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The construction of identities in 21st-century celebrity culture : gender, heteronormativity and postfeminism

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Vanesa Aguaded Camacho

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María Pilar Cuder Domínguez

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**The Construction of Identities in 21st-Century
Celebrity Culture: Gender, Heteronormativity and
Postfeminism**

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Vanesa Aguaded Camacho

Supervisor:

Dr Pilar Cuder Domínguez

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Abstract

We live in a globalised world where the growing phenomenon over the last two decades of celebrity culture has been inextricably connected to the pervasiveness and influence of mass media. In this doctoral thesis on celebrity studies, I examine how the mass-mediated representation of celebrities constitutes mirrors of the workings of ideology, its practices and gender relations. The research corpus is formed by 5 celebrities: Miley Cyrus, Nicki Minaj, Ricky Martin, Robbie Williams and Sinéad O'Connor, whose ages range from the twenties to the fifties and who embody different genders, ethnicities and sexual orientations. They have been selected for their impact across the media and popular culture, and because, in covering a period from the late 1980s to the second decade of the 21st-century, the encoding of the visual-discursive simulation of these celebrities incorporates attributes of gender, race, age, sexual identity and ethnicity that allow us to examine the evolution and nuances of the mechanisms used to fabricate and mobilise their identities within dominant popular discourse.

Hence, this is a qualitative study that contributes to highlighting and identifying the predominant techniques of constructing identities and bodies through the lens of queer and posthuman theories combined with critical discourse analysis by focusing on the ways the technologies of the body have mutated in the close analysis of the enactment of the aforementioned artists. Moreover, it aims to demonstrate that heteronormativity with its gender binaries and the precepts of hegemonic femininity and masculinity control the visual-discursive encoding of today's celebrity. As such, I explore the current materiality of the body derived from the updating of old mechanisms of production in the service of dominant ideology within the 21st-century capitalist marketplace. This study also problematizes the intersection of gender, sexuality and race that are dependent on each other to materialise hierarchies amongst the individuals, particularly with the objective of normalising non-normative identities. The analysis is based on data extracted from these artists' music videos,

performances, official websites, social media and interviews in an attempt to provide a deep, comprehensive analysis of the construction of their identities and how they negotiate them in the media. Additionally, this doctoral study is intended to offer an examination of these celebrities that does not succumb to offering a simplistic account of their representation in relation to binary divides.

This said, recent years have witnessed a gradual integration of a neoliberal postfeminism into media culture, by constructing a new female subjectivity based on sexual entrepreneurship, over-sexualisation and emphasis on their gendered marked body. This thesis also argues that whereas female celebrities mobilise their identities/bodies incorporating these heteronormative postfeminist attributes, male celebrities fabricate their identities/bodies by using techniques aimed to market hegemonic masculinity. In other words, this research proves that sexual identity, gender and race have become commodities in the third millennium. Nevertheless, the corpus also includes a musician, the Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor, who is presented as a model of resistance against the fabrication of celebrities as object of consumption and the ubiquitous hyper-sexualisation of women in mainstream popular culture.

KEYWORDS: identities, celebrity, body, gender, postfeminism

Resumen

Vivimos en un mundo globalizado en el cual, durante las dos últimas décadas, el creciente impacto del mundo de las celebridades está conectado con el auge de la influencia de los medios de comunicación. Esta tesis doctoral se inserta en este marco de estudio en el cual pretendo examinar el modo en el que la representación mediática de personas famosas refleja la ideología dominante, las prácticas asociadas a la transmisión de sus valores y las relaciones de género arraigadas en la cultura occidental. El corpus de esta investigación está compuesto por cinco celebridades: Miley Cyrus, Nicki Minaj, Ricky Martin, Robbie Williams y Sinéad O'Connor, cuyas edades van de la veintena a la cincuentena, materializando diferentes identidades de género, rasgos étnicos y orientaciones sexuales. El motivo de su selección ha sido el impacto que han tenido en los medios de comunicación y en la cultura popular, así como que nos permiten cubrir un periodo de tiempo desde finales de los años ochenta hasta la segunda década del siglo veintiuno crucial en este campo de estudio. De este modo, la codificación de la representación a nivel visual y discursivo de estas celebridades incorpora atributos de género, raza, edad, identidad sexual y etnicidad que nos permiten examinar la evolución y los matices de los mecanismos usados para fabricar así como para manejar sus identidades dentro de los discursos ideológicos dominantes.

Por consiguiente, se trata de un estudio cualitativo que contribuye a detectar e identificar las técnicas predominantes que intervienen en la construcción de identidades y cuerpos a través de los paradigmas de la teoría queer, el posthumanismo y el análisis del discurso. El enfoque está dirigido a cómo las tecnologías de producir el cuerpo han mutado, lo cual puede ser percibido claramente en la representación de estas celebridades. Además, se pretende demostrar que la heteronormatividad, en conjunción con el binarismo de género y los ideales hegemónicos de feminidad y masculinidad, dominan las simulaciones visuales y discursivas de las celebridades en la actualidad. De igual modo, este estudio va dirigido a

reflejar la materialidad dominante del cuerpo normativo como resultado de los mecanismos de producción del cuerpo que operan al servicio de la ideología dominante dentro del mercado capitalista del nuevo milenio. Además, esta tesis ha tenido en cuenta en su análisis la intersección de género, sexualidad y raza como categorías dependientes en la materialización de relaciones jerárquicas en la sociedad, sobre todo con el objetivo prioritario de normalizar las identidades que son consideradas como abyectas. El análisis se basa en datos extraídos de videos musicales de estas celebridades, actuaciones, páginas web oficiales, redes sociales y entrevistas para tratar de entender cómo se construyen sus identidades y cómo estas celebridades negocian su formación a través de los medios de comunicación. Es necesario enfatizar asimismo que esta investigación pretende evitar un análisis simplista de la representación de estas personas famosas que sucumba a la lógica binaria.

Una vez dicho esto, debemos tener en cuenta que últimamente los medios de comunicación han llevado a cabo una asimilación del discurso neoliberal postfeminista que deriva en la producción de una subjetividad caracterizada por ofrecer la imagen de las mujeres como emprendedoras sexuales que comercializan con su propia sexualidad, la excesiva sexualización de sus cuerpos y un marcado énfasis en dichas anatomías. De hecho, mientras las celebridades femeninas exhiben unas identidades y cuerpos de acuerdo a ideales heteronormativos y postfeministas, las masculinas, por el contrario, emplean técnicas dirigidas a vender representaciones de masculinidad hegemónica. De hecho, como este estudio pone de manifiesto, en el siglo veintiuno la identidad sexual, el género y la raza se han convertido en bienes de consumo. No obstante, el corpus de esta tesis argumenta que la cantante irlandesa Sinéad O'Connor constituye un modelo de resistencia opuesto a las celebridades cuya identidad es cosificada, recurriendo a la desexualización como estrategia para socavar la ideología dominante.

PALABRAS CLAVE: identidades, celebridad, cuerpo, género, postfeminismo

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If I am writing this, it means that it is OVER. This has been a long trek to conclude this dissertation. Not surprisingly, a doctoral thesis on mutation is the story of my transnational identity, an in-between, caught between Irish and Spanish cultures forever. First, I would like to make clear that this thesis is about social justice: social justice for Sinéad O'Connor, for abused Irish children, those Spanish *pelonas* and social justice for my own great-grandma Juana, an *estraperlista* that with other ordinary Spanish women paved History. Now, it is time to say thank you to all those great people who made this project possible.

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At the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come.

(Foucault, 1991: 209)

Whereas the disciplinary system of the nineteenth century considered sex to be natural, definitive, unchangeable, and transcendental, pharmacopornographic gender seems to be synthetic, malleable, variable, open to transformation and imitable, as well as produced and reproduced technically.

(Preciado, 2013: 105-106)

The questions, ‘Why stardom?’ and ‘Why such-and-such a star?’, have to be answered in terms of ideology –ideology being, as it were, the terms in which the production-consumption dialectic is articulated.

(Dyer, 1979: 38)

In an interview Sinéad O’Connor responded about the function of celebrities as role models: As an artist you have to be conscious of minors. If she [Miley Cyrus] wants to stuff dollars down her throat and wear next to nothing – fine. But not in an environment where minors are going to be exposed to it. There’s no excuse for endorsing this type of reckless behavior because that leads to child sex trafficking and ultimately the deaths of children. It’s that dangerous. It’s well known that paedophilic people hang around industries where children are. Look at the Church, look at schools, look at the music business.

(Deevoy, 2014)

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the advent of the third millennium, we live in the era of current consumer-capitalist societies, whose pace of communication has frenetically been accelerated. Moreover, over the last four decades, society has changed dramatically in relation to diversity management, which has had a great impact on the media master-narratives and the practices that render a wide range of identities more visible than they used to be before. Within this context, one should not underestimate the impact of the virtual fabrication of modern celebrities' intelligible anatomies,¹ their identities and subjectivities, as well as the complex techniques involved in the process of marketing and packaging them, on the perpetuation of dominant ideology within the precepts of hegemonic femininity and masculinity in mainstream popular culture. Indeed, I see a key challenge in analysing and recognising the embodied nature of the capitalist production of celebrity bound up with intersections of gender, sexuality and race.

To understand how and why the production of celebrities' identities in contemporary times has become the object of this study, we must briefly describe the cultural-economic conditions that have triggered a new world-ontology. Indeed, the queer philosopher Beatriz Preciado (2013) has identified the establishment of "a third form of capitalism" (25). The Spanish scholar has even stated that the quintessence of this current economic and political regime rests on the thriving mutation of the constructions of gender and sexuality into profitable commodities (Preciado, 2013: 34). In other words, this advanced capitalism is deeply ingrained in commodity culture and its capacity to objectify cultural formations.

It is worth noting that the production of celebrities is marketed and encoded through the management of high-impact audio-visual technologies. Such transformations are connected to the effects of worldwide globalisation, that is undoubtedly dominated by the

¹ The mark of gender must be understood as the precondition to the intelligibility of bodies in our contemporary societies in this doctoral thesis.

rampant influence of mass media—whose rapid development started after World War II—in the third millennium. Henceforth the communication industry has been transformed into the most effective apparatus that enables a complex and wide dissemination of prevailing values in our Western cultures. Further, this understanding of its socio-political intervening power has to do with the expansive re-definition of mass media as an institution that contributes to the maintenance and stability of dominant ideology. Over the last four decades, this notion has been widely used and largely developed through the confluence of diverse disciplines. In this respect, the linguist and social critic Chomsky (1997) has observed how we are confronted with an institution (the media) that operates within a system of indoctrination (1). This notion of the media as an institution serving the interests of ideology was expanded by Eoin Devereux, who wrote:

Media representations of the social world reproduce hegemonic understandings of how the social world should be organized...media discourses reproduce dominant perspectives about class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality which are far from being impartial. This raises fundamental questions about the power of the media to inform and misinform audiences about the complexities of the social world. (2013: 217)

Another key element in this research is the tremendous impact of social media on everyday life at the dawn of the 21st-century global world and how these devices contribute to the construction of the subject alongside its agency. Concentrating on the stunts and ruses used by celebrities today to both interact with their audiences and directly interfere in the crafting of their public identity, we must direct our attention to the powerful influence of social media platforms. Unlike traditional mass media, social media sites have formed a complex virtual networking that facilitates a multidirectional communication between celebrities and their audiences, so that they can partially manage popularity rankings via the active manipulation of media filters (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 5, 7). As a result, it can be

suggested that social media play a pivotal role in re-defining and significantly altering the complex process of manufacturing 21st-century celebrity.

Having said all this, the study of celebrity is considered as a privileged space to conduct this study on the current status of the biopolitical regulation of the body alongside the constitution of prevailing identities through the machinery of capitalism in this new era. I have chosen music as my area of interest for this doctoral study due to its power to culturally and politically influence our society. In a world dominated by political turmoil and growing social unrest, I defend the necessity of inquiring into those mechanisms permeating popular culture that result into inequalities and exclusions to maintain the hegemonic vectors of difference untouched. The next section defines the field of study of this doctoral thesis—celebrity studies—by presenting its major theoretical paradigms and highlighting its relevance to our world, namely the fundamental importance of subjecting it to gender analysis.

1.1. Celebrity Culture: Postfeminism and Current State of the Art

My dissertation is inserted in the context of celebrity studies considering the growing impact of this area of work, at a time when the celebrization of our culture saturates the media by influencing the public sphere centres in the third millennium, especially over the last decade. Thus, first, I will proceed by pointing out the origin of this academic discipline, subsequently will define this particular field of study and finally, will delineate the most important elements of this discipline within the domain of humanities and social sciences. This new impactful field of study has been receiving increasing interest in academic circles: the amount of published books proves that (Boorstin, 1961; Dyer, 1979; Turner, 2010; Redmond, 2014; Marshall & Redmond, 2016; Rojek, 2001; Lee, 2009). Notwithstanding this recent impact in academia, the study of celebrity can be traced back to the second half of the

20th-century with the influential work of Daniel J. Boorstin. According to Boorstin, the last century economic structures developed new ways of producing fame through the media by deriving into celebrities as marketed products that established a mould for other human beings (1961: 47-48).

It was precisely this way that celebrity studies turned into an area of knowledge—connected to popular culture—that focuses on celebrities as cultural formations that constitute a privileged locus to analyse the recent transformations in the production of the social body, which is permeated by vectors of power (Turner, 2010: 13). As Graeme Turner wrote: “celebrity is a genre of representation that provides us with a semiotically rich body of texts and discourses that fuel a dynamic culture of consumption [and] also a discursive effect [whose] objectified outcome [...] is itself a commodity [and it] is also a cultural formation that has a social function” (2010: 13-14). In his examination of the rise of celebrity culture, indeed intimately connected with the commodification of culture, Turner (2010) identified how the media appropriated the academic discourses of this field of study to back up their master-narratives (10). Thus, this scholar stressed the importance of orienting celebrity studies to the politico-economic relations and structural regulations that are concealed behind the manufacturing of celebrity (Turner, 2010: 10). Indeed, the formation of celebrity accounts for the production of cultural identity that impacts our globalised societies (Turner, 2010: 19).

Furthermore, the significance of 21st-century celebrities has to do with visibility that will result in endorsement of particular cultural values in the public eye. In this respect, Sean Redmond’s definition of celebrity encapsulates its key overarching functions, that include: “the transmission of power relations, [its connection] to identity formation and notions of shared belonging; and [its circulation] in commercial revenue streams and in an international context” (2014: 3). Therefore, the notion of celebrity is linked to its effects on subjectivity, which is, after all, the product of ideology. According to Marshall and Redmond, the

representation of celebrities encodes value-laden meanings permeated by gender and youth amongst other categories; in fact, due to their high visibility, they become bearers of cultural codes by enabling the negotiation of the standards of normality and thereby establishing what counts as non-normative (2016: 2). This proves the political significance of celebrity by manufacturing types of identity that affects the social body along a scale that constructs deviant Others.

As Turner has discussed, then, it is important within the academia to address the ways ideology strives to fabricate model moulds that reinforce the biases of dominant culture. This leads us to Richard Dyer as the key scholar in the foundation of celebrity studies by providing an insightful work into the manufacturing and consumption of celebrities, whose images are structures over which cultural meanings and bias are imbricated (1979: 38). As Dyer (1979) stated:

Star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to ‘manage’ or resolve. In exceptional cases, it has been argued that certain stars, far from managing contradictions, either expose them or embody an alternative or oppositional ideological position (itself usually contradictory) to dominant ideology. The ‘subversiveness’ of these stars can be seen in terms of ‘radical intervention’ (not necessarily conscious) on the part of themselves or others who have used the potential meanings of their image...One can think of it as a clash of codes, quite possibly fortuitous, in which the very clash or else the intensity with which the alternative/oppositional code is realised result in ‘subversion’. (38)

For our purposes, this scholar’s rumination on celebrities’ agency and resistance not to succumb to the codes of the hegemonic social order recognises these social formations as productive cultural products that can attempt to deviate from media regulation and categorisation. Indeed, it was him who defined the complex multi-layered structure of celebrity image. Accordingly, in this doctoral study, I will follow Dyer’s paramount concept

of Star Image Theory, which argued that “by ‘image’ here I do not understand an exclusively visual sign, but rather a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs” (1979: 38). Importantly, this scholar’s definition recognises a “star image” as an imbrication of manifold meanings, and therefore, as a system of representation.

All these theoretical approaches to celebrity studies have moved towards exploring how these branded cultural products have resulted into the effective manipulation of present subjectivity. As Chris Rojek (2001) stated: “celebrity=impact on public consciousness” (10). With this in mind, from a psychoanalytic perspective, then, the media distribution of celebrity is linked with the purported psychic process that traditionally intervenes in the forming of the normative binary relations: subject-object of desire. It was Rojek who recognised that this fusion of celebrity and commodity culture mobilised the encoding of the celebrity as the territory over which who constituted the subject and object of desire was negotiated in order to incite an attraction between celebrities and consumers for the sake of capitalism (2001: 14-15). Indeed, this scholar suggested that “celebrity culture has engaged as a central mechanism in structuring the market of human sentiments” (Rojek, 2001: 14-15). In short, it will be important to note that this approach has further implications embedded into today’s Western economy and modality of subjectivity: celebrities contribute to marketing individuals’ consciousness.

Furthermore, Rojek (2001) described the three major paradigms in the approach to celebrity studies: (1) Subjectivism that understood celebrity as a unique individual whose success depended on their innate talent; (2) Structuralism relating celebrity to the context and social structures in which they were produced and (3) Post-Structuralism that examined celebrity inserted within a particular system of production, as the product of representation, as a structure of power and a commodity for consumption (29, 33, 45). The last two are crucial for this study concerned with ideology, power relations and commodity culture. From

a structuralist perspective in which celebrity is addressed as a mould to structure social relations, Rojek (2001) asserted:

Celebrities are conceptualized as one of the means through which capitalism achieves its ends of subduing and exploiting the masses. They express an ideology of heroic individualism, upward mobility and choice in social conditions wherein standardization, monotony and routine prevail. Thus the identification of the masses with celebrity is always false consciousness, since celebrities are not regarded as reflections of reality, but fabrications designed to enhance the rule of capital. (33)

Within this discipline, gender as a vector of difference and political significance must be examined in relation to the process of celebritization and the dynamics of consumption that is legitimised. The analysis of celebrity in relation to commodity culture has been examined by other scholars. In his insightful book *Celebrity, Pedophilia, and Ideology in American Culture*, Jason Lee (2009) claimed that “celebrity media culture epitomizes commodification of the human, the metamorphosis of the subject of its desire, and in turn becomes an object” (51). This said, there is no doubt that celebrity is imbued with ideology and its hierarchy. Not surprisingly, over the last decades, women’s struggles have posed a threat to the media biased stories, considering that the traditional gender hierarchy started to be dangerously questioned. Therefore, female celebrities became a very useful tool for the media to thrive in the control of these transformations. This shift entailed the gradual integration of postfeminism into the mainstream media and popular culture; to this extent, it not only incorporated some useful elements of the feminist agenda, it shaped them to fit into the conventions of domination.

Rosalind Gill (2007a) defined postfeminism as a sensibility that has permeated the media as well as their cultural products, marketing femininity as a bodily attribution that transforms female sexiness and sexual attractiveness into core elements of their identities; to

put it simply, women have internalised surveillance of their anatomies as a source of empowerment, and at the same time, the result of free will (148-149). In other words, women across the media as the eternal mark of sexual difference have become “sexual entrepreneurs” (Harvey & Gill, 2011: 52) as a new mode of hegemonic femininity—entailing the trade and capitalisation of their own sexuality—, whose role relies on their assimilation of this pivotal function as empowering, aspirational and desired. As Gill (2007a) argued, this cultural tendency is connected to the acceptance of the sexualisation of culture, especially the inscription of explicit sexual codes on female bodies—including celebrities—that make them sexually available for the titillation of male desire (150). I should be clear here that when I use the word “female,” (and male) this concept is not approached as a natural category since gender and sex are understood as cultural products in this doctoral study. In this view, women trade on their sexuality, that becomes a commodity in the marketplace. Yet, the aforementioned process of over-sexualisation which is crucially exploited in the postfeminist times has been investigated at a psychological level. According to Fredrickson and Roberts, women have internalised the male gaze, that demands constant assessment of their sexualised anatomies, thus proceeding to incorporate it as an attribute of female identity in a Western culture profoundly ingrained in heterosexuality (1997: 175, 177). Hence self-objectification must be understood as one of the underpinnings of the postfeminisation of our contemporary societies and their representational strategies.

If “sexual entrepreneurship” is essential in millennial postfeminism, we should identify and unravel the core elements of this contemporary trend, especially amongst celebrities. As Harvey and Gill (2011) wrote, this notion describes the essence of a renewed femininity that relies on sexuality to promote images that reinforce compulsory over-sexualisation, beauty and appeal to sexual allure organised around heterosexuality, whose compliance is under strict surveillance (56). In addition, these two scholars identified “sexual

entrepreneurship” as the constitutive element in the formation of the postfeminist subject that conceals how this subject has been interpellated within the precepts of a patriarchal culture that has appropriated feminist discourses for the interests of the capitalist marketplace (Harvey & Gill, 2011: 52). Hence, the incorporation of gender perspective into the analysis of celebrity is of utmost importance to disclose the role of female celebrities in the encoding of social imaginary and if their representation are promoting a more egalitarian society.

With respect to this view, the great achievement of this postfeminist turn has been to mask misogyny by representing women as ‘subjects’ of desire, instead of objectified bodies, although this is a fiction that reflects the effects of having incorporated the male gaze into female subjectivity (Gill, 2007a: 151). Importantly, it can be argued that postfeminism is the 21st-century makeover of old sexism as an attempt to de-politicise current feminist demands. So, it is important for us to try to negotiate the narrow path and limitations that this updated “sensibility” is legitimising for women. As Tasker and Negra (2007) stated:

Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment. (2)

Other scholars have expressed similar concerns in our Western societies. Natasha Walter (2015), for instance, has noted the ways the media and the music industry have assimilated the aesthetic values of pornography in their modes of representation, a culture that has invited women to embody the “living doll” ontology, that is, the materialisation of a femininity in terms of over-sexualisation and fictional attributes that are voluntarily implanted in their bodies (4-5). As a result, Walter has pointed out that female musicians are compelled to embrace these restrictive standards of a sexualised beauty for women, whose

representations are addressed to girls who are expected to reproduce the mainstream ideal of femininity (Walter, 2015: 71-72). So it seems that postfeminism represents the influence of capitalist neoliberalism in how gender is rendered across the media. The quote below summarises the articulation and effects of this sensibility in both the media and celebrity culture:

Critical observers might note also the way in which a politically sanitized, neoliberal, and highly sexualized version of postfeminism circulates in the media where girl bands like the Spice Girls, female singers like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, ‘babes’ like Ally McBeal, and a silicon-enhanced model turned political candidate (Jordan) are among its most celebrated icons. (Gill, 2007b: 252)

The shift of the industrial production of female celebrity intertwined with this postfeminist turn to sexual difference is popularly and deliberately used to reproduce models of femininity anchored in the heteropatriarchal order. Indeed, Gill (2007b) has stated that the patterns of the media encoding are non-neutral, since they are predicated on the system of domination that establishes a socio-political hierarchy according to the axes of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality amongst others (7). Therefore, celebrities as widespread cultural formations are mirrors of hegemonic identities with their attributes and markers of difference.

From this perspective, in this neoliberal postfeminist era, the overall effects of this sensibility can be perceived in media conversations around female celebrities and their embrace of feminism as a source of empowerment and or liberation. One significant example of this is Beyoncé’s “Flawless” (2013), that used the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s talk “We Should All Be Feminists” as an intertextual tool about those aspects of traditional femininity that create different social expectations for girls and boys and therefore attempting to raise awareness about the importance of becoming a feminist (Dandridge-Lemco, 2016; Knowles line 28-52). Although Adichie emphasised Beyoncé’s right to take a

political stand, she also highlighted the ways the artist's mainstream feminism legitimised compulsory coupledness, became too focused on men and, since she was a black woman, her appeal to sexuality imposed differentiated cultural meaning on her body rather than those inscribed on white female anatomies (Dandridge-Lemco, 2016).

Amongst these debates on postfeminism in the media, another relevant aspect is its imbrication on issues of race. In the music industry, where celebrities such as Miley Cyrus and Beyoncé have incorporated elements of the ratchet culture associated with black women and stereotypical images of black people from the ghetto, the activist Angela Davis has stated the need to eliminate these images from the media by dismissing the appropriation of these elements as empowering for women; on the contrary, she defines ratchet in terms of sexism and racism ("Progressive Pupil," 2013). Another compelling example of media debate over whether over-sexualisation and the incorporation of masculine codes into female celebrities' performances could be defined as empowering involved to what extent Miley Cyrus's aesthetics in "Wrecking Ball" became acceptable and hetero-flexible. Rubinstein pointed out that Cyrus's attempt to break the mould of femininity failed to display a powerful image of female sexual empowerment, considering that in a male-dominated music industry that is founded on misogyny, her image too dependent on sexuality partly succumbed to the regulatory encoding of femaleness (2016) and thus, fuelling the dynamics of postfeminist consumption.

These brief examples attest to the relevance of celebrity studies to better understand pressing questions on the construction of identities in our current world. Once considered some of the major aspects of celebrity studies as an academic discipline as well as its capacity in conjunction with the media to assimilate postfeminism as a mechanism of the political management of gender in the public sphere, I will explain the need for a general theoretical framework and multidisciplinary theories that account for how celebrities are gendered, as

well as how celebrities studies should move towards developing research practices that include those marks of differentiation that alter the reading and decoding of representation.

In 2013, Kristin J. Lieb addressed the complexities and particular attributes that enabled the crafting of female pop stars through an interdisciplinary work that integrated the vectors of gender and sexuality as core techniques of this process of manufacturing and consuming gendered celebrities. Her research provides two general theoretical categories of analysis to understand the production of modern female celebrity as a commodity in an era where the market mandates: the branding process and the lifecycle model, both arranged around gender and sexuality. Regarding the first, the management of brands, Lieb argued that these celebrities are marketed around two core assumptions: on the one hand, rigid classificatory labels dependent on the product they sell; and on the other, female artists usually have short-term careers, except if they are able to adapt their art to the music industry demands, but in both cases, success is linked to beauty, to the musicians' ability to change standards of attractiveness and their dexterity in updating their sexualised images following the imperative of ageing (2013: 39, 64-65). In her approach to female celebrities, Lieb is concerned with sexual differences in the music industry: whereas women are encouraged to occupy a sexualised position within rigid labels, men's sexuality is both a choice amongst others and their bodies are not subject to be represented as sexually available (2013: 110).

By focusing on the lifecycle model, we get a sense of the context in which today's consumer culture and the marketplace aim to package female celebrities constrained by gender and hypersexuality. According to Lieb, the lifecycle is a labelling mechanism that relies on predictable and regulatory categories where female musicians are compelled to fit, ranging from most rigid ones, such as the good girl, the temptress, the whore, to more flexible, such as the legend in order to expand the longevity of their brand in a popular culture, whose expectations of these celebrities are connected to notions of idealised beauty

and fit bodies (2013: 87, 90, 134). The critic summarised the relevance of female pop stars' adherence to the constructed organising principles for their marketing in the music industry as follows:

The *good girl* and the *temptress* are important roles to consider, as virtually all female pop stars must embody these roles if they wish to have prominent careers in the industry. These two initial phases of the *Lifecycle Model for Female Popular Music Stars* create a rigid dichotomy that perpetuates feminine stereotypes and, almost without exception, set the stage for a female pop star's options later in her career. (Lieb, 2013: 110)

Therefore, Lieb's study and theoretical frameworks for the examination of female pop stars revealed that specific conceptual tools of analysis should be developed as an attempt to comprehend the obstacles and difficulties musicians encounter by the mere fact of having been marked by gender. To put it another way, the study of celebrities as cultural formations must be tackled considering those axes of differentiation that invest the body with cultural and political inscriptions. In the same way, by focusing on artists' official websites, Jacqueline Lambiase (2003) had noted that female singers were very rigidly constrained by sexualisation, which was a recurring trademark to sell their brands and, in contrast, male musicians were not subject to this regulatory mark inscribed on their bodies (51). In her analysis, Lambiase (2003) wrote that "an official site's construction of a celebrity's sexuality is akin to that displayed in music videos, advertising, magazine covers, and celebrity posters: all are tightly controlled as copyrighted or trademarked images" (58). From these studies, it can be stated that sexualisation seems a common technique used to promote female celebrities whose sexual allure is perceived as aspiration for other women.

In contrast to Lieb, Doris Leibetseder's study examined those artists who deviated from the heterosexual orientation, focusing on the following queer strategies: irony, parody, camp style, masquerade, mimicry, cyborg, trans and dildo in the context of pop and rock

music (2012: 1). From a constructionist perspective, this scholar's methodological model is aimed to analyse the history of key queer concepts, trace the roots of the use of queer representational strategies in the music industry, and in it gender is understood as a social construction (Leibetseder, 2012: 3, 13). In her study the analysis of the dildo as a queer semiotic strategy is considered as one of the key conceptual tools of transgression in order to undermine the sex-gender dichotomy (Leibetseder, 2012: 183).

Much has been written, especially during the last decade, on the production and impact of female and male celebrities in both, the music industry and popular culture. For the purposes of this research, I will continue with some recent studies on celebrities that highlight not only the relevance of this growing academic field of study, but also expose the most important aspects on which critics have focused to explain the major role and symbolic value of celebrities in the manufacturing of globalised identities as well as the meanings derived from their representation by considering the dimensions of gender, sexuality and race.

In 21st-century celebrity studies, Lady Gaga has captivated the interest of scholars working on queer theory and the construction of identities. Jack Halberstam (2012) analysed this pop star's performances by concluding that we must understand her as a symbol of today's construction of fluid gender roles, whose tensions and contradictions expose femininity and masculinity as mere fictions (xii-xiii).² Similarly, Martin Iddon and Melanie L. Marshall (2014) highlighted the centrality of theatricalising queerness in her performances, characterised by the rendering of fluid gender identities through the incorporation of some attributes associated with camp culture (2-3).³ 'Camp' can be defined as "a male person with extravagant (homosexual) behaviour and lifestyle, a kind of dandy; secondly 'campy' in the

² For more information on this topic, see Halberstam's preface and chapter one of *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*.

³ The female re-appropriation of white gay subculture brought into mainstream pop culture is going to be a recurring technique among leading female singers, including Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj, who are part of the corpus of this research.

sense of extravagant, theatrical and flamboyant” (Leibetseder, 2012: 186). As Susan Sontag (2009) stated: “Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization” (277). This casts light on the type of subversive strategies that current female artists—and male artists too—are using to oppose the traditional rigid label of femininity, which means recurrence to certain types of aesthetics and artifice.

Amongst these discourses of intersectionality between ‘feminism’ and celebrity culture, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs (2016) has discussed the ways celebrities via their visibility have partly enabled the democratisation of ‘feminism’ in recent years, emphasising the role of Beyoncé in questioning the whiteness of mainstream feminism through a subversive representation of black women (1-2). Aisha Durham (2012) has also stressed the relevance of this black musician for integrating ‘feminism’ into popular culture, so Beyoncé has become the vehicle for performing images of black womanhood in which black female sexuality is negotiated (35-36). However, when thinking about the ideological implications of Beyoncé’s self-representation of black femininity, it has been noted that we must be cautious of her ‘feminism’ for two major reasons: first, the hyper-sexualisation of her body is far from disrupting the stereotypes of black girls’ bodies and, second, it seems she has actually succumbed to mainstream celebrity feminism anchored in white capitalist imperialism (Durham, 2012: 45; Haiphong, 2014: 1).

