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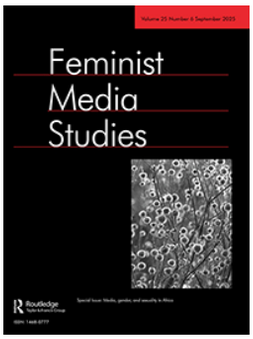

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Stacks and sirens: construction of race, femininity, and feminist agency in two Finnish rap music videos

Inka Rantakallio

Musicology, Department of Philosophy, History and Art, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

ABSTRACT

Music videos have had a significant role in defining rap music's aesthetics and narratives and depicting non-male rappers' agency. This article presents a close reading of two music videos released in 2023: "10x" by Black rappers Yeboyah and Slani, and "Märkää" (Wet) by white rap duo Matriarkaatti (Matriarchy). The article analyzes how the two videos portray gender, sexuality, and race, and argues that the videos construct feminist agency through raced femininity, solidarity, and pleasure. Theoretically, the article draws on Black feminist and hip hop feminist theory, gender and queer studies, and critical whiteness studies. The article expands understanding about the shifting and contextual meaning of gender, race, and feminism in culture and society.

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Introduction: gender and race in rap music

Hip hop has always been a highly visual, flamboyant culture (Tricia Rose 1994), and music videos have had a significant role in defining rap's aesthetics and narratives (e.g., Maeve Sterbenz 2017; Zachary Wallmark 2022; Elina Westinen 2017). Although rap is generally considered to be a male-dominated, hypermasculine genre (Michael P Jeffries 2011), rap songs and videos have a long legacy of depicting women's sexual agency (Aisha Durham 2012; Rana A Emerson 2002, Aria Halliday and Ashley Payne 2020; Robin Roberts 1991), as demonstrated by the work of Salt'n'Pepa, Lil' Kim, Missy Elliott, Nicki Minaj, and Megan Thee Stallion, among others. These trailblazing rappers have challenged hip hop's "near compulsory heterosexual culture [where] women are routinely reduced to conquests and objects" (Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting 2007, 14).[1] Whereas earlier generations of Black US women rappers participated in subversive gender politics through their creative work, many were reluctant to don the label "feminist" due to mainstream feminism's perceived whiteness, anti-Blackness, or assumed antagonism towards men (Rose 1994, 176–178; Sharpley-Whiting 2007, 153). In the 2020s, however, mainstream artists such as Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion have embraced and redefined feminism as a feminine, sex positive, assertive, political, and intellectual[2] project that challenges respectability politics

CONTACT Inka Rantakallio inka.rantakallio@helsinki.fi Musicology, Department of Philosophy, History and Art, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

(Aaryn L Green, Maretta Darnell McDonald, Veronica A Newton, Candice C Robinson and Shantee Rosado 2024; Ashley N Payne and Aria S Halliday 2023; Wallmark 2022).

This article focuses on the Finnish context and openly feminist and feminine rap made by non-male artists. Developed in the 1980s, the Finnish rap scene has until recently been dominated by middle-class white men (Jasmine Kelekay 2019, 389; Mervi Tervo 2014). During the 2010s, many new artists of color, women, and non-binary artists have emerged (Kelekay 2019; Inka Rantakallio 2025; Westinen 2017). BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) artists have utilized rap to negotiate racialized identities and challenge the normatively white Finnish culture and ideas of Finnishness (Kelekay 2019; Westinen 2017). Further, Finnish women rappers have challenged the local rap scene's male norm and sexism through artistic collaboration and networks (Rantakallio 2025).

Hip hop originated in New York City in the 1970s as a subculture of graffiti, DJing, rapping, and breaking amongst predominantly Black and Latino working-class youth (Rose 1994). Today, hip hop has transcultural and overlapping yet distinctly local manifestations around the world (Jaspal Naveel Singh and Quentin Williams 2023). Yet, hip hop and rap music are often considered to represent primarily (although not exclusively) Black people and Black lived experience (Mickey Hess 2005; Jeffries 2011). In the US, white rappers have needed strategies for asserting credibility and authenticity in the rap genre (Hess 2005; Tara Morrissey 2014; Melvin L Williams 2017). In comparison to white US rappers, who have usually addressed their whiteness in their music (Hess 2005), white Finnish rappers have typically not done so because of the local rap scene's and Finnish society's normative whiteness (Rantakallio 2025). White women are marginally present in global hip hop culture, but the majority of Finnish women rappers are white; thus, their racial positionality is normative and privileged in both society and rap.

This article examines the shifting and contextual representations of gender, race, whiteness, and feminism in hip hop culture and rap music by conducting a close reading of two music videos by Finnish rappers released in 2023: "10x" by Yeboyah featuring Slani, and "Märkää" (Wet) by the rap duo Matriarkaatti (Adikia and Mon-Sala).[3] Yeboyah and Slani are Black, and Matriarkaatti rappers Adikia and Mon-Sala are white.[4] I explore how the videos construct gender, sexuality, race, and feminist agency in different ways, drawing on Black feminist theory and hip hop feminist theory for analyzing the construction of Black feminine agency in "10x," and on gender and critical whiteness studies for analyzing the construction of white femininity and sexuality in "Märkää." Agency in feminist theory is considered as situated, embodied, and relational (Lois McNay 2016, 41). Using the terms "feminine" and "feminist agency," I denote how the Finnish rappers articulate solidarity, pleasure, being assertive and in control, and embody raced femininity in their videos. I pay attention to questions of cultural adaptation and appropriation in Finnish rap music and argue that the videos construct feminist agency but also testify to the evolving and complex glocalized (i.e., entangled, simultaneously global and local) meaning of race and gender in hip hop.[5]

