through language that we can name ourselves and our struggles, demystifying mainstream media representations of both queer and non-queer Latinx and Chicanx people (ibid:12). This follows a feminist tradition in building culturally situated knowledge crossed by our bodies and experiences, advocating for an embodied objectivity shaped by our experiences (Harraway, 1991).

Writing about a Mexican artist as a white Canadian scholar has inevitably been fraught with challenges, from awkward misunderstandings to the often-overwhelming task of grappling with a vast and unfamiliar body of literature. I have sought to embrace

ethical principles of cross-cultural research (Broesch et al. 2020; Chilisa, 2019), prioritizing both Latinx and Chican@ scholarship and voices through the co-production of knowledge with my generous colleague, Dr. Jessica Rodriguez.[42] The research and writing of this chapter have been greatly enriched by Jessica's insights into translation, cultural commentary, and recommendations for further reading. It has also been, for me, a messy, humbling, and rewarding effort.

At the same time, the co-production of knowledge in this chapter exists in tension with the realities of individual authorship and voice. While this work has been deeply collaborative, the final text is still written from my perspective – filtered through my own experiences, questions, and positionality as a researcher. This is why I primarily employ a singular first-person voice throughout the chapter, even as the ideas I engage with have been shaped by an ongoing dialogue with Jessica. In this sense, I am not claiming sole authority over the interpretations presented here, but rather acknowledging that knowledge is always relational, always situated.

The choice of pronouns reflects this dynamic. When I use "I," it signals the moments where I am grappling with ideas, acknowledging my own limitations, or situating my perspective in relation to the work. When I use "we" or "us", it refers to the shared intellectual space that Jessica and I have built together in our discussions – moments where our exchanges, reflections, and insights have directly shaped the

[42] While "Latinx" is a broad, inclusive term for individuals of Latin American heritage, "Chican@/x" refers more specifically to people of Mexican descent who are born or raised in the United States. Consequently, even though Snow identifies as both Chicana and Latina, this dual identity may not apply to other artists or authors.

arguments being put forth. In this way, the chapter attempts to honour both the deeply personal nature of the learning process and the collaborative spirit in which this knowledge has emerged.

It is impossible to ignore the ways my own racial, class, and national identities have shaped this research and the values it implicitly upholds. Even as I write this, I am mindful of the critiques surrounding white feminism, which often centers white women's experiences while marginalizing those of women of colour (Kendall, 2020). It has therefore also been necessary to reckon with the idea that what I hope have been good faith efforts still reflect a tendency toward making sure I have done things "the right way", and this perfectionism may be in fact be a manifestation of my own white fragility – a concept describing the defensive reactions white individuals often display when confronted with racial stress (DiAngelo, 2011). Embracing these forms of cultural criticism and self-reflexivity have been difficult, but I think that is the point. It should be messy, hard, and uncomfortable. As feminist scholars who strive to understand and utilize the lessons and goals of intersectionality, it is essential to embrace the vulnerability, be one with the uncertainty, and be ready to admit when we inevitably get things wrong.

With the above in mind, this chapter responds in part to the "lack of knowledge relative to Chican@ and Mexican@ language [and expressions] use and culture which can be rectified by careful attention to things like hip hop" (McFarland, 2021: 8).[43] Rhetorical tools like poetics and language play crucial roles in articulating identity and

[43] We have added the phrase "and expressions" to this statement since it is not just about base language, but about how people express themselves using Spanglish, slang, and rhetoric.

challenging oppression (Bradley, 2009); for Latinx artists, maintaining a connection to land, place, and distinct cultural identity is another important element of their musicality (Hernandez, 2010). The discussions in this chapter aim to illustrate how Snow's artistic output and online interactions concerning queer Mexicana representation actively contribute to a broader and more inclusive global understanding of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the "borderlands". This goal is achieved by enacting a process of *cultural translation*, as defined by Adriana Oniță, who expands the definition to include rap music as "a performative language capable of encoding and translating complex cultural issues related to race, gender, and sexuality" (133).

Engaging with cultural materials like music and social media can work to deepen out-group understandings of the nuanced and often contradictory expressions of identity in contemporary Chican@ feminism, as well as the ongoing negotiation between assimilation into dominant Anglo-American culture and the preservation of Mexican heritage. Drawing on concepts from Chican@ feminism, Jotería studies, and scholarship on racialized motherhood, this chapter undertakes a multimodal case-study analysis of the poetic and political contours of Chicana feminist ideology as manifested in Snow tha Product's music and social media. I argue that Snow tha Product's music and online texts contribute to Chican@ feminist discourses by creating a "narrative of liberation," through which she expresses her national, maternal, and queer identities. The audiovisual texts I examine can be seen as enacting a critical queer Chicana feminist practice whereby Snow names her roots, asserts her hybrid identity, showcases her contradictions, and centers

cultural references to place, sound, and sociopolitical histories that are crucial for understanding the "borderlands" space.

I deploy a concentric approach to unpacking the materials I engage with, beginning with a broad entrance into Chicana feminist discourses, history, and cultural production. Establishing this foundation allows for a deeper engagement with the theoretical underpinnings that shape my analysis, ensuring that the discussion remains grounded in the scholarship that informs it. From this broader framework, I narrow the focus to one of Chican@ scholar Patricia Zavella's (2018) "four key dimensions of the borderlands" – the discursive site – by utilizing distinct but interconnected concepts to ground my analysis in aspects of Snow's music and cultural production. Much of my understanding of the "borderlands" concept is owed to Zavella, who explains that this term refers not only to the geographical area between the United States and Mexico but also to a metaphorical space where multiple identities, cultures, and languages collide and intersect. Her work expands on the ideas put forth by early Chican@ feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who first showed that the "borderlands" are sites of conflict, hybridity, and transformation – a space where Chican@s and other marginalized groups negotiate their identities amid internal community pressures and external societal forces. By moving from a broad theoretical base to a focused discussion of the discursive site, this approach allows for a layered analysis that situates Snow's work within a dynamic tradition of Chicana feminist thought while attending to the specific ways in which she engages with and reconfigures these discourses.

As Juana María Rodríguez (2003) notes, this space manifests through language, navigating the in-between of Spanish and English (or various forms of Spanglish) to re-mediate and make sense of their existences – especially as a "queer" Latina, given the lack of an official translation for the word "queer" in Spanish (23). This hybrid use of language itself poses the possibility of existence. Rodríguez considers how Spanish-speaking communities grapple with translating queerness by proposing alternative terms such as *divas*, *atrevidas*, and *entendidas*, which acknowledge local socio-cultural contexts rather than uncritically adopting the English socio-political baggage of "queer". In highlighting how these Spanish words can be mobilized within an English-language framework, Rodríguez underscores the generative potential of linguistic hybridity. In her music, Snow tha Product deliberately switches between Spanish and English to exploit the socio-cultural weight attached to certain terms – revealing how the interweaving of multiple linguistic registers can serve as both a mode of self-expression and a challenge to dominant narratives. For Snow, the "borderlands" space is indeed fraught with contradictions and tensions, but also serves as fertile ground for creating new forms of identity that are enacted in discursive, agentic, interactional, and structural dimensions (Zavella, 2018: 156).

Cultural Translation vs Cultural Crossover

It is important to note that this analysis differentiates cultural *translation* from cultural *crossover*. Cultural translation can be understood as a dynamic, performative process of re-interpreting cultural expressions – encompassing linguistic form, affective nuance, and the creator's background – without a fixed source or target text (Munday,

2012: 138, qtd in Oniță, 2017: 133). By contrast, cultural crossover describes the deliberate blending of styles to appeal to mainstream audiences, often at the expense of original context. David Brackett (2012) has addressed this notion of crossover in his work as a way of understanding how music transcends its initial cultural boundaries and becomes part of the mainstream. While commercially viable, that process often involves a strategic smoothing of musical elements that can dilute their cultural specificity. Latinx, hip-hop, and rap music have been especially susceptible to crossover in light of rap's enduring popularity with youth audiences (IFPI, 2024: 35).

While Snow values having a large audience of her music, she is also conscious of the tensions between authenticity and marginalization in the music industry that could cause her music and message to be watered down. The steadily increasing success of her music signals a trend that was observed in the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI)'s *Global Music Report of 2024*, which noted that hyper-localisation and "domestic repertoire" were at their highest that year (IFPI, 2024). This shift is evident in the careers of artists like Bad Bunny and Karol G, who have achieved global recognition while remaining rooted in Spanish-language music and Latin American musical traditions. Their success challenges the long-standing industry assumption that crossover appeal necessitates English-language production or a dilution of cultural specificity.

The continued separation of Latin music into distinct categories at major award shows such as the Grammys and Billboard Music Awards further demonstrates how the industry maintains rigid genre classifications even as Latin music gains unprecedented

mainstream popularity. While Bad Bunny's *Un Verano Sin Ti* (2022) made history as the first Spanish-language album nominated for Album of the Year at the Grammys (Lechner, 2023), the majority of Latin artists remain confined to the Best Latin Album or Best Latin Pop Album categories, reinforcing an implicit barrier between Latin and "mainstream" music.

This exemplifies not only how the industry has changed but that there is a real and radical potential for *cultural translation* to take place – a process that, for Snow, does not dilute but rather preserves, strengthens, and clearly articulates the depth and importance of her Mexican-American heritage, bisexuality, and role as a mother. This approach enriches the listener's understanding rather than simplifying it for mainstream consumption. Snow's work, much like Bad Bunny's, resists this compartmentalization by seamlessly blending Spanish and English, as well as Latin and hip-hop influences, without compromising its cultural depth.

Such hybridity is disruptive to the essentializing processes that keep the top artists of the US music industry homogenized and broadly accessible. Such hybridity is disruptive to the essentializing processes that keep the top artists of the North American music industry not just *categorized* but often *marketed as culturally generic*, i,e, homogenized through industry expectations that demand broad accessibility for a predominantly white, English-speaking audience (Román-Odio, 2013; McFarland, 2021). In this context, it is not individual artists themselves who are inherently homogenized, but rather how they are *packaged, promoted, and constrained* to fit preconceived industry templates designed to maximize mass appeal. Snow's blending of musical traditions thus

works toward unsettling the normative categories that the industry relies on to maintain its own coherence, while at the same time asserting a commitment to representing the complexity of her cultural experience. It is unsurprising then, that many of Snow's music videos and social media posts feature prominent visual displays and references to Mexican cultural iconography – something also seen in Bad Bunny's use of Puerto Rican symbolism and Karol G's celebration of reggaetón's Colombian roots. Taken together, these texts convey a hybrid set of values and affinities, reflecting a polyculturality that is already inherent in Latinx and hip-hop music (McFarland, 2021: 19).

Self-describing her music as a hybrid between Chicano rap and other musical influences from Mexico and the United States, tracks like "Quimica" (2024), "Que Oso" (2021) and "El Llorón" (2024) reflect this hybridity and are infused with sonic elements from traditional Mexican genres, including the brass instrumentation of banda, the string-based textures of mariachi, the clave rhythms of reggaetón, and Latino song structures such as call-and-response. According to Deborah Pacini Hernandez (2010), "the mixture of genres with such profoundly dissimilar aesthetics … confound[s] the music industry's efforts to categorize and to market such musics … (58). Snow encountered an additional difficulty in dealing with well-meaning managers who did not understand the diversity of Latinx identities, often bringing ideas to her that were more reflective of Puerto Rican or Cuban culture rather than Mexican culture (Alannized, 2022). A persistent lack of understanding by her management team at Atlantic on these grounds led to her being

"shelved" in 2013, a move that would lead to the establishment of her now-successful label, Product Entertainment.[44]

Of course, many rappers establish their own labels, though few achieve the level of success and autonomy that Snow has realized without the support of major industry names. Unlike larger entities like Jay-Z's Roc Nation or Lil Wayne's Young Money, which have significant resources and industry backing, Product Entertainment thrives independently. An artist's decision to remain independent in a highly competitive, homogenized industry often reflects a conscious rejection of the mainstream labels imposed by a predominantly white, male-dominated establishment (Beyoncé's production company, Parkwood Entertainment, also fits this bill). This move thus enacts a substantial intervention into cultural hierarchies that so often treat commercial and artistic facets of the music industry as mutually exclusive (Román-Odio, 2013: 238).