In today’s postfeminist times, a debate has ensued about the image of the black rapper Nicki Minaj portrayed in the mainstream, and the ways it opens out onto possibilities for challenging ideas about black women. Thus, Theresa Renee White (2013) explained the need to examine Minaj’s aesthetic and celebrity image to understand the production of her sexual subjectivity, body and agency in a male-dominated genre, and how her role as a “sexual entrepreneur” actively acted upon the representation of her black sexuality, which was a

source of resistance and free will rather than objectification in white mainstream media (608-610). Minaj, moreover, importantly offers representations of her body characterised by their theatricality. Uri McMillan (2014) used the term “nicki-aesthetics” to define Minaj’s performances of female blackness embedded in camp tradition in order to generate cultural meanings inscribed on her body subject to re-negotiation, so that camp imagery enabled the subversion of the limited stereotypes reserved to female hip-hop singers (79-80, 82). Indeed, Savannah Shange (2014) focused on the tension between this black-female rapper’s playfulness mingled with explicit hypersexual iconography and queer transgression by revealing the fissures and interstices in the rigid categories of gender, race and sexuality that intersect with one another to produce her body (30). These are some of the questions and debates we will take on board later in this research.

Regarding the Irish artist Sinéad O’Connor, Emma Mayhew (2006) analysed her androgynous image that could be described as a “queer aesthetic” that disrupts the binary gender (169). This scholar has stated that O’Connor’s discourse on her sexual identity avoids labelling and how the media has attempted to normalise her queerness (Mayhew, 2006: 170: 173). Moreover, Mayhew’s doctoral thesis on the representation of female musicians established that O’Connor’s non-conventional motherhood was a powerful strategy to challenge the traditional role of women in the public sphere (2001: 113, 115). In Chapter 5, we will return to this singer’s androgyny and its political implications in the disruption of the political category of women as the marked gender.

Within celebrity studies, the performances and cultural meanings derived from male artists have also been the object of analysis. For instance, Stan Hawkins (2009) conducted a study on different British male pop singers, tracing the lineage of the dandy as a particular cultural embodiment of masculinity, sexuality and identity materialised and or performed by artists such as Robbie Williams and David Bowie (4, 10). According to him, the dandy is a

signifying practice that defies and expands rigid notions of gender by creating a space of resistance, alterity and transformation through its theatricality that exposes masculinity as an artifice (Hawkins, 2009: 11-12, 15). In this study, Hawkins (2009) identifies Robbie Williams as a modern dandy, whose parodic performances of masculinity and overt mannerism establishes a site for transgression against heteronormative maleness that is unmasked as a fiction (34-35, 133).

Research has also directed attention specifically to Latin male entertainers. Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2004) analysed—amongst other Puerto Rican singers—the figure of Ricky Martin, addressing the cultural impact of this Latin singer as a vehicle to bring Latin music to mass audiences, whose success facilitated his assimilation into mainstream pop culture (248). In such scenario, the critic discussed the ways the queerness of Martin's hips was transformed into a commodity that undermined the possible disruptive cultural meanings derived from his ethnicity and sexual identity (Negrón-Muntaner, 2004: 255, 258). Her work reviews the ways this artist has transformed his identity into a softer version of Latino in order to conceal his non-hegemonic origins (Negrón-Muntaner, 2004: 249-250), and so it will become especially useful for our purposes later.

Nevertheless, of the many male artists who have generated most interest amongst scholars in recent years, the English singer David Bowie undoubtedly occupies a central position in research on popular culture and celebrity studies. Presently, the examination of his oeuvre has drawn special attention due to his dilated career (from the 1960s to the early 21st-century). It has given special attention to the complex ways Bowie masterly performs multiple identities, recognising his power as a maestro of gender identity manipulation in constant transformation, consequently exposing the joining of masculinity to artifice (Cinque, Moore, & Redmond, 2015: 1; Waldrep, 2015: 1, 3). Importantly, it is worth pointing out how scholars have established a link between the performative art of Bowie and posthumanism,

inasmuch as his performances incorporate prosthetic elements that approximate him to the cyborg ontology (Waldrep, 2015: 4; Devereux, Dillane, & Power, 2015: 245). As Waldrep (2015) has noted, Bowie's aesthetics connected to the cyborg trope enabled the elaboration of complex fantasies on stage that resulted into a sophisticated multimedia performance, which has largely influenced other 21st-century performers' theatrical art, for example Lady Gaga's visual fictions (148-149, 169). Therefore, it has been suggested that Bowie's art thrived on disrupting the heteronormative canon through an "androgynous image" of the self that was the result of the queering of his body due to his aesthetic choices (Devereux et al., 2015: 232).

In the works on these artists' contributions to popular culture, it is important to focus on the ways celebrity studies make us think about the construction of identity and the need to integrate categories of difference—gender, race and sexuality—into the analysis of representational strategies. In this respect, this academic discipline gives us much information about the productive function of celebrity.

1.2. Working Hypothesis and Objectives

I start from the assumption that mass-mediated celebrity culture produces and encodes identities through the technologies⁴ of gender, sexuality and race that account for dominant cultural-political inscriptions on bodies as well as the moulding of master subjectivities. In this regard, they actively reinforce heteronormativity—whose praxes produce what counts as idealised femininity and masculinity inseparable from the compulsory complementarity of the sexes—, that is to say, an inherently supremacist system of domination rooted in the development of capitalism. I also argue that the media and social media operate as crucial

⁴ In this research, we will start from the conceptual formulation of Foucault, who identified "the technology of sex" that entailed the assemblage of techniques deployed by different social institutions to control the entire social body, thus considering sexuality as the corporeal effects of that technology (1998: 116-127). This Foucauldian episteme captures the complexity of 21st-century workings of those vectors of difference that act upon the corporeality of the modern individual.

platforms to manufacture and distribute the cultural values embodied by celebrities. Therefore, my argument is that those non-normative identities and bodies acting as locus of resistance against dominant ideology will encounter a fierce opposition as they attempt to normalise disorder. In this regard, heteronormativity is considered a complex regime of domination that permeates the whole population by deploying multiple axes of differentiation that pierce bodies imbued with power relations.

In relation to this current political-anatomical scenario, through the examination of the production of the bodies of celebrities and the interconnected display of other anatomies in their performances, my dissertation is aimed to contribute to discern what type of ideology is legitimising the media through the visual-discursive representation of celebrities and to identify the technologies involved in the fabrication of those bodies as a multimedia mirror for the interpellation of Western audience's identity. It is in this context that I approach social reality enacted by the media through the lens of queer theory and posthumanism for three major reasons. First, they are fundamental in order to identify those techniques of the body embedded in dominant discourses inextricably linked to the establishment of heterosexuality as a machinery of developing mechanisms that overlap with each other to conceal their normalising effects. Second, they enable the unmasking of celebrity culture and mainstream mass media alongside the new media as 21st-century operational devices that participate in the economy of the binary logic, which controls cultural intelligibility. Finally, these theoretical parameters allow us to think about gender, sexuality and race as interlinked technological apparatuses that are mutually reinforcing to fix a particular hierarchy of the normative subject.

In short, this research is intended to demonstrate the persistence and mutation of what Michael Warner (1991) coined as heteronormativity, a regime ingrained in the maintenance of the masculinist episteme alongside its markers of differentiation, emanating from various

institutions: the traditional ones—the family, religion, the school and so on—but also from the new apparatuses such as the media, the social media [and celebrity culture] by establishing the distinction of the normal-deviant as mutually exclusive (3-4, 6, 16). By considering the aforementioned hypothesis, it contributes to highlighting the gaps this research is hoping to fill, regarding the identification of the mutation of specific techniques to produce the hegemonic body-identity saturated with heterosexuality for maintaining unequal relationships in this new era.

Furthermore, this doctoral study examines a unique combination of Rojek's structuralist and post-structuralist paradigms (see section 1.1) by integrating queer and posthuman theoretical insights. Here, I want to stress that this doctoral thesis should contribute to producing new knowledge in this field of study and in order to reach my goals, it will differ from previous studies by rejecting the idea of gender, race and sexual identity as socio-cultural constructions but as prosthetic realities. Although there are some studies on the celebrities that form the corpus of this study, they merely focus on some aspects of the production of their identities without considering how the mutation of the techniques of producing the body are fundamental to understand their encoding in the media and not delving into the complex imbrication of cultural meanings sedimented in the visual-discursive representations of these artists that are highly dependent on the deployment of heteronormativity. Moreover, regarding the last musician that is analysed in this doctoral study, there has a very limited amount of research that has been done on the Irish [counter]celebrity as a valid model of resistance against dominant discourses, underestimating the importance of her political idiosyncrasy—in the production of her identity—, and her power to produce cultural meanings that undermine the binary logic, and as such this research project may bring new insights to current literature on this area of study from a different perspective as was delineated above.

In the context of celebrity studies, this study is aimed to meet the objectives drafted below:

1.2.1. General Objectives

1. To further enrich the current debate in feminist research from the aforementioned approaches with regard to the role of mainstream celebrity culture related to the media in the era of millennial postfeminism and globalised communication, as an attempt to unravel the type of cultural identity that is pervasively reproduced and legitimised;
2. To detect and identify the techniques of normalisation implemented to visually-discursively materialise the predominant social formations, and thus, to which extent they serve the needs of dominant ideology and its established normative social order;
3. To demonstrate how the construction of 21st-century cultural identity-body is the result of the conflation of old techniques that have mutated and perfected in order to maintain heteronormativity as a meta-stable system of domination;
4. To examine the ways the technologies of gender, race and sexuality are imbricated on one another rather than working separately;
5. To demonstrate that those identities that do not fit in the hegemonic mould are subject to techniques of normalising disorder in order to undermine their potential subversion.

1.2.2. Specific objectives

1. To analyse the representation of popular celebrities from the music industry and from different political locations, focusing on the type of identity and anatomy materialised by these artists through the dimensions of gender, race and sexuality in order to identify if they succumb to the pervasive commodification of today's celebrity market, partly disrupt this rigid dynamics, or step out of the pathos of heteronormativity. To accomplish this key objective, I will proceed to the complex

examination of the core components of the system of representation following Roland Barthes's visual rhetoric model described in the next chapter. For the purposes of this research, the model of analysis here will focus on the following elements that are essential in the understanding of the audio-visual production:

- The visual representation;
- The verbal representation;
- The narrative representation: the ways celebrities' actively participate in the production of their identities and meanings derived from the cultural products they are creating. In this respect, Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond describes the organising principles of the production of celebrity (2013: 14) as examined in the next section.

1.3. Methodology: A Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach has been adopted to conduct this study given the socio-political nature of this research that attempts to capture the complex intersectionality of gender, sexuality and other vectors of difference, which forges a matrix of binding relations that intervene in the construction and management of identities. Consequently, it enables offering a deep insight into social reality and the ways cultural meanings invest bodies with norms. The understanding of culture where social formations are constituted requires delving into the entangled social relationships and overlapping codes derived from the productive workings of ideology. Due to the complexity of the social world, qualitative methods are the most appropriate because "they help us understand underlying behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, and culture in a way that quantitative methods alone cannot. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to understanding the *how* and *why* questions" (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005: xiii). In practical terms, there are two characteristics of qualitative methodology

that are essential for this multidisciplinary research: it “seeks depth of understanding” and “views social phenomena holistically” (Ulin et al., 2005: 6). It is in this context that the so-called critical paradigm has been selected as the backbone of this qualitative research to design an appropriate method for data analysis.

1.3.1. The Critical Paradigm: the Ideology Critique

The critical paradigm is the theoretical basis of this research that will demarcate the ways we will approach the social reality explored in this thesis. As mentioned above, queer theory and posthumanism constitute the lens through which data will be analysed, both inserted in the realm of critical theory that marks the origin of this paradigm. According to Baxter and Babbie, the critical paradigm is one of the key tools of qualitative communication research method that is aimed to unmask ideological biases and inequalities permeating the entire social body, for instance, gender ideology and other forms of oppression in Western capitalist societies (2004: 63). Indeed, this paradigm has been selected because it captures the critical ideological discourses from the following philosophical movements: queer theory, posthumanism, critical discourse analysis,⁵ and feminism (Mack, 2010: 9) that will underpin the analysis produced in this study.

Basically, the goals of queer and posthuman theories are the demise of the binary logic—in other words the de-naturalisation of heterosexuality—, the destabilisation of other axes of oppression such as sexuality and race, the unmasking of the human as an exclusionary ideological category and the construction of identities-bodies through the assemblage of interconnected elements with human and non-human elements to undermine gender ideology. Hence it opens up possibilities for change and resistance in opposition to mainstream culture. Generally, the following question comprises the core ideas of both counter-narratives that

⁵ Hereafter CDA.

operate against essentialism and a fixed identity of the self: “can we really be sure that our own desires and pleasures are normal, natural, nice—or that we are?” (Spargo, 1999: 5). Generally, to describe the methods I will use in this doctoral thesis by combining queer and posthuman conceptual frameworks, Jack Halberstam’s definition of queer methodology summarises my approach to celebrity:

A queer [posthuman] methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer [posthuman] methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence. (1998: 13)

In practice, this methodology is about the acceptance of plurality and ambiguity of the social world by rejecting the existence of a unified identity. This is the political strategy of queer and posthumanism as well as recognised in the following quotation: “Post-human bodies are not slaves to masterdiscourses but emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context” (Halberstam & Livingston, 1995: 2). Nevertheless, the major paradigms of these theories will be deeply examined in Chapter 2. This way of thinking about dominant culture, then, entails that there are ‘universal’ organisational structures and codes that govern power relations, so consequently we start from the assumption that knowledge is deliberately biased. So, the epistemological and ontological principles of this paradigm that delineate the blueprint for engaging in critical reflection that reveal those generative practices in the establishment of a hegemonic hierarchy are quoted below:

- Critical approaches examine social conditions in order to uncover hidden structures. Critical theory teaches that knowledge is power.

This means that understanding the ways one is oppressed enables one to take action to change oppressive forces.

- Critical social science makes a conscious attempt to fuse theory and action. Critical theories are thus normative; they serve to bring about change in the conditions that affect our lives. (Bevir, 2007: 188)

As for methods, this theoretical framework is essential to analyse the multi-layered meanings overlapped on the images that form the qualitative data of this research as an attempt to understand the interests they serve and to which extent they legitimise ideological biases. Moreover, as I discussed above, the analysis of discourse will be another powerful tool of the qualitative method used in this dissertation in order to reach a clear understanding of the multi-layered meanings that operate on master-discourses.

1.3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

For this study of the representation of celebrities across the media, CDA is a very useful analytical method to decipher and unravel those cultural meanings and messages conveyed through language, since verbal representation will be the object of analysis in this thesis. CDA approaches language as a multi-layered structure in which the individual's subjectivity is encoded. As Hansen and Machin (2013) stated: "CDA allows us to carry out a more systematic analysis of texts and language. [It] can allow us to reveal more precisely how speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning" (115). Undeniably, it will be important to note that language is neither neutral nor innocent but biased; it determines how social reality is depicted, since it is predicated on ideology-laden values (Hansen & Machin, 2013: 116). In other words, discourses constitute a cultural mechanism of representation through codes that are globally reproduced to legitimise master-narratives by serving as the foundation of mainstream culture.

Drawing on these assumptions, CDA rests on the “three central and constitutive concepts: power, ideology and critique” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 1). Doubtless one of the key scholars from which the critical paradigm is drawn from, and whose theoretical approaches are crucial for the examination of discourses, is Foucault, who established an inextricably connection between language and power and the ways discourse concealed the effects of it, analysis that has been a key element in media and cultural studies (Foucault, 1998: 87-88; Gill, 2007b: 61). Foucault’s contributions to the linkage between discourses and power-relations will be further discussed in the next chapter. Therefore, the intersectionality of CDA with the paradigms of the aforementioned theories will be the relevant tools to unravel all those practices and mechanisms that ensure the stability of heteronormativity. Underpinning the construction of dominant discourses is the institutionalisation of its signifying practices of labelling. Here, then, it is important to note “how discourse injures bodies” and “the power of discourse to produce that which it names” (Butler, 1993: 224-225). This said, discourse is a site of contestation of who determines what counts as ideology.

1.3.2.1. The Use of Slang and Critical Discourse Analysis

Within this approach to CDA in this dissertation, the use of slang or lack thereof must be integrated into this method as a signifying element of discourse patterns that can partially or radically modify cultural meanings. Since the use of slang is conditioned by factors of age, gender, values, social class, race and obviously ideology, it will be included in this analysis of celebrities focusing on what type of relevant information can be extracted from its articulation in relation to the above-mentioned categories: whether it is used as a tool of transgression or of reinforcement of mainstream values.

According to Bróna Murphy, in the context of Irish society, the utterance of taboo words is conditioned by the age of speakers—especially used by adults in their twenties—,

gender inasmuch as slang is traditionally linked to masculine speech, and religion, so that people with strong Catholic beliefs usually dismiss this practice (2009: 103-104). Zhou and Fan (2013) also noted the social determining factors that influence the production and consumption of this variety of speech such as gender, identity and the emotive function; that is to say, slang is defined as a vehicle to express feelings and emotions (2212-2213). Moreover, these authors pointed out that notwithstanding the connotations of inappropriateness associated to the use of taboo language, for example, in American culture, it has been noticed its growing popularity and relevance to the discussion of contemporary American English (Zhou & Fan, 2013: 2209). Therefore, under this premise, celebrities' use of slang should not pass unnoticed in this research. How you articulate discourse adds layers of meaning to the messages that are transmitted.

1.3.3. Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond

An appropriate methodology for dealing with the complex variables that converge in the representational strategies of celebrities in the media entails the use of Griswold's Cultural Diamond.⁶ This scholar developed an empirical-conceptual tool that is comprised of four interrelated elements: the social world, producers, the cultural object and receivers (2013: 16). Griswold (2013) views this theoretical framework of analysis as a fundamental tool to understand the cultural location where celebrities as cultural products are ideologically anchored so in this respect she understands the artist as an active agent in the manufacturing and attribution of cultural meanings upon their identities received by the consumers-audiences (14-15).

Since the social media is going to be one of the sources of extracting data, this model is of utmost importance. Indeed, Lieb (2013) has argued that today's singers have become

⁶ The layout of the Cultural Diamond has been included in the appendix to Chapter 1.

both cultural objects and their own creators if we consider their individual agency used to package their products in the third millennium media platforms that work as channels to manipulate the virtual images geared to followers and fans (2-3). Although the Cultural Diamond includes the audiences-receivers as part of the complex societal relations that contribute to mould the meanings associated with celebrities, in this research the focus will not be on their impact on fans, but on the ways the celebrity participates in the management of their public image in order to be capitalised. Thus, through the lens of queer and posthumanism we will examine the intersection of the core elements of the Cultural Diamond: the fabrication of social reality, celebrities' identities and the politico-cultural meanings derived from their representation in the media. For our purposes, this useful framework of analysis for celebrities has integrated paths that detect and decode hegemonic gender concepts and the heterosexual matrix, which corresponds to the objectives of this doctoral study.

1.3.4. Research Corpus and Selection Criteria

My research corpus is formed by five singers: Miley Cyrus, Nicki Minaj, Ricky Martin, Robbie Williams and Sinéad O'Connor,⁷ whose ages range from 24 to 50 years old and whose career spans cover the period of time from the late 1980s to the second decade of the 21st-century. This corpus has been selected according to the following criteria in relation to their impact across the media: first, since one of the artist's careers started in the late 1980s, it allows us to examine the mutation of media techniques-practices and those devices available for celebrities to construct their identities and bodies from a more vantage point considering that this study encompasses three decades. Second, if we consider the different cultural and social backgrounds of these musicians—whose performances are embedded in Western culture—as well as the diverse categories of differentiation that permeate their

⁷ The profiles of these artists have been included in the appendix to Chapter 1.

identities, bodies and subjectivities, the analysis of their visual-discursive representation provides us with relevant information about both the type of ideology legitimised by mainstream pop culture, and whether they succumb or else resist dominant discourses.⁸ Third, the transnational cultural formations of some of these artists are fundamental to understand and examine the ways they negotiate non-normative cultural meanings in the media and music industry. Fourth, the inclusion of masculinities alongside femininities is aimed to explore the ways in which the binary gender is maintained and represented in the era of an advanced capitalism, or if on the contrary, it has become more fluid. Finally, the account of current celebrities—that has been catapulted to fame in the advent of the second decade of 21st-century—will reveal whether or not recent media's master-narratives are more inclusive than in past times.

1.3.4.1. Data and Sources of Analysis

As I discussed earlier, this research is focused on the thorough analysis of the visual and discursive display of celebrities from the music industry, whose images have widely been commercialised and distributed in the media over the last three decades. A contemporary account of singers needs to consider the transformations in the mechanisms of production and marketing of the cultural products. In times of globalisation and rapid cultural changes, this justifies the data collection sources aimed to avoid simplistic accounts of the construction of celebrities' identities and bodies. The selection criteria have taken into consideration the multi-layered complex nature of this analysis, in which different levels of representation intersect one another: the visual, verbal and narrative representation. It is in this context that

⁸ With the term dominant discourse I refer to those narratives that are ingrained in heteropatriarchal culture.

the subsequent sources have been chosen: music videos,⁹ performances, interviews from videos and online articles, official websites, online published letters, the lyrics of the songs and the social media,¹⁰ since the first decade of the 21st-century is the key period to the Internet or digital revolution.¹¹

So far, then, Chapter 1 of my research has accounted for the need of this study, delineating the field (celebrity culture) in which it is contextualised with its major cultural paradigms, how gender has been integrated into media discourses, recent studies on this specific academic discipline, methodology and the corpus selected for this dissertation. Chapter 2 examines the relevant literature review for this study, describing the key conceptual clusters in order to identify the technologies of manufacturing the political body and identity and thus, to produce a deep analysis of the representation of the above-mentioned celebrities. Next, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are focused on the examination of the enactment of the five artists included in this study through the intersection of the levels of analysis described in this chapter. These chapters are aimed to discuss the most important elements of the ideology and discourses that permeate the media. This said, Chapter 3 compares the production of femininities through the analysis of Cyrus and Minaj; then we turn to disclose the workings of masculinities (Martin/Williams) in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 proposes a model of subversive/resistant identity: Sinéad O'Connor. My study ends with the conclusions of this research, limitations of the study and directions for future research.

⁹ Many of these videos have been sourced from the artist's official VEVO, that is a new device used by the music industry to promote and sell the singers' cultural products in a digital era in which CD has become an outmoded tool. VEVO was created by Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group and Abu Dhabi Media in order to increase profits by attracting advertisers (Moreau, 2016).

¹⁰ The comments on social media posts can be located in primary sources. They have been referenced by the last names of users except for those that have a single username.

¹¹ This period of time is commonly known as 'the noughties'.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents the key conceptual clusters of analysis in the context of the construction of identities and production of the body within a given ideology. It examines the essential concepts for the understanding of how the representational strategies used to display the celebrities that will be examined in the next three chapters are rooted in a history of techniques of fabricating the self. As seen in Chapter 1, queer theory and posthumanism are the major theoretical backgrounds which inform this research and situate this doctoral study within the philosophical paradigms of critical theory against the traditional accounts of mainstream narratives. Thus, here we provide insight into a model of analysis aimed to detect and identify those hegemonic mechanisms that were developed to maintain the normative social order and its societal forces untouched. As a result, culture and ideology, both intertwined and transmitted through the representation encoded in media texts are crucial to approach data analysis in the research context of this study.

Many theories have been proposed to explain all those instruments that intervene in the production of the social body. Although the literature covers a wide variety of those theories and there are a large number of studies on queer and posthumanism, this review will focus on the four key interlinked conceptual clusters that have been designed for achieving the goal of this research because of their relevance to this doctoral thesis: (1) Ideology, the subject and power; (2) technologies of producing the body: the normal versus the abnormal; (3) techniques of visual representation: the panoptic principle and the construction of the gaze and (4) the materiality of language and the production of truth. They contribute to highlighting the core components of those vectors of difference that will intervene in the crafting of the five singers that form the corpus of this research.

2.1. Ideology, the Subject and Power

Clearly, as the context of this research is celebrities from the music industry encoded through the mainstream media anchored in Western culture, ideology and its biases play a pivotal role in the exploration of how we understand musicians' behaviours and the articulation of discourses in the way they do. In this respect, representation is imbued with political manoeuvring that most of the time is deliberate. Louis Althusser is one of the leading thinkers in the theorisation of the ways ideology works and how the subject is constituted in a particular political enclave. As he said, "every social formation arises from a dominant mode of production [and] must therefore reproduce: 1. the productive forces, 2. the existing relations of production" (1971: 128). This approach to the subject was understood in connection to the establishment and materialisation of a hegemonic ideology with its corresponding practices that must be reproduced to ensure control in capitalist societies (Althusser, 1971: 133, 136).

As an attempt to perpetuate a hegemonic cultural model predicated on dominant ideology, Althusser (1971) identified what he called "Ideological State Apparatuses" that ranged from the traditional ones—such as religion, family and culture—to the most innovative (at that period of time), communications (143). In his formulation of ideology, he identified mass media as one of those institutions that contributed to the circulation and distribution of ideological messages and, more, specifically, to reproduce power relations. Regarding this, he argued that the media apparatus was aimed to provide the individuals with discourses rife with impartial perspectives about national identity, sexism, capitalist liberalism and morality anchored in Humanistic ideals (Althusser, 1971: 154).

Significantly, Althusser (1971) correlated ideology with a set of practices, ideas and rituals that had materiality, that is, ideology is a material reality that has effects on the

individual's subjectivity (166, 168-169), a concept that is introduced here, yet fully developed by queer thinkers such as Foucault, Butler and Wittig, as will be discussed later in this chapter. At work in this recognition of the subject's consciousness within ideology is the process by which they are constituted through the performing of certain rituals. As the scholar suggested, individuals cannot escape ideology insofar as they are the product of ideology:

As a first formulation I shall say: all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject [so that] ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing. (Althusser, 1971: 173-174)

As was discussed in Chapter 1, this research overtly recognises the functioning of ideology in the formation of subjects through the identities of celebrities by dismissing the idea that these public figures are mere entertainers. On the contrary, to borrow this Marxist thinker's terminology, artists are "interpellated" by ideology in which they are anchored, as the above-mentioned celebrity scholars have admitted. Therefore, as Althusser said, subjects and actions can never be located outside ideology but inside its territory (1971: 175), a theoretical foundation that is underneath the queer analysis on the development of Western exclusionary system of classification that controls the domain of cultural intelligibility, an insight that I will clarify below. However, Althusser's theory on the constitution of the ideological subject, which is still relevant today, defines that subject as male (1971: 164), and consequently, it reveals that ideology is a masculinist construction. This bias will permeate all its practices, which is a key consideration to our approach to the corpus examined in this research. As such, this involves that the hegemonic subject central to representation is

heteronormative and male, which means that all the practices and norms within society are profoundly ingrained in the privileging of masculinity.

Indeed, Jacques Lacan delved into the “interpellation” of the subject, adding that this cultural formation was determined by gender and embedded in heteronormativity, which described the regulatory process of hetero-sexualising the individual. This delineates a prevailing and enduring ontology that will be taken into account in the ways I will look at the social reality that is the object of inquiry in this doctoral thesis. The French psychoanalyst identified two key techniques or strategies in the constitution of the subject in (Western) culture: the Mirror Stage and the dichotomy being-the phallus (woman) and having-the phallus (man). The mirror stage refers to that phase when the infant identifies with the image reflected in the mirror creating a coherent and unified perception of the subject; thus, this image is fully dependent on the cultural-external world that also functions as a mirror and an agent of intervention in order to normalise the construction of the self (or the “I”) (Lacan, 2006: 76, 78-79). In other words, the subject bound up with the process of identification is a universal and normative political category invested with power by marginalising certain identities that deviate from gender and sexuality norms.

The second highlights the ways in which the subject symbolically occupies a particular sexed position. For Lacan, the phallus is a “privileged signifier” that masks the complementarity of the sexes in which men occupy the having-the phallus sexed position—as the subjects of desire—and women identify with the being-the phallus—as objects of male desire—so that the phallus is a metaphor for the psychic process through which heterosexuality is internalised, with women (or the Other) defined in terms of castration in the symbolic order (576, 581-582). This idea of Lacanian articulation of desire is incorporated in feminist studies on visual representational strategies in order to unmask the ideology hidden behind them, as will be analysed in the third section of this chapter. For a

critical analysis of ideology, the politics of the subject developed by Althusser and Lacan are mutually reinforcing: man as the subject of representation became a naturalised organising category around which the deviant Others were constructed.

The aforementioned theoretical assumptions turned out to be very productive for queer theory and its counter-narratives, that established a connection between ideology and power. More specifically it uncovered the norm of heterosexuality with its politics of gender, sexuality and sex as determining factors in the “interpellation” of the ideological subject. It was Michel Foucault (1998) who coined the term bio-politics—that originated in the 18th-century—as a concept to refer to the nature of dominant ideology working for power through those traditional institutions defined by Althusser in Western countries inextricably linked to the rise of capitalism (141). Needless to say, this bio-power was bound up with the reproduction of useful labour force subject to control, identifying the technology of sexuality as an essential mechanism of power (Foucault, 1998: 140-141). As this thinker wrote: “ideology [is] a doctrine of apprenticeship, but also a doctrine of contracts and the regulated formation of the social body” (Foucault, 1998: 140). If bio-politics (or ideology) was developed as a complex machine for monitoring the entire population, it means that celebrities are included in the functioning of its practices to secure power. Foucault went as far as stating that bio-power was about creating norms and restrictive mechanisms, whose goal entailed the management and administration of lives, so that ideology normalises subjects in accordance with exclusionary norms (1998: 144). Accordingly, ideology has evolved over the years in order to constitute subjects, whose lives do not challenge the hegemonic order grounded on a socio-political hierarchy that excludes and medicalises difference. Non-normative individuals pose a threat to hegemonic ideals of national identity and capitalism.

It is important to note that Foucault described an ideology bound up with power that reduced homosexuality to a subhuman ontological status—inasmuch as capitalism is a heterosexual organisational structure—, which means that its domain of cultural intelligibility is ruled by the humanistic binary logic (Foucault, 1998: 83, 101). So far, then, we have started to add the complex layers that compose the socio-political dimension of bio-politics, elements that the three chapters of analysis build on. Although his theory dismissed gender as an attribute linked to the technology of sexuality, he described two key aspects of it in the deployment of ideology: firstly, it affected social relations and individuals' anatomies, and secondly, the surveillance of children's and women's sexuality was of the utmost importance to maintain the stable economy of capitalist society governed by the ruling class (Foucault, 1998: 120-121, 127). Sexuality is a paramount category in this research data analysis, relevant to the postfeminist generation and especially in the case study of the Irish singer in this study, particularly connected to the Irish legacy of child abuse.