Reading rap music videos through the lenses of Black feminism, gender studies, and critical whiteness studies

My close reading is informed by previous research on music videos and audiovisual aesthetics in popular music and rap (e.g., Lori Burns and Stan Hawkins 2019; Durham

2012; Emerson 2002; Diane Railton and Paul Watson 2011; Roberts 1991; Sterbenz 2017; Carol Vernallis 2019), i.e., "the ways in which sound, image, and lyrics can be placed in relation" (Vernallis 2019, 274). The term "close reading" is used to describe interpretative, contextualized cultural analysis through specific analytical lenses to understand how the object of study constructs meaning (Burns and Stan 2019; Sterbenz 2017; Vernallis 2019). Music videos are a rich topic, as testified "by the increasing number of videos, studios, and directors on the one hand, and by the continuously expanding field of music video scholarship on the other." (Tomáš Jirsa and Mathias Korsgaard 2019, 112.) Non-US rap music videos have tended to feature both local specificities and US American stylistic influences (Tervo 2014, 173–175). Joel Rubin (2016, 77) argues that rap music and rap videos have entered a more fluid, post-regional phase in the age of internet and mobile media, yet still remain important sites for identity articulations. Although rap music videos often replicate recurrent hip hop culture tropes, the genre of the song does not dictate the music video's formal or aesthetic features (Railton and Watson 2011, 45–46). These tendencies are evident also in the two rap videos analyzed below.

My first analytical lens is Black feminist (Patricia Hill Collins 2002, 2004; bell hooks 1995) and hip hop feminist theory, particularly intersectionality. Intersectionality theory draws attention to the differential treatment and differing experiences of people in society and how identities are shaped by the intersecting dimensions of race, class, sexuality, and ability among others (e.g., Kimberlé Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2002). Hip hop feminism, first coined by Joan Morgan (1999), is inspired by generations of Black feminist thinkers, and feminist hip hop studies now encompass scholars across disciplines and continents. Hip hop feminists have centered the voices and agency of women and non-binary people of color and offered critical, intersectional analyses of societal power structures and of hip hop's pleasurable, empowering, but also problematic traits, such as sexism and misogyny (e.g., Brittney C Cooper, Susana M Morris, and Robin M Boylorn 2017; Aria S Halliday and Ashley N Payne 2020; Bettina L Love 2011; Gwendolyn Pough 2004; Gwendolyn Pough, Elaine Richardson and Aisha Durham 2007). Recently, hip hop feminist theory has expanded towards ratchet feminism (Cooper et al. 2017; Halliday and Payne 2020) and trap feminism which are sex positive and explicitly "refute classist, white, male, and/or patriarchal expectations of how Black women should behave, speak, and act" (Green et al. 2024, 18).

As my second analytical lens, I use gender studies' and queer studies' views of gender as fluid and performative (e.g., Judith Butler 1990; Laura Harris and Elizabeth Crocker 1997). This article focuses on the construction of femininity rather than female gender identity, as one of the artists under focus, Yeboyah, is non-binary and openly queer. Femininity can be defined as a discursive process of becoming that is mediated through cultural texts (Butler 1990; Tiina Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg Marinella and Foka Anna 2015; Beverly Skeggs 1997, 98). The construction (and analysis) of femininities is heavily focused on women's bodies, perceived beauty, and race (Collins 2004, 194). Analysis of (queer) femme bodies has shed further light on how femininity is socially and culturally coded and holds subversive potential (e.g., Harris and Crocker 1997). Skeggs (1997, 98) notes that "[b]eing, becoming, practicing and doing femininity" varies among (Western) women who differ in terms of, for example, class, race, age, and nation. The intersecting identities form a hierarchy where whiteness is normative and white femininity hegemonic (Collins 2004, 193). An audiovisual product, such as a music video, can provide a rich example for

analyzing how femininity, and through it, gender and race, are culturally constructed and negotiated, how the videos participate in "histories of representation" (Railton and Watson 2011, 90).

My third analytical lens is critical race and whiteness studies. Scholars have highlighted the often unmarked and unnamed character of whiteness as a racial standpoint and societal power structure, and how these traits help whiteness maintain dominance (Collins 2004, 96–97; Richard Dyer 1997; Ruth Frankenberg 1993). Further, scholars have called for localized and contextualized analyses of whiteness instead of broad generalizations (Marcus Bell 2021). Josephine Hoegaerts, Elizabeth Peterson, Tuire Liimatainen and Laura Hekanaho (2022, 6) argue that although Finnishness and whiteness are not interchangeable, they have often been constructed as such. This societal normativity of whiteness and myth of a homogeneously white Finland have sustained ideas of white racial superiority, and contributed to the racist discrimination of Black, Indigenous, and people of color in Finnish society (Hoegaerts et al. 2022, 4–6; Suvi Keskinen 2019, 175–178) and to ignorance and silence concerning race and racism in the Finnish rap scene (Rantakallio 2025, 25).

Researchers in humanities and social sciences often discuss their positionality as part of their research ethics. Close reading as a method is also affected by the situatedness of the observer (Sterbenz 2017). In addition to being a white female scholar, I have worked as a DJ in the Finnish hip hop scene since 2018, including with Yeboyah and the Matriarkaatti rap duo whose music videos are under analysis in this article. Working together as non-male performers in the male-dominated Finnish rap culture has shaped my (feminist) knowledge production and sparked my interest in the work of these artists.