Cultural Context & Grounding Concepts

Mexican-American identity is shaped by a complex interplay of national, cultural, and political affiliations, with varying terms reflecting distinct positionalities within this landscape. The way Snow refers to herself as "Mexicana" emphasizes a national and cultural identity tied to Mexico itself, often evoking heritage, family, and language rather than explicit political orientation (Sánchez, 1993). In contrast, "Chicana" emerged as a politicized identity from the United States' Civil Rights Movement, signifying resistance to assimilation and a reclamation of Indigenous and Mexican heritage within a framework

[44] In her interview on Alannized, Snow admits she "stayed way longer than she should have" at her label despite knowing she had been shelved.

of social justice. These identifications are not mutually exclusive, but their usage reflects differing relationships to history, geography, and sociopolitical consciousness.

Chicana and Latinx scholars have long emphasized how intersecting identities, particularly those related to race, gender, sexuality, and class, create complex experiences that resist binary categorizations. *Xicanisma*[45] is a term that embodies a Chicana feminist consciousness and incorporates the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Crucially, it centers the lived realities of colonization, immigration, and cultural hybridity that Mexican-American women face (Castillo, 1994; Espinoza et al., 2018). However, recognizing these intersections also means acknowledging the vast diversity and individual nuances within the Chicana community. While the term Chican@ operates as a unifying term for a distinct political orientation, it "nevertheless requires acknowledgment of differences along lines of race, class, generation, sexual orientation, age, language use, region, and place of birth, making heterogeneity critical to understanding the overall Chicana experience" (Zavella et al., 2003: 3).

Snow rarely uses the term "Chicana" to describe herself, instead leaning into national identifications of Mexicana or Mexican-American. Her preference for these terms may reflect a personal and cultural grounding that prioritizes familial and national heritage over the explicitly politicized framework of Chicana identity. However, her

[45] In the 1990s, a group of Chicana feminists started replacing the "Ch" in "Chicana" with a capital "X" (Xicana) to evoke the visual and auditory presence of *Nahuatl*, an ancient Indigenous language that has survived to present day. This shift in spelling and pronunciation, both in writing and speech, is meant to highlight Indigenous resistance embedded within Chicana, Chicano, and Chicanx identities. See Sandoval, González & Montes, 2020.

artistic expressions remain deeply engaged with themes central to Chicana feminist discourse, including linguistic hybridity, migration, and gendered racialization. Thus, while not all Mexican-American women identify as Chicana, Chicana studies and feminist frameworks remain crucial for understanding how figures like Snow negotiate respect, visibility, and cultural belonging in both Mexico and the United States.

Having a working understanding of the concepts that ground the ensuing analyses requires a brief look back to the emergence of *La Causa*, known in the Anglo world as The Chicano Movement – a significant civil rights and social justice movement that aimed to empower Mexican-Americans and address systemic inequalities. *La Causa* emerged in the southwestern United States during the 1960s (Rosales, 1996) after a sustained period of systemic discrimination faced by Mexican-Americans who, following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, found themselves living in territories that had become part of the United States (ibid). Despite the treaty's promises to protect their rights and property, Mexican-Americans experienced land dispossession, legal inequalities, and social marginalization (Muñoz, 1989). Segregation was prevalent, with Mexican-Americans subjected to separate and unequal treatment in schools, housing, and public facilities (ibid). Amid these and many other civil rights challenges, a younger generation of Mexican-Americans began to develop a heightened sense of cultural and political identity (Vargas, 2011: 209). Influenced by the broader civil rights movements of the time, including the African-American Civil Rights Movement and global decolonization efforts, Chicanos started to assert pride in their indigenous and mestizo heritage (Muñoz, 1989: 26). While "mestizo" is used here in keeping with historical

terminology to describe mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, this chapter will later take up Gloria Anzaldúa's framework of *mestiza consciousness*, a term that expands beyond racial hybridity to encompass a fluid and intersectional mode of being. Attending to these different gendered endings ("mestizo" vs. "mestiza") helps distinguish between the male-dominated nationalist discourses of Chicano identity and the feminist interventions that emerged in response. Cultural nationalism became a unifying force, emphasizing a shared history and collective struggle against oppression (ibid).

The attendant concept of *chicanismo* emerged during this period of political upheaval, part of a "youth revolt" intent on expressing a political stance against economic inequality, racism, and injustices caused by the Vietnam War (Espinoza et al., 2018). Etymologically, chicanismo is a neologism combining the term "Chicano" and the suffix "-ismo" (English: "ism"). Thus, *chicanismo* expressed a form of political consciousness attributed to Mexican-American *men* who sought to establish a political voice for themselves. It was also the case that Chicano movements legitimized themselves by reproducing predominantly masculine interpretations of history and culture, which led to the subordination of Mexican-American women and Chicanas (Blackwell, 2011). Consequently, Mexican-American women found themselves marginalized by masculine ideologies as well as by the predominant feminisms in the United States that did not account for their cultural, racial, or class distinctions (Quintana, 1990: 258). This dual marginalization reflected broader dynamics within Mexican and Mexican-American cultures, where notions like *machismo* and *marianismo* have historically shaped gender expectations (González et al., 2023: 5.1.2). These ideologies, along with the

marginalization of queer identities, further complicated the struggles of Mexican-American women and queer Chicanas, requiring a nuanced understanding of their experiences within both nationalist and feminist frameworks.

Conscientización and the Mestiza Consciousness

Ana Castillo (1994) has referred to the process of recognition and resistance as *conscientización* – a process which involves developing a critical consciousness that enables individuals to recognize and resist oppressive societal expectations, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. Castillo also emphasizes the importance of challenging patriarchal language – visual and written – and redefining narratives to reflect the experiences of Chicana women. *Conscientización* is thus a transformative process that is often intertwined with mestiza consciousness. Castillo emphasized that individuals can not only become aware of the social, political, and economic contradictions in their lives but find ways to live authentically as Chicanas/Mexican-American women through self-reflection and critical analysis.

Gloria Anzaldúa's germinal work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) introduced the notion of *mestiza consciousness* – an idea that distinctly embodies a hybrid identity capable of transcending these simple binaries. For Anzaldúa, the mestiza – someone who "lives in the borderlands" – navigates a metaphorical space of cultural, racial, and sexual intersections, where identities are fluid and multifaceted (Anzaldúa, 1987: 99). Building on this framework, Chicana feminist thought positions literary and artistic expression as a form of resistance against dominant cultural narratives (Castillo, 1994). This perspective provides critical insights into concepts such as mestizaje, hybridity, and the borderlands,

addressing issues like colourism, the decolonial imaginary, and the methodology of the oppressed (ibid, 5). By focusing on the lived experiences of Chicana women, rather than purely poetic expressions, Chicana feminists carve out a distinct aesthetic that highlights their unique cultural and social contexts (Quintana, 1990: 260).

The emergence of Chicana feminism in the 1970s marked a critical shift from these male-centered, nationalist narratives and non-intersectional feminisms, aiming to recognize the agency of Chicanas in the struggle for social justice. Addressing the exclusion faced by women and queer Mexicans, Chicana lesbian feminists such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa critically responded to the limitations of early Chicana feminism by foregrounding issues of sexuality and queerness. Moraga's, *Loving in the War Years* (1983) critiqued the exclusionary practices of Chicano nationalism and early Chicana feminism, revealing the discomfort and exclusion faced by Chicana lesbians (Bebout, 2011: 151). Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) further expanded this critique by exploring the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, and by challenging the fixed categories of identity that marginalized queer Chicanas (Bebout, 2011: 154).

Indeed, the pervasive influence of Catholicism in Mexico has profoundly shaped societal attitudes toward sexuality, particularly homosexuality, and had a heavy influence in the way bi+ people faced discrimination (Amuchástegui & Parrini, 2010). The Church's doctrines stigmatized same-sex relationships harshly, framing them as sinful and morally deviant. This religious backdrop exacerbated the marginalization of queer individuals within Mexican society, especially queer women. Moraga (2001) notes that,

in these contexts, homosexuality was often viewed as a "disease" or "contamination" of the Anglo world and became something that was merely "tolerated" within Mexican society. Lesbianism, in particular, was seen as a significant threat to la familia, perceived not only as a "white thing" but something to be "avoided at all costs" (46–7). These cultural and religious constraints create additional layers of oppression that queer Chicanas must navigate, often finding expression and resistance through their art.

Given these societal constraints, bi+ invisibility has been perpetuated by both heteronormative and homonormative discourses, which fail to fully recognize the distinct experiences of bisexual individuals. As a result, bisexual women often face dual marginalization, both within heterosexual communities and within the broader LGBTQ+ community. Bi+ and lesbian Chicana women, subjected to patriarchal and hypermasculine cultural stigmas, sought ways to resist these "dual oppositional" discourses by creating opportunities for new aesthetic possibilities (Quintana, 1990). Through the integration of music and activism, these women continue to challenge both the gender and sexuality norms within their own communities and the broader societal expectations imposed upon them.

Historical Foundations: Music as Resistance

Queer Chicana feminist cultural production, including music, has been an important part of *La Causa*'s efforts to challenge dominant narratives and assert a distinct Chicana identity (Rodriguez, 2010; González, 2023). In the early years of *La Causa*, traditional Mexican musical forms like corridos (narrative ballads) and mariachi were blended with influences from American musics such as rock and roll, creating a unique

Chican@ sound that fostered community solidarity and amplified their political voice (Smithsonian Folkways, 2024). This fusion of musical styles served as an embodiment of the *mestiza consciousness*, merging different cultural elements to reflect the hybrid identities of Chicanas and Chicanos. In this way, music became a powerful tool not just for community building, but also for expressing the complexities of navigating multiple, often conflicting, cultural worlds.

A key precursor to this blending of musical traditions was Pedro J. González, a musician and radio broadcaster in Los Angeles during the 1920s and 1930s, who played a pivotal role in shaping the Chicano sound. His *corrido* "El Lavaplatos" (The Dishwasher), recorded in 1926 by Los Hermanos Bañuelos, tells the story of a Mexican immigrant struggling to achieve the American Dream, only to face economic hardship and ultimately decide to return to Mexico. González, like many early Chicanx musicians, used traditional Mexican ballad structures but adapted them to reflect the social realities of Mexican-Americans in the United States. His work laid the foundation for later artists who would merge folk traditions with contemporary political messages, demonstrating how music served as both a means of resistance and a way to forge a collective identity within the movement.

Chicana feminist groups like Mujeres de Maiz, active since the late 1990s, exemplify how Chicana and Latina women have used music and art as a means of challenging both racial and gender oppression (Latorre, 2008). Their interdisciplinary approach – incorporating poetry, performance, and visual art – highlights how grassroots artistic movements can serve as both cultural preservation and political resistance.

Similarly, Chocolate Remix, an Argentinian lesbian reggaetón band founded in 2013 and led by singer Romina Bernardo, subverts the hypersexualized and *machista* themes of traditional reggaetón by using satirical lyrics and a queer feminist lens to challenge the male-dominated industry of this genre (BBC Mundo, 2017).

The connection between artistic expression and activism is further explored by Emma Pérez (1999) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba (2003), who discuss how these "artivists" use performance to address systemic issues such as sexism, economic inequality, and the marginalization of women within their communities. This artistic-political fusion is especially important for queer Mexican-American women, who, through music, navigate the persistent cultural expectations, language barriers, and racialized forms of oppression that shape their lived experiences. By examining artists and collectives from different regions and time periods – ranging from Chicana feminist movements in the United States to contemporary Latin American queer musicians – this discussion underscores the continuity and global resonance of feminist artivism as a tool for resistance and cultural affirmation.

While many feminist and queer artists use music to challenge gender and sexual norms, Snow tha Product offers a distinct perspective as a bisexual, bilingual rapper navigating both the constraints and possibilities of multiple cultural, linguistic, and social identities, creating and performing music that participates in the long-standing tradition of blending musical genres to express hybrid identities in Mexico. These are artists who, as queer and critical race studies scholar Deborah Vargas (2012) puts it, "do not easily fit the normative parameters of subjectivity in dominant academic and public cultural narratives

of Chicano music and thus have been literally and discursively unheard, misheard, or overheard" (ix). Despite Snow's many lyrics performed solely in Spanish, her expansive online following suggests that she attracts a diverse audience across linguistic lines, including monolingual English speakers. With over 3.2 million Instagram followers and a similar number of monthly listeners on Spotify, her bilingual artistry allows Snow to bridge multiple fan demographics, even without precise data on language breakdowns (HypeAuditor, n.d.; Masquerade Atlanta, n.d.). This broad appeal speaks to rap's unique ability, as Adam Bradley argues, to "aggressively assert itself … upon our consciousness" through its rhythmic and rhyming elements (Bradley, 2009, xiv).