To further grasp the materiality of ideology and its effects on the subject, the queer philosopher Judith Butler identified the compounded category sex-gender as the key to reproduce the conventions of domination, exploring the issue of how women were excluded of the constitution of the normative subject. According to her, the materiality of the body was the product of how ideology productively acted upon the subject by inscribing cultural meanings on it (Butler, 1993: 2). Indeed, Butler underwent an epistemological rupture away from feminist essentialism when she stated that gender and sex were the exact same cultural-political category, highlighting that its naturalised distinction was the effect of "bio-power" to maintain the status quo, which entailed the reproduction of the idealised human dimorphism (2007: 54-55, 98). Her narrative reveals that the institutionalisation of the binary sex-gender was the bastion of heterosexuality that naturalised women within the prescriptions of normal.

Similarly, Monique Wittig (1992) viewed gender as a naturalised artefact used by ideology to manipulate women's anatomies and subjectivities (9). Gender is therefore a crucial underpinning of the hegemonic cultural model, even if it is overtly masked by current political practices. Furthermore, Wittig's major conceptual achievement was to uncover heterosexuality as the dominant ideology per se that governs society: its beliefs, values, behaviour and intelligibility so that it is not a political-free encoding system, but, rather, it plays a central role in the perpetuation of culture and its organisational hierarchy. As she put it: "I describe heterosexuality not as an institution but as a political regime which rests on the submission and the appropriation of women. [...] There is no escape" (1992: xiv).

Starting from this assumption, Butler (2007) stated that heterosexuality had gradually been institutionalised, and consciousness (or psyche) was not exempt from this normalising process by being subject to the constraints of the ruling political agenda (165). Moreover, she developed a conceptual model to tackle the functioning of ideology that enables us to further understand the relevance of gender, sex and sexuality in the maintenance of today's normative social order in our globalised world: the heterosexual matrix.¹² According to Butler, the heterosexual matrix is constituted by a regulatory grid of intelligibility in which sex, gender and sexual identity are both, inseparable and interlinked: one sex results into one assigned gender and in consequence, this leads to a fixed sexual identity, thus the conflation of these three categories materialises a coherent and unified body-subject, legible for the hegemonic gaze (2007: 72, 99). In her words, the binary gender derives into a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality, which means that women and men are two distinctive and

¹² The Foucauldian understanding of Western countries' development of techniques aimed to manage and regulate human life is fully understood with Butler's model. To control life entails to have a hold on all those determinant elements that intervene in the "interpellation" of the individual as a subject in the social world and culture. In this regard, power is not neutral but a gendered web of forces of production.

exclusive reified identities (Butler, 2007: 81).¹³ The understanding of heterosexuality as a political regime, that is to say, a naturalised fiction lies at the core of the research context of this study. Indeed, it constitutes the key assumption for the selection of the critical paradigm with its associated methods in this doctoral thesis.

2.2. Technologies of Producing the Body: the Normal versus the Abnormal

This section reviews the key technologies that were designed and developed to produce the ‘normal’ political body as a universal category and consequently, in marked contrast, this process entailed the construction of the abject bodies, particularly those whose identity-anatomy deviated from the “heterosexual matrix” of intelligibility (or dominant ideology) as was described above. In the context of this research, the identification of the regulatory techniques of moulding the hetero-centred anatomy is crucial to analyse the representation of celebrities in the media.

Foucault is a key philosopher in this field of study because he traced back the history of the technologies of the body to the development of capitalism, identifying the set of techniques that were deployed to control the subject’s subjection to the ruling class and the reproduction of the productive anatomy for the interests of the capitalist market and its institutions. In brief, the perpetuation of ideology required the materiality of its normativity through the surveillance of the population. As Foucault (1998) stated:

The bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes...it also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their

¹³ Adrienne Rich popularised the term “compulsory heterosexuality” in her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” originally published in 1980. As she stated: “yet the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness” (Rich, 1996: 135).

availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. (140-141)

Therefore, his project was aimed to identify and explain how those bodies were adjusted and optimised to generate effective work for the Western regime. As with other techniques, Foucault (1991) pointed out that the construction of a clearly identifiable identity connected to a unified individuality was determinant to fix an established hierarchy imbued with power-differentiated relations (291). In other words, this reveals that identity is a key technique in the fabrication of the entire social body in the field of power. According to this scholar, the so-called disciplines that were originated in the 19th-century constituted that array of useful devices to extract capitalist surplus value from the individual, which were characterised by their subtleness—very discreet in their use—, the maximisation of the effects of power and usefulness for the growing economic market (Foucault, 1991: 218). Accordingly, one of the major goals of the design and deployment of the disciplines was the concealment of its effects: the less perceptible they are the more effective they become. As Foucault (1991) argued: “the historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful” (137-138). This confirms the idea that every social formation is political and therefore public, playing a role in culture.

The first section of this chapter presented sex, sexuality and the management of human life as crucial aspects in the field of ideological production, which implies that disciplines—alongside its techniques, practices and rituals—are inextricably connected to them. As was described above, sexuality is one of those technologies of the body, and therefore, now, we will describe those mechanisms and devices associated to this machinery

of interpellating the social subject. In this respect, Foucault (1991) identified the following signifying practices that accounted for the exploitation of the body: supervision, examination, surveillance of behaviour, identity and corporeal acts amongst others aimed to refine the machinery of a capitalist-oriented production (29, 77). This shows that the individual turned into an object of knowledge, whose life was perceived as a property of the normative social order. For the purposes of this research study, surveillance is a key technique when we consider that the media are a set of platforms that increase visibility and exposure in the social world.

This being said, the fact that the former techniques were used to enable an effective mechanism of control shows that the sites where disciplines deployed aimed to homogenise individuals by establishing an exclusionary classificatory system to domesticate difference (Foucault, 1991: 183). To put it another way, normalisation was the paramount mechanism to invest the body and identity with norms, this is how the normal came to exist as a category for dissolving differences (abnormal) within the hegemonic cultural model (Foucault, 1991: 184). Another essential instrument of domination was classification. Foucault (1991) asserted that “it is a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (184). If we focus on the context of this study: the media and celebrity encoded through representation, the political manoeuvring of classification and labelling, will be key elements in uncovering the cultural meanings inscribed on them as social formations. So their categorisation will highlight if they are serving mainstream popular culture imbued with manifold ideological biases, attempting to escape its constraints, or else they are running in opposite direction.

Therefore, Foucault’s work can be considered as a catalyst for the heteronormative distinction between the normal and the abnormal, considering that the latter constituted the

mark of those identities posing a threat to the regime. In order to restrain the abject, dominant ideology had to produce a materiality and define their features. In short, it was necessary to produce a material mould that should therefore be repudiated by individuals. The production of the homosexual is a clear example of those qualities rejected in our history of Western cultures. Thus Foucault (1998) said that “the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (43). Regarding this, non-normative sexual identity is described as a 19th-century invention disavowed because it challenged the foundations of the hetero-sexist capitalist economy. Therefore, Foucault brought into the light all those normalising techniques that produced the excluded or the marginal in contrast to the normal.

In Ireland, those disciplinary techniques delineated by Foucault to control the entire social body are associated to a gendered strategical project of constructing postcolonial national identity based on the appropriation of women’s bodies and surveillance of their sexuality after its independence from Great Britain. The relation between Irish postcolonial nationhood and endemic discipline of female bodies has been recognised by scholars (Meaney, 1991; Fischer, 2016). Gerardine Meaney (1991) noted that “sexual identity and national identity are mutually dependent. The images of suffering Mother Ireland and the self-sacrificing Irish mother are difficult to separated” (3). Precisely because the bodies of women were the key to purify the colonised country, the Catholic Church served the purposes of the State to compel women to conform to the traditional ideal of femininity and roles (Meaney, 1991: 4). Therefore, the hegemony of masculinity in power was secured by inscribing cultural meanings on Irish female bodies as the embodiment of a pure nation (Meaney, 1991: 7). In other words, in the history of the technologies of the body, women’s

anatomies have been pierced by regulatory heteronormative codes as attempts to construct fixed, coherent and unified national identities.

As Fischer (2016) has noted, the politics of this project was premised on the institutionalisation of female sexuality and, particularly sexual transgression of standards of purity by forging a hierarchy of deviance through the inscription of the political mark of shame on their bodies, so gendered Others's inadequacy was restrained making their stigma visible (830-832). Hence, these women who embodied shame were strictly controlled in accordance with a graduated scale of classification that hinged upon the type of deviance from normative gendered social norms (Fischer, 2016: 833). Thus, the disciplinary Irish system constrained the female deviant Others by a forced concealment of 'immoral' sexual behaviour from public view, so then, exclusion functioned through the forcible internalisation of shame and guilt that was policed by those institutions aimed to ensure the materialisation of national discourse through the medicalisation and institutionalisation of women's bodies (Fischer, 2016: 835, 839). This scholar claimed that "while the politics of shame thus hid Ireland's national shame of assumed sexual transgression, it induced a fear of exposure, a sometimes lifelong need to hide one's shame of having been a penitent in Magdalene laundry" (Fischer, 2016: 836), as one of the official institutions designated for the containment of women's bodies. The implications of these mechanisms of supervision, classification and constrain will be further discussed in Chapter 5 due to the confinement of the artist analysed in this reformatory institution.

Like Foucault, Judith Butler highlighted the normativity of the category of identity. The American philosopher defined identity as a foundational technique which imposed the exclusion and rejection of fluid principles to structure it, thus, coherence and a sense of unity were its key components invested with a regulatory law (Butler, 2007: 69, 71). She added that sex, gender, and sexuality have the pivotal function to stabilise and preserve the notion of

identity as a prescriptive imperative within the regulatory grid of intelligibility embedded in heterosexual rituals (Butler, 2007: 71-72). It is important to note then that the method of analysis of the media representation must incorporate all these concepts-instruments as an attempt to fully understand if the notion of ‘universal’ heterosexual identity is still pervasive in the mirror images of the world and how it is policed to perpetuate the stability of the economic system.

In addition, another fundamental analytical tool of analysis in this research study is what Butler termed ‘performativity’ in relation to the materialisation of the body and the fixation of normative identity. She detected and described the ways in which dominant ideology had thrived in reproducing, legitimising and maintaining its status intact throughout history:

Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. What will, I hope, become clear in what follows is that the regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative [...] the understanding of performativity [should be] not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains. (Butler, 1993: 2)

In other words, the production of the gendered-dimorphic anatomy is the product of constant repetition of corporeal acts as well as discourses that have a productive effect by which the subject is formed, and thus resulting into the naturalisation of that cultural formation. The aim of performativity is to ensure the plausibility of the material appearance of those bodies rather than exposing them as mere fictions. The work of Butler unmasks the naturalised heterosexual body imbued with the norms of gender, sex and sexuality as a

delusion, that is to say a fabrication that has a social regulatory function in culture, so it follows that binary genders are not natural (2007: 266-267). Given the compulsory repetition of corporeal acts, its signifying practices and norms, Butler contended that “this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete...the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law” (1993: 2). Relentless reproduction is another technique of the machinery of crafting hegemonic anatomies that materialise norms.

Furthermore, she adds another layer of complexity to the crafting of the fantasy of the materiality of gender, which constitutes an effective tool of examination in this doctoral analysis that addresses the virtual production of identities and morphologies: the technique of imitation. It follows from above that if gender is a naturalised and normalised fiction as the product of the effects of heterosexual power it can be imitated and it is precisely imitation that reveals this category as a pastiche by offering alternate possibilities that disrupt this stable mechanism (Butler, 2007: 269). Moreover, the use of the imitative structure of gender is also applicable to other vectors of differences such as sexual identity and race. Since not all the singers that form the corpus of this research negotiate their identities as hegemonic subjects, this analytical element will be extremely useful in producing a deep analysis of how their bodies and identities are constructed in mainstream popular culture.

This reformulation of the morphology pierced by axes of differentiation leads us to another normative category that was examined by this theorist: the human. Butler (1993) explained that what counts as the human is very much delimited by exclusionary attributes such as gender, whose existence or lack thereof establishes the cultural intelligibility of those beings (8). In other words, cultural exclusion is another technique at the service of capitalist societies, which is intended to thwart dangerous disruption. Indeed, it is a widely held assumption that ideology reinforces and extends the effects of power through the

development of complex technologies that comprise a set of techniques that have a historicity which depends on discreet but enduring coercion.

This section is also aimed to examine the ways these mechanisms of producing the hegemonic body and identity have mutated throughout history rather than replaced by new ones. In the second half of the 20th-century, Donna J. Haraway's concept of the cyborg was a watershed moment in the identification of the formative elements of the third millennium corporeality and subjectivity. In a historical period through which capitalism and technology are intertwined, Haraway (1991) proposed the cyborg as a new ontology that relied on the transgression of binary boundaries of intelligibility and legibility, that is, the idea of heterogeneous society linked to bodily and cultural hybridity as a project aimed to undermine the pillars of the normative social order (150). Therefore, her theorisation of the world was a response to the rapid technological transformations and multiple social forces—all of which are continuously changing—in our current globalised and digitalised societies by creating a project that entailed an allegiance between the human and technology:

The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction. (Haraway, 1991: 150)

This statement implies that both the renewed ontological and epistemological foundations of today's society mobilise a mutation of the technologies of producing the body

and technological apparatuses offer endless possibilities to subvert the humanistic philosophical divides by recognising the agency of the subject. Needless to say, in this doctoral thesis focused on the examination of virtual representations of the self, Haraway's hybrid concept is fundamental to understand how celebrities engage with those limited boundaries imposed on them by Western culture. Here, it is important to note that Haraway's cyborg is interlinked with those techniques identified and described by Foucault and Butler but in a mutated cultural world. Furthermore, Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg recognises the fluidity of the mechanisms of fabricating the body due to the gradual "miniaturization" of the instruments of power as well as the interconnection of the human with all the objects and organisms in the world (1991: 152-153). Indeed, the era of social media exemplifies the multiple interlinks between the subject and the non-human. Therefore, this defines our current culture as a product of hybridisation, which affects the perception of social reality and how it is enacted.¹⁴

Another key philosopher in the context of this doctoral study is Beatriz Preciado, who identified the ways the complex earlier techniques of producing the body, identity and subjectivity had irremediably mutated in the third millennium. Therefore, her conceptual and analytical tools are crucial in my research data analysis. Preciado describes gender as a sophisticated prosthetic technology that fuses with the materiality of the anatomy (2011: 21), so this thinker developed Haraway's concept of cyborg (see above in this section) and Foucauldian theories by considering the evolution of all the instruments that intervene in the sculpting of human morphology. Moreover, since the Butlerian theoretical framework focused on the materiality of the body from a linguistic perspective, the Spanish scholar's theory fills that gap by examining how human corporeality is materialised and the changes in the systems of its production.

¹⁴ To illustrate this idea, a virtual representation that embodies these complex transformations in our world ontology has been included in the appendix to Chapter 2.

In other words, she challenged the idea of sex and gender either as essentialist categories or social constructions; conversely, this scholar described them as complex technologies associated with practices of body modification and body-altering by dissolving the traditional distinction between the natural anatomy and bio-technological artifice (Preciado, 2011: 116). In this context, Preciado defined the human body as an appendage to technologies—such as the social media—that had altered the ontology of the subject: “[T]he technologies of communication function like an extension of the body. Today the situation seems a lot more complex—the individual body functions like an extension of global technologies of communication” (2013: 44). This demonstrates the relevance of Haraway’s cyborg to analyses of the body linked to social media that has become an integral part of our daily lives.

Significantly, Preciado applied the “cyborg ontology” to develop the ‘dildo politics’ through the development of ‘dildotechtonics’ as a queer strategy of semiotic representation that emphasises the imitability of the hegemonic gender, so its plasticity enables the displacement of the phallus as a privileged signifier of men as an attempt to undermine the fixity and limitations of binary gender borders (2011: 21). Thus, the dildo draws from and expands the Butlerian notion of imitation and its disruptive possibilities. Preciado viewed the dildo as a key semiotic technique in her “counter-sexual manifesto” that was aimed to de-naturalise heteronormative gender, and it rejected fixed sexual identities by producing a type of counter-corporeality (2011: 13). For this scholar, therefore, dildotechtonics is a counter-science that has been designed to go across the boundaries between the ‘natural’ sex and gender as culturally produced, so the body is a political territory over which the plasticity of the dildo will be used to break away from the ways desire has been encoded in our culture (Preciado, 2011: 41). We will return to this notion of the dildo in Chapter 3 when two of the examined performances implement this theory in a counter-sexual context.

Furthermore, Preciado even goes as far as stating that “nature” is a product of these technologies, whose conventional binary differences between natural and artificial cannot be demarcated so that her theoretical approach moves across borders (2011: 157). Preciado adds that 21st-century genders are prosthetic—as the new ontology of the self—, which means that femininity and masculinity are attributes that are both incorporated and assumed, that is to say the fabrication of the body is interlinked with the massive crafting of identities within the current field of relation of productions and power (2011: 199). This conceptual framework provides a good understanding of the body as an active political materiality and portrays those aspects that will be examined in this study that goes from the late 1980s up to the second decade of the new millennium.

Regarding this, this philosopher has developed several paramount concepts to further grasp the construction of today’s subjectivity and dimorphism, viewed in terms of fusion, fluidity and hybridisation. Preciado (2013) has called this third regime of capitalism ‘Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism,’ recognising the control of sex, gender and sexuality as the pillars of the renewed marked through its technological production and the encoding of its regulatory codes through ultra-rapid semiotic representation digitally transmitted (25, 33). The quotation below summarises the materiality of this capitalism and the development of its technologies to govern the entire social body:

Technoscience has established its material authority by transforming the concepts of the psyche, libido consciousness, femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, intersexuality and transsexuality into tangible realities. [...] Contemporary society is inhabited by toxic-pornographic subjectivities defined by the substance (or substances) that supply their metabolism, by the cybernetic prostheses and various types of pharmacopornographic desires that feed the subject’s action and through which they turn into agents. (Preciado, 2013: 34-35)

From this perspective, the techniques of producing the subject have transitioned from external disciplines that were internalised to their transformation into tangible realities that penetrate the anatomy, for instance, hormones, digital codes, praxes of body building and surgery. Preciado concisely summarises it as “the pharmacopornographic business is the invention of a subject and then its global reproduction” (2013: 36) on a global scale. Thus the rise of Internet tools for encoding anatomies has allowed the global distribution of profit-oriented human moulds which are aimed to the perpetuation of the hegemonic Western model of cultural intelligibility and whose production devices are constantly changing.

Therefore, this scholar addresses the ways this prosthetic materiality of the body is conceptualised as a capitalist product in order to promote consumption, and the media is an effective means through which dominant ideology achieves its ends (Preciado, 2013: 41). Preciado also specifies that the most thriving capitalist product in the new era is gender, whose mutation over the last decades has transformed it into the most sophisticated tool of political power with its productive effects on subjectivities in the service of the stabilisation of the supremacist social order. Today’s gender is the result of those technical apparatuses and semiotics that intervene in its construction and or modification—all of which, additionally, are facilitating its circulation—to materialise its prescriptive formative function:

Gender in the twenty-first century functions as an abstract mechanism for technical subjectification; it is spliced, cut, move, cited, imitate, swallowed, injected, transplanted, digitized, copied, conceived of as design, bought, sold, modified, mortgaged, transferred, downloaded, enforced, translated, falsified, fabricated, swapped, dosed, administered, extracted, contracted, concealed, negated, renounced, betrayed. (Preciado, 2013: 129)

Within the shift towards this commodity culture, gender has been integrated into the neoliberal structures of capitalism used as a means of market expansion, or more precisely gender has become a profitable commodity. Her theory represents an epistemological rupture

that denies the conceptualisation of gender as a social construction, but, rather as a system of communication and a bio-technical network of codes (Preciado, 2013: 156).

In her understanding of the predominant gendered moulds, Preciado highlighted that the imperative of heterosexual binary gender was the norm but whose bodies had mutated into a more refined and malleable materiality adjusted to 21st-century transformations. She established a distinction between the “techno-Barbie” (or the “megaslut”) and the “sterile supermacho” (or the “megaletch”) as the two updated fictions of femininity and masculinity (Preciado, 2013: 48, 220). Firstly, the “techno-Barbie” is conceptualised as an aspirational model that readily succumbs to over-sexualisation and the ideology of artificial eternal youth and her beauty is technically produced, that is to say she is marketed for male consumption (Preciado, 2013: 48, 220). In contrast, the “supermacho” still occupies the privileged position of the subject, who is white, male and heterosexual and whose hegemonic status is further extended in time by bio-technical artefacts that fuel their sexual desire (Preciado, 2013: 48, 220). According to this, the complementarity of the sexes continues governing life and subjectivity, a concept that will be also discussed in the next section of this chapter regarding the dominant visual representation of femininity and masculinity in the media.

As examined in Chapter 1, personal choice and the voluntary acceptance of norms are intimately related to this new regime of power. In this respect, Preciado (2013) highlighted the ways the 19th-century forcible disciplines had been turned into more fluid mechanisms of control and sculpting of subjectivity through the operation of technological visual apparatuses (51). In other words, the current interconnected subject has accepted the hegemonic consensus by developing a type of competence that secures constant self-assessment of their lives according to models reproduced through the media and communication networks on a hierarchical structure and therefore this minimises the intervention of those traditional

institutions described by Althusser (see section 2.1): current capitalism is about maximum profit at minimal cost.

For all these reasons, Preciado has placed herself in continuity with the philosophical paradigms of the posthuman tradition, whose key concepts are also a fundamental analytical tool for the data analysis in this study. Like Rosi Braidotti, Preciado established a complex connection between the technologies of sex and gender—equated with heterosexuality—and the ‘bio-political’ regime that designed a grid of cultural intelligibility that constructed the hegemonic subject as white, heterosexual and European, which implied that colonialism was another essential technology in the production of the body (2011: 92) as will be discussed later in this section on race and its major role in the maintenance of dominant ideology.

Rosi Braidotti looked closer at the major goals of posthumanism and explained its main paradigms to destabilise the philosophical foundations of mainstream culture and to displace the naturalised notion of the human. To say it plainly: along similar lines that Haraway, this scholar proposed the blurring of dichotomous boundaries to dissolve the distinction between the normal and abnormal. Braidotti described the dynamics of the hegemonic cultural model, that was apparently neutral. However, as she explained, the Western paradigms that founded the dominant world ontology and epistemology were grounded on the binary economy of the self: femininity and masculinity versus the production of the deviant Others were products of masculinist Humanism, that needed to clearly differentiate hegemonic identities from Otherness marked by difference which carried negative connotations of abnormality, impurity and inferiority as disposable bodies for the consumption of the privileged subject of Humanism: man (Braidotti, 2013: 15). Thus, those dehumanised Others were embodied through a body over which naturalised, sexualised and racialized codes were inscribed by establishing different hierarchical statuses amongst humans along a scale of differentiation (Braidotti, 2013: 15).

Braidotti, like queer theorists, was disclosing the complicity between Humanism and the interpellation of heteronormative white man as the privileged subject, whose central position is highly dependent on the aforementioned technologies: race, sexuality and nature. Thus, she concisely describes “Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied” (Braidotti, 2013: 24). Importantly, the posthuman project is a shift away from this organisational hierarchy and its classificatory system aimed at combatting inequalities. Braidotti went so far as to say that the paramount goal of this project was “posthumanism as a move beyond these lethal binaries [...] the anti-humanist death of Wo/Ma” (2013: 37). In other words, it pursues to eradicate binary gender.

In her view, the disarticulation of gender relations correlated with the disruption of the binary logic of identity through which differences are mapped by prioritising positions of in-betweenness and fluidity, so she stressed the importance of challenging the grid of cultural intelligibility that sustains the neoliberal structures of representation. Braidotti uses the term “becoming” (or “in-betweenness”) as a technique of connection in the construction of identities that undermine the pillars of the heteronormative regime against the imperative of a coherent and unitary subject. For Braidotti, the posthuman mode of life is predicated on the generative process developed by Deleuze and Guattari “becoming-” that is connected with assemblage rather than opposition, which have the potential to displace components from their original function; in doing so, it brings change moving across-boundaries (Goodchild, 1996: 150). As they emphasise, becoming establishes a continuum, a mode of in-between, always in transformation by challenging essentialism and absolute constructs, adopting a paradigm that transgresses the symmetrical production of linear narratives of domination (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 293). In this regard, this scholar defines the posthuman project as follows:

A figuration is the expression of alternative representations of the subject as a dynamic non-unitary entity; it is the dramatization of processes of becoming. These processes assume that subject formation takes place in-between nature/technology; male/female; black/white; local/global; present/past—in the spaces that flow and connect the binaries. These in-between states defy the established modes of theoretical representation because they are zigzagging, not linear and process-oriented not concept driven. Critique and creation strike a new deal in actualizing the practice of conceptual personae or figuration as the active pursuit of affirmative alternatives to the dominant vision of the subject. (Braidotti, 2013: 164)

From this point of view, Braidotti delineated the blueprint for dismantling the hierarchical order of differences by denying the essentialist being. She pursues a subversive becoming not understood within the negative parameters of humanistic otherness, that is to say, she focuses on the creative potential of blurring fixed social formations to exceed what counted as the universal human. Indeed, this posthuman notion of constructing counter-identities and bodies defies the normative conceptualisation of identity alongside its hegemonic status in the Western philosophical tradition. In a nutshell: the posthuman consciousness is about discovering other modes beyond normalisation and seeking to manufacture subjectivities far from the hegemonic subject

So in the 21st-century, Rosi Braidotti emphasises the necessity to create alternatives that subvert the hegemonic identity politics, that is, the posthuman subject, with a new mode of subjectivity that emphasises, as did Haraway's cyborg, boundary breakdowns:

My position is in favour of complexity and promotes radical posthuman subjectivity, resting on the ethics of becoming. [A] non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others including the non-human [...] This results in radical posthumanism as a position that transposes hybridity, nomadism, diasporas and creolization processes into means of re-grounding claims to subjectivity, connections and

community among subjects of the human and the non-human kind. (2013: 49-50).

This thinker, then, problematizes how difference has historically been thought, and she contributes to working across and beyond those practices of negative differentiation legitimised by hegemonic discourses by proposing the abolition of the political categories of gender: the continuum against oppositional dualism.

Having said this, two other essential notions that are an integral part of the production of the body as a political entity in our Western societies are the construction of masculinities and race. Since male artists and singers marked by either race or ethnicity have been included in this doctoral study, a deep understanding of how they trigger the fabrication of a specific materiality and identity implies the review of literature that deals with these topics.

2.2.1 The Construction of Masculinities: a material approach

As suggested above, the hegemony of men formulated by classical Humanism has secured a hierarchical social order based on exclusion, negative differences and dualisms. In other words, the socio-cultural formation of men has been the organising principle around which inequalities have been created. Moreover, because this thesis addresses the materiality of the body, the production and economy of the male body is an important aspect of this research as another product of ideology. As Jeff Hearn correctly recognises, violence and its material-discursive effects are linked to the analysis of masculinities inasmuch as aggressiveness has been a key element of male identities as the result of their role as dominant subjects (2014: 9). He argues that male violence—physical and discursive—not only reproduces norms but also has a materiality such as male domination (Hearn, 2014: 9). He concisely defined men as “a social materialdiscursive category, not and identity-oriented

category” (Hearn, 2014: 9). It seems that whereas men are the embodiment of power, women were assigned the task of being upholders of male domination by conforming to norms.

Interestingly, Hearn problematized the taken-for-granted existence of a current material unitary masculinity in the hetero-patriarchal social order, that is to say, to focus on the analysis of one “hegemonic masculinity” dismisses all those vectors of difference that produce a variety of masculinities in terms of race, ethnicity and heterosexual orientation (2014: 10). To put it another way, he rejects the existence of a universal and coherent masculinity. Thus, Hearn (2014) is interested in examining those complex practices that derive into the construction of men as hegemonic subjects: “men are both a social category formed by the gender system and dominant collective” (10). He defined seven key social processes in relation to the material-discursive production of masculinity, of which four are crucial for this research data analysis:

3. which men and which men’s practices—in the media, the state, religion, etc —are most powerful in setting those agendas of those systems of differentiations.
4. the most widespread, repeated forms of men’s practices.
5. description and analysis of men’s various and variable everyday, ‘natural(ized)’, ‘ordinary’, ‘normal’ and most taken-for-granted practices to women, children and other men and their contradictory, even paradoxical, meanings.
6. how women may differentially support certain practices of men, and subordinate other practices of men or ways of being men. (Hearn, 2014: 10)

Hearn’s theory also explores the ways the traditional hegemonic man has been disembodied, considering that he was the primary bear of what counted as knowledge and authoritative discourses whereas those male subjects that were marked by otherness—such as social class, ethnicity and so on—were assigned a particular materiality (2014: 11). Indeed,

Patterson and Elliott (2002) suggested that “representations of male bodies are likely to have varied effects depending on the age, sexuality, class and ethnic background of the audience” (238). However, the reproduction of idealised male bodies in accordance with heteronormative codes is usually internalised by the male audience, so that these images contribute to the reinforcement of the materiality of the hegemonic subject (Patterson & Elliott, 2002: 38). Even those anatomies that are considered non-normative as long as they conform to hegemonic standards of masculinity are readily accepted in mainstream culture (Patterson & Elliott, 2002: 38).

As was mentioned in relation to the word female, “male” is addressed as the result of relations of production rather than a biological concept. This epistemological conceptualisation to understand the materiality of masculinities is particularly pertinent in the second section of Chapter 4 for the analysis of Ricky Martin. Another important aspect of examining this topic is the need to focus on male physicality and its sexuality as key concepts in the construction of men’s anatomies as a complex embodied reality with identifiable characteristics. Finally, this scholar stresses the ways men are inserted in a gender system and how they contribute to reproducing gender imbalance and in doing so, they are legitimising the normative organisational structures (Hearn, 2014: 14). Put otherwise, both women and men materialise through their bodies the power relationships of the hegemonic order. From this perspective, male bodies are seen as machines or communication networks that reproduce ideology through one major technique: violence-aggressiveness.

This brings us to another technique used to reproduce traditional masculinity as a hetero-masculinist body, exaggeration as an attempt to avoid the regulatory label of abnormal by succumbing to homogenisation. As Michael S. Kimmel stated, “the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual pedration toward women. Homophobia and sexism go hand in

hand” (2005: 37). This assumption is predicated on the idea that all men are potential projections of hegemonic masculinity. This view on materialising codes associated with masculinity is very relevant to this doctoral research that focuses on current visual materialisations of men in the media and the ways they sustain or defy white male supremacist ideology, as will be in-depth discussed in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, through the controlling function of this mask of patriarchal heterosexual masculinity, they reproduce violent behaviours and corporeal contours in the public sphere, which intrinsically means to perpetuate the hegemonic male body. Kimmel explained that “women and gay men become the ‘other’ against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood” (2005: 37). This involves addressing the mainstream media as the embodiment of heteronormativity—that is to say, a heterosexual man—that projects its values and identity on the bodies that are represented, what is at issue in this research.