"10x:" Black solidarity and getting money

The joint single "10x" (2023) by Finnish rappers Yeboyah and Slani was produced by Grammy nominated Finnish producer Danitello (Daniel Okas). The video is Yeboyah's directorial debut. Yeboyah has released music since 2017 and is currently an independent artist/DJ; they were signed to Sony at the time of this video's release. Their style ranges from trap to afrobeats. Slani released her debut single "Stacks" in 2021 and is signed to Def Jam Finland under Universal Music. She draws from US subgenres of rap such as trap and New Orleans bounce, and from influential Black women rappers such as Lil' Kim.

The "10x" video's cast consists of Black people and other people of color who count dollar bills, relax on couches, and dance joyfully. Several are models and dancers, exuding Black beauty and coolness[6] through clothes, hairstyles (braids, afros, curls, silk press), and accessories (designer sunglasses, hoops, doo rags). Visually, Blackness is constructed as a range of styles, skin tones, and expressions, signifying Black agency and strength (Emerson 2002, 125). The video takes place in three locations in Helsinki: an apartment, a bar/restaurant, and the harbor. In the apartment, the focus is on counting, organizing, and displaying money. The bar/restaurant is mainly used for leisure, and people are either sitting at the bar counter or dancing in a cypher. The harbor scenes show the two rappers in a vintage car.

Black joy and love are expressed throughout the video. Red, heart-shaped lollipops are manufactured, shared, and consumed, and a green, pulsating heart-animation starts the video and ends the song prior to the coda, featuring these heart-shaped lollipops

Figure 1. The heart-shaped animation with lollipops in the vintage television, suggesting that the video portrays Black (self-)love (0:04). Screenshot from YouTube, courtesy of Yeboyah.

(Figure 1). During the intro of the video, the animation appears on a vintage CRT television, and credits Abenayo and Babeton for production and Yeboyah for directing.

"10x" follows a verse-chorus form, where each chorus is preceded by a prechorus, and the song ends in a coda. Yeboyah and Slani each have one verse and pre-chorus and go back and forth line for line in the coda. The song intro introduces an acoustic, latin style guitar melody which is repeated four times, and the melody recurs throughout the song. Transition from the intro to the first verse occurs through the guitar melody dropping out.[7] During the verses, the uptempo beat (102 bpm) consists of a simple bass line, a snare and kick drum, and at times accelerating hi-hats. The pre-chorus gains more force from chromatic piano accents, and in the chorus, the guitar melody and piano accents are stacked on top of each other, reinforcing the rhythmic accents of the rapping. During the transition from pre-chorus to chorus, and from chorus to verse, one bar of steady four-on-the-floor kicks occurs. In the pre-chorus, a twerk clap in the last four bars further accentuates the transition. Finally, the beat changes in the coda, and the song ends with a loud sub-bass, extending the steady 8-bar structure of the song by an additional bar to accommodate the booming finish.

The rappers mix Finnish and English comfortably throughout the song, alternating between starting deliberately off beat and on beat in their respective verses. Yeboyah starts the first verse with a soft voice, which, as they mention in the song, is "raspy," narrating how their haters produce "bank," i.e., money for them. In the video, Yeboyah counts money on the floor and three Black feminine-presenting individuals are half sitting, half lying on two sofas—one teal blue, the other rusty orange—looking unbothered and almost bored. One is talking on a vintage portable phone, with a pile of money in the other hand, while another is fanning herself with money. The daylight emanating from between thin curtains on the large windows, together with the sofas and brown furniture, create a 1970s vibe.

In the pre-chorus, Yeboyah and Slani describe their longstanding friendship and alliance, that they are Black (calling themselves "shea butter baby" [sic], alluding to their melanated skin), and that they mean business. Yeboyah raps that they "go way back" with Slani; in my interview (Yeboyah, pers. comm. April 20 2022), Yeboyah mentioned that they know Slani from adolescence. The song highlights the significance of friendships and

relationships for the mental well-being of Black women and Black non-binary people (see Collins 2002, 104); collaboration and sisterhood have been significant and recurring themes in music videos by Black women (Emerson 2002). At the same time, the artists rap that they are here to get bread, i.e., earn money.

Occasionally referred to as "green," money is the main motif in the video and a recurring trope in rap music. Yeboyah's green clothing appears to underscore this. At the beginning of the video, Yeboyah wears a sleeveless light green and dark blue leotard, light green gloves, and black knee-high platform boots. Their hair is in bantu knots, and singular braids with fluffy ends hang from some of the knots (Figure 2). Later, Yeboyah is dressed more formally in a business-style power suit consisting of a light green pencil skirt and blazer (see Figure 6). When wearing this outfit, their long hair is in a simple half-open high ponytail. Yeboyah raps during the pre-chorus, "booty the only thing I throw back" (booty ainoo mitä takas heitän) and shakes their behind in the video (at 1:47). The combination of the two clothing styles establishes Yeboyah as a feminine Black person who is a jack of all trades, owning their sexuality, taking care of business, making money, and moving forward in life even when they must work ten times harder than others due to racial and gender discrimination (see Figure 6).