Black cultural studies scholar Tricia Rose (1994) also highlights how rap's flow, layering, and "ruptures in line" allow artists to convey emotions and ideas beyond the literal words. This transformative power of rap positions it as a tool for *cultural translation*, enabling artists like Snow tha Product to navigate and communicate the complexities of Latinx identity, bilingualism, and social fragmentation. Snow's music acts as a bridge between cultures, using the sonic and rhythmic elements of rap to translate experiences that transcend linguistic boundaries. In this sense, her work not only contests social dislocation but also translates the lived realities of Mexican-American and Chicana identities through sound and emotion, resonating with a diverse audience, including those who may not speak Spanish.

As McFarland et al. (2013) suggest, hip hop and rap offer Chicanas a platform to resist oppression through narratives of liberation, often "subverting masculine iconography and using Mexican national symbols to challenge racist nationalism" (3-4).

By blending Mexican national symbols and bilingual lyricism with the rebellious aesthetics of hip hop, Snow's music functions as a form of cultural translation that reinterprets traditional markers of identity, making them legible within both Chicana/o communities and broader cultural contexts. Through this lens, Snow's music not only asserts her cultural identity but also serves as a conduit for translating these identities across borders, languages, and social codes.

Zavella et al. (2003) also note, significantly, that such approaches allow Chicanas to articulate their identities from positions of situated knowledge, thereby disrupting the notion of a singular, homogeneous identity (6). Snow's music embraces this instability, using *cultural translation* as a method to reflect the fluid, overlapping nature of her identity as a queer, bilingual, Mexican-American mother. By engaging in *cultural translation* through her lyrics and musical styles, Snow resists the essentializing pressures of the music industry that seek to simplify and commodify her identity, instead offering a dynamic narrative of self-definition. These reimagined possibilities, characterized by multiple and overlapping voices, enable the self-determined definition of Chicana identity, emphasizing agency, complexity, and cultural resilience (ibid, 259).

Analysis: Translating Hybrid Identities

In this section, I analyze Snow tha Product's "Butter" (2017) and "Bilingue" (2019) as multimodal texts to show how she enacts *conscientización* through three major themes:

(1) *the complexities of bi+ identity*; (2*) food as metaphor*; and (3) *language use in Mexicana identity formation*. In these music videos, Snow utilizes language and visual

iconography as tools of *cultural translation* to express her hybrid identities and carry out the work of challenging oppressive societal expectations – particularly those related to gender, sexuality, and cultural identity – thereby enacting the transformative process that Ana Castillo describes.

While the production of these tracks features the familiar West Coast Trap sound, what sets them apart are their lyrics and visuals: through her bilingual lyrics, symbolic imagery, and storytelling, Snow not only asserts her authentic self as a queer Chicana artist but also fosters a critical consciousness among her audience. This examination highlights how her work redefines narratives to reflect the multifaceted experiences of Chicana women, contributing to a broader discourse of liberation within marginalized communities. They also carve out a counter-hegemonic space within McFarland's (2021) framework of sexual politics in Chicana rap, which observes women as either asserting agency and control through the erotic in *heterosexual* contexts or by presenting their bodies for male pleasure and control (79-80). Chicanx feminists, particularly those who are LGBTQ+, do not neatly fit into this framework of sexual politics in Chicanx rap. Instead, they choose to define themselves outside these borders, rejecting external control and patriarchal domination.

1. Complexities of Bi+ Identity

One of the most striking features of Snow tha Product's artistic persona is the way she refuses to silo her queer sexual desire from her identity as a mother. This remains a relatively rare move in popular music; where Beyoncé's self-titled album *BEYONCÉ*

(2013) broke ground in merging sexuality and domesticity with her larger-than-life star persona, Snow's work similarly puts little effort into compartmentalizing or reconciling these aspects of her identity within a hip hop context. As Christina Baade observes in her analysis of Beyoncé, "for many women working in popular music, singing confessionally about motherhood can involve a fraught engagement with normativity" (Baade, 2019: 45), especially when race, class, and genre expectations shape whose maternal and sexual identities are viewed as legitimate. Snow's refusal to downplay either her queerness or her motherhood poses an effective challenge to these cultural boundaries, positioning both as central to her self-definition and public artistry.

This section explores how Snow navigates and retools dominant tropes surrounding bisexuality, queer performance, and motherhood, with particular attention to the visual and lyrical strategies she employs in songs like "Butter" (2017), "Bilingue" (2019), and "How I Do It" (2020). In 1.1, I examine how she confronts the common erasure of femme-presenting bi+ women by staging scenes of queer desire that oscillate between affirmation and fatigue. In 1.2 and 1.3, I consider how she subverts the "predatory bisexual" and objectified Latina tropes through exaggerated performance, satire, and visual control. Finally, in 1.4, I analyze her depiction of queer motherhood as a site of resilience and political resistance that challenges prevailing industry conventions that render motherhood either invisible or incompatible with sexual agency (Boak, 2015). Taken together, these texts reveal how Snow uses her platform to complicate and re-script the narratives available to queer Latinx women in popular music.

1.1 *But are you 'Gay Gay?': Bi+ Identity and the Politics of Queer Performance*

[*Three men are depicted accosting Snow and her friends as they try to leave the club*]

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In "Butter" (2017), Snow addresses one of the major challenges faced by femme-presenting bi+ women: the denial or questioning of their queer identity. In a brief interlude around the half-way point of the video, Snow and her girlfriend are preparing to leave a nightclub when they are approached by a group of men who proceed to question the legitimacy of their relationship, asking prying questions like, "but how do you really know?", and, "you mean like, '*gay* gay'?. Snow appears annoyed and unimpressed but plays along with the line of questioning and affirms her sexuality by repeating the last question as an emphatic statement. The men ignore her assertion and continue attempting to entice them back into the club with the promise of alcohol. It is interesting to note that she does not attempt to qualify the statement by insisting that she is actually bisexual, even though she clearly sings in the track, "I'm an itty bitty saditty bitch that go both ways". In my own experience, it can often just be easier to say one is in a lesbian or gay relationship when with a same-sex partner. This scene thus expresses a broader social

reality: defending one's identity constantly is tiring, and it is sometimes easier to just lean into the binary and present as lesbian in the face of heteronormative skepticism.

A recurring theme in Snow tha Product's music (most explicitly in "Butter") and even in her self-presentation in interviews and social media posts showcases her ability to "turn out" women who are presumed heterosexual. In an interview on the podcast *Bestie Bueno Friends*, Snow explicitly acknowledges that this is part of the "alter ego" she embodies as Snow tha Product, rather than who she actually is (Bestie Bueno Friends, 2020). While a problematic idea in many public discourses within lesbian and bisexual communities,[46] it can also be framed as a tactic of refusal – namely rejecting heteronormative boundaries and asserting queer and bisexual identity. This trope also interacts with broader cultural narratives about bisexuality, women's desire, and the representation of queer women in popular media. By subverting normative heterosexual relationships and the male gaze, Snow destabilizes the boundary between straight and queer experiences, presenting an alternative desire that challenges machismo and societal expectations of bi+ women.

The "turned out" trope also engages with discourses on sexual fluidity and *heteroflexibility.* In a 2019 interview, Snow remarked, "I think all women kind of have that thought [about being with other women]" (Complex, 2019). Psychological studies

[46] I hate to pick on *The L Word* again because I loved this show growing up, but I seem to remember a not-insignificant part of Shane's character was her charismatic ability to seduce straight women and "convert" them. Snow seems to be leaning into this notion, as well, ironically (and perhaps unintentionally) reinforcing the conception that bisexual/queer women are predatory (Weinstein, 2021). That said, it also leans into a tradition of queer humour about embracing and reclaiming stereotypes to play with and take power from.

have substantiated the idea that women's sexuality tends to be more fluid than men's, and Lisa Diamond's (2008) work on sexual fluidity explores how women's sexual desires and identities can change over time, offering a perspective that destabilizes fixed sexual identities and offering a critique of rigid heteronormative norms. This engagement with fluidity also invites questions about the line between bisexual desire and performative bisexuality – a phenomenon in which women's same-sex attraction is framed as temporary, experimental, or meant primarily for male spectatorship rather than as a legitimate expression of identity. In mainstream media, bi+ women have often been depicted as engaging in same-sex interactions primarily to attract male attention, reinforcing the idea that queerness in women is conditional, superficial, or ultimately in service of heterosexuality (Fahs, 2009; San Fillipo, 2017). Snow's playful engagement with the "stealing your girls" trope could potentially be interpreted within this framework of inauthenticity,[47] inviting critiques that it aligns with the very narratives that render bisexuality invisible or dismiss it as a phase. Ultimately, what looks like a replay of the 'predatory bisexual' script becomes a site of critique, as the next sequence I discuss makes plain.

1.2 *Subverting the 'Predatory Bisexual' Stereotype*: After a short exchange between Snow and JuJu in the car as the three men interrupt their departure from the club, the video cuts back to the beat with a verse in which Snow emphasizes her prowess,

[47] Ashnikko also playfully engages this trope in the music video for Slumber Party (2021), discussed in Chapter II. The video stages a femme-to-femme seduction through flirtatious, hyperfeminine visuals, arguably reclaiming the "predatory bisexual" stereotype through camp aesthetics and a satirical edge.

"Dicen que ellos no me creen que tan bonita y quito novias" (They say, they don't believe me, that I am so pretty, but I steal your girls).[48] While this line could be interpreted as reinforcing the overplayed script of bisexual women as predatory, or being part of an agenda to "recruit" straight women, Snow seems to be subverting this idea by explaining, "Tengo práctica, yo tengo plática y esto no para" ("I have practice, I know how to flirt and talk to a woman, and it doesn't stop there").

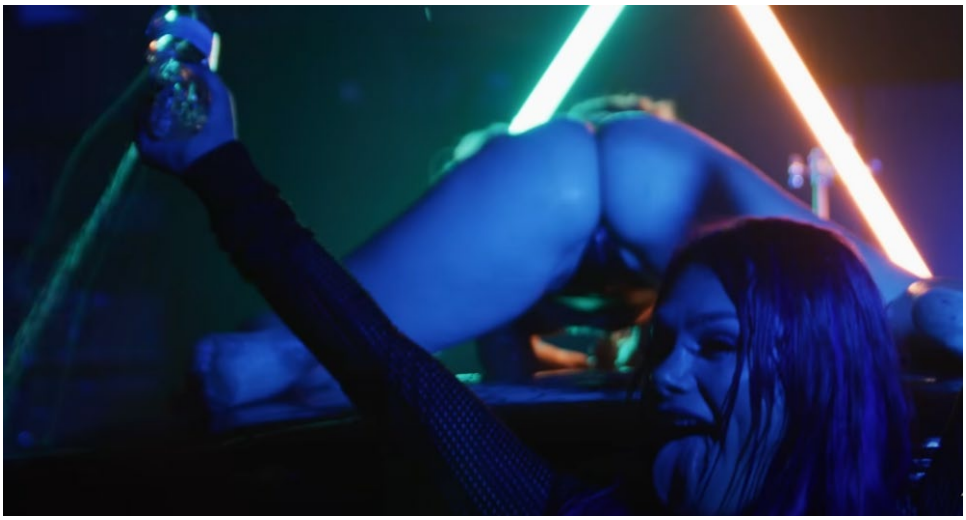
One reading of this verse suggests that Snow is presenting herself as someone who genuinely connects with and respects the women she pursues. For Jessica and me, this nuance distinguishes her approach from traditional Chicano rap and the hypermasculine tropes that often frame women as passive objects of desire. Indeed, the video makes it apparent that Snow is disrupting these readings by asserting the legitimacy of bisexual desire, asserting herself not as a performer for a male gaze but as an active subject engaging in relationships on her own terms.