However, at the advent of the new millennium and its neoliberal economical transformations, the fact that the male body has been targeted by the media as a commodity has brought a great impact on male subjectivities. According to Patterson and Elliott, the male gaze as a technique of producing the body has been inverted; in other words, men have internalised their own perspective by being encouraged to consume particular renderings of male bodies (2002: 232-233). This involves that men are encouraged to focus the hegemonic male gaze upon other men (Patterson & Elliott, 2002: 235). When they wrote that “central to the development of identity in consumer culture is the notion of bodies as projects. Bodies that are not accepted as given; rather, they are malleable, capable of being transformed and constructed” (Patterson & Elliott, 2002: 233), their ideas clearly connect to Beatriz Preciado’s theory on the mutation of the technologies of the body. In fact, these authors suggested that

male bodies altered by body modification are the products of consumption and at the same time, their anatomies work as mirror images for others in society (Patterson & Elliott, 2002: 234). As such, internalisation can be considered as a strategy of producing masculinities in commodity culture.

As Hearn did, Patterson and Elliott (2002) highlighted the moulding of the physical appearance based on muscle building as acceptable images for men embodying the new 'macho' in this new era, transformations in masculinity which constituted nothing more than adaptation to the refined capitalist marketplace, so they assert that "the increasing feminization of hegemonic masculinity is a means by which it can align itself more closely with consumer society and protect its self-designated dominance" (2002: 235). I should make clear here that "feminization" refers to that male corporeality that has integrated codes of physical fitness and beauty traditionally encoded as feminine. For this reason, current male identities are represented by a materiality that is subject to a process of objectification that increases the profits of the 21st-century advanced capitalism (Patterson & Elliott, 2002: 236). In this respect, it does not mean that the male subject no longer occupies the privileged position, it reflects a more complex process: the hegemony of masculinity and at the same time, men's self-objectification through a re-adjusted anatomy serves the interests of the neoliberal capitalist ideology of gender because they are considered as aspirational. This negotiation of today's male identities as well as their bodies cannot be separated from the postfeminist strategies that commodify female bodies; instead, they are complementary to one another. Consequently, the complementarity of sexes is understood as an updated technique that feeds on heteronormativity in powerful ways. Patterson and Elliott (2002) summarise this: "[T]hese institutions of consumer culture provide men with both templates for their body/identity projects [...] Hegemonic masculinity is changing in order to maintain

its privileged position” (241). Therefore, the materiality of male bodies and consumption are intertwined.

In addition, regarding the analysis of masculinity within a Latin American context and its assimilation into mainstream culture, the understanding of the production of the Latin Lover is crucial for this study. Nadia Lie (2006) explores the construction of Latin Lover as a product of Hollywood machinery that defined Latin men in relation to love, passion and romanticism, whose mannerism was aimed to make white women fall in love with them (133). In a Foucauldian sense, the fabrication of this category is connected to a long story of Western classification of otherness that was adaptable to forms of masculinity that reinforced hegemonic masculinity; that is, this idealised fiction of the Latino is the embodiment of a male sexualised masculinity inextricably connected to the womaniser and his heterosexual desires, elements that reproduce stereotypes of Latin American culture (Lie, 2006: 134-135).

It is important to recognise that this fiction of the Latin Lover must be understood in connection to the relationships that exist between Latin American masculinities intertwined with gender identities and ethnic-racial identities produced by cultural practices. Within the Puerto Rican context, to be a man is predicated on social respect from others in order to have greater social mobility. Marysol Asencio (2011) highlights “the need and importance placed on obtaining respect through masculinity is further complicated by Puerto Rico’s colonial status and the racialization of Puerto Ricans Stateside as well as other social markers” (336). In her article, Asencio points to the effects of being branded as “nonmasculine” or effeminate—whose identities are not in accord with what is socially expected—on the roles played by men in this society; therefore, they are stigmatised (2011: 336).

Consequently, in heteronormative Puerto Rico, the macho represents a form of ideal manhood associated with dominance and sexual aggressiveness (Asencio, 2011: 337) by

revealing the interdependence between the Latino as a 'true' man and the colonisation of the bodies of Puerto Rican men in the dominant social imaginary. As noted by this critic:

Puerto Rico is not a nation in the classical definition of the term since it is not sovereign. [...] Puerto Ricans negotiate their identity as colonial subjects of the United States and as citizens in the United States. Therefore, when discussing issues of gender, gender conformity, and sexual orientation, both Latin American/Caribbean and U.S. contexts and discourses frame Puerto Rican experiences. [...] As such, the importance placed on masculinity by Puerto Rican men is intertwined with their ethno-nationality. (2011: 339)

Thus, Puerto Rican masculinity is constructed with a strong emphasis on heterosexuality and traditional gender relations predicated on the binary logic as a strategy of resistance against American oppression (Asencio, 2011: 339). As a result, this type of masculinity involves the exclusion of those bodies marked by otherness: women, homosexual and racialized men (Asencio, 2011: 339). From this perspective, in challenging the racist images of Puerto Rican masculinity, they reject the dominant hierarchies by having to prove their masculinity, which involves the distancing from female codes of behaviour (Asencio, 2011: 343). Although homosexuality is sanctioned amongst these men, Asencio points out that "they also speak of a hierarchy among gay masculinities in which gay masculinity is equated with respect, power, and social standing the more closely it conforms to hegemonic heterosexual masculinity" (2011: 343).

Indeed, in the study conducted by this scholar, homosexual Puerto Rican men who had migrated to America showed a tendency to repudiate every label and behavioural trait associated with femininity inasmuch as they established an equation between effeminate masculinity and lack of respect (Asencio, 2011: 344-5). She notes that these men opted for identifying with hegemonic masculinity as a strategy of becoming accepted within mainstream society (Asencio, 2011: 345). According to this, the mechanisms of identification

and internalisation of Western heteronormative codes of masculinity were effective ways of maintaining gender and ethnic hierarchies through the sanctioning of effeminate formations of manhood amongst Latinos. In this respect, the construction of Latino identity and body is accomplished through the incorporation of heteronormative codes, binary splits and hierarchical power-relations (Asencio, 2011: 350). Enacting the macho—even when they were not heterosexual—was considered a form of preserving their manliness in American culture that had historically castrated non-Western masculinities. Asencio (2011) concludes with the idea that for homosexual Puerto Rican men in America “maintaining a normative masculine identity and persona, they believe, is one way to prevent further marginalization based on gender normativity” (350). Having said all this, in a Butlerian sense, the technique of imitation of corporeal acts and discourse as was discussed in section 2 of this Chapter is used by Latin American stigmatised individuals to avoid being sanctioned in mainstream society.

2.2.2. The Production of the Black Body: Gender and Race

The former sections have addressed two key elements in this doctoral thesis. On the one hand, the constitutive and formative elements of dominant ideology embedded in heteronormativity and embodied by the hegemony of the white heterosexual man amongst other characteristics. On the other, those marked bodies pierced by the axes of differentiation aim to adapt to the normative social order by internalising its dynamics of power relations. In short, the supremacist subject and his by-products are fabrications of the machinery of power. When it comes to black bodies and their identities, the same patterns of correction and surveillance are found mobilised by relations of materialist and discursive practices of control and economic production.

Much has been written about the production of the black body in mainstream culture with the result of the extensive work by scholars on race placing emphasis on its materialist construction and otherness (Wallace, 1990; Bush, 1990; hooks, 1990; Wallace, 2004; Spillers, 1987; Edwards, 2006). One of the pioneering studies in the construction of black subjectivities is Michele Wallace and the myths of the black macho and superwoman, that are still deeply relevant to current debates on race.

According to Wallace, the capitalist slave plantation systems appropriated the bodies of black people whose cultural practices were suppressed whilst assimilation and internalisation of white sexual and gender codes were imposed on them: the black macho and over-sexualised black women became tangible realities (1990: xix). Yet, in so doing, it can be stated that the gendered, sexualised and racialized body is a product-fiction of the capitalist economy of slavery whose pervasive effects on the representation of black people saturate 21st-century media despite the profound socio-political transformations. Wallace goes on to describe the cultural formation of these two Western fabrications as polar gender constructs with its deep implications in the perception of black people in our current society. In addressing the production of the black macho, Wallace (1990) pointed out that black male slaves were psychologically castrated by being deprived of their patriarchal status; therefore, black men negotiated their identity as colonial subjects through their hyper-masculinity that over-emphasised their sexuality and physical strength as a strategy of resistance against the denigrating stereotypes derived from the dehumanised experience of slavery (xix-xx, 17). As Edwards (2006) explained:

Black men have been and or continue to be somehow 'emasculated' through processes of racism, colonialism and Western imperialism. [...] [F]irst, black men are emasculated; second, [...]the causes of both black men's oppression and their sexism are essentially structural and relate to the history of colonialism, slavery and the rise of monopoly capitalism. (58-59)

The impact of the capitalist slave plantation on the construction of black masculinity was a macho that primarily focused on an exaggerated sexuality in order to distance themselves from that image created in Western culture. Yet, somehow the internalisation of this model of white masculinity served dominant ideology to ensure the surveillance of black men, due to the fact that black hyper-masculinity posed a threat to white men based on their fear that black men appropriated the bodies of white women as bearers of the nation's identity (Wallace, 1990: 32), that is to say, the control over the encoding of black masculinity was essential to contain them within the hierarchy of race as one of the technologies at the service of the maintenance of political power. The result is that black men as colonised bodies accepted this fabrication of their identity in order to assert their true masculinity and patriarchal rights.

Within the heteronormative ideology as a machinery of manufacturing fictions, every gendered product has its binary counterpart and both are mutually reinforcing. Consequently, the superwoman was born. Wallace (1990) wrote about the forcible sexual availability of black women for white masters on slave plantations; after all, they were reduced to men's possessions (12, 18). The sexual exploitation of black women had negative impacts on the construction of their identities and anatomies in terms of promiscuity as the guarantors of the status of white pure women as reproducers of American national identity (Wallace, 1990: 26). As bell hooks (1990) puts it:

One has only to look at American television twenty-four hours a day for an entire week to learn the way in which black women are perceived in American society—the predominant image is that of the “fallen” woman, the whore, the slut, the prostitute...A devaluation of black womanhood occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery that has not altered in the course of hundreds of years [...] Annals of slavery reveal that the same

abolitionist public that condemned the rape of black women regarded them as accomplices rather than victims. (52-53)

Moreover, it has been noted that this situation of exploitation and oppression in the economic structure of the plantation compelled these women to construct their womanhood in association to physical strength, muscular build and independence as a way of surviving abuse in a mainstream culture that had deprived them of the support of black men on slave plantations (Wallace, 1990: 11, 17). To be a black superwoman means a hyper-sexualised body marked by race and physically capable of hard labour for their economic exploitation. As discussed in this section about men, black women also tended to imitate white women's behaviour in order to undermine those stereotypes of their sexuality that stigmatised them (hooks, 1990: 55). Although they attempted to distance themselves from these labels of oppression and exclusion, the pervasiveness of the promiscuous stereotype is deeply ingrained in American culture and organisational structures, enduring well in the third millennium. This resulted into the naturalisation of this conception of black femaleness understood in terms of difference, therefore, as the essence of their identity.

Thus, disciplinary classification and performative reproduction were key tools to construct black identities and bodies. With respect to this historical devaluation of the black women, hooks asserts:

So pervasive was the tendency of whites to regard all black women as sexually loose and unworthy of respect that their achievements were ignored. Even if an individual black female became a lawyer, a doctor, or teacher, she was likely to be labelled a whore or prostitute by whites. All black women, irrespective of their circumstances, were lumped into the category of available sex objects. (1990: 58)

Indeed, as she has further stated, the marginalisation and oppression of women deriving from the construction of their identities, that involved placing emphasis on their

sexual availability during slavery, has gradually been institutionalised in American society (hooks, 1990: 59). Thus this type of femininity is maintained within the precept of hegemonic narratives, and as such will be brought into the data analysis of Chapter 3.

Another technique used to perpetuate the myth that all black women were sexually loose was metonymy, that is to say the “interpellation” of their identities was dependent on sexualised parts of the black female body. Wallace (2004) described the ‘Hottentot Venus’ as one of the most pervasive and demeaning labels to classify black women and make their bodies intelligible within the hegemonic grid of cultural intelligibility (428). The pejorative term ‘Hottentot Venus’ first used for Sara Baartman has extended to refer to black female identity in connection to her buttocks as an essentialist attribute of over-sexualised black women’s anatomies, which has the negative connotations of lust and promiscuity (Wallace, 2004: 428). In this respect, the materiality of this construct is another delusional fabrication of colonial slave plantation (Wallace, 2004: 429). These colonial by-products of black female sexuality are the result of the deployment of the Western technique of examination that produced a penetrated body viewed from the hegemonic male gaze (Bush, 1990: 11-12).

According to Bush, these myths of black women are the creation of an effective mechanism of bio-political regulation through the sexualisation and animalisation of black femininity that was reduced to a sub-human ontological status (1990: 15) of the kind bell hooks describes as the “white male perception of black women as “beasts,” sexual savages who are unfit for marriage” (1990: 65). These depictions of black women’s bodies justified the exploitation of these women and their inferiority. All these techniques and master-narratives reveal how racial structures and dominant ideology were historically created, which ensured the hegemony of the normative social order. Consequently, these negative images of black women will affect the ways they are portrayed and made visible in the media

by ridiculing them. bell hooks summarises these ideas of damaging material constructs of black femininity mobilised through Western visual systems of representation:

Whites who control media exclude black women so as to emphasize their undesirability either as friends or sexual partners. This also promotes divisiveness between black men and black women, for white people are saying via their manipulation of black roles that they accept black men but not black women. And black women are not accepted because they are seen as a threat to the existing race-sex hierarchy. (1990: 66-67)

These theories cast light on the establishment of the supremacy of race and the branding of black bodies as disposable. It was Hortense J. Spillers who coined the term “pornotroping” to explain the mechanisms deployed by dominant ideology in order to maintain the status quo untouched (1987: 67). This influential scholar stated that black ‘bodies’ (female and male) were considered as ‘flesh,’ which triggered the dehumanisation—extreme objectification—of slaves and their cultural unintelligibility (1987: 67). She also explained why black women were classified in terms of monstrosity because when the “Negro family” was inserted within the Western grid of cultural intelligibility, the figure of the father was displaced from his patriarchal position in the symbolic order and black women—whose bodies were properties of the white masters—occupied that phallic position inasmuch as they were the transmitters of the name to their offspring (Spillers, 1987: 66, 80).

The fact that black women have traditionally been excluded and or erased from representation is crucial to understand the ways the democratic inclusion of the depiction of black female bodies within mainstream mass media and popular culture either sustains this misogynistic racism or creates alternative versions of this femininity that are far from the colonial by-products. To summarise, all these techniques of producing the racialized and colonised body as fictions of hegemonic fabrications reveal how normative political mechanism and its practices are deployed to articulate bodies marked by otherness through

heteronormative perspectives on gender intertwined with other technologies such as race that rely on binary divides aimed to control difference.

2.3. Techniques of Visual Representation: the Panoptic Gaze

The workings of ideology on the legitimisation of its hegemonic corporeal fabrications are inextricably linked to the design of representational strategies that distribute and reproduce heteronormativity. This section explores theories on the devices of representation and its organisational principles that intervene in the production and encoding of the body in the media.

A key scholar on representational strategies and the conception of the image as a complex multi-layered structure is Roland Barthes's thought on the rhetoric of the image. According to him, the image was a device compounded of three elements, "a linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message" (1977: 36). Firstly, the linguistic message has two paramount functions: "anchorage" and "relay" insofar as signifiers encoded in an image can convey multiple meanings; this type of message either contributes to fix meaning and/or alter it by guiding the reader towards plausible interpretations (Barthes, 1977: 38-39). Moreover, this critic identified the function of "anchorage" as ideological, orienting the reader or audience through the choice of the "preferred reading"¹⁵ of signifieds encoded in the media text (Barthes, 1977: 40). Secondly, the coded iconic or symbolic messages are those cultural connotations that permeate an image by creating a complex web of communication through the use of visual techniques that add political meaning to its structure (Barthes, 1977: 44). And finally, the non-coded iconic message or literal meaning constitutes those messages that are empty of connotations (Barthes, 1977: 42). Nevertheless, Barthes concludes that the symbolic and literal meanings

¹⁵ In media and cultural studies, Stuart Hall coined this term to refer to when the audience interpreted the meaning or reading of a text in the expected way (1997: 228).

cannot be separated, which implies that the literal meaning per se is neither neutral nor innocent (1977: 42).

In the context of celebrity studies represented through the media, the understanding of the structure of the image plays a major role in the uncovering of ideology. However, there is another essential apparatus that intervenes in the representation and interpretation of images and to which I will turn next: the gaze.

2.3.1. The Gaze and the Principle of Surveillance

Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's project, the Panopticon, Foucault described it as an essential mechanism of control, monitoring and surveillance, and identified its usefulness for Western capitalist societies in order to hold positions of power that facilitated the manipulation of the population. In Foucault's work, the Panopticon is a complex mechanism of supervision predicated on the principles of visibility and inspection for correction of non-normative identities confined in architectural structures (1991: 201). Within this context, the Panopticon is about constant surveillance and making individuals highly visible in order to keep a hold on their bodies in our Eurocentric societies, whose power relied on the management of the living corporeality (Foucault, 1991: 201). As Foucault pointed out, its organisational principles were aimed to tackle difference through examination and classification, which would result into the production of a homogeneous subject (1991: 203), a mould to be universally reproduced.¹⁶

It is important to note that he highlighted that this mechanism of monitoring was applicable to every institution and organisational structure (1991: 205). By considering that we live in the era of social media, somehow he envisioned the ways this mechanism of power

¹⁶ As was discussed in section 2.2, the philosopher Beatriz Preciado examined the applicability of the Panopticon in the construction of the hegemonic subject through the mutation of gender.

would permeate the entire social body and as a result, it was subject to mutation in the heteronormative regime as a meta-stable system of domination: “the panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body” (1991: 207). Moreover, he described the effectiveness of the deployment of the Panopticon based on new modes of producing the self that was more discreet, fluid and rapid which resulted into the refinement of the apparatus of surveillance (Foucault, 1991: 209). The panoptic supervision was aimed to construct a subject pierced by classificatory labels and invested with the norms, and those ones who deviated from regulatory control were relegated to an inferior status or medicalised as a way of neutralising their power of subversion (Foucault, 1991: 223). Yet, in doing so, panoptic surveillance became a technique of normalisation that establishes hierarchies amongst individuals that range from the hegemonic subject to the non-normative.

If observation, visibility and surveillance are key elements of the Panopticon (Foucault, 1991: 201), it means that the gaze is an integral part of this apparatus of correcting individuals. As Foucault stated, the Panopticon was both an architectural structure and an “optical system” where the gaze played a pivotal role in having a hold over the bodies of those who were its inmates through mechanisms of exclusion and/or medicalisation by establishing an ontological hierarchy amongst individuals depending on the degree of deviance on the axis of normalisation; indeed, he envisioned how the Panopticon would mutate into a principle of surveillance that could be applicable in multiple contexts (1991: 205).

In the Irish context, the Magdalene Laundries were a type of panoptic institution that contained that embodied femininity deemed to be non-normative as an attempt to examine and control female sexuality. Simpson, Clegg, Lopes, e Cunha, Rego and Pitsis explained that these institutionalised corrective spaces operating for three centuries in Ireland targeted

women whose sexuality was categorised as promiscuous (2014: 256-257). By removing these women from public spaces, a hierarchy of gender was established through the Magdalene Laundries as systems of constant surveillance of female transgression in disciplinary Ireland. As mentioned in section 2.2, the conceptualisation of this institution as disciplinary has been examined by Clara Fischer, who identified its punitive function of surveillance of those women whose sexuality was considered promiscuous so that they were labelled as pollutants (2016: 824). Given the fact that all Irish women were considered as bearers of the postcolonial national identity, meaning that their abandonment of decency put this project at risk, the massive projection of the panoptic model of surveillance onto Irish social organisation was necessary, through the intense control to which women were subjected and held:

The assumption that all women were potential sexual transgressors shifted the burden of proof away from members of the clergy, social workers, police, and family members to facilitate, with relative ease, the incarceration and sometimes reincarceration of unwanted women and girls. (Fischer, 2016: 834)

So, the panoptic inspection model enforced in Ireland until the end of the 20th-century as one of the political contexts included in this research proves its effectiveness and its consolidation in our globalised Western societies. However, this panoptic control and its hegemonic gaze gradually mutated from the second half of the 20th-century to the advent of the new millennium. It was Beatriz Preciado who developed the Foucauldian conceptualisation of the Panopticon, identifying its transformations that enable a subtler and more effective regulation of the political body. For Preciado, the human anatomy has internalised panoptic surveillance, since it has become a prosthesis that fuses with the flesh through body-modification and alteration techniques that incorporate attributes that intervene in the moulding of the corporeality and subjectivity: “[I]t is the body desiring power, seeking to swallow it, eat it, administer it, wolf it down, more, always more, through every hole, by

every possible route of application. Turning oneself into power” (Preciado, 2013: 208). In this respect, the Panopticon has transitioned from an architectural structure to a malleable form of control that penetrates the body (Preciado, 2013: 207).

In other words, the ideological gaze is voluntarily internalised by the subject operating inside the body. It is undeniable that this mutation is inextricably connected to Haraway’s identification of “miniaturization” (see section 2.2) as part of the construction of the corporeality of 21st-century subjects. Furthermore, this prosthetic incorporation and infiltration of the panoptic gaze as a device of self-control underpins the material practices of the construction of postfeminist identities and today’s masculinities.¹⁷ By assessing the pervasiveness of the institutionalisation of the normative gaze—policing eye—, this sheds light on the complex relations between gender, sexuality, race and nation identity. The hegemonic gaze is a key tool to classify, evaluate, and maintain power-relations intact. Preciado’s account of the incorporation of the miniaturized control highlights the idea that current subjectivities are a product of an advanced capitalism that has refined and re-adjusted the old techniques of surveillance to the inevitable changes in our Western societies, whose power relies on the government of life.

The conceptualisation of Preciado’s prosthetic gaze is connected up with Haraway’s theorisation of technological devices as appendages to the human eye invested in norms within a society dominated by processes of semiotic-technical codes of representation (1991: 190). For this theorist, both technological systems of vision and human eyes were non-neutral devices that intervened in the decoding of social reality and bodies, thus they actively established hierarchies or social relations, which crucially hinged on biased perspectives and ideological values that spread throughout the entire social body (Haraway, 1991: 190).

¹⁷ See Chapter 1 section 1.1 and Chapter 2 section 2.2.1.

By establishing an interlink between both post-human notion of the gaze, both the organic and the audio-visual technique are non-neutral devices that ensure the reiterative production and legibility of gendered and sexualised morphologies within the imperatives of dominant ideology along a scale of hierarchies. Thus, these scholars contest the heteronormative regime embedded in neoliberalism with its corrective practices and a purported 'objective' grid of intelligibility to perceive individuals. As Haraway insists, "this is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White" (1991: 188). The identification of the normative components of the gaze is crucial for this doctoral thesis that aims to disclose how the encoding of visual representation is aligned with the conventions of domination and legibility of Western capitalism as an accomplice of a deeply hetero-patriarchal culture. As such, the male eye not merely aims to stabilise the identity and corporeality of the legitimised modes of femininity and masculinity, but also establishes the formulaic code systems to represent otherness (or difference) within the precept of bio-technical hegemony.

2.3.2. The Visual Representation and the Heteronormative Eye

The exploration of the panoptic gaze has been analysed by feminist film theorists that maintain its male-dominated structures and intolerance of deviance. Here we will focus on the contributions of Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis to the understanding of how the female body is encoded through biased representational strategies, theories that are linked to the former conceptual and analytical tools of analysis in complex ways. In our approach to celebrity studies, Mulvey's work on the cinematic apparatus reveals how media visual production is controlled by hegemonic gender politics that articulates disempowered images of women through objectification (1975: 803).

Drawing on the Freudian conceptualisation of scopophilia, this scholar explained the interdependence between the gaze—that is essentially voyeuristic—and images of individuals that are decoded as a sexualised body, and further, how mainstream cinema is dependent on this process of achieving sexual pleasure through objectification (1975: 806). Therefore, a psychoanalytic approach to apprehend the connection between desire, the look and perception of the human body must be recognised. Mulvey problematizes women's gendered and sexualised bodies over which the male gaze projects his desire in a hetero-patriarchal society that expects women assume passive roles (1975: 808). As she pointed out, “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1975: 809). What comes into play here is that the historical oppression of women has marked them as those others from whom sexual pleasure is derived for the dominant male gaze. Thus the history of visual representation remains profoundly gendered. Parallels can be drawn here between the Lacanian understanding of the heteronormative symbolic order and the ways women are visually represented as the embodiment of the object of desire (being-the phallus).

This structure of the image by the marking of difference was also noted by Teresa de Lauretis. So meaning depends on the invocation of femininity pierced by sexual difference, image that is so compelling in the Western practice of representation. This scholar explained the dominant form of encoding women through images, which reduced them to mere objects to be observed, displayed and look sexually attractive to men (de Lauretis, 1984: 37). Hence, she examined the pervasiveness of the representation of women as the territories over which sexualised codes were inscribed, representational mechanisms that had penetrated society and its institutions, whose negative effects were the construction of female identities marked by the ideology of gender and the moulding of subjectivities in relation to power-differentiated

relations that hinged on the binary economy of sexual difference (de Lauretis, 1984: 37-38). Here, it is important to note that both authors located this tendency to transform women into commodities in visual apparatuses of representation.

Although these theories were developed in relation to film studies, their relevance in the analysis of celebrities is undeniable since the encoding is done through media texts such as music videos and performances amongst others. Moreover, three female artists have been included in this doctoral study and the image of women is an essential element in the articulation of meanings in media narratives (Mulvey, 1975: 809). Indeed, as Mulvey has highlighted, the heterosexual imperative in the encoding of gender relations has traditionally mobilised the plot in the image structure in which women are the bearers of the phallic effects of objectification (1975: 810). In other words, the practice of visual representation is a projection of the history of the colonisation of the female body rooted in the taken-for-granted submissiveness of women so that an idealised image of a woman is one of a dehumanised anatomy that accept her role as guardians of the reproduction of national identity.

As Haraway did, Mulvey recognises the camera eye as a mechanism that ensures the perpetuation of hegemonic enactments of sexual difference. She has stated that “the camera becomes the mechanism for producing an illusion of Renaissance space, flowing movements compatible with the human eye, an ideology of representation that revolves around the perception of the subject” (1975: 816). Thus Mulvey and de Lauretis are concerned with the institutionalisation of the media as a machine of reproducing dominant discourses of sexual difference and the hierarchy of gender in relation to established notions of femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, for them, the gaze—organic or technological—is an indispensable device aimed to preserve misogyny in popular representation. So the media images aim to render gender identities that are unitary and fixed rather than the effects of power.

In order to examine the functioning of the masculinist system of representation, de Lauretis developed the concept of “technologies of gender” as an attempt to explain that visual objectification of women is not the mere result of sexual difference but, rather, the effect of complex cultural and political practices and techniques from different institutions that operate within ideology (1987: ix). In relation to this, she explained that gender was not simply a biological product with a natural anatomy but the result of cumulative meanings that were sedimented in our bodies through the reiteration of visual-discursive representations of the individual, which originated from a wide range of institutions, some of them the traditional heteronormative ones such as the family, religion, education and so on, by adding the media, language, film amongst others (de Lauretis, 2008: 16). Further, de Lauretis explored the ways representation and spectators’ materialisation of their gender are part of a complex process, that is, representations embody attributes of gender and those are assimilated by the audience (2008: 16). It is in this way that the reproduction of gender is secured. In other ways, representation operates in a performative way in a Butlerian sense.

We are confronted, then, with the ways hegemonic ideology has thrived in incorporating manifold institutions and disciplines in the machinery of [re-]producing power difference derived from gender and privileging heterosexuality. Notice how this scholar identifies language as another mechanism at the service of ideology, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter and justifies the integration of CDA in the research methods of this study. Within heteronormativity, the technologies of gender also refer to gender as the product of representation that has material effects in real life and that the history of Western Art conforms to its ideals, values and practices, naturalising the complementarity of the sexes as oppositional political categories (de Lauretis, 1987: 3, 5). This said, de Lauretis described the enactment of gender as violence per se; she stated that “representation of violence is

inseparable from the notion of gender. [...] [V]iolence is engendered in representation” (de Lauretis, 1987: 33).

The pervasiveness of these dominant practices of representation that serve the purposes of the normative regime in the 21st-century is recognised by the philosopher Beatriz Preciado, who asserted that the hegemony of the current materiality of the body results from the relation of production of the mechanisms of representation (2013: 49). In this regard, representation is a key underpinning of Western culture and economic system by contributing to the stability of heteronormativity as a default setting that ensures massive consumption in this era of a new kind of capitalism that is highly dependent on the rapid digital transmission of information. De Lauretis also explored how cinema—which can be extended to all media apparatuses—manufactured multi-layered meanings imbricated on images that actively intervened in the modulation of subjectivity, that is, a signifying practice that could not escape ideology (1984: 87). To put it simply, all codes and the mechanism of encoding have an ideological purpose that accounts for the complexity of the representational system to articulate acceptable gender relations within heterosexuality.

As was argued above, the process of vision is indispensable in order to engage spectators in the decoding of meanings and how the sexualised-gendered other is predominantly valued for consumption. We can conclude this section with two final remarks. Firstly, the male (or heteronormative) gaze is still pervasive in our current systems of representations and it is another by-product of ideology. And secondly, whereas these theorists focus on the importance of the external gaze that objectifies, classifies and brands the different other, in the previous section we noted how the subject has internalised the male gaze, operating in the fabrication of their bodies and subjectivities. Consequently, the contemporary subject lives under total surveillance from outside and inside the boundaries of their corporeality:

In the pharmacopornographic era, the body swallows power. It is a form of control that is both democratic and private, edible, drinkable, inhalable, and easy to administer, whose spread throughout the social body has never been so rapid or undetectable. In the pharmacopornographic age, biopower dwells at home, sleeps with us, inhabits within. (Preciado, 2013: 207)

The Panopticon in the third millennium has perfected its techniques of monitoring and updating the individual according to the transformations in the capitalist marketplace bound up with its mechanisms of production.

2.4. Language and the Production of Truth

In the semiotics of visual representation, the material-discursive function of language and the production of truth play a major role in the analysis of the three chapters of data analysis included in this doctoral thesis. Firstly, we will focus on language as a powerful instrument of ideology and the paramount technique used for the production of dominant discourses. And secondly, we will delineate those conceptual strategies that have been developed to counter-attack absolute or official versions of truth that are of the utmost importance in the analysis produced in Chapter 5, where a subject that defies normativity is presented.

2.4.1. Language and the Hegemony of Master-discourses

From a materialist approach, Wittig (1992) examined the power of language to produce discourses that established hierarchies amongst the individuals by materialising oppression and its real implications for the material life of those who were marked by difference (22). She insisted that people were compelled to use those discourses invested with heteronormative norms; therefore, those who deviated from them were sanctioned (Wittig, 1992: 25). Wittig stated that “we forget the material (physical) violence that they directly do to the oppressed people, a violence produced by the abstract and ‘scientific’ discourses as

well as by the discourses of the mass media” (1992: 25). Thus she views language as a type of violence owing to the fact that it is inscribed in dominant ideology and its practices of domination. The above notions of language indicate that its use encompasses a wide spectrum of elements and functions such as its materiality, anchorage in ‘high culture’ and ideology, establishment of power relations, and violence. I will return to this notion of language in the analysis of how the artists’ lyrics are permeated by this violent materiality.