Slani wears a blazer with straight pants, both light blue; she soon moves aside the jacket and reveals a red bikini top and curvaceous torso (Figure 3). By adjusting the blazer herself, she is signaling that she is in control of her own body. She claims power through her sexuality while demanding "where's the money at" (mis ne massit on). A bit later, she wears a long, pimp-style golden-orange velvet coat with a pink fur lining while squatting on a table and looking sideways into the camera, a gesture to Black women rappers such as Lil' Kim and Megan Thee Stallion who perform similar moves in music videos and demonstratively own their sexuality. Through her attire and lyrics, she assumes the control that characterizes a pimp or a hustler (see Payne and Halliday 2023, 528), typical especially in masculine gangsta rap: Slani boasts how it only takes "twenty-four hours and I double it, couple of hours and I'll spend it" (kakskyt neljä tuntii ja mä tuplaan sen, pari tuntii ja mä spendaan sen). During these lines, she crosses her arms to form the letter x, the symbol of multiplication, and rubs her fingers together to visualize the spending. Slani claims to "speak money" by listing different currencies, and her first four bars end in the clink of a cash register. Eithne Quinn (2000, 116) discusses the significance of (male)

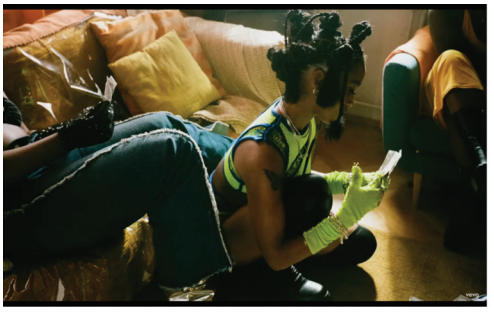

Figure 2 and 3. Yeboyah kneeled on the floor counting money, with a green leotard, gloves, and bantu knots (0:23). Slani in a red and light blue outfit next to a table with piles and rolls of cash (1:19). Screenshots from YouTube, courtesy of Yeboyah.

gangsta rappers' "becoming stylish, sexual hustlers" through adopting pimp imagery, such as fur coats (ibid. 131), for creating compelling narratives and personas in their songs. Whereas many female gangsta rappers, in turn, adopt the character of a materialist "hoe" (Quinn 2000, 116; cf. Diana Khong 2020), Slani incorporates aspects of both roles into her performance.

In capitalist societies, money rules everything. Money, as opposed to generational inherited wealth, has also historically been one of few means for Black people to accrue capital. Money has been a way to assert one's power, and as a trope, money has been a staple in hip hop since its early days, appearing in numerous rap songs, such as Eric B. & Rakim's "Paid in Full" (1987), Wu-Tang Clan's "C.R.E.A.M" (1993), and more recently, Cardi B's "Money" (2018). Rap songs often celebrate money, and rappers flash cash in music videos and on album covers. "10x" partakes in this legacy, featuring dollar bills in the apartment scenes in the video. In Finland, however, the currency is euro; the dollars ground the video in US hip hop rather than European or Finnish hip hop. Boasting about one's ability to get money is archetypical in hip hop, and Yeboyah and Slani thus establish themselves firmly as part of hip hop and as independent hustlers (neither mentions needing men or anyone else to get money).

In the bar/restaurant scenes towards the middle and end of the video, during the last pre-chorus and chorus, people are sitting and collectively sharing the fruits of their labor, the heart-shaped lollipops that were manufactured in the beginning of the video. There is a dance cypher, and people take turns dancing in the middle while others cheer them on. The dancers' bodies follow the accents and groove of the music, bopping their hips and heads, and waving their hands.

During the coda, Yeboyah and Slani drive a vintage, danube blue 1965 Chevy Impala (Figures 4–5). The duo is also seen in or around the car earlier in the video during the first pre-chorus and chorus. Choosing this nostalgic car establishes another connection to US hip hop culture; the iconic Chevy Impala and Latino/Mexican-American lowrider car culture impacted West Coast hip hop videos and lyrics massively in the 1990s (Kevin Strait date unknown). Cars symbolize both wealth and freedom of mobility (Erik Nielson 2009, 351–352); the two rappers cruise into the night as feminist agents of their own destiny, symbolically adopting the (masculine) power associated with car culture. Slani opens the coda with "stacks are what I want" (stackei on mitä haluun), stack being slang for one thousand dollars, and thus the focus remains on getting money. Yeboyah's bantu knots are now half-open, more voluminous and

Figure 4 and 5. Cruising in the Impala at the harbor at dusk (2:09). Slani pointing with gun fingers as Yeboyah controls the wheel (2:20). Screenshots from YouTube, courtesy of Yeboyah.

relaxed; they are wearing a white tube top and Cuban link chains (another hip hop staple seen in numerous music videos).

In the coda, the shots become distorted and melt into one another, suggesting a futuristic vision or a dreamlike sequence. The beat changes, although it retains the tempo and crisp sound of the programmed drums and now includes a prominent, legato synthesizer melody, where the timbre alternates between strings and woodwind instruments. The coda becomes almost like a warning, as the synthesizer sounds like a ship horn calling into the night while the artists cruise into the dusk. Yeboyah raps "sauce is missing, you can't copy the culture" (soossi puuttuu, kulttuurii ei saa kopioituu). What is broadly understood as Black or hip hop culture is often shortened to just "the culture" (Kyesha Jennings 2022), and "10x" contributes to this discourse about community, creativity, and ownership of Black culture. The lyrics assert that imitations of originally Black culture and expression will result in exploitative appropriation. The imitators lack "sauce," i.e., style and confidence, to successfully use Black expression, and do so without giving proper credit. The beat drops out again when Slani utters her last words "backhand who wants smoke, grr" (backhand ketkä haluu savuu, grr), followed by a loud boom of the bass, cautioning us to not mess with either of them.