Another reading of this line moves beyond the fleeting and often trivialized depictions of sexual fluidity in pop culture – think lyrics like, "Hope my boyfriend don't mind it" or "Red wine, I just wanna kiss girls".[49] Rather than presenting same-sex attraction as a momentary thrill or ploy for male attention, Snow frames her attraction to women as continuous, self-affirming, and rooted in a stable identity. In this way, she not

[48] All Spanish-language translations in this chapter were provided by my co-author Jessica Rodriguez.
[49] The first lyric comes from Katy Perry's, "I Kissed a Girl" (2008), and the second from "Girls" by Rita Ora ft. Cardi B, Bebe Rexha, Charli XCX (2018). Both Rita Ora and Cardi B have publicly come out as bisexual and view the song as reflective of their experiences. Much of the backlash, however, came from other queer artists and listeners who perceived its portrayals of same-sex attraction as "inauthentic."

only complicates tropes like the "turned out" woman or the "predatory bisexual", but also exposes the ways in which performative bisexuality has been used to undermine bi+ women's self-determined identities.

Snow treads a deliberate and nuanced line here: her engagement with these tropes encapsulates queer theory's own ambivalence, as Warner (2012) describes, while also exemplifying what Hascemi, Kilian, and Michaelis (2013) call queer's 'iterative capacity' – its continual renewal and redefinition through each expression of desire and identity (2). In doing so, she resists essentialist narratives while deliberately embracing ambiguity, challenging both heteronormative assumptions and the erasure of bisexuality within queer discourse.



[*Snow is depicted pouring out a bottle of liquor with her tongue sticking out just off to the right and foregrounded in the frame, while center of frame in the background shows another woman barefoot and twerking*]

***

1.3 *Negotiating Hip Hop's Objectifying Frameworks*: As seen in the above image, Snow's choice to downplay her own visual sexualization (she often wears a lot of black,

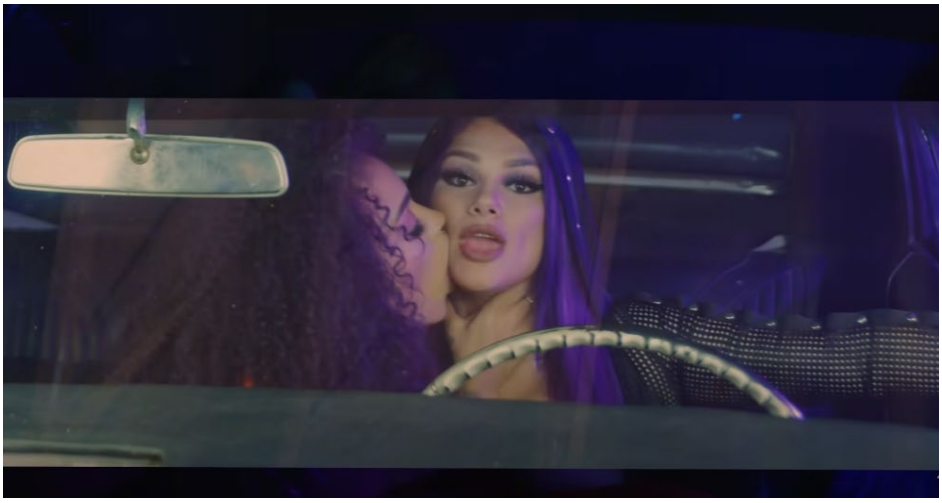
long sleeves, and baggy pants) clearly does not signify an absence of sexuality in her work. Rather, she chooses to center a Sapphic perspective, offering a corrective lens against an overwhelmingly straight, male gaze. Adriana Oniță (2017) argues that Snow's efforts to de-sexualize her body can be understood as an assertion of creative agency and bodily autonomy (135-6). This choice enables Snow to engage with the landscape of popular music without conforming to its typical patterns of objectification. Namely, in "Butter", Snow deliberately reinscribes familiar, hyper-sexualized imagery we might take for granted in many mainstream hip hop music videos, thereby exposing the performative nature of objectification and inviting viewers to see these tropes as constructed rather than innate. Lyrics like, "want the privileged life like a fucking white man," make it clear that the excess of "Butter" should be read as mostly satirical because it amplifies rather than normalizes the spectacle. Snow acknowledges her influences from both Chicano rap and hip hop (Balfour, 2014), and, yet, in staging the twerking women in this video not as background video vixens but as humorously performative overkill, she invites audiences to not take the images too seriously while, at the same time, questioning why such images proliferate elsewhere in mainstream rap music videos.

Indeed, while Snow's performance of hypersexualization in "Butter" sits closer to critical intervention than capitulation, there does also seem to be hints that she is genuinely enjoying her surroundings in this video. Scholarship on bisexual women's use of objectifying frameworks shows that such strategic participation can be a mode of empowered self-expression and resistance to normative sexual politics (Serpe et al.,

2020).[50] In Snow's case, this tactic centers a queer, Sapphic perspective and asserts her autonomy within a music industry shaped by label-driven marketing campaigns, streaming algorithms, and the visual commodification of bodies – all of which reinforce heteronormative spectacle and suppress women's desire and self-expression.

As Castillo (1994) lamented, "For the political activist, sexuality has been the last frontier to liberate" (184); we suggest that foregrounding queer sexuality as a domain for authentic representation and empowerment demonstrates that Snow actively engages with this very challenge, refusing to present sexuality merely as spectacle. Rather than viewing music videos and popular culture as inherently misogynistic spaces devoid of agency for women of colour, Román-Odio (2013) might suggest that Snow's approach aligns with Foucault's notion that affirming sexuality does not necessarily mean rejecting power (246). Taking this approach seriously creates room for more nuanced portrayals of sexuality, particularly those rooted in queer experiences, positioning them as both personal and political forms of resistance.

[50] Rosalind Gill (2007) and other critical studies scholars such as Angela McRobbie demonstrate how postfeminist texts enlist mimicry of sexualized tropes to signal both empowerment and self-management, turning objectifying scripts into potential sites of critique.



[*Juju pulls Snow into an impassioned, seductive kiss while Snow delivers verses about her ability to seduce women with more care and practice than her male counterpart*]

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As listeners and viewers, we are invited to interpret Snow's audiovisual texts through the interplay of representation and erasure, where queer sexuality is simultaneously made hypervisible and yet remains entangled with processes of desexualization. Her in-your-face portrayals of a particular form of queerness, alongside the ways her identity remains enmeshed with markers of heteronormativity, prompt us to engage specifically with bi+ and hybrid identities as destabilizing forces that challenge conventional norms. The spectacle of "Butter" cultivates queerness not merely through the visible eroticism of women with women, but by queering the very codes of performance and space within hip-hop: the video's over-the-top choreography and styling consistently center women's agency and desire outside of the logic of male validation, while Snow's fluid code-switching between English and Spanish further queers the text by refusing a fixed linguistic identity, embodying José Esteban Muñoz's notion of queer

futurity as a space of "in-betweenness" that anticipates alternative modes of relating (Muñoz, 2009: 1–2).

Yet, even as the video foregrounds queer performance, it remains framed by heteronormative markers. The lyric, "I want the privileged life like a fucking white man" alludes to normative power structures – whiteness, masculinity, and upper class – as the supposed ultimate ideal, thereby unsettling that ideal by explicitly queering its edges. Visually, conventional camera angles and framing still at times reinscribe the male gaze, panning across bodies in ways that recall mainstream pop-video erotics rather than fully escaping heteronormative spectacle (Butler, 1990). These tensions – between a queering of musical and visual form and the persistence of heteronormative signifiers – underscore how even radical gestures must negotiate dominant gender and racial hierarchies.

Rather than treating visibility as a monolithic concept, this chapter considers it within the specific context of Mexican-American cultural narratives, where representation operates not only as a means of empowerment but also as a negotiation of gendered and racialized expectations (Muñoz, 1999; Rodríguez, 2003). Through these nuanced representations, we can view Snow's work as a form of *conscientización*, encouraging critical reflection on our assumptions about gender, sexuality, and cultural identity. In this reading, her music acts as a site of *cultural translation*, where the complexities of queer and marginalized identities are made accessible, compelling us to question dominant discourses and consider alternative realities.

1.4 *Queerness and Motherhood*: Scholars of Latinx media and gender studies argue that women, especially Latinas in the United States, are often constrained by stereotypical representations of sexuality and femininity (Valdivia, 2000; Molina-Guzman, 2010). Within Latinx cultures, where heteronormative family structures remain deeply ingrained, queerness is frequently positioned in contrast to traditional motherhood (Moraga, 1983; Pérez, 1999). Queerness and motherhood alike disrupt the music industry's commodification of femininity, inviting social and professional erasure (Park, 2020; Reed, 2018). Snow's defiance of the expectation that "mothers cannot be sexual beings, let alone queer" (Castillo, 2004: 192-5) directly challenges dominant frameworks that marginalize both queer motherhood and women in the music industry by offering a counter-narrative that refuses to pit these identities against one another. Snow's deft navigation of both her queerness and her role as a mother challenges these biases, positioning her intersectional identity as a form of resistance. To illustrate this, I draw on Camille Wilson Cooper's concept of "racially conscious mothering," which underscores how maternal identity can function as a site of sociopolitical resistance. Cooper (2007) describes *motherwork* as a "liberatory praxis, fueled by race-related meaning-making, that is countercultural to the colorblind aims of U.S. society in the twenty-first century" (346). Snow frequently shares stories and even raps about raising her son as a queer mother splitting her time between the United States and Mexico, offering a rare and nuanced portrayal of motherhood, queer Chicanx identity, and being a rapper.

As a single mother and the financial provider for her family, Snow's depiction of motherhood embodies resilience and agency rather than sacrifice alone. Her willingness

to express her sexuality while also incorporating her son into aspects of her public life – whether through social media or select performances – reflects a deliberate effort to normalize the co-existence of her sexuality with her role as a mother without flattening or conflating them. Across Snow's discography, she names the real pinch points of solo parenting: "As your child grow bigger, child support don't stack" (Child Support, 2021) and then flips them into empowerment. In "Not Today" (2022), she asserts her right to carve out personal time, declaring "Baby father mad / she got her kid all week…but not today", reframing maternal labour as a site of agency rather than obligation. Even in "How I Do It" (2020), she juxtaposes hustle and childcare – "I got a business and I need some cash / I got a kid and he growin' up fast" – to show that motherhood is the very engine driving her creative and economic momentum.

Motherhood in Snow's music is neither a backdrop nor an imposed ceiling, but a dynamic force she names as constraint only to convert into liberation: by refusing to flatten, erase, or romanticize maternal labour, these portrayals actively work to dismantle patriarchal and industry narratives that demand mothers vanish from the spotlight. Instead, Snow's queer Mexicana maternal identity bursts forth as a platform for resilience, rebellion, and boundary-pushing artistry. Indeed, by occupying and representing multiple "borderlands" of identity – Mexican-American, queer, mother, daughter, and independent artist – Snow negotiates power through her unflinching artistic and personal narratives. These narratives participate in the reimagining of identity through cultural expression, positioning her work as entertainment but also as a critical tool of resistance and empowerment.

Snow often credits her own mother as a central influence in her life. In doing so, she directly challenges the psychoanalytic "daughters of the father" phenomenon, which suggests that successful women ultimately seek male approval (Castillo, 2004: 202). Her assertion of maternal influence as foundational to her success is both personal and political, underscoring her broader critique of hegemonic narratives surrounding Latinx women's achievements. This resistance is evident also in her public decision to remove herself from an unhappy relationship with her son's father, choosing instead to be a single mother. In this act, she rejects the legacy of motherhood as associated with maternal sacrifice and emotional suffering in Mexican patriarchal social structure (Herrera, 2008: 90), reframing motherhood as a site of power and agency rather than loss or submission.

2. *Food as Metaphor*

Snow tha Product skillfully employs food as a metaphor to explore themes of sexuality, cultural identity, and resistance, particularly in her songs "Bilingue" and "Butter" These metaphors serve not only as playful double entendres but also as critical tools for asserting her queer identity and challenging patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks. Snow's use of food metaphors reflects broader dynamics of power and identity (Carruth, 2013), where the act of consuming or preparing food becomes a way to assert agency. In the Latinx context, food metaphors have long been used as a form of double-coding for subjects still considered taboo, including queerness and female sexual autonomy (Ehrhardt, 2006: 98). Snow extends this tradition, using food imagery to subvert objectification, assert her bisexuality, and reframe Latina sexuality outside the constraints of the male gaze.