The materiality of language described by Wittig is clearly linked to Butler’s performativity of identities and the ways that discourses fabricate the materiality of bodies as was discussed earlier in this chapter (see section 2.2). Indeed, given the embodied nature of language for Butler, she insists in the imperative of citation of norms, values and rules as indispensable for the materiality of fixed cultural formations that are always gendered. Butler wrote that “this citation of gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a ‘one,’ to become viable as a ‘one,’ where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms” (1993: 232). This function of language activates and produces a forcible dimorphism; it is a signifying practice whose aim is twofold, productive and repressive by sanctioning those identities that are labelled as abject.

Regarding the notion of truth, Foucault explained the processes of manufacturing truth in Western cultures. Foucault (1998) argued that gaining knowledge of the individual created an illusion of social reality that was indispensable to manufacture what would count as essential truths in our societies (58). Confession was identified as a crucial technique developed for the manufacturing of truth by authorities and the intellectual elite. Foucault wrote that “the confession became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society. [...] Western man [and woman] has become a confessing animal” (1998: 59). What can be elicited from his words is that to make the subject verbalise their innermost desires was necessary for learning

how to control the population and exert power over them. Moreover, he stated that confession had been internalised by the individual through forcible utterance over so many centuries that it had been naturalised as an integral part of our Western idiosyncrasy, so it was possible to conceal the fact that it was the effect of psychological manipulation (1998: 60). It is in this context that confession must be understood as a ritual permeated by power relations insofar as it serves as a vehicle for producing useful knowledge and doing so, the individual cedes power to others over them, and in doing so, it contributes to maintaining hierarchies amongst individuals through the entire social body (Foucault, 1998: 61-62). Increasingly, then, confession has become a compulsory technique of extracting useful knowledge, thus, it was gradually anchored in culture, subject to constant transformations as a discreet apparatus that modulated subjectivity (Foucault, 1998: 63).

Insofar as confession became a sophisticated mechanism of producing ‘scientific’ knowledge about the population, it also allowed the creation of a system of codes that were associated with normative signified of conducts that could be recognisable and legible in society, so the training of the gaze analysed in section 2.3 according to the conventions of domination and confession are interlinked (Foucault, 1998: 65). This technique of knowledge, which is not natural attribute of the individual, is crucial in the selected field of study for this dissertation on celebrity whose speech acts are actually subject to public opinion, so they have to be analysed within this complex context that incorporates this technique as part of the machinery of ideology.

2.4.2. The Production of Counter-discourses

This section discusses relevant theory on the manufacturing of alternative discourses that resist dominant ideology and its master-narratives. Therefore, we will focus on the work by scholars on counter-discourses (Haraway, 1991; Butler, 1993; Braidotti, 2002, 2004 and

2013). There are ways to resist identification with heteronormativity and this involves distancing oneself from hegemonic identities and practices. Celebrities cannot escape surveillance but they can alter the effects they have on their identities. This thesis acknowledges normative culture as being composed of a high culture and the possibilities of a counter-culture operating against/within a set of prescriptive rules that substantially affects subjectivity.

The starting point for this is Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" that confronts us with resistance from historically marginalised positions. She defined "situated knowledges" as those that are partially located somewhere, manufactured by the individuals whose bodies have been marked by gender, sex, sexuality or race amongst other categories and consequently, they are by-products (or fictions) of heteronormative discourses—that are masculinist, racist and colonialist—, developing subjectivities that question and/or displace dominant narratives from their central position (Haraway, 1991: 111). In short, it is a strategy for striving to achieve accountability for people who have been dehumanised by their otherness. Thus, Haraway adds that "situated knowledges are always marked knowledges; they are re-markings, reorientatings, of the great maps that globalized the heterogeneous body of the world in the history of masculinist capitalism and colonialism" (1991: 111). By considering that what counts as dominant ideology has traditionally been a machinery of objectifying the marked Other, "situated knowledges" enables the disarticulation of this mechanism by becoming active agents in the production of truth rather than passive objects (Haraway, 1991: 198).

This tool is a powerful instrument of empowering the Other and reversing the sub-human ontological status that the supremacist capitalist regime has assigned to them. Moreover, it is intrinsically linked to Rosi Braidotti's rumination on the notion of becoming-

minoritarian¹⁸ (or becoming-nomad) that mobilises a position against the humanist, colonialist and nationalist Western imperialism by supporting diversity and social justice (2013: 53). Thus, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti (2002) proposes the becoming-minoritarian as a new kind of subject or consciousness that alters or disrupts the binary relations on which the universal subject constitutes himself as the norm; indeed, such a transgressive minoritarian is able to transcend Western boundaries by moving in-between the limits of their borders (119). Following on from the aforementioned ideas, it may be said that the partial location or perspective of the oppressed is fundamental to produce a counter-narrative in order to disarticulate the distinction between the central position of the hegemonic subject and those marked bodies that occupy the margins of society (Braidotti, 2013: 16).

For as soon as one dwells on the territory of becoming-minoritarian towards the posthuman subject, the process of disidentification is unavoidable; this medium is a way of developing a new mode of perspective on being accountable as an active micropolitics that resists the economy of polar thoughts. As Butler has stated, “that failure of identification is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference” (1993: 219). What constitutes this productive process of disidentification or misrecognition is the deviation from those normative signifiers or rules that are organised around the dualism machines and work for the “majoritarian” with its fixed structures of identity (Butler, 1993: 219). This account of a mode of life that distances itself from the hegemony of a masculinist society is also discussed by Braidotti as an attempt to escape from dominant discourse and consciousness in order to explore possibilities of in-between. The importance of disidentification for the posthuman project that entails the rejection of gender is recognised

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari developed this term by drawing a distinction between “major-itarian,” a mode of being equated with man as a dominant identity and becoming-minoritarian that accounts for those modes of difference that do not represent a standard and they do not offer an unified identity, so their becoming- deviates from the norm-majority (2005: 291-292).

by this theorist: “I have defended this method as a dis-identification from familiar and hence normative values, such as the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity, so far to move sexual difference towards the process of becoming minoritarian” (Braidotti, 2013: 89).

Becoming-minoritarian, that is, a posthuman subject, is associated with a particular type of ethics based on a sense of community and a strong bond amongst its members, which differs from the regulatory category of individuality as a product derived from masculinist Humanism for the control of the entire population (Braidotti, 2013: 190). Since the posthuman subjectivity is a disavowal of the normative state of domination, it raises questions about the legitimacy of the underpinnings of Humanism such as secularism; thus, one might adhere to a religion without entailing a contradiction to the posthuman ethics and the questioning of dominant values (Braidotti, 2013: 35). Accordingly, the postsecular turn is a response to the crisis of Western secularism that had failed to achieve equality and continued dehumanising otherness (Braidotti, 2013: 36). One can view postsecularism as a new mode of subjectivity that defies the absolutist rhetoric of our imperialist culture and its practices of producing the idealised binary gender alongside its hierarchy.

Furthermore, another significant element of this shift towards the posthuman is a new perspective of current medicalised practices of self-destruction, which should be understood as a sign of resistance against the capitalist economy of transforming all lives into commodities by imposing an ideology of eternal youth, fitness and the internalisation of the self-surveillance of the individual's health in order to extract productive labour forces at minimal cost (Braidotti, 2013: 114). In this respect, mental health issues should be viewed within the evolution of an advanced capitalism that demands an idealised dimorphism to serve the interests of the marketplace. In other words, these self-destructive practices reveal the forcible normalisation of the imperatives of heteronormativity as fabrications that

establish impossible objectives for the human beings, which just can be approximated. These elements of the posthuman ethics will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

Within this model of the posthuman psyche, memory is a fundamental tool to produce versions of truth that disrupt dominant discourses of the subject and History. What has traditionally counted as legitimate History is an array of linear master-narratives that are masculinist, racist, hetero-centric and colonialist. However, Braidotti proposes memory as a complex device characterised by its non-linearity, non-unitary and rife with interstices and fissures operating somewhere along the continuum, which can be used as a powerful and generative mechanism for producing those histories that has been either erased or discredited when they came from those individual who had been relegated to exclusion as disposable bodies (Braidotti, 2013: 167-168). Thus, they can insert themselves into it by mechanisms of inclusion that recognise alterity as part of an intensive multiplicity.

Therefore, for Braidotti (2004), to be minoritarian—that is nomadic or in constant transition—triggers the elaboration of counter-memories that oppose to the hegemonic enactment of the multiple Others; in consequence, they assemble a new representation of reality detached from the conventions of domination and its Western classificatory system (3). Memories, then, act as a map that nourishes alternative subjectivities developed by those individuals who were denied the right to produce History from their perspectives as marginalised and politically embodied. As Braidotti (2013) has stated, what has traditionally counted as valid and reliable ‘scientific’ knowledge is the political and cultural product of societal forces in conjunction with their norms, whose production of truth was institutionalised within the boundaries of the normative social order; on the contrary, the posthuman thought is intended to create alternative truths that undermine dominant ideology by using creative mechanisms (169-170). When Braidotti writes about the posthuman subject, therefore, she refers to a modulation of subjectivity that creates spaces of resistance for the

oppressed, an alternative and habitable territory for them by striving not to reproduce the normative categories of the self. It is about mapping new modes of consciousness that counter-attack those heteronormative scientific disciplines premised on exclusion.

Chapter 3

The Playfulness of the Sexual Entrepreneur and Cultural Appropriation:

Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj

In this chapter, we will closely examine the mainstream encoded production, cultural representation and the explicit or implicit ideological values associated with the American female singers: the pop star Miley Cyrus and the rapper Nicki Minaj (born Onika Tanya Maraj). In the third millennium, we are being confronted with a new kind of postfeminist capitalism that mobilises and embodies particular models of femininity. It is in this context that these two celebrities will be analysed in order to see the form of femininity they reproduce through the set of body attributes and practices they incorporate in their images. What has been considered appealing about them and worthy of consideration is the powerful instrumentality of their staged charisma, the flamboyance of their performances and constant transitions into radical images by trading on multi-layered cultural meanings as will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

This chapter will also explore the taste/desire they promote, the techniques employed in the distribution of their media texts and how troubling or compelling they may be in the mass media spotlight. In the first section, we will focus on the visual-discursive representation of Miley Cyrus due to the impact of her cultural product in mainstream pop culture. Indeed, it has been stated that Cyrus is one of the most celebrated icons in the 21st-century pop culture (Berkesengun, 2014). Moreover, due to the fact that as a white American, she is deeply rooted in dominant culture, the analysis of her projected image will contribute to highlighting the transformations in the current display of the hegemonic ideal of femininity bound up with social expectations and the choices on offer to women. Thus, we will aim to fathom the imbrication of the visual and linguistic messages from diverse sources such as

official music videos, performances, and the social media during the second decade of the 21st-century—since both stars rose to fame as solo artists in the same period of time—as an attempt to understand the ways their public identities and bodies have been manufactured and encoded. Although both artists are inserted within different genres of music, coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds in terms of class and race, they have both been included in this chapter because striking similarities have been found in the ways they play the role of the “sexual entrepreneur” linked to the current hypersexual culture and materialise hegemonic codes of femininity as products of masculinist Western culture. Harvey and Gill (2011) used the term sexual entrepreneur to refer to the new modality of femininity that trades on sexuality as a commodity, which covers up the male-centred capitalism’s appropriation of neoliberal ‘feminist’ values through the convergence between feminism and patriarchal interests (52). Therefore, we will examine the ways both artists embody this new feminine subject. In the second half of this chapter, we will turn to Nicki Minaj to examine the production of her identity and the meanings conferred upon her distinctive cultural product.

3.1. Miley Cyrus: from a Disney Girl to a Pop Icon

Miley Cyrus became a teen idol as a Disney girl in 2006 and later she gradually transitioned into a mass-mediated pop star all over the world. To begin with, Cyrus can be defined as an “ascribed celebrity” since her initial privileged status as a Disney star is connected to the popularity of her lineage because celebrities coming from well-known artists tend to be somehow favoured in the entertainment industry (Rojek, 2001: 17). This is precisely the case of Cyrus, whose father Billy Ray Cyrus was a highly successful country singer and actor. This information is also significant in terms of her social class within American society.

To further grasp the cultural meanings inscribed in this artist's identity, it is important to note that there has been a substantial evolution in Cyrus's image and career by transitioning from Hannah Montana to her current status as a pop culture icon. Three moments should be taken into consideration in order to trace the features of her representation: her origin as a celebrity (Disney actress), a transitional stage when she reached the age of consent, and today's Miley Cyrus. My argument here is that when she was about to turn eighteen, she attempted to distance herself from Hannah Montana by gradually hyper-sexualising her celebrity image, incorporating subversive corporeal acts, masculine codes, and particularly cultural elements of Afro-American subculture in order to cause a major rupture in the traditional image of American femininity embodied by the Disney actress.

In this respect, Hannah Montana is the genesis of Cyrus's identity as a mainstream celebrity, which originated from the compounded effects of a reiterative visual-discursive representation of the Disney star in the media. According to Judith Butler, identity is a normative category, which centrally hinged on the performative repetition of norms within the dominant grid of cultural intelligibility that fabricates an illusion of a coherent identity that is dependent on the stability of gender, sex and sexuality (2007: 71). Moreover, Rosi Braidotti (2013) has stated that the political location of the individual—"where one is actually speaking from" (16)—matters in the project of identity formation and ideological anchorage. Disney as a machinery of producing the idealised fiction of normative femininity created Hannah Montana, a delusion that embodied the purity of white American femininity that should be preserved, so that she must fit that ideal represented by the following image:



Figure 3.1 (Bruk, 2016)

This normative representation of American female whiteness displays an ossified image of Cyrus. Regarding this, Laura Mulvey discussed that the images of women were the result of pervasive objectification, that is to say, the heteronormative gaze enabled women to become a commodity to be looked at and consumed (1975: 808-809). In other words, their visual encoding was a reflection of male fantasies. Here, then, Cyrus as Hannah Montana displays the enactment of a white middle-class woman: a carefully crafted image invested with white norms. She looks straight at the camera with a wide, welcoming and trusting smile. Insofar as she was a minor, she has not been sexualized yet and so she is projecting the 'healthy', fresh image middle-class white America wants to see for itself. In this light, Cyrus's alter-ego emphasises a fiction of femininity deeply ingrained in heteronormativity with the articulation of the 'good' girl that mainstream mass media endorsed by serving the capitalist interests of commodity culture. Rojek's combined structuralist and post-structuralist paradigms of celebrity point out that it is both a vehicle for capitalist exploitation and a system of representation intertwined with consumption (2001: 33, 45). From this perspective, Hannah Montana became a gendered brand aimed to increase profits within the new organisational structures of capitalism.

However, when she was going to turn to the age of consent, she started distancing from the Disney brand. “Can’t Be Tamed” (2010) marked a transitional stage in the evolution of this artist. This music video is inserted in the context of the museum, where Cyrus is confined in a cage. It plays with fantasies that converge in a clash of codes troubled by the binary rhetoric: white imperialism versus exoticism/orientalism, black/white, Avis Cyrus/Peacock Cyrus, inmate/museum’s spectators/, subject/object, female aggressiveness/sensuality, human/animal—despite the attempt of hybrid Avis Cyrus—and culture/nature, man/woman. Moreover, the artifice of this performance is predicated on the imbrication of panopticism, observation, classification and self-proclaimed individuality. Importantly, this video also encodes a covert reference to the circus that adds the element of performance used by the artist as a mechanism to disrupt the masculinist control exerted over her gendered body. As Foucault explained, panopticism—conceived as an architectural structure—was a technique of surveillance and examination of its inmates that were classified as non-normative, whose function was the correction of their behaviour; in this regard, the gaze was essential to contain deviance (1991: 207, 209). This idea is connected to Beatriz Preaciado’s definition of the museum: “the museum is a machine of the production of truth” (“A Parte Rei Revista de Filosofía” 2015) [My translation].

In relation to this, the following image represents this idea of panoptic surveillance that permeates the media text¹⁹ and her challenge to the gaze:



Figure 3.2 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2010)

Moreover, the introductory speech contributes to highlighting the position of Cyrus as an inmate to be classified through observation. Therefore, in this media text the interconnection between image and verbal message is crucial to interpret the representation of the artist. Indeed, Barthes had identified the function of the linguistic message as an instrument to fix meanings (1977: 38). She is introduced to the audience as follows:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the museum!
Tonight we are proud to unveil our great exhibit yet,
A creature so rare, it was believed to be extinct.
Well tonight, we shall see.
Ladies and gentlemen in captivity for the first time
The rarest creature on earth: Avis Cyrus. (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2010)

Therefore, the rendering of Cyrus is linked to this history of the museum, that has traditionally acquired rare objects for display in the West, and consequently, the museum is intimately connected to the construction of Western culture, and particularly to the rise of

¹⁹ The video can be accessed online at the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjSG6z_13-Q

social sciences. According to Preciado, Western culture has historically been obsessed with the establishment of the dichotomy: the normal versus the non-normative as a strategy of controlling the population (2013: 69-70). Braidotti added that those identities/bodies marked by otherness—such as gender, sexuality and race—had been naturalised, thus the hegemonic subject (man) maintained his status (2013: 15). Regarding this, here the attempt of dominant ideology to label Cyrus as abnormal and at the same time, to objectify her ‘naturalised’ body, is pervasive.

Her hybridisation is another essential aspect of this performance. As Haraway has stated, the cyborg ontology predicated on the fusion of the human and non-organic elements represents a transgression of the binary boundaries that have dominated our culture (1991: 150-151). Cyrus’s hybrid body, then, entails constructive strategies to disrupt the heteronormative gaze embodied by the camera and the man who introduced her to the audience.

During the performance, Cyrus abandons the cage by appropriating the museum as a normative ideological institution to produce a counter-narrative that undermines the corrective function of the panoptic surveillance that penetrates the media text. As discussed above, Butler identified the main features of normative identity: coherence and fixity, that is, the fictions of femininity and masculinity were presented as unified subjects and bodies (1993: 2). Nevertheless, the artist calls into questions the normativity of identity when she sings: “I’m not here to sell ya or tell you to go to hell / I’m not a brat like that / I’m like a puzzle, but all my pieces are jagged” (line 17-19).²⁰ I argue here that the verbal message of the song and the visual representation of Cyrus are mutually reinforcing by defining identity in terms of lack of coherence, continuity and non-unified and thus, a fluid notion of the

²⁰ The lyrics of the song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

subject is offered. The following image interconnected with this subversive discourse illustrates the disruption entailed by the performance:



Figure 3.3 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2010)

Although Cyrus was in a transitional stage, she has maintained the rejection of a fixed identity in the evolution of her career. We can observe her persistence in refusing classification when she was interviewed three years after this music video. It was Foucault who identified the technique of confession as a Western powerful tool to produce normative truth; this ritual ceded power to the listener as the one who gained useful knowledge to control and constrain the individual who confessed (1998: 61-62). Importantly, when the American journalist Barbara Walters asked Cyrus about her identity from Hannah Montana “to what?,” the pop star replied: “people that know me, they see me change really every week, every two weeks, I’m changing and learning so much. I think especially now that I feel like I’ve found more of my independence. I don’t think I was ever really happy with who I was” (Rubenstein, 2013). Whereas Walters—acting as a confessor—is attempting to extract a confession from the artist in order to label her identity, the celebrity’s answer revealed the

ways she was in constant mutation and her lack of affection for the Disney brand: Hannah Montana. I contend that these two confessional narratives (the song's lyrics and the interview) are important for two major reasons: on the one hand, how Cyrus reversed the old technique of confession for producing a non-normative version of identity and on the other, this proves how this device developed by the Catholic institution and science has been incorporated in the mainstream media to monitor the production of subjectivities since celebrities are role models for people in the era of globalisation and the social media.

To conclude with this transitional performance of her identity/body, I argue that in marked contrast to the masculinised Avis Cyrus at the beginning of this media text, the video also displays Peacock Cyrus as an explicit sexualised version of the artist image. Peacock Cyrus is intimately connected to the hypersexual culture around women in the postfeminist era, one of the main features identified by Rosalind Gill (2007a): the self-exploitation of sexualisation that is suggested as aspirational. Thus women trade on their own sexual allure, femininity is mobilised through the body as the mirror of identity, difference becomes a commodity and self-monitoring (149). What is considered attractive in postfeminism—sexiness—resonates with Lieb's theory on the transitional stages of female pop artists from the "good girl" to the "temptress" as the 'naturalised' transformation in the image of musicians when they become adult (2013: 102). In other words, as de Lauretis suggested, this is a visual culture where female bodies have been used as the space where sexuality is inscribed, that is, mere images to titillate men's sexual desire (1984: 37).

Regarding this, exotic Peacock Cyrus is understood as the ‘natural’ transition of her image as an artist integrated into the postfeminist dynamics of articulating identity through the over-sexualisation of the body as the passport to success, as this image illustrates:



Figure 3.4 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2010)

In this media text, both representations of her body alternate by negotiating femininity until Miley Cyrus is the one that remains victorious. Thus she concludes this negotiation with the verbal message from the lyrics “I can’t be tamed. I can’t be tamed” (40).²¹ The reference to taming is problematic because traditionally it has been connected to domesticity, so while all other women are “tame,” meaning they settle down with a man, she is the “rarest creature” because she will not do like the rest. On the contrary, it can be argued that she is ‘masculinised’ by behaving like men do, that is, by rejecting commitment. This is the precise opposite of the middle-class good-girl kind of image projected in Hannah Montana. The process of shattering the Disney ideal of femininity had already started. What is more, if we take into account that this celebrity is at a transitional stage of her career, the interaction of

²¹ In Miley Cyrus’s claim for her right to define her identity, there is a symbolic image where she is violently held back by a male dancer. This representation embodies the violence of the heteropatriarchal society to have a forcible hold on female anatomies. The image has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

the two simulations of Cyrus and the final triumph of Avis Cyrus over peacock Cyrus as a claim of her identity and individuality might carry a meaning that is twofold: first, the incoherence of this media text is linked to this search for a fixed identity away from Hannah Montana and second, the choice of the provocative and challenging Avis Cyrus seems to drop a hint about the mutation of her artist identity, although she is not yet sure about where she is going, which is stated when she sings: “I wanna be a part of something I don’t know” (line 23).

Henceforth we will observe a shift towards an identity/body away from the fixed mould designed by Disney where she was expected to fit. On *Rolling Stone*, she confessed in 2012 that when “I was away from people for a minute [...] I just started feeling my own vibe. I bought a pair of Doc Martens. I shaved my hair. Driving a fucking Ford explorer. Just blending in” (Eells, 2013a). Thus, she expressed how her transition from the “good girl” to *Bangerz*²² Cyrus was mobilised by moving into masculine codes, marked by her use of swearing language as will be examined later. I would like to stress that although Nicki Minaj also plays with incorporating radical changes in the projection of her image, the rapper’s strategy has much more to do with the imitation of canons of white femininity related to the stereotypes of black women deriving from the legacy of slavery.

This key stage in the transition of the artist is deeply ingrained in a highly hypersexualised culture materialised through soft-porn aesthetics. The most important features of the construction of her adult identity are the following: the appropriation of elements of the masculine working class, performative gestures, appropriation of Afro-American subculture of the ghetto, the display of an infantilised aesthetics, use of genital prostheses on-stage and visual-discursive references to drugs as indicative of individual freedom and rebelliousness.

²² Her album *Bangerz* (2013) marked a point of no return in the evolution of the artist’s celebrity image.

As concerns the first relevant element, it is true that Cyrus attempts to step out of the stereotypical image of femininity by assuming masculine attributes and phallic codes of the working class, but they are encoded in a representation that has bought into over-sexualisation. Thus, the use of the elements of the working class as an artifice is clearly displayed in her video “Wrecking Ball” (2013). In an article from *The Independent* in 2013, Denise Calnan echoed Miley Cyrus’s words for the massively popular magazine *Rolling Stones* on the source of inspiration for the “Wrecking Ball” music video: “‘Wrecking Ball’ [video] is like Sinéad O’Connor’s media text [“Nothing Compares 2 U”] but, like the most modern version ... I wanted it to be tough but really pretty. That’s what Sinéad did with her hair and everything [...] I think it will be one of those iconic videos too.” Cyrus’s words establish a significant connection between her video and O’Connor’s media text from 1990 that adds and alters the meanings in the reading of it by being placed in a context, that is, this is an example of intertextuality. Cyrus’s intent is immediately evident if we put side by side (see below) the first frame of her video (a close-up of her face) with one of O’Connor’s:

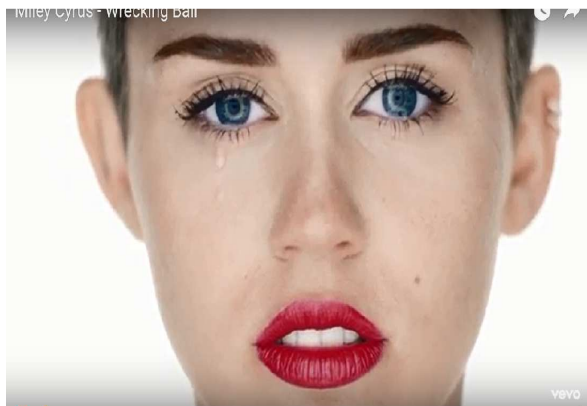


Figure 3.5 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2013)



Figure 3.6 (“Nick Macchiavelli,” 2015)

By comparing Cyrus’s appearance characterised by her masculine short hair with O’Connor’s shaved head, I contend that whereas the American celebrity conformed to camp aestheticism as a symbol of young rebelliousness and non-conformity, the Irish singer’s bald head is an act of political disobedience related to her anchorage in Ireland (see Chapter 5).

Sontag (2009) pointed out that the camp phenomenon was predicated on an exaggerated aesthetics associated with homosexual men who incorporated feminine attributes in their performances tied with the pursuit of androgyny (277, 279).²³

Nevertheless, the camp aestheticism linked to the display of masculine working class codes such as the wrecking ball and sledgehammer are problematic and at the same time subversive because they burden the representation of Cyrus's gendered body with phallic connotations. This is clearly seen in the following image:



Figure 3.7 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2013)

It is in this context that we must focus on Lacan's heteronormative articulation of desire that explains the psychic internalisation of normative gender where men symbolically occupy the having-the phallus position (subjects of desire) in contrast to women that must assume the mandatory being-the phallus (objects of desire) in the symbolic order (2006: 581-582). In this respect, Cyrus appropriates the masculinist position of having-the phallus, which is reinforced by the lyrics when she sings: “I will always want you” (19).²⁴ One might add

²³ This use of the camp tradition was noticed by Mariel Rubinstein (2016), who published on her blog a reading of this video called “Miley Cyrus, Feminist or Whore?” in which she claims that Cyrus displays a camp aesthetics mediated by masculine codes that are given a phallic use (“Storify”). Despite the fact that Cyrus does not behave in a submissive way by performing female sexual empowerment far away from conventional sexiness, her choice of placing her naked body on a wrecking ball is problematic (“Storify”).

²⁴ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

here that she becomes the subject of desire in accordance with the position she occupies. However, the representation of the artist licking the sledgehammer can paradoxically lead to a double interpretation: on the one hand, since she has appropriated a masculinist role, it represents a homoerotic articulation of desire and on the other hand, she is succumbing to the traditional female role that aims to satisfy male desire.

Furthermore, the wrecking ball as a masculine device of the working class is saturated with meanings from her sexualised naked body that gyrates on the ball, which is placed within the context of the heteropatriarchal ideology:



Figure 3.8 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2013)

Laura Mulvey argued that women had become the passivized object of the male voyeuristic gaze that penetrates the female body with its scopophilic instinct when their images are projected on the screen (1975: 815). This theorisation of the role of female images is inextricably connected to the postfeminist culture that is predicated on the idea that sexual liberation of women is about becoming sexually available for men, which is perceived as a source of empowerment (Walter, 2015: 5). Therefore, since her body is perceived by the heteronormative eye of the camera whose major role is the pervasive objectification of

female bodies, Cyrus—who is compared with the wrecking ball: “I came like a wrecking ball” (22)—contributes to the exploitation of her sexuality. Indeed, as Haraway (1991) suggested, neither the organic gaze nor the camera are neutral but biased (190). In this respect, this representation fails to step out of the violent encoding of women as an object of observation and examination.

Indeed, the Spanish philosopher Beatriz Preciado analysed how the principle of panoptic surveillance had mutated in a [postfeminist] world where the body voluntarily internalised inspection that fused with the organic, that is, 21st-century anatomies were infiltrated by power (2013: 207). This explains why Cyrus has finally succumbed to heteronormative control in this media text. My argument here, then, is that it is undeniable that the artist’s incorporation of masculine codes corresponds to a deliberate initiative to shed the image of Hannah Montana, but her assimilation of the panoptic gaze as well as her sexual playfulness with the external camera eye saturate the text with tensions and contradictions that expose her failure to disarticulate hegemonic gender relations. This demonstrates the pervasiveness of the principle of the Panopticon in Western culture in order to control those who attempt to deviate from the precept of normative binary logic.

Embedded within and across these contradictions is her gender nonconformity, publicly revealed three years after this music video, which seems to suggest that her identity is more fluid than either Hannah Montana or the sexualised Cyrus. In 2016 in a hyper-confessional interview with *Variety*, she openly spoke about her identity:

My whole life, I didn’t understand my own gender and my own sexuality. I always hated the word “bisexual,” because that’s even putting me in a box. I don’t ever think about someone being a boy or someone being a girl. Also, my nipple pasties and shit never felt sexualized to me. My eyes started opening in the fifth or sixth grade. My first relationship in my life was with a chick...Yeah. My mom is like an ’80s rock chick — big blonde hair, big

boobs. She loves being a girl. I never felt that way. I know some girls that love getting their nails done. I fucking hated it. My nails look like shit. I don't wax my eyebrows. I never related to loving being a girl. And then, being a boy didn't sound fun to me. I think the LGBTQ alphabet could continue forever. But there's a "P" that should happen, for "pansexual"... Even though I may seem very different, people may not see me as neutral as I feel. But I feel very neutral. I think that was the first gender-neutral person I'd ever met. Once I understood my gender more, which was unassigned, then I understood my sexuality more. I was like, "Oh — that's why I don't feel straight and I don't feel gay. It's because I'm not." (Setoodeh, 2016)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, confession was an essential tool for monitoring the individual, and more specifically their sexuality, through the extraction of information that allowed the pathologisation of the subject on the axis of the differentiation between the normal and abnormal (Foucault, 1998: 67). This Foucauldian analysis of confession is essential to fully understand the implications of Cyrus's narrative clearly interconnected to the transitional stages of her identity described above. Notwithstanding her internalisation of the male gaze, she produces a discourse that tries to resist classification, therefore we cannot categorise her within rigid labels, as the mainstream media have aimed to do according to Mariel Rubinstein.²⁵

Her gradual distancing from the fiction of Hannah Montana also entailed the incorporation of performative gestures that have become iconic and an integral part in the fabrication of her identity/body: sticking her tongue out, crotch display and pole dancing, especially the first one, that has been relentlessly represented in the media. Judith Butler coined the term performativity to explain the ways an identity was manufactured and fixed through the constant repetition of corporeal acts that derived into the materialisation of the sexed body (1993: 2). Moreover, as Foucault stated, individuality, that is, the idea of having a

²⁵ For more information on this topic, follow the link <https://storify.com/Mrubinstein/miley-cyrus-in-gender-and-sexuality>

recognisable identity, was developed as an essential technique of control (1991: 291). This technique of producing the body is related to Preciado's theory of how the internalisation of panoptic surveillance contributed to the fixation of identity (2013: 208). These interlinked ideas are applicable to the interpretation of the following image from her music video "We Can't Stop" (2013), with her tongue out as a performative gesture that is a form of fixing her identity by resembling a selfie picture that connotes narcissism/individualism as a form of 21st-century self-expression. Thus, this image resonates with the idea of self-supervision. Indeed, this marked individualism is linked to the rise of capitalism in Western societies and commodification:



Figure 3.9 ("MileyCyrusVEVO," 2013)

Indeed, this hallmark of Cyrus's celebrity image is reiteratively performed across the social media by reinforcing her search for a distinctive identity away from the Disney star, as the image below posted on her official Facebook page shows:



Figure 3.10

The use of the social media adds a new layer of meaning to her active participation in the crafting of her anatomy and subjectivity. At the psychological level, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) offered an understanding of how today's women had assimilated the male gaze into their consciousness as a way of self-surveillance and reproducing the standards of heteropatriarchal beauty (177). Although this selfie is an indicative that the artist has succumbed to that perfected technique of the panoptic gaze, she reproduces a masculine corporeality. Nevertheless, it can be also considered as part of the strategical shedding of Hannah Montana. Whereas in Foucauldian disciplinary societies, individuality was invented as a technique of controlling the social body as discussed above, 21st-century individuality has mutated into a commodity to be traded on. Unlike Cyrus, Nicki Minaj's selfies are aimed to promote Western wealth and the over-sexualisation of her body, especially putting emphasis on her buttocks, a portrayal connected to the objectification of women during slavery.