Overall, the song and video construct the idea of solidarity and self-love, or the importance of Black people and especially Black women and non-binary people to love themselves in a world filled with anti-Blackness. Upon the release of "10x," Yeboyah also wrote (in English) about the need for solidarity among "Black (assumed) women" on Instagram (Figure 6), stating that the song describes how a "Black (assumed) woman" must work ten times harder and that

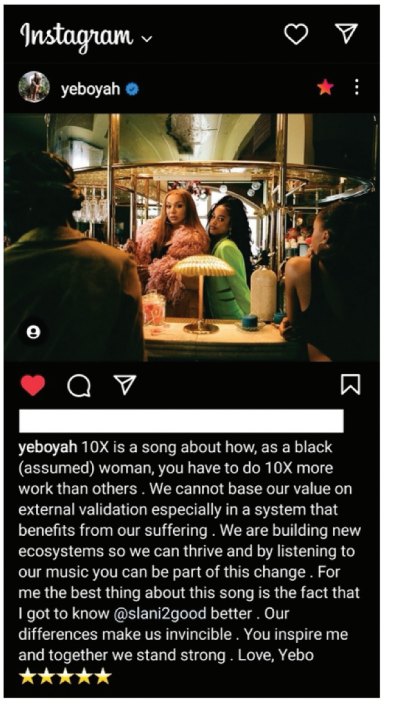

Figure 6. Screenshot from Yeboyah's Instagram with a picture of them, Slani, and two extras on set of "10x," March 27, 2023. Image courtesy of Yeboyah.[9].

by supporting each other, they become stronger. Black women have historically created safe spaces for each other to get their voices heard, and for Black feminist self-definition and self-affirmation (Collins 2002, 101–104). This is the core feminist message of "10x:" Black (non-male) people need to build their own ecosystem, as Yeboyah raps in the chorus. In the normatively white Finnish context, Black women become hypervisible and thus vulnerable to misogynoir, defined by Black feminist Moya Bailey (2021, 1) as the "simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization"); creating their own counterspace is a feminist, political act.[8]

"Märkää:" a wet siren song

Video for "Märkää" (2023) by the Matriarkaatti duo, i.e., rappers Adikia and Mon-Sala, was directed by Lotte Laitinen and shot by Inka Haukkala. The beat was produced by Elo (Vera Horn) who has produced several of Mon-Sala's solo releases and the entire *Matriarkaatti* album (2022). Matriarkaatti (Matriarchy) began in 2017 as a feminist hip hop platform. They have since hosted a similarly titled podcast, clubs, open mic events, and created a regularly updated Spotify playlist *Matriarkaatti Monthly*. Both rappers have, however, mostly released music as solo artists.

"Märkää," wet in English, is loosely inspired by Cardi B's and Megan Thee Stallion "WAP" (2020; an acronym for wet-ass pussy) but also by a Finnish rap song "Märkää" by Petri Nygård, which focuses on sex and alcohol (Adikia, pers. comm., June 17 2023). Both "WAP" and Matriarkaatti's "Märkää" focus on female sexual pleasure and exude metaphors of bodily sites for and functions of that pleasure. The video consists of middle and close shots of the rappers inside three different containers of water: pool, tank, and a bathtub. All water scenes were filmed in the basement of a residential house in Helsinki. The "office" seen in the video was constructed in the ground floor living room. Nearly throughout the video, the two white Finnish rappers rely on the water element, virginal white clothes, and mermaid aesthetics.

Unlike the single release, the "Märkää" video features a 32-second intro with no music. The two rappers are seen wearing 1970s style tan and off-white business clothes (Figure 7), doodling vulvas on post-its in a bland, beige office as they listen to someone blabber over two rotary telephones. The people on the lines keep them busy, allowing little respite. The wooden desk between the rappers is covered with binders, papers, and a caramel-brown vintage briefcase. The camera zooms into a poster of a red-hot desert, highlighting the dull dryness and stuffiness of the office.

The office scene is followed by a transition into the song's water world. A wavy, white text "Matriarkaatti presents" appears against an ocean-blue wall and a glimmering reflection from an indoor swimming pool. The dry, mundane atmosphere of the office in the video intro creates a contrast and tension with this new, wet environment. The video appears to depict a sexual daydream of two working women who let their hair down, literally: their hairstyles change from buns to flowing and unbound (see Figures 7 and 8). Historically, femininity and sexuality were separated through class; femininity was associated with bourgeois middle-class respectability, and sexuality with working class white and Black women's unruliness (Skeggs 1997, 99–100). In the video, the two women embrace the daydream and their sexuality, rejecting the constraints of respectability politics, yet also utilize symbols of respectable white femininity, such as white clothes.

Figure 7. The two rappers, bored and busy, in the dry office (0:22). Screenshot from YouTube, courtesy of Matriarkaatti.

Figure 8. Mon-Sala's index finger lures the viewer towards her and Adikia as they stand in the pool, wearing white pearls and ruffled white tops (0:51). Screenshot from YouTube, courtesy of Matriarkaatti.