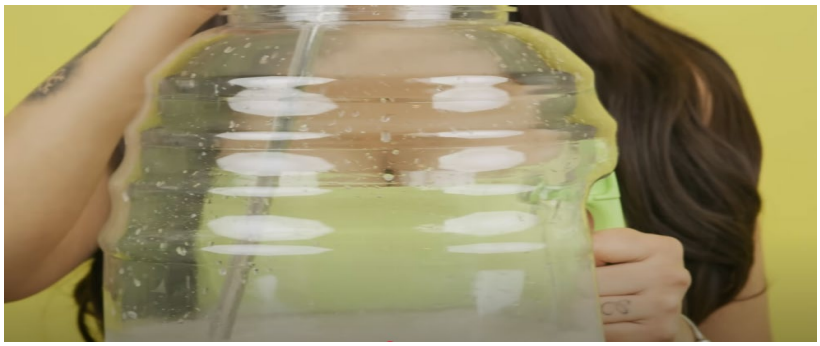
2.1 *Queering Cultural Foods in "Bilingue"*: The music video for "Bilingue" transforms cultural foods into a spectacle of excess and sensuality, reinterpreting acts of eating through a queer Latina lens. The hyper-saturated, almost surreal visuals exaggerate everyday consumption, layering coded gestures and playful excess with deeper cultural critique. Snow and her then-girlfriend Juju are depicted in scenes featuring traditional Mexican foods such as tacos, *horchata* (a grain-based drink, usually made of rice), *paletas* (a frozen fruit dessert on a stick), and pink *conchas* (a traditional Mexican sweet bread). These foods are culturally distinct and central to conveying Latinx identity, as María Elena Cepeda (2008) observes in her analysis of Shakira's *Oral Fixation*, which used themes of sex, food, and language as key components in cultural expressions of her identity. Likewise, in "Bilingue", food becomes a site where cultural and sexual identities converge.

One of the most striking images features Snow's then-girlfriend, Juju, licking a paleta, its bright red interior exposed – an immediate visual cue for sensuality and temptation. The close-up framing mimics mainstream media's sexualization of women, but Snow repurposes this trope to emphasize ownership, playfulness, and resistance to the male gaze. In this queer Latina context, indulgence becomes an act of autonomy rather than objectification.

[*JuJu licks a paleta*]

***

Another image shows a massive jug of horchata being stirred, its oversized nature amplifying the excess and absurdity. The sheer scale of it turns a simple act of drinking into something dramatic, hinting at indulgence, thirst (in both the literal and figurative sense), and the playful exaggeration of bodily needs. The over-the-top proportions of food and drink throughout the video parallel how sexuality and appetite intertwine – both things that, for queer women, are often policed or repressed. Here, however, they are celebrated in a manner that is humorous and unashamed.



[*Juju stirs a large jug of horchata with a giant metal straw*]

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In the following image, Juju holds a plate of *tacos de lengua* (beef tongue tacos) up to the camera, an overtly suggestive choice given the slang associations between "tongue" and oral desire. The camera angle, zoomed in on Juju's cleavage, draws attention to how food and body are both objects of attention in media – yet this framing feels more self-aware than exploitative, as we argued in the "Butter" music video analysis. The term *dos de lengua* specifically resonates in a bilingual, bicultural context – both as a literal food item and a nod to the Spanish word for "tongue", linking it to Snow's linguistic dexterity and as an illustration of the sexual innuendo in this song.

[*Juju' holds a plate of beef tongue tacos*]

***

As seen in the image below, Snow's inclusion of *conchas* in the video is a deliberate play on the word's multiple meanings across Spanish dialects. In Mexico, *concha* refers to a beloved sweet bread, while in Argentina, it is a slang term for female genitalia. This linguistic duality is subtly reinforced for Anglo and Western audiences to evoke associations with the phrase "eating out", particularly due to its pink and fleshy appearance. As an act of *cultural translation*, Snow's strategic use of these metaphors

reflects her broader commitment to reclaiming sexual identities historically denied to Latina women. At the same time, it extends hip-hop's tradition of self-expression and self-empowerment.

[*Juju eats a pink concha*]

***

One of the most visually striking and humorously provocative moments in the video features Juju gripping a whole watermelon, tilting it toward her mouth as juice drips dramatically down her chest. Snow's expression toward the camera is both suggestive and playful, blurring the line between seduction and satire. The exaggerated spectacle of watermelon eating acts as a vivid symbol of excess, transforming into a fun but unmistakable metaphor for messy, unrestrained desire.

[*Juju is depicted biting into a watermelon while Snow looks into the camera*]

***

2.2 *Double Entendre in "Butter"***:** Snow again draws on food metaphors to explore themes of bisexuality and sexual agency in "Butter". Though not visually represented, these metaphors are linguistically invoked in lines like, "Para, déjale saber que es cosa rara que se me antoje un cuerno, pero de qué es la empanada?" (Stop, let her know that it is weird for me to crave a *cuerno*, but what's inside the *empanada*?). Here Snow uses food not only to playfully intimate her bisexuality but also to highlight the fluidity of her desire. In our discussions of this scene in the video, Jessica explained to me that the uses of "*cuerno*" and "*empanada*", both traditional breads in Mexico, cleverly serve as metaphors for male and female genitalia, respectively.

Centering the Latina mouth and food – elements that carry cultural and sexual significance – is a recognizable through-line in how Snow's music enacts a form of *cultural translation*, most potently in this example by mocking and reframing dominant stereotypes about Latina women, while reclaiming forms of self-sexualization typically reserved for the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). In this context, the Latina mouth, often

exoticized and eroticized in popular media, becomes a site where personal pleasure, cultural symbolism, and resistance collide. Snow's reorientation of these metaphors aligns with her broader *narrative of liberation* as a queer Chicana artist, providing a counternarrative that reclaims and affirms both her sexuality and her culture.

3. Language Use in Mexicana Identity Formation

3.1 *Theoretical Foundations:* This section outlines key theoretical perspectives on language, identity, and resistance in hip hop and Latinx cultural contexts. By foregrounding the work of Adam Bradley, Pancho McFarland, and Gloria Anzaldúa, it establishes a framework for understanding Snow tha Product's linguistic choices – particularly her use of Spanish, Spanglish, and caló – as strategies of cultural assertion, identity formation, and political resistance. Adam Bradley (2009) underscores that wordplay and double meanings are essential to hip hop's lyrical craft, allowing artists to convey complex ideas and assert their identities in inventive ways. Through the manipulation of words and meanings, rap "renders familiar words unexpected and fresh" (40) a technique that includes puns, homonyms, and coded language that engage listeners on multiple levels. Pancho McFarland (2018) also sees language as central to Latinx identity formation, asserting that "language variations (women's language, ethnic language, dialects) are intimately interconnected with, coincide with, and express identity" and are "absolutely necessary in the process of struggling for liberation" (10). He further argues that for marginalized groups, speaking in one's own language is an act of resistance, explaining that "to speak means to assume a culture" and that language "helps defend one's sense of identity" (ibid, 11).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) reinforces this connection between language and identity affirmation, arguing that "ethnic identity is twin to linguistic identity" (633). In her 1987 essay "How to Tame a Wild Tongue", Anzaldúa critiques the policing of Chicano Spanish, highlighting how linguistic discrimination – what she terms "linguistic terrorism" – functions as a means of erasing cultural identities. Snow's use of Spanish and Spanglish reflects a deliberate resistance to such linguistic hierarchies, directly countering assimilationist pressures. The use of *caló* thus operates as a deliberate linguistic strategy that both asserts cultural hybridity and resists linguistic assimilation. As Anzaldúa insists, "wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (ibid, 629), conjuring a visceral image of the violence inherent in linguistic erasure and the necessity of repudiating dominant monolingual norms.

3.2 *Language, Identity, and Power:* For Chicanxs and Mexicanas, engaging in Spanglish is thus not merely a linguistic choice but a political act that challenges the subordination of Spanish and Chicano English within white-dominant language hierarchies. Code-switching between Spanish and English serves as a means of asserting Latina identity in the face of linguistic discrimination; by deliberately incorporating Spanish elements into her music, Snow actively engages in what Zavella (2018) describes as the discursive negotiations of identity at the linguistic borderland (156), using Spanglish to navigate and contest exclusionary narratives of authenticity and belonging (Flores and Rosa, 2015). Just as Anzaldúa describes the societal expectation for Chicanxs to conform to standardized Spanish or English, Snow's bilingualism serves as a declaration of self-determination. Her use of *caló* and code-switching, rather than being

markers of linguistic deficiency, reinforce her authenticity and challenge dominant narratives about language purity.

Snow's Spanish lyrics firmly place her within the Mexican diaspora, reinforcing her claim that she represents a "particular audience that has always maybe been underrepresented" (Lothspeich, 2019). By rapping in Spanish and English, Snow engages in what McFarland (2018) describes as "creating language anew in order to define their unique circumstances" (12), using her bilingualism to navigate and challenge dominant linguistic and cultural hierarchies. An insistence on incorporating both Spanish and English in her music is the result of a constant process of navigating identity politic, and involves what Soto (2011) calls a "double narrative of outsiderness and homecoming": a simultaneous feeling of being an outsider in both cultures while seeking a sense of belonging in each (24). By employing *caló* (Spanglish) and code-switching, she strategically identifies with the Mexican dimension of the Mexican-American experience, utilizing linguistic resources to construct and navigate the borders around these experiences (Delgado, 1998: 103). McFarland et al. (2013) describe these narratives as "experiential conversations of people on the borderlands, reflecting polyculturality and challenging one-way assimilationist perspectives" (8).

Creating a "sense of place" is crucial for Latinx musicians and listeners, whether physically in specific venues or symbolically in terms of cultural memory and community (Nowotny et al., 2013: 79). This is particularly significant in communities shaped by migration and displacement, as is the case for many Mexican-Americans. Snow addresses these politics in her song "How I Do It" (2020) with the line, "Porque de mi parte parece

que ni los de allá me quieren, ni tampoco acá" ("Because from my side it seems that neither those over there love me, nor here either"). Here Snow reflects her position as someone in a "double diaspora." This term refers to individuals who grew up in the United States but maintain strong connections to Mexico, rendering them 'foreign' in both contexts. In the United States, they are part of the Mexican diaspora, yet when they return to Mexico, they are also seen as foreigners because they grew up in the United States, making them part of a diaspora there as well.[51]

This duality reinforces the tension between cultural identification and political legibility – tensions that Snow navigates through her choice to identify as "Mexicana" or "Mexican-American" rather than "Chicana." While this distinction was introduced earlier in the chapter, here it takes on added weight: rather than signaling political disengagement, Snow's emphasis on Mexicana identity foregrounds her familial and linguistic ties to Mexico in the face of racialized belonging in both nations. As Contreras (2017: 32) notes, such identification reflects how Mexican-American women negotiate cultural meaning amid shifting hierarchies of race, nationalism, and class. Through this lens, Snow's assertion of *lo Mexicano* becomes both a personal and strategic act, one that resists rigid identity categories while navigating the cultural and linguistic expectations embedded in the borderlands.

[51] While Chican@ identification attempts to unify and fully encompass some of these "borderland" experiences, it is important to note that Chicano/Latinx culture in the United States differs significantly from that of their counterparts in Latin American countries.

3.3 *Reclaiming Joto/a (Jotería Studies):* Jotería studies, a specialized area within Chicanx and Latinx studies, focuses on queer Latinx experiences and the reclamation of derogatory terms to empower marginalized identities. Juan Sebastian Ferrada (2018) argues that "through the reclaiming of Jotería, Latinx communities resignify their own futures into existence." Eddy Álvarez (2023) extends this analysis by asserting that acts of linguistic subversion and reclamation function as deliberate redefinitions of identity, disrupting heteronormative and colonial discourses to create new spaces for self-expression and community belonging. Central to Jotería is a holistic approach to reclamation – one that encompasses language, culture, race, and ethnicity – challenging multiple layers of marginalization simultaneously.