In addition, crotch display and manspreading have been other bodily performative gestures reproduced in the media, as signifying practices in the representation of her cultural product. According to Foucault, the invention of disciplines as techniques of controlling and filtering in the body entailed the forcible production of particular corporeal gesture, thereby fabricating useful anatomies (1991: 152). Preciado (2013) identified the ways these disciplines were classified between “semio-technical codes of white heterosexual femininity” and “semio-technical codes of white heterosexual masculinity,” being physical containment one of those encoded as feminine (120-121). Thus, the fact that Cyrus overtly displays her crotch and her recurrence to stereotypical manspreading is a non-neutral gesture in the media, especially if we consider that this institution has been defined as a code of “white heterosexual masculinity” (Preciado, 2013: 121). The effect of her enactment of this masculine expansive posture of occupying public space in the media is twofold. Firstly, the subversion of gendered corporeal constraints imposed on women’s anatomies by the heteropatriarchy and thus disrupting this bodily action that correlates with male dominance, suggests that Cyrus’s manspreading is somehow a source of empowerment.²⁶ But since her body is marked by gender displayed across the mainstream media that is dominated by the male gaze, this could be also interpreted as a sexualised posture inviting penetration.

²⁶ Katherine Timpf wrote an article about the importance of the campaign launched by New York public transport MTA in order to control manspreading since this posture was an “assertion of male dominance” perpetuated by the patriarchy, that is, a gender issue (2015).

The following image is a 2014 performance of her song “Love Money Party” (2013) where she incorporates this masculine corporeal act as an element of the spectacle as the following image displays:²⁷



Figure 3.11 (“Miley Vevo,” 2015)

Once more the representation of Cyrus’s body denies a simplistic interpretation of an identity constructed on the axis of the binary logic. Moreover, this focus on the artist’s self-expression through a masculine practice of domination is reinforced by her assertion of the masculinist values of an advanced capitalism in this performance. It was Preciado (2013) who discussed we lived in a new mode of capitalism that was characterised by the multimedia transmission of information and the moulding of subjectivities that were penetrated by the values of commodity culture in order to produce capital (33-34). This message is encoded in the lyrics of the song: “Money ain’t nothing but money / When you get to the money, it ain’t nothing but money...Love, money, party” (1-2, 7). Cyrus becomes the prophetic bearer of this hedonist ideal of capitalist consumption that is a key feature of current capitalism by appealing to the audience with this desire for superficial values.

²⁷ Another image that proves the “performativity” of this posture from a concert in Helsinki has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

As stated earlier in this chapter, contradictions constitute an essential element in the construction of her identity. Regarding this, the exploitation of sexuality will be integrated into her performances, that encode this neoliberal message of promiscuity as a source of empowerment for women. In Natasha Walter's discussion on the mainstreaming of the values of soft pornography, she stated that the practice of pole dancing linked to the history of strip clubs and prostitution had become fashionable amongst women as a way of being more sexually attractive in the public sphere; indeed, it was considered empowering for them (2015: 42). This postfeminist rhetoric is related to the features of this advanced capitalism that transformed orgasmic force into a commodity. As Preciado (2013) said: "the raw materials of today's production process are excitation, erection, ejaculation, and pleasure" (39). Cyrus is also well-known for having popularised through her performances this practice, which is essentially connected to a system of male dominance that trades on women's sexuality as objects to be consumed. The image below exemplifies this idea of her acceptance of this new mode of production embedded in 21st-century capitalist marketplace:

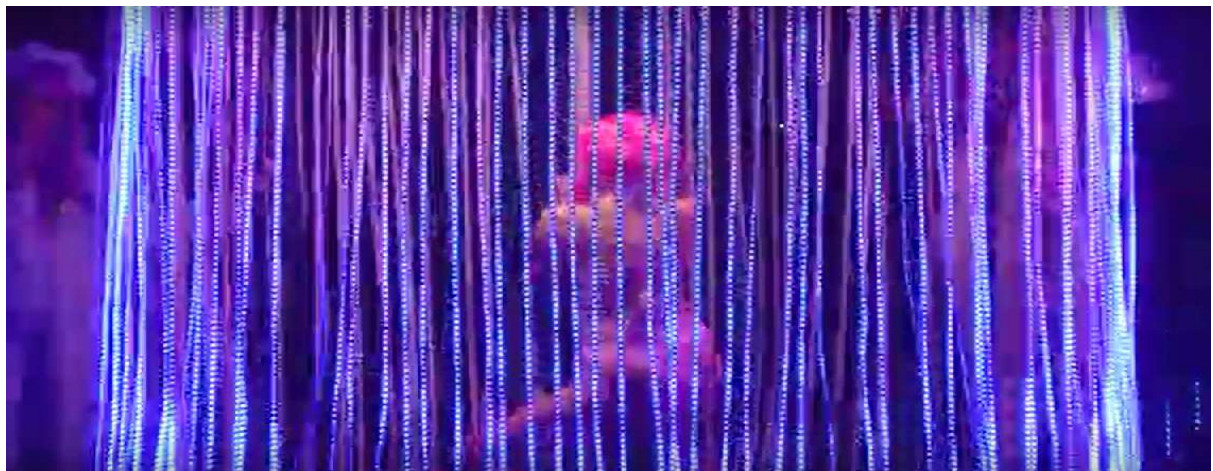


Figure 3.12 ("markit aneight," 2015)

Significantly, the strategy of over-sexualisation has been part of the manufacturing of her celebrity identity since the *Bangerz* tour. In this regard, in the above-mentioned interview with Walters, Cyrus admitted that this was a publicity stunt for making profits. When the

journalist asked about having any regret for *Bangerz*, she replied: “Not at all. It wasn’t just ‘shock people to shock people,’ it really was with a purpose, I guess...To make everyone in the world be talking about me and music” (Rubenstein, 2013). There is no doubt that the media mobilised its mechanisms of normalisation to have a hold on her body. Foucault (1991) stated that what counted as the normal versus the deviant—along the scale of the binary economy—was part of the apparatus of surveillance aimed to classify the individuals as a strategy of control and scrutiny (184).

Here, it is important to note that the singer’s discourse reveals her awareness of this pervasive form of containment—that relies on the binary logic— that has been assimilated by the media. In that interview, she highlighted that despite her recurrence to nudity, the mainstream mass media articulated a restrictive discourse on her identity. Thus Cyrus said: “I don’t alllllways wanna be naked. Once I came out on stage, and I came out and was in full Marc Jacobs dress, completely covered, and they wrote ‘MILEY IS BORING’ She doesn’t get naked and she’s boring. No matter what I do, I’m either boring, or a slut” (Johnson, 2013).

Importantly, Cyrus has also displayed highly sexualised simulations of her body by incorporating prosthetic elements that have marked a transgression of the traditional visual representation of female morphologies, even mobilising a posthuman notion of the subject that was integrated in the aesthetics of the hybrid Avis Cyrus. During her 2013 VMA²⁸ performance the most complex connoted meanings are articulated when Cyrus becomes part of Robert Thicke’s performance of “Blurred Lines”,²⁹ a song that mobilises the codes of rape culture. In this part of the performance when Thicke comes on stage, Cyrus is sexualised wearing a latex bikini whilst holding a foam finger as the prosthesis of her arm.

²⁸ This is the abbreviation for MTV Video Music Award.

²⁹ Slang word for “the ‘lines’ are personal boundaries a person designates in his/her sexual life. They usually only appear ‘blurred’ to men who don’t comprehend the meaning of ‘no’” (“urban dictionary”).

Notwithstanding the hypersexualisation of her anatomy, she adopts the having-the phallus position projecting sexual desire (Lacan, 2006: 582). Further, this representation of the artist is much more complex than this. As Braidotti discussed, the posthuman notion of the self enables an assemblage between organism and non-human elements that substantially affected the modulation of subjectivity (2013: 45). Consequently, this performance offers a visual simulation of her body with an appendage to her arm, which crucially emphasises the posthuman continuum of the human body and objects that is key political strategy to destabilise the precepts of dominant ideology through the “interpellation”³⁰ of a sexed position that disrupts the complementarity of the sexes. The next image represents this prosthetic embodiment of Cyrus:



Figure 3.13 (“MTV TELEVISION,” 2015)

³⁰ Althusser’s terminology.

The transgressive pose of Cyrus was disrupted when she twerked on Thicke mobilising cultural and political meanings ingrained in the deep-seated values of the heteropatriarchal culture that aims to align dimorphism with the compulsory complementarity of the sexes:



Figure 3.14 (Nauman and Spargo, 2015)

Cyrus incites this male artist dressed up in what could be considered as sexually explicit clothing whilst he just performs his song without engaging into the twerking. But this image is much more complex than stating that Cyrus is degrading and reducing herself to an object of desire. If Thicke's "Blurred Lines" celebrated a man who was going to make sexual advances on a meek woman, the female pop star decided to grope him without his consent sticking her performative mocking tongue out, at least, that is what Thicke's passive attitude on stage seems to convey. However, the problematic of this artist's action is that the media are dominated by a hegemonic grid of cultural intelligibility. De Lauretis (1987) explained that the mandatory coupledness of femininity and masculinity is an essential tool in our Western culture that is predicated on gender relations that has derived into a normative system of representation (5). It is in this context that the reading of this image is going to be oriented to the audience. So, rather than Cyrus's sexual advances, it is the fact that she appeared with a latex bikini whilst Thicke wears a suit by succumbing to the female

hypersexualisation conventions that are intelligible for the heteronormative gaze of the audience and the camera. Here, she failed to simulate an empowering simulation of her body. Indeed, that is the way the audience worldwide understood Cyrus's partial nude and display of her sexuality.

Finally, this could be probably considered as the most controversial performances in the history of VMA in this and other respects, therefore some final remarks must be made. Drawing on Preciado's reading of Foucault that established how the Panopticon had mutated into light codes distributed through the media (2013: 207), her fluid multi-media panoptic spectacle connoted one of the key posthuman notions of the assemblage of the human and non-human through giant teddy bears dancing and Cyrus phallic foam finger. Undoubtedly, this female pop singer attempted to distance herself from the heteronormative ideal of docile femininity and sexuality. But after this performance, Cyrus was accused of being a racist across the mainstream media (Okolie, 2013). Cyrus's provocative outfit and her privileged whiteness, reinforced by the choice of black female backup dancers, contributed to displaying race as a technique of classification and her materialisation of sexuality as a label of degradation for women within the regulatory decoding process triggered by the heteronormative gaze.³¹ The idea that Cyrus objectified black women reducing them to a mere metonymy through their buttocks is connected to the commodified identities of black women produced within Western societies and will be analysed below. In short, the simulation of her body cannot be critically understood here as merely degrading in a linear way, but her controversial performance uncovered manifold tensions and contradictions within the encoding of Western female whiteness controlled by the dominant ideology.

³¹ The video can be watched following the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEBwvwhc4IM>

The use of black female anatomies at the 2013 VMA performance is a reproduction of the visual-discursive simulation of her iconic video “We Can’t Stop” (2013).³² The shedding of Hannah Montana entailed negotiating her identity as a white gendered subject of America. Her challenge of hegemonic femininity was inextricably linked to the incorporation of the so-called ratchet culture that has been mainstreamed in pop culture, which is a fairly recent phenomenon. By the term ‘ratchet’ I am referring to a subculture characterised by the use of a particular kind of language, lifestyle, aesthetics and cultural practices, for example, ‘twerking,’ associated with black poor people from the ghetto and more specifically black women (Williams, 2013).³³ It was Cyrus who appropriated twerking as a strategy to manage her celebrity identity connected to seedy and racialized and gendered praxes. Despite this, twerking is a dance that has African roots and it is embedded in the traditions of the African diaspora practiced by black women and men and deprived of overt sexual connotations, which has evolved into a dance done by women focused on their buttocks that, perceived through the Western lens, has become a technique to sexualise the black bodies of women from the ghetto (Wiggins, 2013; Mbakwe, 2013).³⁴

Undoubtedly, this Westernised evolution of the meanings of twerking (a ratchet practice) is intimately tied with the fabrication of the black body in dominant ideology. hooks (1990) argued that the black female body was a product of the sexual exploitation in the capitalist system of slave plantations that derived into the deliberate racist and misogynistic distortion of that past of systematic rape by white masters into the promiscuity of these women (51, 52). One of the techniques employed by the hegemonic grid of intelligibility was the manufacturing of the stereotype of the Hottentot Venus—that is, the definition of these

³² When this video was released on VEVO, it beat the record and attained a Certified status when it got over 100 million views in 37 days and 10.7 million views during the first day (Tharrett, 2013). It also won the 2013 MTV VMAs for the best female video (“IMVDb”).

³³ Indeed, the pop icon Miley Cyrus has been proclaimed as the ratchet queen and has been a key figure in the mainstreaming of this subculture as part of the manufacturing of her celebrity image (Williams, 2013).

³⁴ The current use of the verb ‘twerk’ is defined as follows: “dance to popular music in a sexually provocative manner involving thrusting hip movements and a low, squatting stance” (“Oxford dictionaries”).

women's identities in relation to their buttocks—, thus, their bodies were pierced by the technologies of gender and race (Wallace, 2004: 428). Within this context, Cyrus's aforementioned media text ("We Can't Stop") and WMA performance encoded this biased ideological misrepresentation of black women—who have pervasively objectified in Western societies— without altering its negative implications in terms of gender and race as the next two images³⁵ symbolically represent:



Figure 3.15 ("MileyCyrusVEVO," 2013)



Figure 3.16 ("MileyCyrusVEVO," 2013)

³⁵ Two images from her MTV VMA performance where this visual encoding is performatively reproduced are included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

Moreover, the artist goes as far as to reinforce the mainstream image of twerking that mobilises the enactment of black women as sexually loose when she sings: “To my homegirls here with the big butt / Shaking it like we at a strip club” (32-33). Therefore, this visual-discursive narrative fixes twerking to the hypersexual culture by creating a mirror that presents black female bodies constrained by the hegemonic fictions of their identities perpetuated in the normative social order and flooding in at mainstream audiences in the media. Further, since the media text is inserted in the context of a party—“It’s our party we can do what we want” (1)—her entitlement to objectify black women is emphasised. Additionally, as discussed earlier, Cyrus had adopted “the having-the phallus” position (white male subject), so by appropriating the bodies of black women that had traditionally been the properties of white masters, she dared to hold a similar position of power, a privilege denied to white women who occupied the status of the bearers of the purity of American nation (Wallace, 1990: 26). Regarding this, she is reversing the roles of hegemonic femininity and masculinity by reproducing the violent hierarchy established by the normative subject.

Cyrus failed to note how her popularisation of twerking³⁶ by transforming black women into props was racist. Althusser (1971) had theorised on the ways every subject was interpellated and anchored in ideology, which was an unavoidable process (171). The forming of cultural formations is clearly linked to Braidotti’s notion of the importance of political location (2013: 16). Thus, in an interview in which Cyrus was asked about being accused of racism, she was unable to realise that her identity was a fabrication of femininity articulated within dominant ideology rather than her black female dancers’ bodies that were marked by another vector of difference: race that hierarchized different statuses of femininity:

³⁶ Although the word “twerk” dates back to 1820, it did not enter the Oxford dictionary until 2013, therefore, as Barbara Walters claims: “she made twerking not just a mainstream activity but an actual word in the dictionary” (“BBC,” 2015; “ABC News,” 2013).

Me and Mike WiLL³⁷ were talking about it. He said, "For me, my biggest achievement has been working with a white girl – but for a white girl to work and associate with black producers, you're being ratchet." He's like, "Why am I on the come-up if I work with you, but if you work with me, it's like you're trying to be hood?" It's a double-standard. I didn't really realize it, but people are still racist. It's kind of insane. Like if I had come out with all white-girl dancers, and done the fucking "Cha Cha Slide"—same outfit, same everything—it wouldn't have been bad. But because of who I came out with, people got upset. Because they were girls from the club. They had thick asses. They were twerking. That's what I want, though—I want real girls up there who can really party. The Baker girls don't give a fuck about me. They love me, but they're not kissing my ass. They're just excited to not be dancing at the club. (Eells, 2013b)

When Cyrus defined these girls as “real,” this proves she has internalised that process that naturalises racial-gendered differences as ‘normal’ rather than the product of culture. Unlike Cyrus, Nicki Minaj did not appropriate the bodies of black women as props but she used her own body to reproduce the fiction of black female identity legitimised by the normative social order. In this regard, both artists served the interests of dominant ideology with a noticeable difference, Cyrus maintained the superior status of white women over black women.

Within heteronormativity lies a compulsory coupledness, and this is also applicable to the Western fabrication of black bodies along the binary scale. As part of her assertion of a distinctive individuality, Cyrus appropriated the bodies of black men too and used semiotextual codes of black masculinity in the representation of her body. Wallace (1990) identified the “black macho” as the fabrication originated on slave plantations; indeed, it was the by-product of hegemonic white masculinity since black men in order to empower themselves had reversed the imposed psychological castration by mobilising an identity that

³⁷ An Afro-American record producer, rapper, and songwriter.

embodied hyper-masculinity and virility (xix-xx). As Edwards (2006) stated, the emasculation of black men was linked to racism, which had deprived them of their role in the patriarchal family (58). These ideas on the production of the corporeality of the black body are reproduced by Cyrus in her performance, which is hinged on this racist construction of hypersexualised black masculinity as this image displays:



Figure 3.17 (“Lauiii iHD,” 2014)

Beyond the physical castration, black men were also physically emasculated due to the fear of white men as the guardians of the reproduction of pure national identity that they should appropriate white women (Edwards, 2006: 59-60; Wallace, 1990: 23). So, in addition to black hypermasculinity, this performance is symbolically visibilising the castration of these men as the result of racism. Although she may decide to incorporate black bodies in order to make them visible, how their bodies are rendered implies that Cyrus is reproducing the fixed encoding of black anatomies by contributing with her gendered/sexualised body to reinforce the fantasy of the “black macho.”

Significantly, the above-mentioned idea of how white American men felt threatened by black men's sexuality because it nourished their fear of the pollution of their national identity is mobilised through the media when Cyrus posted this photo on her official Facebook account:



Figure 3.18

What it is striking about this post is not the image but two remarks made by two men amongst those who left their comments on FB. One said: “she’ll get gangbanged” and the other man wrote: “they gang banged³⁸ her after this.” If we establish a connection between the fabrication of the “black macho” in relation to white hegemonic masculinity and these comments that come from two white men, needless to say that for their heteronormative racialized gaze, this relation of Cyrus and black men is only intelligible within the context of over-sexualisation, even when Cyrus is not represented in a provocative way. Butler has argued that the maintenance of the dominant ideology depends on the performative reiteration of power-differentiated relations that operate on the prohibition of homosexuality and miscegenation (1993: 167). So here, the body of Cyrus is the locus of political meanings

³⁸ Gangbanging is a recurrent practice in the porn industry that consists of “when multiple partners, usually three or more, engage in sexual intercourse with a single willing partner. (If partner is unwilling it is called gang rape)” (“urban dictionary”).

whose female whiteness—non-racialized gender—is considered a possession of Western white men.

As previously stated, the American singer masculinised her body by incorporating codes associated with black rappers in her aesthetics, elements from the aforementioned ratchet culture. Butler noted that the formation of identity was based on two fundamental processes: first, her internalisation of other individuals' attributes and second, by imitation, that is, the parody of the fiction of gender [race] revealed this category as non-natural (2007: 138, 269). It is in this context that we must read Cyrus's imitation of these cultural and political codes represented by the following image:

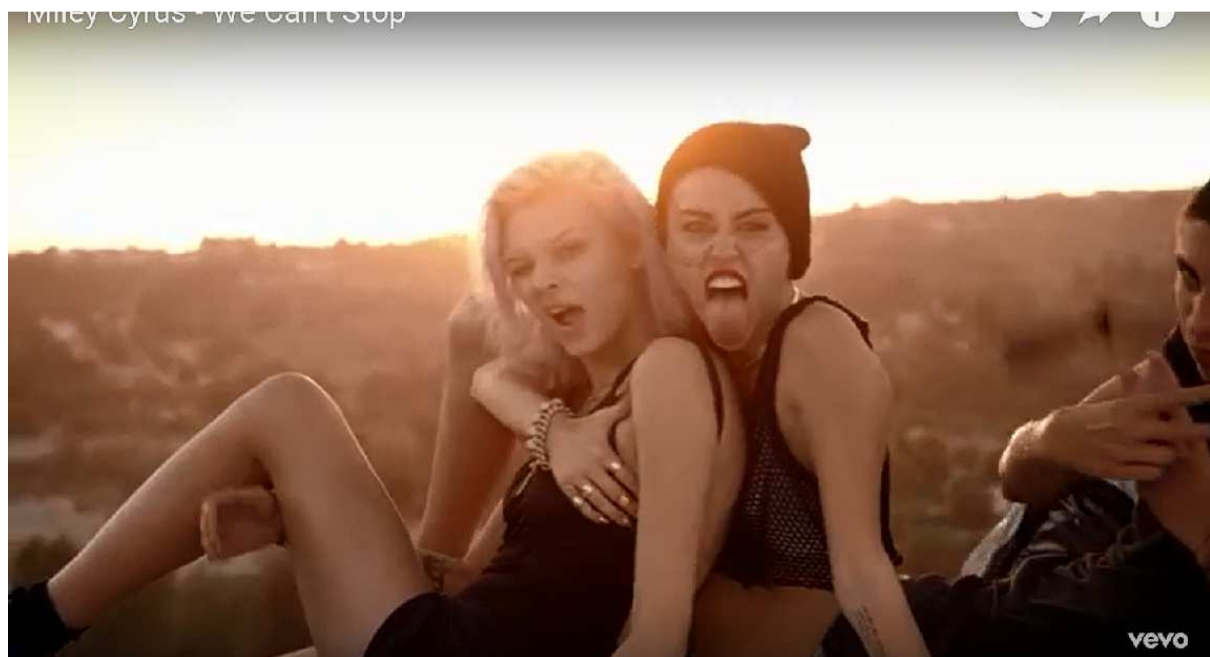


Figure 3.19 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2013)

Here, then, the problem is that Cyrus is white, celebrating superficial values within Western commodity culture. As an outsider, she is appropriating elements from a culture that is not hers in order to make money. Furthermore, importantly, in this image there are no black people—who have been represented throughout the media text (“We Can’t Stop”)

repetitively—³⁹ just a group of white boys and girls imitating the paraphernalia of black culture, which is deeply problematic. However, this imitative strategy proves that those stereotypes associated with black culture are both simplistic and cultural fabrications. In the section focused on Nicki Minaj, we will examine the ways the black female rapper plays with the aesthetics of hegemonic white femininity. Whereas Cyrus has incorporated the biopolitical codes of black culture to take a distance from the Disney star as an act of rebelliousness—as has been discussed so far—, Minaj’s appropriation carries different meanings in terms of race and gender as a black female artist within the discourses of dominant ideology that fabricated black femininity as a by-product of slavery by asserting their inferior status in relation to white women, as will be analysed in the next section of this chapter.

Within these profit-oriented marketed codes following the structure of imitation, another strategy was the visual simulation of her infantilised body. In her discussion of the postfeminist market, Natasha Walter (2015) analysed the ways the media have crafted an ideal of an infantilised femininity as a mould for young girls to such an extent that they were becoming “living dolls” (2). They embodied the new materiality of 21st-century gendered bodies that willingly buy into a hypersexual culture that fed on the values of pornography (Walter, 2015: 4-5). However, this current practice is non-neutral but it is inserted in the development of the technology of sex that started in the 18th-century, thus we have the problematisation of the sexuality of children as a technique to gain knowledge to control the whole social body through the classification of the normal and the pathological (Foucault, 1998: 104, 120). Preciado pushed these interlinked ideas further by stating that those morphologies encoded as either female or child-like have become objects of consumption for the hegemonic male subject in order to perpetuate his status in the heteronormative

³⁹ Notice for example, the black women displayed in the twerking scene of the music video.

organisation of our culture (2013: 48). In addition, the major goal of this advanced capitalism was to fabricate a dimorphic universal mould for the subject and reproduce it in our globalised world (Preciado, 2013: 54). By interlinking the evolution of the techniques of producing the political body, the fact that Cyrus has selected the codes of infantilisation to manufacture her individuality and rebelliousness against dominant white femininity are precisely achieving opposite effects by internalising that subtle surveillance aimed to maintain the status quo intact. The visual representation of Cyrus below, taken from her music video “BB Talk” (2015), exemplifies this idea:



Figure 3.20 (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2015)

The sexualised body of Cyrus represented as a baby is highly problematic, especially if we consider that she finished her song in this way: “fuck me so you’ll stop baby talking” (44). Paradoxical as it may seem to convey desire through the image of a female baby, Cyrus also uses the discursive narrative to become a subject of desire that has traditionally been denied to women: “Alright, I was sleeping next to him but I was dreaming about the other dude” (2).⁴⁰ It is true that Cyrus is using this visual-discursive narrative as a vehicle to express women’s sexual drives and the sexuality of children that has historically been

⁴⁰ ‘Dude’ is slang for friend (“urban dictionary”).

constrained in our Western culture, but the fact that the media alongside the camera gaze operate within the heteronormative cultural intelligibility implies that this media text is legitimising paedophilia. Indeed, comments posted about this video confirm that this was what the audience understood: “Carl Marks: How this fly in today’s society? Why would ANYONE think this is acceptable”; Maria J. Rey: Carl Marks Because the musical industry is infested by pedophiles, like Hollywood” (“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2015). It seems that at this complex level, this media text encodes children’s sexuality as a fetish in celebrity culture.

Another remarkable example of an aesthetics that relies on exaggerated pornification of infantilised images is when the performer combined these codes with the conventions of pole dancing:



Figure 3.21 (“markit aneight,” 2015)

The effectiveness of this representation relies on the ways it embodies how the technology of sexuality has mutated in the third millennium. It is important to note that one of the great achievements of this new regime of capitalism has been to transform desire, affects, and gender into fluid semiottechnical codes and one of those associated to white

heterosexual femininity is “knowing how to give a good blowjob” (Preciado, 2013: 54, 120). This transformation in the techniques of power is perceived in this enactment of Cyrus as a pornified young woman whose body desires are being penetrated by phallic codes. Thus, this image is inserted within that mainstreaming of soft pornography conceived to titillate the male gaze.

As a result, the construction of this celebrity’s identity is rife with contradictions that are pervasive in her career. In marked contrast to this infantilised imagery that does not manage to disrupt heteronormativity, the use of prosthetic dildos in her performances entails the queering of her narrative as part of the strategies to shatter Hannah Montana. Firstly, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the phallus as the “privileged signifier” is a symbol of male power in a symbolic order where femininity was defined in terms of castration (Lacan, 2006: 576). Therefore, although Lacan denied that the phallus was equated with the male sex organ, the structure of the symbolic reveals that the organic genital is the embodiment of the phallus. Preciado developed the dildotechtonics as an experimental counter-sexual technique in order to destabilise the normative correlation between the phallus and the male genital (2011: 41). In this respect, the body became the locus over which the dildo was displaced from one point to another as a mechanism of distorting the normative cultural meanings (Preciado, 2011: 41). This makes sense in a semiotical system of representation in which women are placed in relation to the phallus as an object to be enacted marked by sexual difference (de Lauretis, 1984: 16).

In the subsequent performance, Cyrus reverses the traditional visual-discursive representation of women as mere images to be desired through the negotiation of the meanings of the dildo as a subversive prosthetic sign:



Figure 3.22 (“Lauui iHD,” 2014)

From her interaction with the audience, we know that the prosthetic dildo is meant to engage the audience as part of the performance. When she grabbed it, the first thing she did was to say thank you to the audience for the dildo and started asking if that object was a microphone by holding the dildo as a “micro,” “a cell phone” or if it was a “big dick” putting the dildo near her crotch and pretending the audience were actively participating in the conversation. The reason why this part of the performance is extremely meaningful is threefold. First, she is negotiating-identifying the meaning of that object, so she is engaging the audience into the sexual fantasy of the performance. In other words, she is implementing a counter-sexual practice of displacement of the dildo from its heteronormative ‘naturalised’ location. Although she finally chose the third meaning—the “big dick”—that matched the agenda of the dominant ideology and gaze, her action connoted that the heteronormative meaning can be displaced from its symbolic locus. So, her performance on stage revealed

masculinity as an unstable category rather than a fixed one. Regarding this, her performance displays the possibilities of the dildotechtonics as a disruptive practice of privileged signifiers.

In this light, her performance can also be read as posthuman since Cyrus is establishing interconnections with the spectators. In the 21st-century, the old scaffold—examined by Foucault as a spectacle of visual codes to be deciphered by the gaze—has transformed into a virtual posthuman platform to maximise the benefits of the music industry in which the distinctions between the artist and audience are blurred (Foucault, 1991: 46; Halberstam & Livingston, 1995: 2). Second, once more, this prosthetic extension of her body can be plausibly read as disrupting the binary logic of the human-non-human divide, considering how Braidotti pointed out the need of the continuous flow without the continuum (2013: 45). And third, from a Lacanian sense, once more Cyrus is having-the phallus, that is to say she is adopting the position of men in the psychoanalytic symbolic as the bearer of masculine power. She becomes the subject of desire, a position reinforced by the lyrics of “#GETITRIGHT” (2013): “I feel a surge coming over me / I feel it all around my thighs” (1-2). Here, then, I do not contend that Cyrus was aware of the significance of her visual-linguistic discourse but the fact that she opted for the meaning that was intelligible and coherent for the heteronormative gaze proves that her choice was working within what has been called “preferred meanings” while at the same time, calling into question its naturalisation. As Stuart Hall put it:

The domains of ‘preferred meanings’ have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of ‘how things work for all practical purposes in this culture’, the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions. Thus to clarify a ‘misunderstanding’ at the connotative level,

we must refer, *through* the codes, to the orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology. (1980: 134).