"Märkää" follows a chorus-verse form; after the short intro, the chorus starts the song. The chorus immediately highlights that the main motif is water. The invitation to come play is repeated twice over a demanding, powerful sub-bass: "I'll give that wet, come sip, come splash and splatter" (Mä annan sitä märkää, tuu hörppii, tuu roiskii ja läträä). The slow beat (62 bpm) centers the sound of dripping, flowing and splashing of water, accentuating the materiality of sexuality and sexual arousal. The beat blends water sounds with hi-hats, occasional cow bells, and the loud, booming bass. The dripping water becomes a prominent percussive element, reminiscent of claves. The bass is mostly slightly muffled, as though under water, occasionally returning to the surface of the song. In the beginning of the song, the dripping sound appears to come from a large, echoing space, like a swimming hall. The two rappers are in water throughout the video, either in the swimming pool (Figure 8), a white bathtub (Figure 9), or a glass tank (Figure 10). This constant state of wetness can be read as reflecting the protagonists' sexual arousal, much like the water element in the "WAP" video.

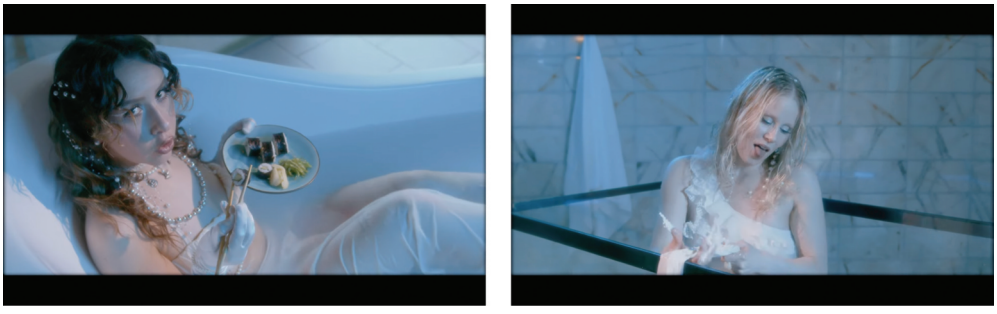

Figure 9 and 10. Adikia eating sushi in a bathtub (1:03). Mon-Sala retrieving a net-like fabric while squatting in a tank with her tongue out (1:49). Screenshots from YouTube, courtesy of Matriarkaatti.

The rappers' virginal white clothes symbolize purity while the wavy hair and pearl accessories construct a mermaid fantasy world (Figure 8). With intentional irony, or with self-awareness of how white women's femininity, morality, and sexuality have traditionally been depicted from a misogynist perspective in culture generally and in male rap music particularly, the two rappers assume the roles of siren-like temptresses. In Western culture, sirens (sometimes equated with mermaids) have been depicted as enchanting singers and dangerous, sexually insatiable nymphomaniacs (Michael Bull 2020, 23–24). Sirens wield power over men through sonic and sexual means. Mon-Sala boasts in her first verse about not getting seasick and handling the wet environment. The video plays with the madonna/whore-dichotomy; a woman can be innocent looking and sexually active and in control at the same time.

Yet, there is nothing virginal in the self-confident lyrics filled with mostly sea-related metaphors and insinuations to sexual pleasure. Adikia starts her verse by mentioning Bon Jovi, an allusion to the band's album *Slippery When Wet* (1986). She later refers to herself as a faucet whereas Mon-Sala raps about the state of being "not moist but soaking wet" (ei kostee vaan litimärkä). "Leakage" as a bodily function has culturally been one sign of (white) female unruliness and lack of control (Skeggs 1997, 100): the two rappers are unruly indeed but in control of themselves, not controlled by others. In their verses (in total four), the two rappers narrate what they will do, and that they require their lovers to have stamina, strength, and more than anything, the ability to handle the wetness and go deep. Both describe themselves as "fresh" and not "fishy," yet also use fish-related metaphors for the wet exploration such as "finding Nemo" (ettimäs Nemoo; Mon-Sala), and "breeding like a salmon [. . .] give me your milt" (kutemaan ku lohi [. . .] anna sun maiti; Adikia), further establishing the mermaid-siren character. Their lovers need the ability to swim (Mon-Sala), and even a wet suit (Adikia).

The only explicit mention of genitals appears in the beginning of Mon-Sala's second verse: "morning dew my vagina's already awake" (aamukaste jo hereillä mun vagina). This is interesting considering that the song ostensibly speaks about vaginal fluids related to sexual pleasure. Many US rappers like the City Girls, Latto, Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B use the word "pussy" frequently in their songs to accentuate sexual power and pleasure. Finnish women rappers rarely mention sex organs or refer to sex explicitly. Although Adikia and Mon-Sala clearly express their sexuality in the song lyrics and through their delivery (see below), the music video is visually fairly sexually modest. The only overtly


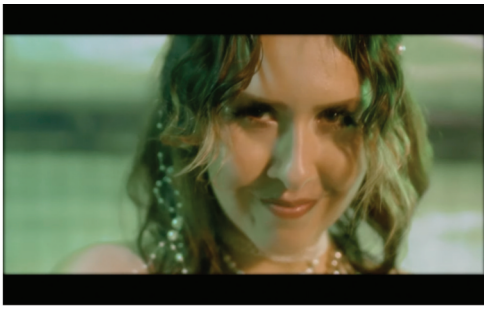

Figure 11 and 12. Mon-Sala's hands accentuating her rapping (2:23). An out-of-focus close shot of Adikia's face smiling mysteriously (2:50). Screenshots from YouTube, courtesy of Matriarkaatti.

sexual gestures are the artists projecting their tongues (e.g., Figure 10). Still, the song is a kind of vagina monologue,[10] celebrating the organ and its pleasure-inducing qualities.