Snow tha Product engages in a powerful act of linguistic subversion that challenges the hegemonic structures of Chicano masculinity by reappropriating patriarchal language and inverting traditional gender roles. In doing so, she embodies and simultaneously rejects the hypermasculine tropes often associated with Chicano rap, reshaping them to resist male control over women's bodies and desires. This practice is not only central to Snow's artistic identity but also contributes to the broader field of Jotería studies, which explores the reclamation of language and identity by queer Latinx individuals. As Quintana (1990) argues, speaking out is essential for Chicanas in combating feelings of alienation and reclaiming their voices as agents of change (257). Snow thus also aligns herself with the Jotería tradition of *resignifying language* to assert queer Latinx identities. In this way, her music serves as a space where the intersection of

language, gender, and sexuality is actively renegotiated, contributing to the broader discourse on the recovery of identity and cultural agency within queer Latinx scholarship.

While many Chicano rappers draw on hypermasculine tropes, Snow's music presents questions about what it means to subvert this tradition by asserting herself within a framework of Chicana feminism. For instance, in "Butter", the line, "Soy la pinche mera mera y hasta puto mero mero" (I am the fucking thing, and even the fucking stud thing) plays with gendered language, using both feminine ("mera mera") and masculine ("mero mero") terms to assert her dominance. This form of linguistic inversion is a recognized strategy in *Xicanisma,* used to critique and dismantle oppressive gender systems (Castillo, 1994). Further amplifying this subversion, the line "Va a costar duro que a mí me paren" ("It's gonna be hard to stop me") carries a layered double meaning. On the surface, the phrase conveys her unstoppable ambition, yet *duro* in Spanish can also imply sexual arousal, akin to the English usage of "hard", while *paren* may reference both stopping someone and, in certain contexts, an erection. By repurposing terminology traditionally associated with male sexuality, Snow disrupts the presumption that men are the sole agents of desire and power. This playful engagement with language allows her to not only subvert expectations but also reframe male-dominated linguistic spaces, positioning herself as both an equal and a challenger to the gendered norms embedded in rap.

Snow's engagement with Jotería practices is most evident in her use of double meanings, particularly in reclaiming and reframing epithets to articulate her bi+ identity. In "Bilingue", she raps, "Bitch, I 'jaja' con jota, 'hahaha' with the J." This line explicitly

plays with language itself – *jaja con jota* refers to how Spanish speakers write laughter (*jaja*), but the phrase also references *jota*, a term historically used as a slur against lesbians and effeminate men. As Álvarez Jr. (2023) explains*, joto* originated from prison slang, specifically referring to Cell Block J in Mexico City's *Lecumberri Federal Prison* (1900–1976), where so-called "effeminate men" were segregated from the general population (863). Over time, *joto* (and its feminine form, *jota*) became synonymous with homosexuality. Snow's usage as a means of leading into the following lyrics, "I'm bi-lingual all day," leans into Gregory Coles' (2016) argument that the power of reclamation lies in making terms ambiguous and multi-layered (40). Through this moment of playful defiance, Snow not only subverts a historically harmful term but actively laughs through the process, signaling to both her English- and Spanish-speaking listeners that she recognizes them, speaks directly to them, and refuses to let language be weaponized against her. In doing so, she enacts Ferrada's (2018) notion of "signifying oneself into the future", demonstrating that bilingualism, like queerness, is a space of fluidity and resistance rather than limitation. For Snow, it is practice that very often moves beyond linguistic dexterity and becomes a critical part of asserting her identity, connecting Mexican-American and Chicanx experiences to broader intersectional political struggles (Alvarez, 2007).

Snow's music powerfully underscores the politics of language, reinvigorating Anzaldúa's claim that language itself is a site of resistance. Just as Anzaldúa faced linguistic policing from educators and her own family, Snow actively and *joyfully* resists the imposed hierarchies of linguistic acceptability, demonstrating that both Spanish and

Spanglish are equally valid and empowering forms of cultural expression. In doing so, she disrupts the expectation that Mexican-Americans must conform to dominant linguistic norms to be accepted, reinforcing language's role in identity formation and cultural resilience.

Conclusion / Future Directions

This chapter has sought to address a significant gap in scholarship on Chicana creative aesthetics and cultural production, particularly within the realm of music and hip hop. While scholarship has predominantly focused on film, literature, visual art, and social media, there has been a conspicuous lack of attention to artists like Snow tha Product – a new generation of politically conscious and highly motivated individuals who embody the complexities of intersectional identity within the music industry and broader cultural contexts. By examining cultural work enacted in the "discursive dimension" of the borderlands, we, including those not familiar with Mexican/Chicana culture, can gain critical insights into how contemporary Chicana artists navigate and challenge the fluid hybridity of Latinx identity in US-Mexico contexts.

Snow's work calls for a cross-media consideration of the greater industry presence of women, people of colour, and queer individuals, marking musical and transcultural time in a dynamic and politically charged manner. It is apt, then, that she chooses hip hop as her main mode of self-expression. Hip hop is as much a product of Latinx cultural influences as it is of Black American origins, unifying these communities across racial and geographic lines (Rivera, 2002: 127-8). Chican@ hip hop, in particular, pays attention to place and mixed identity, revealing insights about Chicana experiences,

political activity, and the "state of the nation" in the new millennium (McFarland, 2018: 1–2).

Snow tha Product's radical artistry lies in her ability to integrate complex layers of identity, resistance, and empowerment into her music and public persona. Contrary to the notion of musical pastiche merely serving broader appeal, her work creates a dialogue between disparate cultural elements, preserving their unique qualities while weaving them into a cohesive narrative that reflects a complex, hybrid identity. This conscious practice of cultural translation aligns with Onita's conception of the term and underscores the transformative potential of her artistry. As an ongoing *narrative of liberation,* Snow's work navigates the complexities of place, space, and identity, extending hip hop's legacy as a tool for cultural translation and resistance into the twenty-first century for global audiences. By embodying a form of decolonial aesthetics and constructing counter-hegemonic narratives, Snow contributes significantly to the evolution of Chicana feminist discourse and offers a blueprint for authentic self-representation in the arts.

Moreover, Snow's deliberate and distinctive use of bilingualism, resignification, visual symbolism, and engagement with Chicana feminist thought exemplifies the power of hip hop music as a tool for cultural translation. By blending English and Spanish, she not only challenges linguistic boundaries but also embraces the mestiza consciousness that navigates and transcends borders – both literal and figurative (Anzaldúa, 1987). Engaging in the reimagining of spaces and Chicana consciousness, she rewrites narratives for the oppressed, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of Chicana identity,

particularly through queer engagements with traditional experiences and iconography (Baros, 2014: 12).

The broader cultural work of reclaiming slurs within queer and Latinx communities is a power-claiming act of naming oneself on one's own terms, becoming a radical assertion of self-definition and community solidarity for Chicanas. By engaging in this multifaceted reclamation that operates along linguistic, racial, and ethnic lines, Snow tha Product's strategic use of language, cultural symbols, and musical artistry strives to overcome oppressive narratives and contributes significantly to Jotería studies by bringing these conversations into mainstream hip hop. As part of her process of *conscientización*, Snow reclaims derogatory terms like "Joto/a/x", transforming potential sources of shame into shared languages of pride and resistance. This reclamation is accessible and resonant for her listeners, furthering the dialogue on identity, empowerment, and cultural translation.

At the heart of this inquiry is Snow's embrace of her roles as both a mother and a queer artist. By navigating the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, Snow tha Product not only enriches the landscape of Chicana and queer cultural production but also invites critical exploration within Latinx queer studies. Namely, her open integration of motherhood into her public persona disrupts conventional industry boundaries that often seek to compartmentalize identities. This disruption contributes to a broader discourse of liberation and self-determination for queer Latinx mothers, exemplifying a politics of refusal that empowers continuous acts of resistance against narrow and stereotypical representations of mothers in the media. Her portrayal challenges patriarchal norms

embedded in the genre, particularly in Chicano rap and Chicanismo, and expands the discourse on Chicana identity by offering new pathways for resistance and self-definition as a highly visible, globally recognized artist.

The very fact that so-called "local repertoire" is increasingly enjoying popularity in the streaming era of music is a positive sign that Snow tha Product's work will continue to reach broad audiences, signaling a shift in the cultural paradigms of representation and resistance within the Latinx community and the music industry at large. Future research could delve deeper into the impact of other emerging artists like Young Miko, Tierra Whack, and Ethel Cain, who, like Snow, challenge traditional narratives and embody complex intersectional identities. Additionally, exploring the reception of such artists within their communities and the broader public could provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of cultural production and identity politics.

By exploring Snow tha Product's music and broader cultural output as an online creative, this chapter aims to spotlight the multifaceted expressions of contemporary Chicana artists. Simultaneously, it invites a re-examination of existing frameworks and encourages a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of cultural hybridity, resistance, and empowerment. In doing so, we move closer to a holistic appreciation of the diverse voices shaping our cultural landscapes and the transformative power they wield in redefining identities and challenging oppressive structures.

Conclusion:
Never Gay Enough + Never Straight Enough = Always Queer

I wrote this thesis between 2022 and 2025, a historical moment that has been characterized by a resurgence of far-right ideologies and persistent assaults on trans and queer rights in North American legal and sociocultural contexts. Nonetheless, the rapid ascension and positive reception of contemporary queer stars like Chappell Roan – who often has drag queens open for her at her shows – serve as both a testament to and a catalyst for the ongoing project of queer visibility and empowerment in the music industry. Roan's breakthrough album, *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess* (2023), is not a queer-coded, subtext-laden gesture toward queerness – it is a full-throated belting expression of queerness that has won the hearts of even non-queer audiences and expanded the category of Sapphic Pop from an emerging niche to a visible, fan-fueled movement. Even so, the album was not an immediate hit; the early adoption of Roan by fans in the LGBTQ community unequivocally helped launch her into mainstream fame (Grady, 2024). Roan's theatrical performances and unflinching lyrics about queer relationships has clearly resonated with audiences that crave spaces where their own fluid identities can find genuine reflection and affirmation.[52] Even Roan's candid and polarizing conversations about harmful fan behaviour (Cain, 2024) – evidence of a somewhat "untrained" mode of media engagement – reveal a kind of messiness and

[52] HuffPost writer Abbi Hassler wrote that Chappell Roan, "helped her express her bisexuality" – an indication that bi+ women are relating strongly to lesbian artists and the experiences they sing about. See Hassler, Abbi. "I Lived With a Secret for Years. Then I Heard Chappell Roan's Music and My Life Changed." *HuffPost*, August 31, 2024. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/chappell-roan-music-bisexual-identity_n_66b7adfbe4b084249ca19e33.

unwillingness to be boxed in that is very reminiscent of and aligned with the kind of unsettling work for which queer feminism and a "bi+ worldview" (Nelson, 2023: 102) advocate.

In the title for this conclusion, I suggest that to be bisexual is to be "always queer" because of the persistent "in betweenness" that can sometimes leave bisexual people feeling stuck somewhere along an 'in/hypervisibility' paradigm.[53] The persistence of heteronormativity has pushed femme bisexuals deeply into this social crevice, combining toxically with gender presentation and monosexuality norms that render femme presenting bi+ women as particularly "deviant" from the expectation that a woman who is not straight would present in a more androgynous or masculine way to signal their non-heterosexuality (Jensen-Granger, 2023). Bi+ identity, particularly in the ways it intersects with entrenched notions of gender and monosexism, unsettles these rigid social boundaries and opens up a set of "truly queer possibilities" (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009: 313). Advocating for bisexuality's ability to "queer queer theory", Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell assert: "The existence of bisexuality and bisexuals virtually demands a reconfiguration of the ways in which we define our desired-object-choice, diffusing outward from a monosexual paradigm into significantly more open-ended categories" (ibid).

[53] This assertion also defies those that insist when a bisexual person is in a heterosexual relationship, they somehow shed their same-sex desires and "become" straight. Bisexual people have long pushed back against this belief.

Roan and the artists I discuss in this thesis represent compelling examples of what the future of bi+ visibility can look like, both in terms of the artistry itself and in terms of how fans, activists, and marginalized communities rally around these cultural texts. More precisely, they illuminate how hermeneutical injustice in bi+ lives is addressed and combatted in digital and social media-driven contexts. Their collective efforts unfold against the backdrop of heightened political tensions and mirror a broader digital turn in activism and identity formation that began to take shape in the mid-2010s with the popularization of social media. Although the early techno-optimism fueled by digital campaigns that shaped movements like the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter has since dimmed, queer and feminist activism continues to adapt.