In this respect, Cyrus's choice maintains the illusion of heteronormative desire in the audience playing with their sexual subjectivities.

This representational expression of gender nonconformity was furtherly explored in her prosthetic-queering performance of the 'unicorn'⁴¹ that goes across binary boundaries:



Figure 3.23 (Freiman, 2015)

This representation of Cyrus, navigating the world of disruptive cultural meanings by wearing a strap-on dildo and other prostheses that fuse with her body is anchored in the possibilities of the posthuman "cyborg ontology." Haraway developed this new mode of corporeality as hybrids of organic material and non-human components to create a

⁴¹ The unicorn is a slang word associated with the LGBTQ community that is defined as follows: "A sexually empowered transsexual woman (male-to-female) that still has her penis. A rare mystical creature only rumored to exist but highly sought after. They are desired by straight men who enjoy anal sex, lesbian women who enjoy vaginal intercourse and homosexual men that more identify as queer than gay. They are further made in short supply due to their own body issues affecting sexual confidence and societal pressures to have full genital surgery" ("urban dictionary").

multiplicity of bodies/subjectivities as a form of integrating into the continuum that undermined the restrictive binary logic (1991: 150-151). Moreover, the use of the plasticity of the dildo as a parody of dominant sexual practices symbolically revealed that gender and sexual identity were prosthetic codes that had forcibly been inscribed on bodies, resulting into its naturalisation (Preciado, 2011: 14, 23). Within this context, the artist's prosthetic performance of a non-normative gender that encompassed codes associated with hegemonic femininity and masculinity exposed a simulation of her body that challenged the heteronormative gaze. Indeed, Cyrus has been able to disarticulate the effects of the postfeminist internalisation of the male gaze by projecting a semiottechnical representation that did not follow the heterosexual pathos.

Importantly, the artist here enabled the articulation of the becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari pointed out, the process of becoming was indispensable for hybridisation, thus it represented a status of in-betweenness that mobilised an assemblage amongst multiple political meanings (2005: 293). This is applicable to this performance because Cyrus encoded a transmission of meanings that challenged gendered polarisation. Moreover, this visual enactment is connected to her discourse on non-identification with binary gender as was discussed earlier. In the next section of this chapter, Nicki Minaj also used the dildotechtonics in order to materialise a body that disrupted the white supremacist regime. Nevertheless, we will examine how the racialisation of Minaj's body produces different meanings due to the marker of race.

Finally, we will focus on another essential mechanism employed by Cyrus to construct her identity: the visual-discursive appeal to drug consumption as a signature of personal freedom and individualism in her rejection of her old identity as Hannah Montana. This practice reveals the operation of Cyrus's subjectivity that marks the distribution of her cultural product: her performative consumption and articulation of the weed and molly

substances. Her position on drugs was: “I think weed is the best drug on earth. One time I smoked a joint with peyote in it, and I saw a wolf howling at the moon. Hollywood is a coke town, but weed is so much better. And molly, too. Those are happy drugs – social drugs. They make you want to be with friends” (Eells, 2013b). Wittig (1992) discussed the ways language had a material reality within the chain of discourses that are profoundly ingrained in ideology (30). By making these statements, the artist was disclosing the mechanisms of the 21st-century capitalism and how they intervene in the production of bodies/subjectivities. Thus, Preciado identified the materiality of the current political body through the incorporation of fluid prostheses that fuse with the body inasmuch as one of the pillars of this advanced capitalism is the fabrication of substances that have the capacity to affect the modulation of subjectivity by constituting hybrid subjects (2013: 34-35). From this perspective, Cyrus has become a weed-molly subject. In this regard, the old disciplines have mutated into chemical substances that modify and alter body-consciousness from within, that is, transformations come from inside the organic. As Preciado stated, in the third millennium, all anatomies are prosthetic, working by incorporating fluid and malleable codes in constant mutation (2011: 1999).

The artist's lyrics in “We Can't Stop” (2013) represent a political practice of reinforcing these changes in our Western globalised societies. Thus, her discourse there exemplifies the ways verbal codes are connected with the materiality of the political body as an archive that embodies the effects of the historical sedimentation of the techniques of controlling the individual. In this narrative, Cyrus articulates her “pharmacopornographic” subjectivity, given that biopolitical substances intertwined with semiotic representation of porn values govern her sexual subjectivity (Preciado, 2013: 33-34) through the following verbal messages:

So la-da-di-da-di we like to party
Dancing with Molly⁴²

....

And everyone in line in the bathroom
Trying to get a line in the bathroom⁴³
We all so turnt up⁴⁴ here. (14-15, 36-38)⁴⁵

Furthermore, the social media has been the main platform to visually distribute this semiotic representation of her lifestyle as the following post from her Facebook account illustrates:

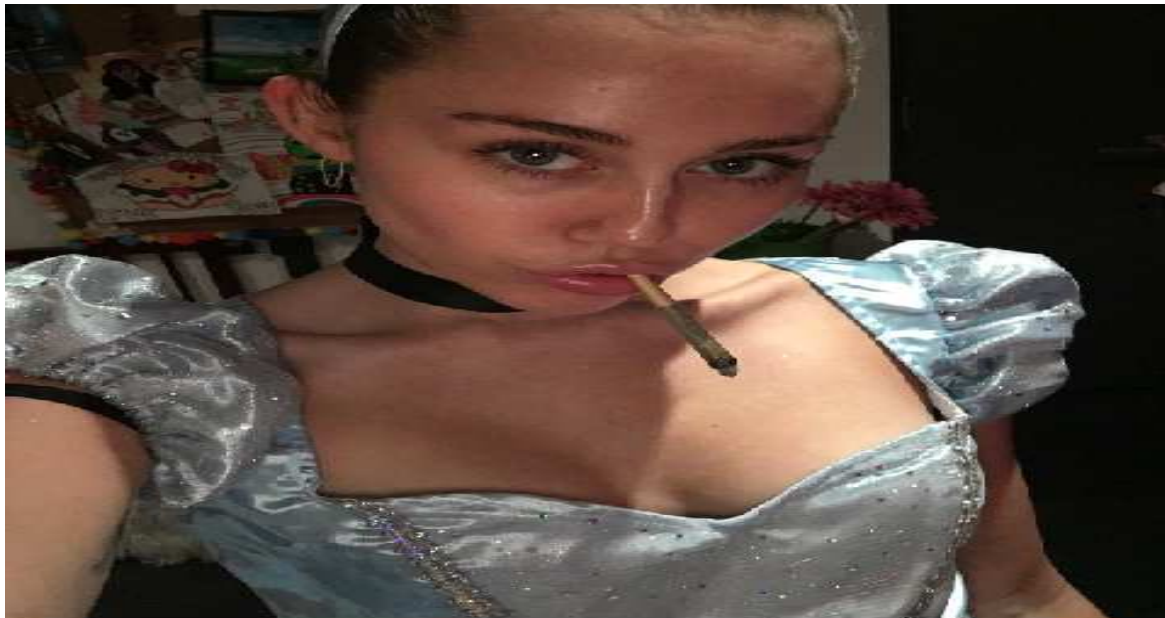


Figure 3.24

On this post, Cyrus is dressed up as Cinderella—another Disney fiction of—without wearing makeup and smoking weed. If we think of Disney as a machine of producing the heteronormative idealisation of femininity, this image steps out of the standards of female beauty and morals perpetuated by the entertainment company. In speaking of dominant

⁴² ‘Dancing with Molly’ is American slang for “going to a club and taking ecstasy” (“urban dictionary”).

⁴³ This line of the lyrics makes reference to the consumption of cocaine.

⁴⁴ ‘Turnt up’ is slang for “the act of getting drunk and high to the highest degree” (“urban dictionary”).

⁴⁵ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

postfeminist ethics, Gill (2007a) had explored the ways women had internalised the male gaze as a form of self-surveillance and self-objectification that was used to materialise the fantasy of men about women (152). Although the selfie is a mechanism of self-monitoring, once more Cyrus is reversing the heteronormative gaze embodied by Disney with its moulds of perfected femininity to counter-produce a version of Cinderella that was not intelligible within the restrictive domain of normative cultural intelligibility. It is true that the artist's act of rebelliousness is triggered by her desire to avoid the identification between the pop icon and Hannah Montana, but this deliberate representation of a subversive Disney princess was highlighting the need to disclose the negative effects of those ideals of perfection for girls that compel them to fit that ideological mould. Thus, in an extensive interview with *Elle* Miley Cyrus spoke about femininity in relation to the use of makeup and her role on *The Voice* that reveals essential aspects on the construction of the body and identity:

Mostly, I tell people, Don't wear makeup. Today, I only have makeup on because Joan had eyeliner on yesterday, and we all think Joan looks so cool that I copied her. I don't really for the contestants, because some of these girls come from fucking Arkansas with cake face on. Like, I don't want these kids to come out here and wear a bunch of makeup. I mean, I cover my zits, but besides that, I don't really wear it...People are like, "Oh, I want to make your eyes almond." I don't have almond eyes! Why are you trying to change my eye shape? When someone changes your face, it's really shocking and scary. (Fitzsimons, 2016)

Additionally, we have seen how Cyrus's discourse is rife with the use of slang and taboo language. Bróna Murphy's research (2009) determined that this type of language is particularly associated with male speech (93). Therefore, Cyrus's lack of restraint in the use of language shows how she has masculinised her discourse with patterns that do not conform to her assigned gender.

In conclusion, whereas the mainstream media has aimed to classify Cyrus according to two restrictive labels, Hannah Montana versus the “slut,” as the artist herself noted, the construction of her identity as a pop icon triggered by her desire to shatter the Disney star has displayed a more fluid identity and production of her body rife with tensions and contradictions that highlight the obstacles a female pop artist must challenge in a celebrity culture that celebrates postfeminist values. As Cyrus stated: “I’m not gonna do Hannah Montana. She was murdered” (“ABC News,” 2013), revealing she refused to be constrained by that idealised fiction of Western femininity. Undeniably, she has attempted to step out of the heteronormative pathos of intelligibility but her appropriation of black bodies, the pornification of infantilised codes, and her partial succumbing to the hypersexual culture failed utterly to destabilize the normative gaze.

3.2. Nicki Minaj: the Visual Construction of the Black Female Celebrity

In this section of Chapter 3, we will examine the black female celebrity Nicki Minaj in a visual culture dominated by mainstream encoding, to explore the representation of her black body/identity through the processes by which her celebrity image has been codified and particularly as a subject-position that is subject to racialisation and sexualisation, because race inscribes differential cultural meanings on her anatomy, unlike Cyrus’s.

Here, it is important to note that this artist is a high-profile celebrity in the music and entertainment industry, and more specifically, in a non-female friendly genre like rap music. Despite this, she has maintained intact the status of “the only mainstream female rapper for so many years” (“BSO,” 2016). Indeed, she was included in *The Rap Year Book: The Most Important Rap Song from Every Year Since 1979, Discussed, Debated and Deconstructed*, Nicki Minaj is the only female rapper mentioned not as the main recording artist, but as how

Minaj prominently featured on the male rapper Kanye West's song "Monster" in 2010 due to her vocal dexterity (Serrano & Torres, 2015: 198, 202).

In the previous section, we critically examined the visual-discursive representation of Miley Cyrus, who actively intervened in the manufacturing of her celebrity identity through the negotiation of her hegemonic white femininity, capitalising values of individuality and rebelliousness, which was not void of tensions and contradictions by embodying aesthetic values of a pervasive hypersexual culture. Regarding Minaj, I argue that the construction of this celebrity is based on the following major aspects: 1) the hypersexualisation of her racialized body that succumbs to the performative reproduction of the fiction of the black female that Western culture had fabricated for systematically maintaining the supremacy of race ingrained in its classificatory system; 2) the performative imitation of white aesthetics in terms of gender; 3) her adherence to values associated with the subculture of black male rappers within the dynamics of commodity culture; 4) the technique of the carnival to celebrate her ethnicity and 5) the articulation of cultural-political values anchored in monstrosity and unintelligibility to distort the white norms that had imposed its codes on the production of the black body as a property.

Far from being diametrically opposed, Minaj and Cyrus concur in cultivating sexual attractiveness but with different visual practices based on racial differences. According to Hortense J. Spillers, black people within the history of capitalist slavery had been dehumanised and animalised; their brutal objectification was possible by reducing the black body to mere 'flesh' unmarked by the Western technologies of the body that constituted the subject (1987: 67), thus they were encoded as commodities right from the start. In relation to enslaved women (and men), she coined the term "pornotroping" to refer to how the bodies of black women had become the locus over which gender, sexuality and racial differences had been inscribed when they were integrated into the Western market, so their anatomies were

products fabricated in accordance with white norms (Spillers, 1987: 67, 72). Relatedly, the practices of gender, sexuality and race that penetrated their bodies were the projection of dominant ideology (Spillers, 1987: 79). One of the results of the systematic rape of black women was the fiction of the over-sexualised black women, clearly embodied by the Hottentot Venus, whose femininity was defined by the exaggerated backside that reinforced the commodification of their bodies (Wallace, 1990: 12; Wallace, 2004: 428). Indeed, these techniques are embedded in the history of the technologies of the body that medicalised the abnormal Other in opposition to the normal as a mechanism of surveillance in the relentless perpetuation of heteronormativity (Foucault, 1991: 184). It is precisely in this context that we must interpret the visual-discursive representation of Minaj, who readily succumbs and reproduces this demeaning and disempowering fiction of the West that dates back to the rise of the system of the slave plantation. The visual and discursive practices encoded in her music video “Anaconda” (2014)⁴⁶ performatively simulates the 21st-century version of the Hottentot Venus and the violence of this portrayal of the black female body, as the next images illustrate:



Figure 3.25 (“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2014)

⁴⁶ When this music video was released, it had 115 million views under two weeks (“TheEllenShow,” 2014), which proves how successful it was on a global scale.



Figure 3.26 (“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2014)

First, this visual representation in the context of a jungle not only materialises the projection of the fantasy of the white male gaze on black female anatomies that was a recurrent practice in the Western cinematic apparatus (Mulvey, 1975: 808) but it reinforces the ubiquitous animalisation of black women in our societies, which is clearly intelligible for mainstream audiences. Importantly, Barthes (1977) argued that the verbal message intervened in the mobilisation of messages encoded in the image by either altering or fixing them (39). The lyrics of “Anaconda” go as far as to contribute to amplifying the fiction of the black female body under the power of the white phallus that controls the system of representation, as the subsequent lines prove: “My anaconda⁴⁷ don’t, my anaconda don’t / My anaconda don’t want none unless you got buns⁴⁸, hun / Oh my gosh, look at her butt” (19-21). Clearly, the assemblage of the image and verbal messages is articulating heteronormative desire and the idea of compulsory coupledness.

In 2014, Ellen Degeneres—one of the most popular American comedians and television hosts—interviewed Minaj on her show *The Ellen Show* for the success of

⁴⁷ Slang for “large black penis” (“urban dictionary”).

⁴⁸ Slang for “butt” (“urban dictionary”).

“Anaconda” and released a parody⁴⁹ of that smashing video in which she twerked and played the role of one of the rapper’s dancers. Significantly, Degeneres—who is openly lesbian and has performatively reproduced a masculine simulation of her body—exposed how her body did not fit in the aesthetics of the video and highlighted both its pervasive dependence on heterosexuality and the gender and racial differences that mark black female bodies, as this image displays:



Figure 3.27 (“TheEllenShow,” 2014)

If we also account for the function of performativity as an array of repetitive corporeal acts that materialise what is cited (Butler, 1993: 2), this representation of black women’s buttocks is relentless reproduced in the music video.⁵⁰ By comparing Cyrus’s cultural appropriation of twerking and Minaj’s use of other black women’s bodies, we can surmise that whereas the pop star, as a representative of white norms, is imposing this dehumanising technique on her dancers, Minaj is primarily conforming to the predetermined corporeality of racialized women. Indeed, Degeneres’s parody clearly displays how the anatomies of white women are not marked by racial differences. It is also worth noting that on Degeneres show, the host and Minaj play a game in which they have to give synonyms for the backside and

⁴⁹ The video can be watched on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyJ8rulYHpU>

⁵⁰ An image that illustrates this idea has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

significantly, one mentioned by Degeneres is “money maker” (“TheEllenShow,” 2014), which reveals that the rapper has commodified that marked part of black women’s anatomies in order to increase her profits in the Western capitalist marketplace.

In this regard, Minaj’s trading on her over-sexualised body is one of the hallmarks of her cultural product. In 2017, the rapper has contributed to the soundtrack of the film ‘Fifty Shades Darker’,⁵¹ and posted some photographs in relation to this on her official Instagram account:



Figure 3.28

The political implications of this self-representation of Minaj as a sex slave within the historic conditions of slavery should not be underestimated. Weheliye (2008) stated that Spillers’s “pornotroping” was essential to understand the ways the oppressor obtained sadomasochistic sexual pleasure in gazing at the brutal torture of the deviant Other (76). And bell hooks (1990) argued that black women had been devaluated through their systematic rape during slavery (53). Thus, we must interpret this visual projection of Minaj’s body in the context of a media text that promotes sexual abuse as the internalisation of the historical sexual exploitation of black women. In other words, the rapper is self-pornotroping her own

⁵¹ This kind of visual-discursive representation is considered as “a celebration of rape culture and abuse” (Downes, 2015).

anatomy for making money by legitimising the stereotype of black women as promiscuous. In this regard, the image is fuelling the workings of the white male gaze that experiences pleasure through the devaluation of women's bodies marked by racial differences.

The profitable image of Minaj's "captive body" is inserted within the matrix of 21st-century mutation of the panoptic control that is absorbed by the own subject (Preciado, 2013: 208). Moreover, Preciado (2013) stated that the "megaslut" as a body marked by differences such as gender and race was one of the by-products of current capitalism to be consumed by white heterosexual men (48). To summarise, the supremacist white culture does not need physical torture anymore to maintain the hierarchy of race; it is the body pierced by gender and race that voluntarily accepts the effects of "pornotroping." Minaj has voluntarily fit the "megaslut" mould ready to satisfy men's sexual drives by titillating their gaze. In addition, the image is relentless reproduced by Minaj through her official Instagram account. Amongst other effects, this performative self-image of the rapper is the commodification of her racialized body. hooks (1990) claimed that one of the negative consequences of the degrading stereotypes originated from slavery was the reinforcement of the taboo of miscegenation, inasmuch as the visual representation of black women as sexual beasts was used to allege that they were unsuitable for inter-racial marriages (66).

The comments on several of her Instagram posts— such as: “I would f*** those tits”—account for this. The next photograph illustrates this trade on her sexual wildness:



Figure 3.29

Consequently, the artist is contributing to legitimising those old violent myths of black women whose identity is defined in relation to sexual promiscuity.⁵² In an interview on her video “Anaconda,” Minaj maintained the idea that trading on her sexuality is acceptable as long as you have control over it:

I'm chopping up the banana. Did you realize that? At first I'm being sexual with the banana, and then it's like, 'Ha-ha, no.' That was important for us to show in the kitchen scene, because it's always about the female taking back the power, and if you want to be flirty and funny that's fine, but always keeping the power and the control in everything. (Alexis, 2014)

However, her discourse failed to realise that her voluntary over-sexuality is much more complex than the effects of postfeminism on women since this “sensibility” is about the sexual entrepreneur that considers her body as a corporeal property (Gill, 2007a: 149). As a

⁵² Another example of these posts, where the artist represents herself as a “prostitute”—stereotype associated to black women as one of the effects of slavery that hooks pointed out (1990:52)—is included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

woman bearing the legacy of the dehumanising experience of slavery reduced to “flesh,” the postfeminist notion of “bodily property” cannot be easily resolved inasmuch as historically, black women have not been entitled to have a body. Additionally, her Instagram operates as a device that reflects her obsession with the self-monitoring of sexuality. As Preciado (2013) wrote, the Panopticon has become a fluid principle of inspection that has penetrated subjectivity and whose internalisation has increased its effectiveness (207). Thus, Minaj’s use of virtual platforms reveals that she is not a media manipulator but on the contrary, her subjectivity mobilises the assimilation of historical enslavement according to a model of unidirectional oppression

Nevertheless, the formation of her celebrity image is very complex which goes beyond the visual-discursive representation of psychological introjection of sexual exploitation imposed by the operation of white norms. The incorporation of elements of the white aesthetics of hegemonic femininity is another key element in the projection of her celebrity image on a global scale. The exploitation of the Harajuku Barbie⁵³ alter-ego is the most significant example of the mobilisation of codes associated with heterosexual white femininity operating across her marked body with a clear potential to disrupt the entire encoding of American supremacy.

Her hit “Super Bass” (2010) articulated the simulation of HB that entailed the negotiation of her non-normative identity through the codes of dominant ideology. According to hooks, one of the strategies of black women to shed the reiterative image of black women as promiscuous was to imitate the behaviour and mannerisms of hegemonic white femininity (1990: 55). Regarding the act of emulation, Butler (2007) suggested that the imitation of normative identities revealed the imitative structure of the heteronormative ideals by disclosing that both, the “original” and the imitation were fantasies—that exposed femininity

⁵³ Hereafter HB.

as an artifice—, that is, the old fictions of the West (269). By focusing on the artifice of black femininity as a projection of Western gender and race, HB is a problematic alter-ego that has a paradoxical representational function. First, the emulation of white femininity does not dispel the racialized differences inscribed on her body and, second, it uncovers hegemonic femininity as a fiction rather than a biological product. However, imitating the delusion of a white norm that was the ruling episteme for the construction of black female bodies cannot create an effective mechanism that allows her to produce a genuine ontology of liberation from the normative constraints. Indeed, it is reinforcing the over-sexualisation imposed on them by the symbolic order, as conveyed in these images from “Super Bass”:



Figure 3.30 (“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2011)



Figure 3.31 (“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2011)

This profitable version of the Barbie is articulated through the incorporation of prosthetic elements invested in the normative deployment of femininity and the projection of sexual desire towards the “black macho.” According to Preciado, gender in the third millennium was a technology that operated through prostheses that fused with the organic materiality of the body, as a semiotic-technical codes that can be imitated, digitalised, implanted, absorbed, commodified amongst other functions (2013: 129). Thus, through wigs, fake prosthesis, and makeup as a technique of altering the human morphology, Minaj is materialising a fiction that was the oppressive norm for the codification of black female bodies, mobilising an ideal of perfected beauty that can just be approximated.

In relation to the articulation of heteronormative desire with the compulsory complementarity of these two black sexes, Wallace acknowledged that black men developed a hypermasculinity in order to resist the devaluation of black manhood during slavery by emphasising those attributes associated with physical strength and sexuality (1990: xix-xx). As was examined in the first section of this chapter, Cyrus also reproduced this fiction of black masculinity in her performances but transmitting different meanings. Whereas with her privileged status as a white woman Cyrus materialises the racist introjection accomplished by black men that emulated hegemonic masculinity as a strategy of resistance, that is, she legitimises the supremacy of race, Minaj and the “black macho” symbolically reproduce those racialized and gendered fabrications invented by Western culture to legitimise the sovereignty of white ruling deeply ingrained in heteronormativity as the system of domination.

The predominant images of black coupledom as a mirror of the institutionalised white heterosexual couple is also perpetuated by the lyrics: “I said, excuse me you’re a hell of a guy

/ I mean my, my, my, my you're like pelican fly" (13-14).⁵⁴ Moreover, Minaj sells an image of black men that buys into the commodity culture and mobilises her sexual desire to this kind of men: "This one is for the boys in the polos / Entrepreneur niggas⁵⁵ and the moguls...Then the panties comin' off, off, uh" (28-29, 35). Spillers (1987) had stated that the experience of slavery had articulated the "Negro Family" outside of the Western phallic symbolic order since women as properties of white masters were the transmitters of the name to their children (66, 80). In that regard, Minaj could have taken advantage of this to disarticulate the workings of heterosexual patterns of desire according to white norms, but the visual-discursive representation of imitative morphologies undermines this possibility of stepping out of the phallic burden of the oppressor. Indeed, the music video ends with an image that animalises Minaj's body, thus reinforcing the racist bestiality associated to the anatomies of black women as the embodiment of carnal lust.⁵⁶

In highlighting how the gaze is an essential tool of control in the visual construction, we saw that Cyrus's use of the bodies of non-white people was perceived as racist by the audience due to her privileged position as a white woman, their roles during slavery in the reproduction of the purity of the race, and the sadist exploitation of black bodies. Minaj also uses white dancers, for example in "Anaconda" or in this video "Super Bass":



Figure 3.32 ("NickiMinajAtVEVO," 2011)

⁵⁴ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

⁵⁵ 'Nigga' is slang for a black man that "evolved from the derogative term nigger," term that is connected to the dehumanising experience of slavery ("urban dictionary").

⁵⁶ This image has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

The appearance of sexualised white women will not be perceived as props exploited by the artist for one major reason: their bodies are not marked by racial differences. Indeed, they are the mirror of identification for black women. To put it otherwise, the bodies of black women are more intensely objectified than those of white women. In relation to men, Mulvey defined “women as image, man as bearer of the look” (1975: 808), so as the image above proves the white man’s gaze maintains its control and superiority if we focus on the possessive way he is looking at Minaj. Moreover, black men’s hypermasculinity was the result of the internalisation of white men’s virile features and additionally, as Spillers stated, slavery through the technique of pornotroping constructed a gaze that obtained pleasure through the dehumanisation and brutality exercised on black women and men (1987: 67). If we add that the white man is the subject of desire par excellence, the classificatory function of the gaze is aimed to those bodies that are non-normative. Black male bodies are highly sexualised because they are considered a copy of hegemonic masculinity, that serves the interests of dominant ideology to maintain its control over difference.

This subject-position of Minaj in adhering to the imitation of white aesthetics values goes further when the artist performs Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” together with Katy Perry, where she combines elements of white femininity with the camp style of the Drag Queen:



Figure 3.33 (“Moaning Myrtle,” 2012)

Here, it is important to note that Minaj thrives in performing a complex visual representation beyond the mere emulation of hegemonic femininity through the HB. Sontag described camp as a ritual/practice whose aesthetics was based on exaggeration and flamboyance (2009: 279). Moreover, Butler's concept of the performative mimicking of the drag revealed that this kind of performance relies on the imitation of cultural codes that unmask gender as a non-natural anatomical construction, which is intersected with the taboo of miscegenation (2007: 28-29). In addition, de Lauretis (2008) defined particular practices of modifying the body such as transvestism, prosthetic elements, amongst others as useful techniques to blur gender boundaries (16). Within this context, Minaj articulates a visual representation beyond the HB in the performance of a song addressed to white families and rebel daughters, whose Drag aestheticism allows her to enable a fabrication of femininity that is not legible for the male gaze.

Furthermore, the cultural text of the song does not fit the experience of black women. Spillers reminded us that the capitalist dynamics of slave plantations had removed the figure of the father from the symbolic order, thus the "Negro Family" was predicated on the role of the matriarchal mother (1987: 80). Therefore, her performance in a song where the white father is present: "My father yells, "What you gonna do with your life?" / Oh daddy dear, you know you're still number one" (7-8)⁵⁷ reinforces that unintelligibility in mainstream popular culture. Thus, her exaggerated style mocks the patriarchal structure of a family that has been denied to black women since they had to play the role of the phallic father. The relevance of this performance is also connected to the artist's personal experience of a father who abused his mother, to the point of even attempting to murder her. We must consider that this artist (unlike Cyrus) comes from a poor social background, deprived of any privileged status. Thus,

⁵⁷ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

in an interview the rapper was very outspoken about her childhood with an abusive father and her mother as a survivor of gender violence:

When I first came to America I would go in my room and and kneel down at the foot of my bed and pray that god would make rich so that I could take care of my mother ... I thought we would just be happy, but with a drug addicted parent there is no such thing as being happy. When you have a father who is stealing your furniture and selling it so that he can buy crack, you suffer. (Yahr, 2015)

In fact, Minaj's display of wealth differs from Cyrus's image of rebelliousness. To understand the reasons for this departure we should consider that they come from a different class status, and this has powerful effects on the modulation of the rapper's subjectivity whose childhood was marked by poverty, female disempowerment, and violence in contrast to Cyrus's well-positioned family.

The display of luxury of the female rapper is intimately connected to her past and social and personal background. This partly explains her adherence to values associated with the subculture of black male rappers within the dynamics of commodity culture. The choice of a music genre under the control of black men, which encoded sexism, will mark the cultural product of Minaj, who aspired to be a 'mogul' as a source of empowerment due to her family situation. Omar Burgess analysed the ways black male rappers' fashion had gradually evolved from the use of an aesthetics primarily connected to street and gang culture—wearing golden chains and rings as symbols of luxury—to the integration of high fashion, elements that were being adopted by female rappers to reverse gender roles (2013). In the construction of Minaj's identity as a rapper, we will examine how she borrows some elements from the male rappers, particularly the taste for luxury and their sexist language, but unlike them, she trades on her own body and feminises the traditional aesthetics associated with rap, one that fits the capitalist mainstream market and gender relations.

In relation to the over-display of wealth, she uses the social media to mobilise her fascination for this kind of life. Rojek stated that celebrity served the interests of capitalism, whose representation was aimed to increase the consumption of commodities (2001: 33, 45). This idea is reinforced by Preciado's analysis of current advanced capitalism that relies on the ultra-rapid transmission of codes imbued with the values of pornography (2013: 33-34), values that are integrated into the representation of Minaj's body as examined above. The following post from her Instagram account is an example of the reiterative self-representation of her identity embedded in commodity culture:



Figure 3.34

In the process of constructing an identity, it is the constant repetition of rituals and acts of the body and discourses that stabilise a particular materiality of the body through the sedimentation of meanings (Butler, 1993: 9). Throughout Minaj's posts, it remains a body whose masculine codes of luxury have transformed into objects that are associated with wealthy white families. She becomes the bastion of a culture obsessed with commodification through the imitation of hegemonic femininity as part of her rapper's aesthetics that does not intervene in the reversal of gender roles. Moreover, if we think of how Natasha Walter

defined the techniques of Western marketplace—“The brilliant marketing strategies of these brands are managing to fuse the doll and the real girl” (2015: 2)—Minaj’s display of luxury has made possible her transformation into a “living doll”⁵⁸ per se, as the following photograph from her Instagram account illustrates:



Figure 3.35

If we focus on the lyrics of her songs, it can be noted the recurrence to sexist language not only to refer to her but in relation to other women, including explicit references to drugs. Thus in “Anaconda” she raps: “Gun in my purse, bitch, I came dress to kill...I’m high as hell. I only took a half a pill” (8, 10). In “Pound the Alarm” (2012), the verbal messages reveal the ways she trades on other women’s bodies:

If you need a bad bitch
 Let me call a few
 Pumps⁵⁹ on, and the little mini-skirts is out
 I see some good girls. I’mma turn ‘em out.⁶⁰ (11-14)⁶¹

⁵⁸ An image that displays how her obsession with commodity culture has made her fit the mould of a doll has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

⁵⁹ Slang for “high heels” (“urban dictionary”).