During the third verse, Adikia sits eating sushi, well-known for its aphrodisiac qualities, in the white tub (Figure 9). In the fourth verse, Mon-Sala pulls a white, knotted fabric into the tank where she is squatting (Figure 10) like a mermaid might haul a sail boat's sails or a fisher retrieve a net. She raps "no nets in the water everyone crawls to me" (verkkoi ei vesil kaikki kroolaa mun luo), establishing her strong sex appeal.

Both rappers use multirhymes and rhythmic variations. The irregular and surprising changes in rhythmic delivery mimic sexual intercourse, slower and faster movement. In their first verses (verses 1 & 2), the artists rap more slowly and with a softer voice, whereas in their second verses (verses 3 & 4), both use more attack and speed, rapping in double-time. Visually, this increasing intensity is seen during Mon-Sala's second verse when the camera shakes and the image becomes blurry, her hands now moving aggressively to accompany her rapping (Figure 11). During Adikia's second verse, the camera goes in and out of focus in the close shots (Figure 12); her siren character seems to manipulate the viewer's vision. Both rappers' delivery is now more sensual and breathier, approaching moaning, and the bass rumbles almost violently. During these latter two verses, the video's color also changes from deep blue to a light sea green (Figures 11 and 12).

In her first verse, Mon-Sala also raps about making a movie. At the end of the video, the behind the scenes (bts) material (2:52–3:20; 3:47–3:55) features the video's producer, director, and two assistants in addition to the rappers. These bts shots have a retro movie filter (stacked images with burn and grain effects, reduced sharpness of color and image), which can be read as a reference to so-called sex tapes that often feature grainy vintage aesthetics of amateur porn.

Discussion and conclusion

The analyzed music videos deal with two of the most common themes in commercial mainstream rap, sexual gratification and financial success, and participate in subversive gender and racial politics. In Yeboyah's and Slani's video, money connects them with the legacy of US hip hop at large, but also with other contemporary Black women and non-binary rappers (see Khong 2020). Currently, popular songs by Black US women rappers

like the City Girls highlight financial independence and amassing and showcasing power and privilege through money, thus subverting patriarchal power (Khong 2020). While showing wealth is usually considered a sign of power, in "10x," money relates to community and solidarity between Black people.

Importantly, "10x" reflects the long-held idea of Black art as communal culture (hooks 1995, 66–67) and that individual Black women using their voices has significance for collective self-affirmation (Collins 2002, 104; see also Khong 2020, 92; Green et al. 2024, 18). According to Collins (2002, 105), "African-derived communication patterns maintain the integrity of the individual and his or her personal voice, but do so in the context of group activity," and in music, "individuality [. . .] actually flourishes in a group context." The video for "10x" features people of many complexions, dancing and hustling together. Both Yeboyah (pers. comm., April 20 2022) and Slani (pers. comm., November 21 2022) aspire to support and work with fellow Black artists in Finland. Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan and Dionne Patricia Stephens (2005, 260) note that Black solidarity is central in hip hop culture, and that although material acquisitions are celebrated "as a source of pleasure and status," they symbolize "advancement not only for oneself, but also for others, whether members of one's family, crew, or sometimes the entire race, or all oppressed people." I argue that this symbolic collective advancement through feminine agency, solidarity, and collaboration is the main message of "10x" and the logic behind its display of money.

In "Märkää," the main motif is water and the artists perform siren-like characters, depicting female agency and (reclaimed) pleasure. Even a superficial look at social media and society today shows us that women of all races are slutshamed and deemed out of control if they enjoy their sexuality and talk about sexual pleasure. Thus, "Märkää" becomes a feminist space of shamelessness (Jenny Sundén and Susanna Paasonen 2018, 648–652). The video highlights the Matriarkaatti duo's experience and standpoint as white women that relies on culturally tenacious white feminine tropes. In the US, desirable white femininity has been marked by physical features such as long hair, "milky white skin," and young age (Collins 2004, 194). Similarly for Finnish women, slenderness and "decency" (Sinikka Aapola-Kari 2012), white skin, long blonde hair and blue eyes have been culturally desirable (Miia Rantala 2014). These two Finnish rappers fit these beauty standards. Railton and Watson (2011, 88) note that Black people and white people are represented in different ways "in contemporary popular culture generally and music videos in particular." But respectable, hegemonic (white) femininity is meant to be submissive, restrained, and please heterosexual men, and thus women who take control of their sexuality are read as acting like men (Collins 2004, 197–189; cf. Aapola-Kari 2012, 27–28; cf. Railton and Watson 2011, 102–103). Through their lyrics and demeanour, the Matriarkaatti duo owns their sexuality, reclaims the misogynist representations of sex-hungry sirens, and challenges ideas about white women's sexuality. "Märkää" also serves as a response song to the sexist and alcohol-ridden namesake by Finnish male rapper Petri Nygård.