Today, queer feminist resistance manifests potently in online music cultures that, despite their complications, still offer meaningful avenues for visibility, community-building, and the continued unsettling of normative boundaries. Challenges to monosexism, for example, create a critical space where ambiguity is reclaimed as a source of strength. Meanwhile, Fahs's (2009) vision of compulsory bisexuality is actively being subverted: rather than simply rejecting such performative frameworks, these artists and their fans actively repurpose them. As anticipated by Cvetovich's (2003) concept of affective archives, the 'archival bonds' (Varela, 2018) created by the words, images and sounds that circulate in digital spaces – music videos, TikTok duets, Twitter/X comment threads, and hashtags – become living records or a 'queer repertoire' of desire and identity in flux.

From Signification to Solidarity: Music, Fandom, and Bi+ Resistance

Central to understanding these developments is a recognition of cultural production like music as not merely reflective but *constitutive* of social life. The mid-twentieth century sociological turn in musicology, evident in the works of Adorno, Seeger, and Becker, already questioned the autonomy of music by situating it firmly within social, political, and cultural contexts. Such perspectives highlight that musical forms and their en/decoded meanings (Hall, 1982) cannot be disentangled from the sociohistorical conditions that produce and circulate them. In this vein, scholars such as David Brackett (2012; 2016), Karl Miller (2020), and Tom Johnson (2020) demonstrate how genre categories continue to be deeply bound up with racialized and gendered codes, often driven by marketing imperatives and institutional gatekeeping. Maureen Mahon (2020), meanwhile, reveals how Black women in rock have been systematically sidelined by these very categorizations, exposing the racial and sexual biases embedded in mainstream definitions of the genre. Laurie Stras (2011) and Norma Coates (2007) likewise have shown how assumptions about femininity have shaped the reception and participation of women and girls in music, further illustrating that these categories are never neutral, but rather inflected with power relations that determine who gets heard and how.

In a contemporary environment characterized by algorithmically driven curation, user-generated content, and 'platform feminism' (Lawson, 2018), music, visual aesthetics, and social media discourse function as complex signifying systems – akin to cultural codes – capable of articulating, contesting, and reimagining identity and the ways

the music industry has historically coded it. Music and music videos, especially when imbricated with online systems of communication like social media, can generate "affective relations" – the emotional and multisensory connections between individuals – that emphasize how feelings, moods, and embodied experiences create networks of meaning and interaction. These affective and aesthetic dynamics capture the ephemeral, emotional responses that circulate among fans. Music videos, as audiovisual artifacts, bridge the personal and political, engaging fans in co-creative processes that reshape artist-fan relationships by visually and sonically representing artists' identities, narratives, and social contexts. They engage fans not just as passive consumers but as active participants in meaning-making and identity negotiation, fostering co-creative relationships that challenge traditional artist-fan boundaries.

For bi+ identities and marginalized communities, especially within hip hop, music videos serve as crucial sites for visibility, resistance, and cultural expression. They allow artists to perform and reframe their identities in ways that contest dominant narratives and stereotypes. At the same time, fans engage through social media, remix culture, and participatory fandom to co-create meanings and support community building, reshaping artist-fan relationships by decentralizing artistic authority and enabling fans to influence the cultural significance of music videos (Pope, 2016; Zhang, 2024). This co-creative process makes the medium a powerful tool for social and political engagement. In hip hop – a genre historically rooted in resistance and identity politics – music videos amplify these dynamics by showcasing narratives of struggle, empowerment, and intersectional identities, including those of bi+ and other marginalized groups (Jennings, 2020).

The blockbuster video drops that created massive cultural moments by artists like Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Childish Gambino, and Kendrick Lamar defined music video culture in the 2010s,[54] ushering in an era of visually spectacular releases that moved music videos further away from the traditional broadcast model that dominated the 90s and early 2000s (Vernallis, 2019). As we move into the middle of the 2020s, artists have continued to push the limits of technology and storytelling, exploring fresh visual languages and innovative ways to connect with fans through music video. These artists have paved the way for a bold new era where music and visuals merge into boundary-pushing, immersive experiences – continuing the legacy of the artistic medium of music video as a means of redefining how we engage with art and one another.[55] Within this shifting cultural terrain, the artists examined in this thesis – Princess Nokia, Ashnikko, and Snow tha Product – offer vivid portraits of how intersectional bi+ experiences are mediated, performed, and co-constructed alongside their fans.

Princess Nokia's music and persona exemplify what I have called a "hip hop feminist vocabulary"; a 'percussive', genre-defying language rooted in Black feminism that spotlights bi+ and queer women of colour in a genre traditionally dominated by cis-

[54] Beyoncé's "Formation" (2016), Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood" (2015), Childish Gambino's "This Is America" (2018), and Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" (2015) were each widely recognized as cultural events upon release, noted for their high production value, viral impact, and critical acclaim, including Grammy wins and MTV awards. These videos sparked widespread discourse and defined visual trends in 2010s pop culture. See, for example, St. Félix (2018).

[55] Notable examples include interactive videos by Coldplay and The Gorillaz, 360 degree videos, crowd-sourced videos such as "The Johnny Cash Project", and experimentation with the visual spaces of browser windows such as in Arcade Fire's, "The Wilderness Downtown", which allowed viewers to personalize the music videos by superimposing dynamic imagery over any space on Google Maps.

hetero male voices. She accomplishes this by embracing a "messy" feminist praxis to challenge respectability politics, performing a distinctly 'Nuyorican' identity and prying into the very idea of authenticity in the hip hop music genre. Her controversial claims of Afro-Indigenous heritage and use of syncretic spirituality can be both seen and heard throughout her musical catalog, reinforcing the layered complexity of her identity and directly confronting colonial legacies and the diluting effects of commercialism in rap music. As part of a 'politics of refusal', Nokia reframes the conventions of race, gender, and sexuality in her music and public persona – speaking out in numerous interviews, and cultivating a sonic space in which nonconforming, bi+ identity is not just acknowledged but celebrated.

In her alt-rap universe, Ashnikko leverages outrageous imagery, high-voltage music videos, and a candid social-media persona to challenge the music industry's erasure of bi+ and pansexual women. By playfully mining horror, erotic, and Rococo-inspired aesthetics, she magnifies queer desire and resists conventional "normalizing discourses" that reduce or stereotype non-heteronormative identities. In turn, her fans, using TikTok dances, visual "bi aesthetics," hashtag activism, and even in remixing her lyrics, build communal archives of *joyful resistance*, thereby transforming platforms often deemed frivolous into sites of authentic and intersectional feminist protest. Additionally, through parasocial intimacy and bi+ solidarity, Ashnikko and her audience forge a "critical periphery" to mainstream LGBTQ+ advocacy, innovating a genuinely participatory culture where music, queerness, and fourth-wave feminism converge to push back against patriarchal gatekeeping in both pop stardom and digital media spaces.

Snow tha Product brings a mixture of humour and sharp social critique to her feminist approach, infusing her lively stage persona and social media presence with candid discussions of bisexuality, Mexican culture, and artistic self-determination. Having successfully founded her own label, Product Entertainment, Snow now stands as a powerful model of an independent Chicana artist who fuses cultural pride, activist leanings, and irreverent wit in her music. Snow's is a narrative of self-authorized visibility that works to upend the oversexualized, objectified Latina stereotype with unapologetic references to her queerness, while also insisting on showcasing her cultural and familial roots. By openly weaving together the joys, labours, and healing power of humour in her everyday life, Snow expands the representation of Latinx women within popular music and redefines what it means to be both an entertainer and a force for social and cultural enlightenment.

Collectively, these artists' oeuvres push back against assimilationist pressures on queer, racialized, and otherwise nonconforming people, illuminating (as with Princess Nokia and Snow tha Product) how references to ethnic heritage and local traditions can enrich rather than weaken their queer politics. Here, audiences actively participate in unprecedented ways; listeners embrace, remix, and re-circulate these cultural signals through digital fan art, live-stream reactions, and engage in ongoing discussions about representation, thus expanding the reach and impact of intersectional queer feminism in the online sphere. In these contexts, parasocial relationships become sites of political work, making space to articulate queer feminist politics and imagine new terrains of coalition.

Roan's ascendancy thus marks a moment in which the scaffolding of pop stardom is interlaced with networks of interpretation, online dialogues, and evolving frameworks of queer and feminist theory. In this conceptual space, sound itself can generate a shared territory, harkening to the through line of music videos and peripheral factions constituted by fans and audiences as a new "battleground" for fourth wave feminism. Moreover, this dynamic environment allows individuals – especially younger queer audience members – to move beyond covert, coded meaning-making and claim explicit acknowledgment and celebration of their identities. These moves fully realize the early theorization of scholars like Henry Jenkins (2002; 2006), Jonathan Grey (2007), and Paul Booth (2010), who argued that media consumers can be co-creators, collaborators, and critics, ultimately contributing to the evolution and longevity of popular and resistive narratives.

Political scientists also recognize fandom's movement from the private to public spheres. Jonathan Dean (2017) contends that "fandom matters to politics," arguing that fan communities, under certain conditions, can become political agents (Watercutter, 2023).[56] This perspective dovetails with work by Johnson (2013) and Boylorn (2017), who respectively highlight how digital stories are rich research sites for understanding identity shifts and how online spaces serve as affective sites for forging new narratives, solidarities, and emotional connections that challenge existing hierarchies. Consequently, there is an urgent need to broaden feminist inquiry to include more marginalized voices

[56] The "manosphere"—an online network that includes incels, pick-up artists, and other male-focused communities—provides another revealing example of how fandom-like devotion can be redirected toward political ends. In these spaces, shared admiration of certain ideologues or "red-pilled" beliefs often fosters a coherent group identity, shifting individual grievances about men's rights or anti-feminist sentiments into a collective agenda.

and intersecting identities (Beckman, 2014; Browne, Nash, & Hines, 2010). The mediated feminisms at play, which are rooted in queer, culturally distinct feminist frameworks, show how artists navigate appropriation, reclaim narratives, and create "third spaces" (Zavella et al., 2003) of resistance and self-definition.

If culture is "a whole way of life" (Williams, 1958) that can both uphold and contest power, then audience engagement with musical artists and their creative outputs represents a vital research terrain where feminist and queer methodologies become concrete and embodied. By focusing on artists who embrace bisexuality's inherent instability, ambiguity, and fluidity, this thesis recasts bisexuality as a dynamic experience intersecting with other facets of identity, such as gender and race, while opening space to explore realities beyond fixed cultural labels. Music, digital platforms, and fan cultures take center stage, illustrating how fan communities, online networks, and intersectional dialogues foster more inclusive cultural spaces. In these settings, bi+ individuals can speak in their own voices, share their stories, and reshape the narratives that define them; through ongoing engagement, interpretation, and political fieldwork, they enact meaningful inclusion and ensure that bi+ experiences and perspectives become integral to the broader cultural landscape.

Limitations of the Study and Questions for Future Research

This thesis is largely oriented around Western perspectives and audiovisual media, leaving aside the richer insights that might arise from more global, multisensory approaches. Such an emphasis narrows the field of inquiry necessary for a focused thesis but overlooks how musical expression varies across non-Western contexts – as my

chapter on Snow the Product suggests. Indeed, Latin American music is experiencing an unprecedented boom in English-speaking North America, where a new wave of artists exploring their own visual language in music video has cut through,[57] while Bollywood music videos see hundreds of millions of views online, and the global rise of K-Pop music videos breaking through to American audiences raises questions about how queer and bi+ identities might be signaled or obscured in East Asian industries. Below, I sketch how the theoretical insights/interpretive frameworks could be brought into fruitful conversation with bi+ representation in the contexts of K-Pop, music industries in the global south, and "transvestigations" in the public sphere.

