

## Hip Hop Feminism Is Not What You Think It Is – And That’s A Good Thing

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### Abstract

*Hip hop is one of the most popular and prevalent music genres in the modern world. While hip hop used to be primarily male-dominated in its origins, powerful femme (distinctively feminine nature) artists are popping up into the limelight to share their views on feminism, preach their love for the femme sexuality, or just spit bars and have fun. This sect of feminism was primarily constructed by Joan Morgan, a young woman of color who grew up appreciating hip hop culture. Hip hop feminism lacks an anti-patriarchal motive, which is defining feminism through the idea of overtaking and reconstructing the currently male-favoring society. This detail can cause frustration and confusion when comparing this sect to mainstream feminism and the rhetoric that they use, which sometimes relies heavily on antipatriarchal subjects. We then go to explore how listening to hip hop can make an emergency manager more competent in the field of planning. Common tropes in hip hop often describe coming from urban or suburban areas that are less than ideal to live in, whether it be economically unwell, increasingly violent, or places where drug abuse seems to be everywhere one looks. Before cities or suburban areas can be ready to be resilient during times of emergencies, they must be healthy and thriving beforehand. Could listening to the stories in hip hop be a key to listening to the needs of people who live in disaster unready areas? Emergency management can be improved drastically if we learn and appreciate cultures that are different from one’s own, especially when these cultures may be economically, geographically, and socially different than the ones we are comfortable with. Only then can emergency managers be competent in planning for communities unlike ones they are familiar with.*

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When I first read Joan Morgan’s article on hip hop feminism, I reacted how most white women with a broad idea of feminism might. I thought to myself, “I do not understand, and I do not agree with this.” With further research and education, however, I learned that this sect of feminism is one of the most important and needed versions for all young women today,

regardless of race. Morgan’s article brings lesser-known points of view into the feminist spotlight. She brings out the ideas of women who enjoy and embrace their sexuality, and do not have the time or privilege to worry over typical patriarchal struggles.

The taboos of the past are slowly pushing through the societal mesh to

become normal, important, and educational conversations. Whether it be from powerful sex educators, or from femme hip hop idols preaching their love for sex, society has been getting an ear full. The powerful boom of third-wave feminism in the mid 90s was where sex positive, female fronted hip hop introduced itself to change the rap game entirely. With iconic girl duo Salt-N-Pepa preaching the oddities of the hypocritical standards set on sex conversation, stating in their song “Let’s Talk About Sex:”

“Yo, Pep, I don't think they're gonna play this on the radio  
And why not? Everybody has sex I mean,  
everybody should be makin' love.  
Come on, how many guys you know make love?”

Lil Kim embraces her love for being sexually intimate with playful yet powerful lyrics such as ‘Cause he'll be back tonight, and then the next night, and then the next night because the sex tight” presented in the song “Wanna Lick.”

It might seem silly that these lyrics can be praised in a scholarly environment, but these women are breaking boundaries. Long past are the days where the only sexual lyrics one would hear would be phallic references. In a world where femme sexuality has been locked down in an old chest with the key thrown away, the lock has been picked by none other than the people who own the treasure in the first place.

The founding mother of hip hop feminism, Joan Morgan jokes in her book, *When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost*, that some of her friends thought that her idea of hip hop feminism was like reinventing the wheel. (Morgan 1999) Morgan does not comply with anti-patriarchal struggle, a typical trope of mainstream feminism.

Morgan believes the feminism power is not found by tearing down the patriarchy, but by finding power and recognizing ability in one’s self. Morgan says, “I wanted a feminism that would allow me to explore who we are as women—not victims.” (Morgan, 1999, 416) It is understandable that this would cause some confusion to folks who follow and believe in modern third-wave feminism. Morgan even goes as far to say “can you be a good feminist and admit out loud that there are things you kinda dig about the patriarchy?” (Morgan, 1999, 416) such as some sexual dominance clichés and other common tropes of the modern day heterosexual man and woman relationship.