By centering female pleasure, Matriarkaatti offers a subversive, sex positive alternative to cis-male rappers songs stereotyping, objectifying, and degrading women, and thus aligns with recent understandings of feminism in hip hop as self-defined, sexually assertive, and disruptive of social norms (Green et al. 2024, 18–20). However, whereas Black women's bodies and sexuality are comdemned as deviant in the eyes of normatively white society

(Collins 2004; Green et al. 2024), white women can often pick and choose when to sexualize themselves and still remain the norm of what respectable femininity looks like. White people can also live in the "limbic sensuality" of hip hop without the burden of negative stereotypes or material consequences for their lives or for white people as a group (Jeffries 2011, 8), and "[w]hite women [can] subject themselves to the misogynist excesses of Rap and Hip Hop's affinity for hypersexual displays and walk away unharmed" (Williams 2017, 75).

Upon comparison, the focus in "Märkää" is more individualistic, relating in a broader cultural sense to whiteness (Dyer 1997), whereas "10x" represents communal culture central to Blackness (Collins 2002; Green et al. 2024, 142). Adikia and Mon-Sala are alone throughout the video, describing what brings them pleasure; in this way, "Märkää" constructs sexuality as first and foremost subjective, while also reclaiming a cultural-historical misogynist stereotype of sexually active women as deviant and dangerous. Yeboyah and Slani continue in the tradition of strong Black artists in hip hop who work together to create empowering representations of Blackness and Black femininity for themselves and for other Black people. Emerson (2002, 126) argues that by utilizing "signs of Blackness, Black women artists are able to assert the particularity and forcefulness of Black femininity and agency through the music video." By working together, Yeboyah and Slani disrupt the normatively white, anti-Black music industry's rules that aim to control Black creators and expression (see Figure 6).

But to what extent can the "10x" video's central motif, money, build the ecosystem Yeboyah desires in a capitalist society which relies on the oppression of Black people and other people of color? Mainstream hip hop culture rarely features overt criticism of capitalism (Heather Duerre Humann 2007), albeit underground rap has challenged neo-liberal capitalist thinking. A surface level interpretation of "10x" might assume that it celebrates capitalistic, individualistic girl boss feminism. But rather than being money hungry, Yeboyah and Slani are more interested in collective social empowerment of Black people and other people of color, and the video represents this on a symbolic level.

Matriarkaatti's "Märkää" video raises different questions. Symbols of white femininity are not associated with hip hop; but if the duo used more obvious hip hop symbols, they would likely fall into the trap of cultural appropriation because hip hop draws heavily from historically Black styles and expression. Is there space for white femininity, pleasure, and white women as a group in global hip hop, or only in normatively white hip hop scenes like the Finnish one? Do white women become deviant through their non-normativity, breaking hip hop's Black masculine norms? Are white women, due to being outsiders through both gender and race, able to be more playful in hip hop because they have nothing to lose (see above)?

Music and music videos not only shape and (re)create representations of cultural identities but also of values and ideologies (Burns and Hawkins 2019, 2–3). Both analyzed videos can be read as feminist, demonstrating how "[t]he deviant, agentive woman who does things to promote her own aims produces a subversive narrative" (Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg and Foka 2015, 15). The "10x" video by Yeboyah and Slani pays homage to hip hop as Black culture while constructing Black feminine agency. The Matriarkaatti duo's "Märkää," on the other hand, relies on white femininity, thus staying true to the white artists' lived experiences, and challenges misogyny through sex positivity. Portraying femininity in hip hop challenges the genre's hegemonic masculinity (see Rantakallio 2025). In this way, the four artists participate in subversive gender and racial politics through their videos.

Notes

1. Women have been involved in rap music since its beginnings in the 1970s and 1980s (Rose 1994; Pough 2004; Phillips, Reddick-Morgan, and Stephens 2005) yet have been afforded significantly less attention in research than men.
2. Cardi B has met with progressive politicians such as Bernie Sanders and criticized right wing politics (Green et al. 2024, 125–130), while Megan Thee Stallion incorporated her college studies into her "hot girl" artist image (Payne and Halliday 2023).
3. This article is part of a three-year project (2021–2024) during which I interviewed eight feminist women and non-binary rappers. The videos chosen for this article are some of the most elaborate ones in terms of script and staging to appear in Finnish rap in recent years.
4. These self-identifications are based on interviews I conducted with the artists in 2022.
5. The artists have had a chance to read and comment on a draft of this article.
6. Jeffries (2011, 55–62) discusses the history of Black coolness as a coping mechanism and defiance in a racist society, and as a part of African culture and philosophy more generally. On Black culture, popular music, gender, and the origins of cool see also hooks (2004).
7. "Dropouts are a kind of silent or subtractive accent: by suddenly removing the core instrumental tracks, dropouts momentarily draw attention to the foreground, almost always the vocal track, to create tension and anticipation leading to the resolution of the rhyme and/or transition to another section" (Wallmark 2022).
8. Regarding the interlocking racism and sexism in media representations, Love (2011) notes that mainstream rap and popular music videos by male artists frequently portray Black women as oversexualized, racialized commodities and can negatively affect the self-perception of Black girls who consume those videos.
9. The number of likes and usernames have been hidden to protect the identity of Instagram users.
10. *The Vagina Monologues* (1996) is a play written by Eve Ensler.

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Notes on contributor

Inka Rantakallio is a university researcher in Musicology at the University of Helsinki and editor-in-chief of two science journals. Her research interests include popular music, gender, race, and ideologies.

Ethical statement

The University of Helsinki Ethical Review Board in Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences has reviewed the study which this article is based on and found it ethically acceptable (statement 47/2021).

ORCID

Inka Rantakallio http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5409-7635

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