K-Pop, Fan Service, and the Politics of Queer Subtext

The international rise of K-Pop raises important questions about how global entertainment infrastructures intersect with localized gender norms. Given that South Korea has a complex relationship to LGBTQ+ rights – by limited legal protections (Bong, 2008) and entrenched social stigma (Kim et al., 2023) – the K-Pop industry offers a rich setting in which queerness may be simultaneously coded, performed, downplayed, or censored. Indeed, the legal, social, and corporate constraints surrounding Korean pop music often render certain forms of queerness more profitable, and therefore safer, than others. Groups like BLACKPINK, for instance, do not outwardly identify as queer, yet fans worldwide engage in "shipping" or "pairing" specific members, reading homoerotic

[57] Karol G's rise in the North American mainstream has been accompanied by a strong visual sensibility in music videos like "Tusa" (2019) and "Bichota" (2021), which blend reggaeton aesthetics with bold, stylized visuals that emphasize feminine power and emotional complexity. See Cobo, 2023.

undertones into their interactions. These fan-generated narratives – elaborated through fan fiction, memes, and social media edits – are often something the band itself tacitly encourages (Zhao, 2021: 1034). Moreover, language barriers raise additional questions about how queer-friendly messages are transmitted or diluted once translations and subtitles become essential for global audiences.

In many ways, the fan-driven practices surrounding Ashnikko's work – particularly her use of social media–based worldbuilding, hashtag activism, and parasocial intimacy – provide a useful lens for examining K-Pop fandom's own complex relationship with queer and bi+ representation. As seen in Ashnikko's fandom, young LGBTQ+ audiences co-create "critical peripheries" around an artist's music and celebrity persona, forging spaces of resistance through dance challenges, fan fiction, and creative appropriations of an artist's visuals. Similarly, K-Pop fans deploy collaborative creativity to articulate queer subtext that the industry's gatekeepers may try to tone down or ignore. Future exploration of K-Pop fan practices could thus more clearly show how audiences navigate both cultural and corporate pressures to celebrate (or quietly embed) queerness within a rapidly globalizing entertainment sphere.

The expansion of feminist and sexuality studies would also do well to consider how performance arts, dance traditions, and live event practices also shape the multi-layered nature of queer and bi+ representation. K-pop icons, for example, utilize dance and interactive audience participation as powerful mediums of community-building and coded communication, forging alternative languages of desire and selfhood (Oh, 2022). BTS, often credited with spearheading K-Pop's monumental global expansion, are known

for their playful physical affection, intimate gestures, and adoption of "traditionally feminine codes" (ibid, 94) that can be interpreted by some fans as queer-coded interactions. While these gestures are not unequivocally intended to declare queerness, they draw attention to how the K-Pop industry's cultivation of "soft masculinity" (Jung, 2011) may inadvertently or subtly open imaginative spaces for fans to read LGBTQ+ possibilities into the group's performances.

BTS's fan base, known as ARMY, has also demonstrated a remarkable capacity for collective mobilization, sometimes manifesting in high-profile political interventions. One illustrative event took place in June 2020, when large numbers of BTS fans (often in collaboration with K-pop fandom more broadly) reportedly reserved blocks of free tickets for a campaign rally by then-President Donald Trump in Tulsa, Oklahoma – seats that ultimately went unused, leaving swaths of the arena conspicuously empty (Lorenz et al., 2020). Although it was not clear exactly how many seats were "claimed" by ARMY versus other online groups, the incident nonetheless drew widespread media attention as an example of how digital fan communities can strategically leverage viral content, collective organizing, and platform affordances to intervene in mainstream political arenas.

While the K-pop industry profits from carefully curated images and "fan service," fans who publicly "ship" same-sex idols can be understood as pushing back against that control. This exhibits a type of subversion – not necessarily in a grand political sense, but as an everyday, grassroots reworking of the stories fans are "officially" told about these groups. Future research could probe several dimensions of these fan-driven activities: do

fandom-based campaigns, such as those aimed at "trolling" major political actors in the United States, translate into more long-term political engagement among participants? And, might these high-profile acts of fan activism risk commodification by entertainment agencies, who may see strategic value in encouraging or co-opting activist impulses? By examining such questions, scholars can deepen our understanding of the interplay between digital fandom, celebrity culture, and the evolving landscape of political protest.

Navigating Censorship and Corporate Constraints in Non-Western Pop Markets

Just as the previous chapter has approached Snow's music video meanings as layered texts that communicate across cultural, linguistic, and political registers, this same analytical lens can be extended to fans, both of Snow and of other artists, who participate in meaning-making through their own creative and interpretive practices. Snow tha Product's model of queer, bilingual, and culturally unapologetic self-expression highlights the fertile ground that fan-artist relationships can occupy as sites of both entertainment and activism. The pervasive influence of corporate control, censorship laws, state regulation, and platform-specific guidelines in various parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East further broadens that lens, prompting us to examine how similar fan-driven politics could unfold – or be curtailed – under far more restrictive circumstances. While Snow's success demonstrates the transformative power of hip hop and social media when artists have relative freedom to define their public personas, her emphasis on bilingual wordplay, boundary-pushing humour, and community engagement also provides a roadmap for how musicians (and fans) in censored or criminalized contexts might still

carve out spaces of solidarity and resistance, even if they must resort to far more covert tactics and private channels.

Future scholarship could probe the extent to which fan-driven politics flourish under restrictive conditions, where open advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights may be criminalized or socially stigmatized. In these contexts, artists often must navigate not only industrial gatekeepers – record labels, distributors, and streaming platforms – but also legal and religious authorities that may tightly regulate public discourse on gender and sexuality (Moussawi, 2022). Consequently, content deemed too explicit or overtly aligned with LGBTQ+ advocacy can be blocked, suppressed, or penalized, creating a precarious environment for musicians seeking to challenge heteronormative social codes (El-Tayeb, 2012; Moussawi, 2022).

Such conditions also raise critical questions about fan-driven politics in restrictive settings where open support for LGBTQ+ identities is socially stigmatized, if not legally sanctioned. For instance, scholars might seek to interrogate how fans and artists use evasive tactics that range from coded language in lyrics to private online discussion forums to maintain solidarity under the watchful eye of state apparatuses or media conglomerates with partisan political leanings. Additionally, the role of social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp/Telegram (in regions where they are not blocked) becomes pivotal for mobilizing fans, circulating information, and forging a sense of collective empowerment (Kermani & Hooman, 2024). Yet these very platforms often have their own community guidelines and algorithms that may further restrict queer

expression, revealing a double bind in which corporate policing and state censorship reinforce one another (Amar, 2013; Brown, 2019).

Gatekeeping Femininity: Online 'Transvestigations' and the Policing of Gender

Princess Nokia's dynamic presentation of gender, sexuality, and cultural heritage illustrates the power of "messy feminism" as a tool for questioning socially enforced binaries. Her willingness to move between tomboy, femme, and anything in between showcases a refusal to remain fixed in any singular category of "authentic" womanhood. Yet for bi+ women artists more broadly, a distinctly feminine presentation can be a double-edged sword: it raises questions of "realness" or "respectability," but it may also deflect some of the harsher anti-trans attacks often seen online (GLAAD, 2024). These attacks have become increasingly visible in recent years, especially on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok, where creators such as Dylan Mulvaney have faced a torrent of transphobic harassment, including misgendering, accusations of "deception," and coordinated campaigns to delegitimize their presence in brand partnerships (Global News, 2023). Femme-presenting artists may escape some of this vitriol by conforming—visually, if not ideologically—to mainstream gender expectations. However, this protective veneer is tenuous; femme presentation can invite its own set of risks, including hypersexualization, aesthetic scrutiny, and the undermining of an artist's gender or sexual fluidity. The precarious visibility of bi+ femme artists thus operates within a landscape where respectability and authenticity are continually policed from multiple directions.

Princess Nokia's embodiment of a "bi+ worldview" foreshadows the broader ideological battles how fluid, liminal, and ambiguous identities challenge a deep cultural

drive to classify individuals as either "real" or "imitation" women—an impulse on full display in the "transvestigation" conspiracies once aimed at celebrities like Ciara and Lady Gaga. Such obsessions reveal a desire to affirm womanhood as an unassailable biological truth, labeling perceived deviations as fraudulent or invasive. The same anxieties surface in women's sports, where figures like Imane Khelif and Barbra Banda face combative scrutiny from right-wing pundits and even self-described defenders of "women's rights," who raise alarm over who "qualifies" for these traditionally gendered arenas (Habbari & Beachem, 2024; Monteil, 2025). This investment in authenticating or invalidating others' gender status echoes the social policing of sexual orientation, where hostility toward trans bodies mirrors – and often amplifies – the hostility toward bi+ ambiguity.

Future research in this area should thus continue to examine the digital environments that nurture "transvestigation" conspiracies, including the YouTube channels, forums, and social media groups devoted to "outing" allegedly deceptive celebrities. These understudied ecosystems reveal the mechanics of algorithmic amplification while exposing how loosely organized (though often far-right leaning) communities form around transphobic – if not outright hateful – claims. By analyzing these discussion threads, researchers can uncover how recommendation systems drive the spread and perceived legitimacy of trans-exclusionary rhetoric, ultimately informing much-needed updates to content moderation policies.

Concurrently, feminist theorists might investigate how mainstream or pop-feminist discourses are being co-opted to justify trans-exclusion, specifically in the realms

of entertainment and sports. Here, critical scrutiny of rhetorical strategies, such as invoking "women's safety", could illustrate how alliances between cis and trans women fracture under the perceived threat of destabilized gender boundaries. Mapping these positions might show how trans-exclusionary views gain traction and how more inclusive feminist communities can push back.

This interplay of femininity, authenticity, and transphobia reveals a broader cultural compulsion: the urge to rigidly demarcate boundaries of both gender and sexuality. Bisexual and transgender theories challenge these rigid taxonomies, illustrating how normative binaries (i.e. heterosexual/homosexual, cis/trans, feminine/masculine) reinforce each other and create the conditions under which transphobic rhetoric flourishes. Traditional conceptions of femininity, in particular, serve as gatekeepers, determining who "qualifies" as a woman just as entrenched notions of sexual orientation dictate who is considered "properly" heterosexual or homosexual. By refusing to abide by these binaries, one destabilizes the social mechanisms that rely on these firm divisions between "real" and "imitation" women. Under such a system, ambiguity is cast as a threat, and the perpetual state of being "never gay enough" or "never straight enough" makes known bisexual theory's foundational challenge to stable identity categories. This conceptual liminality makes us, in essence, "always queer," regardless of our partners' genders.

Final Words

Even in the face of these fault lines within online feminism, the studies that constitute this thesis affirm the crucial function of popular culture as an evolving

mechanism for contesting erasure, complicating identity categories, and forging new modes of togetherness and resistance. I have aimed to demonstrate through these case studies how *joyful resistance* can act as a transformative force in contemporary culture, not only to affirm queer and bi+ empowerment, but as a testament to the cultural and political feminist work accomplished by artists and fans working in tandem. Most importantly it upholds that community is resistance, self-expression is resistance, and *living joyfully is resistance*. In these performances, activism transcends the grim binaries of success or failure, "real" or "fake", and becomes an ongoing practice of hopeful worldmaking. Multisensory affectations emerge as vital modalities through which communities articulate their truths, sustain each other, and push against oppressive norms.

While Ashnikko, Princess Nokia, and Snow tha Product's music is perhaps too challenging to surface into the mainstream the way Chappel Roan's has, their substantial internet popularity unfolds within a broader ecosystem where audiences have learned to read signs such as colours, hashtags, textual messages, vocal and visual aesthetics and performance styles and to interpret them through lenses shaped by intuitive, lived understandings of intersectionality and queer phenomenology. They also reflect a persistent need for interpretive labour, communal sense-making, and coalition-building among audiences who refuse to accept erasure. In increasingly divided times, we must recognize that activism does not always announce itself through partisan politics, marches or debates; it can just as powerfully dance on a stage, sing into a microphone, or flash across a smartphone screen and be vitally effective in conveying a message to those willing to hear it. Chappell Roan, along with Princess Nokia, Ashnikko, and Snow tha

Product, demonstrate that the transformative potential of music and digital platforms lies not in offering a single truth or "universal language", but in furnishing a dynamic, participatory field where identities can be reimagined, alliances forged, and cultural memories reshaped. In this process, bi+ visibility moves beyond mere recognition to become a lived, evolving force capable of inspiring and sustaining *joyful resistance* in increasingly precarious times.

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Spanish Language Translations

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