“Here I go, here I go, here I go again. Girls, what's my weakness? Men!” to  
“If I want to take a guy home with me tonight, it’s none of your business  
and she want to be a freak and sell it on the weekend, it’s none of your business.  
Now you shouldn't even get into who I'm givin' skins to. It’s none of your business.  
So don't try to change my mind, I'll tell you one more time. It’s none of your business.”

Salt-n-Pepa preach their ideals on hip hop feminism through their lyrics about the simplicities of femme sexuality. A love for sex is an almost universal experience, not dichotomous to binary gender. Salt-n-Pepa also highlights that femme sexuality, whether it be acts of physical sex or simply just information about what sexual activities, can only be accessed with consent. Otherwise, it is none of your business. While these points are all crucial to the foundations of hip hop feminism, is it not only about embracing sexuality (Addawoo 2017).

Hip hop feminism also finds one of its pillars in shedding the victim image.

While it is absolutely correct that women have been oppressed through history, hip hop feminism is looking to move forward from the male-narrative entirely. A message of womanly power shrouds this movement, and none of it is motivated by an anti-patriarchal struggle. This sect of feminism is more focused on the power of women from within the femme gender spectrum, not boosting off of a wall-tearing motif.

In the recent history of large-scale American disaster recovery, it has not been unclear that vulnerable populations, such as those in poverty and minorities, get the short end of the stick. After the poor response to minority needs during Hurricane Katrina, Hip Hop artist Kanye West, famously said “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” Hurricane Maria had nearly wiped out Puerto Rico in the very not so distant past, with recovery efforts being at best less than ideal. (Maxwell, 2018) What does hip hop have to do with any of this? Well, the emergency management cycle is an ongoing organic being. Constant maintenance and attention is needed to have competent emergency plans. To keep a community safe and resilient during times of disaster, a community must first be healthy, fruitful, and fair to all who live in it. Hip hop music is a channel in which the unheard can express their viewpoints and ideals about their lifestyle and their community when the local governments are not listening. The question now is, is the rest of the world listening? The song “HELL YOU TALMBOUT” by Janelle Monae featuring many other artists talks about the police brutality affecting people of color all over America. Is a community ready for disaster if the local police, a source of the quickest emergency response in said community, are not treating the black folks who live there fairly?

Specifically, dealing with hip hop feminism, sexual violence increases due to rises in vulnerability during times of disaster. (Perry and Lindell, 2007) In a world where female sexuality is hush-hush to the mainstream world, are we ready to combat the potential sexual violence in times of disaster if we still think that women are not sexual creatures? This ignorance leads the way for terrible repercussions in times where the most vulnerable are at risk for sexual violence. Some femme people may be afraid to come forward about being sexually assaulted, or some men may be disregarded when coming forward about them being sexually assaulted because of the misconception that women do not have the potential to rape. The conversation of female sexuality and the power to say no to men and the option of physically reprimanding people who attempt to sexually assault women is spoken through the song “Ain’t Nuthin’ But A She Thing” by Salt-N-Pepa:

“We've come a long way, and, baby, that's a fact  
 Let's keep moving forward, girls, never look back  
 Fight for your rights, stand up and be heard  
 You're just as good as any man, believe that, word”

A solid understanding of the messages portrayed in hip hop can be a gateway into understanding the needs of certain communities who are usually ignored by mass media. Artists rapping about the struggles of their community can be projected through the easily accessible internet and into the ears of emergency managers and planners who need to understand that not every community is a suburban wonderland or fruitful and thriving city. Poverty, drug addiction, sexual violence and wide scale gang recruitment is a problem that needs to be addressed and tended to before a city or any populated area

can genuinely say they believe they are disaster resilient. Listening to hip hop and appreciating the culture, to an emergency manager whom is unfamiliar with said culture, is a powerful tool in understanding the needs and wants of communities one may not be familiar with. A competent emergency manager should assess all their resources, including their local hip hop artists.

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