⁶⁰ ‘Turn out’ is slang for “leading a woman into prostitution” (“urban dictionary”).

⁶¹ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

In this regard, Minaj appropriates the sexism of the lyrics of black male rappers as a source of empowerment and as an attempt to reverse gender roles through the masculinisation of her discourse. In the context of this media text, anchored in her motherland Trinidad and Tobago, where women's bodies are also marked by gendered and racialized differences, Minaj is "pornotroping" them, that is, she is discursively imposing the violence of the white male gaze on their marked anatomies, and thus, she contributes to the maintenance of the supremacy of race. As a result, the incorporation of misogynistic language of black male rappers has serious political implications in the visual representation of women who do not conform to hegemonic femininity. In other words, empowerment through exercising violence against other women is deeply disturbing—even when her own racialized body is subject to that violence—, especially if she is a celebrity whose media text is reproduced in mainstream media on a global scale under the control of the heteronormative cultural system of intelligibility.

Another significant element in the enactment of her cultural product is the incorporation of the tradition of the carnival—that is associated with her Trinidadian postcolonial identity—for the consumption of mainstream audiences. For a fuller understanding of Minaj's recurrence to this festivity, we must examine the main aspects of this tradition that can be traced back to Europe. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) conceptualised the carnival as a subversive ritual that blurred the hierarchies of social class and morals during its celebration:

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was a particular significance. Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling ... and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who

were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age.
(10)

In the case of Trinidad, carnival became a symbol against colonial oppression. Patricia A. De Freitas (1999) argued that this ritual established a complex relationship between gender and the construction of postcolonial identity, so carnival became a key tradition in the masculinist nationalist project of nation building in which women were the emblems of this process but represented from a male perspective (6). It is in this context that its origin must be understood as a form of male resistance against elites and white masters, and further a fusion of people from different ethnic groups in search of a national identity (De Freitas, 1999: 13). However, women gradually appropriated the carnival as a female space to disrupt the construction of that male postcolonial identity whilst they succumbed to the stereotypical exotic image of the Other manufactured by Western culture (De Freitas, 1999: 6). Indeed, the media has perpetuated this image of this festivity controlled by women through media texts that reinforce the image of the Trinidadian female body as sensual and exotic (De Freitas, 1999: 20). Notwithstanding this, women have re-defined the carnival festivity as a locus of resistance against local men who intended to appropriate women as the guardians of the postcolonial nationhood (De Freitas, 1999: 26).

However, these images are going to be perceived by an eye that is never neutral. According to Haraway, the gaze—either organic or technological—is neither objective nor innocent but it perceives social reality within the precepts of hegemonic biopolitical codes of organising the world (1991: 190). After having closely analysed the context of Minaj's media texts and how the organic-technological apparatuses of perception work, one might state that the entanglement of the visual encoding of the Trinidadian carnival in "Pound the Alarm" in conjunction with the verbal messages from the lyrics produce a representation that over-sexualises these gendered and racialized bodies by reinforcing the misogynistic and exotic

connotations associated with this ritual—linked to an attempt to construct an identity away from its colonial past—in the media dominated by the Western grid of cultural intelligibility:



Figure 3.36 (“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2012)

As discussed above, the lyrics of this song commercialise the bodies of other women represented in this media text. Nevertheless, it is true that she partially tries to reverse gender roles, more specifically the submissiveness associated to Trinidadian women when the festivity was controlled by men: “I’m a bad bitch, no muzzle, hey?” (16). Despite this, the sexual connotations encoded through “you know we getting hotter, and hotter / Sexy, and hotter, let’s shut it down” (23-24) contributes to emphasising their sexuality and exoticism. Therefore, this narrative is rife with tensions and contradictions; on the one hand it aims to negotiate the identity and liberation of Trinidadian women, on the other, the mainstream gaze is not going to perceive this text through its political enclave by considering the role of women in this ritual associated with the legacy of slavery, but from their biased colonialist perspective.

In these circumstances, Minaj could have used her political location to challenge the hegemonic gaze. According to Haraway, “situated knowledges” was a fundamental technique that could be employed by those racialized, gendered or sexualised subjects to counter-produce a discourse that undermined the homogeneity imposed by dominant ideology and its oppression (1991: 111). But this rapper’s music video, displaying “pornotroped” bodies with a masculinist discourse that was not void of contradictions as well as the integration of Western capitalist references such as “Giuseppe Zanotti,”⁶² which is inserted within commodity culture, partially erodes the possibilities of powerful subversion. Indeed, the most transgressive image of Minaj appears at the end of the video when the camera gaze focuses on her non-normative look that clearly challenges the dominant construction of the gendered and racialized body:



Figure 3.37 (“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2012)

hooks (1990) explained that “in the eyes of the white public she [black woman] would never be seen as worthy of consideration or respect” (55). And through the panoptic principle of surveillance aimed to classify the abnormal (Foucault, 1991: 223), the camera is aimed to

⁶² Giuseppe Zanotti is an Italian shoe designer, well known in the world of high fashion.

impose its hold over her body. However, here Minaj thrives in inverting the power of the colonialist and masculinist eye through her female gaze that rejects the branding of colonial mainstream domination by using the flag of her postcolonial homeland to undermine the exploitative function of the media. To put it otherwise, this particular representation powerfully disarticulates “pornotroping,” inasmuch as she gains respect.

In connection to the carnival as a celebration of ethnicity, “Trini Dem Girls” performance is a much more complex narrative where Minaj fuses the conventions of this festivity, African ancestry and elements of her transnational identity as a woman from the ghetto. Thus, it is a media text that works by the sedimentation of multi-layered meanings. According to Spillers, African captive men were displaced from the white symbolic order, that is, psychologically emasculated so that “the law of the Mother” was founded, that is, black women as matriarchs, as the by-product of slavery and sexual exploitation (1987: 80). Inserted in this legacy of slavery where women were breeders of labour force for the plantations, the representation of Minaj as an African queen with submissive men is once more problematic.

Even though we can perceive an image of an empowered woman pierced by racial differences, this visual representation mobilises the symbolic position of black women as matriarchs whilst black men are viewed as disempowered. So this media text problematizes the search for a powerful enactment that disarticulates the racist fictions of the West in the media ruled by dominant discourses.

Further, the verbal messages related to black cultural identity navigate through words charged with provocative sexual meanings associated with their identity: “Trini dem girls, dem a pat the pum pum” (5)⁶³ as exemplified by the following image from the performance:



Figure 3.38 (“Christopher,” 2016)

Although it can be stated that Minaj was attempting to free social taboos about women and sexuality in the rap industry controlled by black men through her adherence to her ethnicity and this practice of Caribbean black women’s dance,⁶⁴ their legacy of slavery linked to systematic rape and the clash of codes between black culture and the media gaze used to “pornotrope” the bodies of black women makes difficult Minaj’s challenging task. In fact, as Preciado noted, mass media is considered as a “semitechnical code of white heterosexual masculinity” (2013: 121). Therefore, one reading of the image is going to be oriented to perceive it both as an act of degrading women and as serving the interests of heteronormativity to satisfy the voyeuristic white male gaze. Mulvey explained that the

⁶³ ‘Pum pum’ is slang for “a woman’s vagina” but more specifically, this word is associated to black culture in the Caribbean (“urban dictionary”).

⁶⁴ Ade Onibada discussed the moral conflict for a black woman regarding the practice of patting the pum pum considered as degrading for women and feminism (2014).

camera was an apparatus governed by the fantasies of ideology (1975: 816). Nevertheless, the incorporation of elements of her identity as a ghetto woman and her use of a non-normative language set in motion strategies that partially weaken the power of the dominant biased eye: “Yo, he in love with a ghetto girl / He said he want a piece like a Metta World⁶⁵ / Pat, pat on the kitty cat” (9-11).⁶⁶ The singer is negotiating her multicultural identity composed of elements from antagonistic cultures by articulating heteronormative desire towards a woman who is defined by physical strength and sexuality through slang used by black people from the ghetto. If we consider that Bush had stated that the portrayal of captive black women was associated with “harshness,” “robustness” and “animal sensuality” (1990: 15), one might say that it seems that Minaj’s language reveals a subjectivity that has internalised the racist features of black women invented by the West.

This complex interaction between the exotic performance of Minaj’s Otherness and black urban culture does not admit either fusion or interconnection. Thus, she fails to create a powerful visual representation based on intersectionality. Indeed, Stuart Hall analysed the ways the media practices were highly dependent on “the spectacle of the “Other,” that is to say, he noticed the rise of popular culture’s fascination with the encoding of difference (1997: 225). If we muse on how these practices are linked to Spillers’ “pornotroping” dominated by a hegemonic gaze that finds sexual pleasure in dehumanisation and marking the Other’s body, this display of exotic tribalism is subject to commodification in the media used to objectify difference.

Notwithstanding this, it must be acknowledged that Minaj’s masculinised slang challenges the intelligibility of normative language. In addition, although this media text is

⁶⁵ Metta World is an African-American professional basketball player.

⁶⁶ ‘Kitty cat’ is slang for “a woman’s unshaved hairy vagina” (“urban dictionary”).

hinged on the reiterative assertion of black women sexuality through visual-discursive codes, she thrived in rejecting men's sexual drives without consent during the spectacle:



Figure 3.39 (“Christopher,” 2016)

In this regard, clearly, the visual display and the verbal message are mutually reinforcing: “Put it [pum pum] in his face like a cop badge / He wanna pound it like a hashtag...If he shoot it up⁶⁷, I’m gonna bust back” (32-33, 35). Undoubtedly, in the postfeminist era where the fiction of the “sexual entrepreneur” as an empowering subjectivity has been fixed in the social imaginary (Gill, 2007a: 151), the notion of empowering sexual playfulness associated with the black female body is much more complex than in the case of hegemonic femininity as for example, in *Cyrus*, since it conceals the dehumanisation and animalisation imposed on these women by sexual exploitation during slavery.

Indeed, if we compare both celebrities’ manspreading and the act of grabbing her crotch, whereas *Cyrus*’s rebellious acts are related to her search for a distinctive individuality including the appropriation of a posture—especially associated to white male privilege—disrupting that symbol of male dominance, Minaj’s spreading and patting the pum pum is

⁶⁷ ‘To shoot up’ is slang for “injecting drugs intravenously” (“urban dictionary”), so Minaj is playing with its meaning as a metaphor for penetration.

connected to black women's dance and non-normative cultural identity, whose sexual connotations are placed along a matrix of intelligibility that fabricated the racist myth of the female sexual beast. In other words, Cyrus's subversion is about the masculinisation of her body to take a distance from the idealised image of white femininity but Minaj's corporeal act is connected to her cultural identity in a dominant culture that denied black women's humanness.

Finally, we will discuss what can be possibly considered the most powerful visual construction of Minaj's art when she articulated that monstrosity forcibly inscribed on black women's bodies as an enactment that challenged heteronormative intelligibility. Nicki Minaj's visual-discursive performance in Kanye West's music video "Monster" (2010) appropriated the trope of monstrosity—that is to say, the codes of the oppressor—to act as a mirror of the racist practices of violence exercised against black female anatomies, which becomes a strategy of political manipulation that overtly displays the brutality of capitalist enslavement, insofar as it allows for recognition of how dehumanising Western liberalism operated.

As noted, Spillers used "pornotroping" to define the technique deployed by dominant ideology during slavery in order to sexualise, brutalise and dehumanise the black female "body," that was perceived through the male gaze titillated by the sadomasochistic torture of captive women (1987: 67, 76). To put it simply, white sadism worked by encoding these women as sexual animals deprived of humanity. Preciado adds that racialized women were readily branded as sex workers that should be the objects of experiments and atrocities (2013: 183). It is in this context of colonialism that Minaj's embodiment of the sadist monster must be examined. Through her male alter-ego Roman Zolanski,⁶⁸ the rapper materialises the pornotrope role of the dominatrix that oppresses the HB, thus we have a display of the two

⁶⁸ Hereafter RZ.

products fabricated by master discourses on black women: the ‘evil’ sexual beast and the black woman who appropriates the white aesthetics to resist sexualisation, as represented below:



Figure 3.40 (“Os the3 Polemics,” 2016)

This establishes an undecipherable representation for the panoptic gaze. Lacan wrote about the ways dominant ideology worked in the symbolic order by fixing the complementary sexed positions of the having (white man) and being (white woman) the phallus (2006: 582). However, Spillers revealed how the black captive “flesh” had been excluded from the Law of the Father, since the slave system made black women occupy that position (1987: 66, 80). In this regard, Minaj uses the whip as a prosthetic appendage that symbolises the white phallus—whose Law banished black people—to impose her power on HB as the embodiment of white women’s mannerisms as an attempt to mimic the sadism and phallic burden of normative social order.

This enactment of empowering “pornotroping” is anchored by the verbal messages from the lyrics, staging the brutalisation branded on her identity:

You could be the king but watch the queen conquer
Ok, first things first I’ll eat your brains
Then I’m a start rocking gold teeth and fangs⁶⁹
Cause that’s what a motherfucking monster do. (4-7)⁷⁰

Thus, the reading of this text is twofold. On the one hand, the black “flesh” excluded from the white symbolic—that is, from representation—articulates a homoerotic scene of violence that is not legible in the hegemonic domain of cultural intelligibility. Further, the split of the two fabrications of the West refuses the phallic complementarity of the sexes. This visual representation also becomes a reflection of how racism marks the black female body and is materialised. On the other hand, Minaj as a female rapper was claiming her status within the male-dominated rap industry. In that regard, the negotiation of these two imitative identities represents the obstacles black female rappers have in an industry controlled by black men who have reversed the colonialist emasculation though an exacerbated sexism towards black women as a result of the legacy of oppression (Edwards, 2006: 59).

Here, then, it is important to note how during this narrative, both versions of the rapper interact with one another, including the representation of RZ’s pleasure towards HB:



Figure 3.41 (“Os the3 Polemics,” 2016)

⁶⁹ An image that intensifies the instantiation of bestiality and monstrosity materialising this idea is included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Minaj’s verse in “Monster” has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

To further grasp this performance of Minaj, we need to take into consideration who is RZ for the rapper. In an interview for MTV, she described the birth of Roman in 2010 as follows:

Roman is a crazy boy who lives in me and he says the things I don't wanna say. He was born you know a few months ago. I think he was born out of rage. He was conceived in rage so he bashes everyone and he threatens to beat people and he's violent. (Menzie, 2011)

If, indeed, the dominatrix's subjectivity is a homosexual man that conforms to the bestiality crafted by the colonialist system, then this rendering of the rapper's alter ego is a mirror of how "pornotroping" and the branding of the abnormal are intrinsically homoerotic. Spillers (1987) claimed that captive black people—female and male—were the potential locus for "pornotroping" that entailed obtaining sexual pleasure from torture (67). Within this functioning of the production of the black body, the dominatrix alter-ego's desire towards the HB as an imitation of white aesthetic norms of femininity is disrupting the camera gaze in the mainstream media, projecting unintelligible sexual drives for an audience used to the consumption of 'promiscuous' black female bodies as a property in Western popular culture.

Further, the interaction of these two fictions shows that the HB is just a "fake," so that black female identities as constructions in relation to white hegemonic femininity is non-natural as the lyrics reveals: "Forget Barbie, fuck Nicki cause she's fake...Pink wig, thick ass, give'em whiplash...Aaaah. I'm a motherfucking monster" (22, 28, 31). I contend here that Minaj is exploring a consciousness that has historically been denied to black women since when they were enslaved; their identities were constructed in relation to white norms and its heteronormative binary gender. Unlike Cyrus, who was part of the norm and was entitled to have her individuality, black women's legacy of slavery deprived them of modes of subjectivity associated with their own culture. Thus, Minaj's final line asserting she is a monster has a twofold meaning; first, the monster is effectively the mould created by the

master for these women and, second, it reflects her struggle to find an identity in the music industry.

Another powerful example of non-normative representation that challenged the classificatory practices of the media was a 2011 performance when she wears a flamboyant ensemble that simulates Frankenstein imagery, which is complemented by use of a prosthetic white dildo:



Figure 3.42 (“twanatells,” 2011)

As discussed during this section, the black female body had been reduced to an over-sexualised property whose gender and sexuality were differences that marked these women’s “flesh” as the result of their integration into the capitalist slave plantation. They were essentially wombs to be penetrated, trapped by colonialist regulations. Consequently, this enactment of Minaj’s corporeality problematized the legibility of black women’s bodies in mainstream culture.

The use of the dildo is inserted within a history of the Western technologies of the body that was designed to control white women's sexuality and their loyalty to heterosexuality but it could be used as a political tool of subversion through its displacement on the surface of the body that undermined the binary gender relations (Preciado, 2011: 41, 102-103). In fact, as Haraway stated, "the main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (1991: 151). These two interlinked ideas are applicable here because this hybrid image of the rapper coming from a "Negro Family" that has no lineage castrates the white master through the appropriation of the prosthetic phallus as a symbol of colonialist domination that "pornotrope" black women. This image reverses the physical castration of black men by projecting her pleasure in disarticulating the libidinal desire of hegemonic masculinity. The queering of Minaj's body denies legibility within the precepts of cultural intelligibility.

As analysed above, Cyrus also made use of a prosthetic dildo on stage, but the pop star's status, coming from privileged white culture whose body was intelligible, merely mobilised the possibilities of gender fluidity. In contrast, the rapper, whose body was anchored in the history of colonialism and racism subject to brutalisation, not just crossed gender boundaries but challenged the pervasive denial of black subjectivity and control over their sexuality out of the system that produced their bodies in relation to white laws.

I would like here to stress that this representation of the rapper highlights how her subjectivity is shaped by the internalisation of sexual violence, exerted against black people even when she is not aware of that. In an interview for *The Guardian* in 2012, it is interesting to examine the reason why she had decided to rap about men's genitalia: "I don't even wanna refer to female genitalia any more...I just feel I have bigger balls than the boys...I just have huge ones" (Hattenstone, 2012). Wallace analysed the long lasting psychological effects of

slavery on black people and concluded that black men were reluctant to accept black femininity as positive models since they were too tough and emasculated them (1990: 10). Thus, although her discourse reveals the difficulties that a female rapper has to face in the rap industry, Minaj's words are also connected to the forcible role of matriarchs during slavery when men's genitalia were removed as a symbol of white male dominance. Through the connection between the queering of her visual representation and the discourse (including the lyrics of her songs), the rapper is disclosing the ways the past is still haunting the construction of powerful black femininities that call into question dominant discourses, especially in genres that are considered 'masculine.'

Within this exploration of models of subversion offered by Minaj against the construction of black bodies/identities pierced by white norms, her 2012 performance of *The Exorcism of Roman*, based on her song "Roman Holiday," at the 54th Grammy Awards radically disrupted the Western socio-cultural imagery. The artist mobilised a kind of visual-discursive experimentation that represented an assemblage of key politico-cultural elements of white culture that were unsettled and questioned. Thus, this becomes an empirical project—with a character RZ through whom the monstrosity associated with black women had been explored—that seeks to explore identity and female empowerment.

As examined above, Foucault had identified confession as a technique linked to the Catholic Church—as a heteronormative institution—developed and adopted by other Western institutions to produce norms, regulations and absolute truths; in other words, confession is part of the technologies of controlling the body in accordance to dominant ideology (1998: 58, 63). However, since black women were merely "flesh" they were excluded from this technique due to their subhuman ontological status in the slave trade. The intense focus on white people's bodies/subjectivities as the site for extracting knowledge is explained because power was governed by its white ontological and epistemological foundations. Given this

context, Minaj introduces the Catholic confession in her performance, taking control of the technique of the oppressor, which involves the potentiality of deliberately becoming what she wants; thus the rapper's identity is evading classification as an attempt to escape her blackness:



Figure 3.43 (“Marcos Monster,” 2012)

The disruptive force of this performance is that it goes within and across the boundary of intelligibility. hooks had noted that the representation of women distributed in society and the media was under the mark of sexual availability, a myth created to maintain the status of white women as the guardians of national identity (1990: 58-59). It is worth noting here how the interconnection between the visual image and confessional speech results into a clash of codes that disavows those violent labels forcibly inscribed on black women's anatomies: “I feel pretty (x3) / And witty / I slay” (1-2).⁷¹ Consequently, the rapper is appropriating confession as a strategy to counter the degrading stereotypical images of black women as beasts whose ‘truth’ is repudiated.

⁷¹ The performance of “Roman Holiday” is a complex narrative that mixes elements from this song, “Roman's Revenge” and “I Feel Pretty.” However, “I slay” is a modification of the original line from “I Feel Pretty”: “And Gay” (3).

In terms of agency, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) asserted that those colonised bodies were inserted in the process of becoming, as an assemblage of manifold fragments that rejected dichotomy, inasmuch as they became in-between and non-located (293). By focusing on this enactment of Minaj: a black female body with prosthetic elements to modify her body—like the wig—as an imitation of the aesthetics of hegemonic femininity materialising the subjectivity of a homosexual man, her confessional act reveals her fragmented identity rooted nowhere. The ‘monster’ she has created repudiates the white offspring that appropriated black bodies as mirrors of their imperatives.

In the posthuman assemblage of this performance, a video that simulates the movie *The Exorcist* is integrated into the spectacle, where a Catholic priest is welcomed by a character that represents RZ’s mother with a discourse that defines her son as masculine: “He’s upstairs. He’s not well. He’s sick” (“Marcos Monster,” 2012). Here, then, what is also important about this intertextual parody is the way Minaj uses her body as a vehicle to subsume all those negative meanings conferred upon black women in terms of evilness as analysed in this section. According to Foucault, the manufacturing of what would count as Western absolute truth entailed the prohibition of miscegenation, thus race evolved as a technology to perpetuate the supremacy of dominant discourses (1998: 54). As part of those technologies of producing the normative body, Lacan identified the mirror stage as the process through which the individual creates a coherent and unitary sense of the self (2006: 76, 79). These essential apparatuses of creating a superior race are disarticulated by Minaj through the performance of the mirror scene that denies that process of homogenous identification, especially when black people have been excluded from this process of regulatory formation of the self and condemned to materialise the fantasies of the male gaze. When RZ looks at the mirror asserting “I feel pretty,” the character that embodies queerness counter-produces a psychotic narrative that both reveals the mechanisms of dominant

ideology to invest otherness with its norms and claims the right of black women to have their own agency to construct identities that do not become a mere reflection of the oppressor's rules. As a result, RZ becomes unintelligible because the character refuses to follow the conventions that were used to fabricate devaluated black female subjectivities.⁷²

Thinking of the stage scenery as a Catholic Church that is used to contain RZ's otherness, it becomes a space for exploring Minaj's subversion of repressive apparatuses to examine the deviant Others. As Foucault pointed out, the old scaffold aimed to display the bodies marked by difference for controlling the population that became the audience, whose gaze was trained to perceive and exclude the non-normative bodies/identities as a way of legitimising what counted as truth (1991: 43). However, those marked bodies can find modes of resistance against the pervasive classificatory system of the West. Haraway wrote that "my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (1991: 154). Through the exorcism, Minaj articulates a complex spectacle of the posthuman in which the old technique of the scaffold has mutated into a multimedia site for the display of branded bodies whose function, particularly here, has been reversed to transgress the mechanisms of control, showing RZ as an identity that challenges the panoptic eye of the camera as an appendage of the media as a heteronormative institution and other ungended anatomies:

⁷² An image that represents the mirror scene has been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.



Figure 3.44 (“Marcos Monster,” 2012)

Significantly for this discussion, the verbal messages from the lyrics are characterised by their use of the language of the oppressor and misogyny:

Cause my flow’s so sick, and I’m a lunatic
 And this can’t be cured with no Elixir

 And this what I do when a bitch breaks flock
 I’mma put her in a dungeon under, under
 No them bitches ain’t eating, they dying of hunger. (22-34, 43-45)⁷³

In this regard, first, by calling himself “a lunatic” he is claiming his right to have an identity on his own. And second, through RZ, Minaj is revealing the subjectivity of the white master in relation to the experience of black women treated as non-humans under the yoke of slavery. Consequently, this proves how the intensity of RZ’s monstrosity is a reflection capable of retaining the evil that dominant ideology inflicted on black female bodies and their subjectivities. Minaj is reversing the pleasure experience by the male gaze through “pornotroping” when she projects that brutality on the camera and the globalised audience. Therefore this performance exhibits the fragmentation imposed on black women’s identity

⁷³ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 3.

rife with fissures whose contradictions are not easily resolved due to the endurance of past brutality into the negotiation of black identities in the present.

To conclude this section, this analysis of the visual-discursive production of Nicki Minaj's identity/anatomy has proved that her subjectivity has internalised the "pornotroped" fabrication of capitalist slavery society through the materialisation of a 21st-century Hottentot Venus that trades on her backside. Preciado had identified the ways our current capitalist market had been able to transform the old technologies of the body into fluid and tangible realities for the consumption of the audience (2013: 34-35). In this regard, Minaj self-commodification of the marks imposed by slavery on the black female body is a useful tool for dominant ideology to maintain its status quo and the supremacy of the white race intact. Despite this, the rapper has been able to produce some representations that reverse Western sadism by opening up possibilities for the construction of alternative identities out of dominant discourses aimed to perpetuate the effects of slavery in a more discreet way.

Therefore, the two celebrities examined in this chapter, Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj, have strategically played the role of the "sexual entrepreneur" to make money. Notwithstanding this, it is undeniable that Cyrus has been able to produce a more fluid identity than Minaj in mainstream media culture. But the fact that Cyrus comes from a privileged status and social class as a white woman anchored in dominant ideology has facilitated her task, since her body is not pierced by racial differences. The analysis produced in this chapter reveals the need of integrating intersectionality in celebrity studies as a useful instrument to identify and counter-attack dominant discourses and visual constructions on the bodies of women by avoiding a simplistic account of representation that dismisses the ways differences are imbricated on one another to maintain the normative social order unchallenged and untouched.

Chapter 4:

The Virtual Simulation of Masculinities in Mainstream Culture:

Ricky Martin and Robbie Williams

This chapter will examine the media representation of two male pop stars: Ricky Martin and Robbie Williams. Over the last decades, the music industry has both manufactured the virtual simulation of female and male bodies by articulating different modalities of subjectivities and power-relations in order to be capitalised within the marketplace on a global scale. Consequently, it is fundamental to include the analysis of the production of masculinities as part of this research as an attempt to critically understand whether the attribution of gender on the representation of their bodies is still highly dependent on compulsory heterosexuality alongside the normative ideal of the complementarity of the sexes.

I will discuss first the mediatisation of the Latin pop star Ricky Martin to analyse his assimilation in Western pop culture. Indeed, at the end of the 1990s, he was highly praised for his essential contribution to the growing impact of Latin Music on mainstream American pop culture (web profile on Biography.com). Suffice it to say that his success in mainstream American culture marked the gradual integration of Latinisation into the capitalist machinery. As in the previous chapter, first, I will aim to fathom the imbrication of the visual and linguistic messages from diverse sources such as official music videos, performances and the social media from the late 1990s to the second decade of the 21st-century, since both pop stars rose to fame as solo artists in the same period of time, as an attempt to understand the ways their public identities and bodies have been manufactured and encoded. In the second half of this chapter, I will turn to Robbie Williams to examine the visual-discursive production of the

English singer and despite the differences in the political anchorage of both artists—Martin from a non-Western society and Williams from his privileged status within dominant ideology—, I contend that their narratives are embedded in the same master discourses that legitimise heteronormativity.

4.1. Ricky Martin: Latino Identity into Mainstream Pop Culture

In the evolution of the artist, we can perceive his gradual integration into the mainstream American music industry triggered by Martin's internalisation of certain attributes ingrained in dominant discourses, which would mark the acceptance of his cultural product on a global scale. Much has been written about the causes of his cultural assimilation into mainstream American culture. For example, according to Negrón-Muntaner, Ricky Martin embodies the assimilation and commodification of Latin Music insofar as the American pop culture domesticated his Puerto Rican ethnicity through the emphasis on his whiteness (2004: 260). Nevertheless, I aim to demonstrate that this widespread acceptance correlates with the ways Martin succumbs to the legitimacy of the pathos of heterosexuality interlinked to his gradual internalisation of surveillance which has been very effective to control his feminised corporeal acts marked by his Puerto Rican otherness. Marysol Asencio (2011) explored how homosexual Puerto Ricans who had migrated to America negotiated their masculinities and respectability in society through the approximation to a heterosexual masculine ideal so that a hierarchy amongst non-straight men was established, whose status depended on their adaptive capacity to normative codes of Western heterosexuality (343). Significantly, this scholar has argued that this reinforcement of heteronormativity and the binary logic was intimately connected to the construction of national identity in Puerto Rico, which crucially hinged on the adherence to misogynistic values as a mechanism against oppression and the colonial legacy (Asencio, 2011: 339). For these men, heterosexuality

meant respect and it contributed to social mobility in both Puerto Rican and American societies (Asencio, 2011: 336). In this respect, this strategy of negotiating masculinity abroad intertwined with rigid heteronormative Puerto Rican [male] identity is articulated and bolstered up in Martin's oeuvre. In other words, this proves the ways his subjectivity is deeply rooted in his homeland's political project of constituting identity. Therefore, the cultural enactment of Martin is the derivation of politically located signifying and semiotic praxes that are pervasive in the mutation of his body and subjectivity, as will be analysed below.

Hence the deployment of his masculinity is predicated on an ongoing process whose structural underpinnings will be fully examined here. One of the predominant mechanisms is the performative reproduction of obligatory heterosexuality by establishing the dynamics of binary gender as the default setting that is represented both visually and linguistically. It was Monique Wittig who defined heterosexuality "not as an institution but as a political regime which rests on the submission and the appropriation of women" (1992: xiii). Her idea of the workings of sexuality is applicable here because Martin appropriates the female body by particularly reproducing the gender hierarchy that entails the objectification of women and the mobilisation of heterosexual desire. In Martin's oeuvre, this representation is attained through the complex assemblage of two ritualised performances: on the one hand, the singer's performance in media texts that do not involve physical contact with a woman so that normative desire is mainly articulated through the linguistic message of the lyrics, and on the other hand, the materialisation of the white norm through the display of the fulfilment of heteronormative desire on screen.

In relation to the first type of projecting the conventions of this traditional sexual organisation, one quintessential example is rendered in his music video "La Bomba" (1998)

that marked his transition from a Latin pop star for Spanish speaking countries to a mainstream celebrity. Right from the beginning this media text is inserted within the articulation of heterosexual desire by using the nudity of a female body to anchor this meaning. According to de Lauretis “the representation of woman as image (spectacle, object to be looked at, vision of beauty...as the locus of sexuality...is so pervasive in our culture” (1984: 37). The purpose of this image, therefore, is solely to anchor Martin’s video within the dominant ideology predicated on compulsory heterosexuality, particularly if we consider that this woman does not actively participate in the narrative of the video. The subsequent visual representation displays this key concept:



Figure 4.1 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

Significantly, although this media text is focused on the body of Martin that dances alone, the video ends with Martin approaching this woman as displayed below:



Figure 4.2 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

As we have discussed earlier, Martin's performance relied on the verbal messages in order to mobilise the dominant sexual drive. As Roland Barthes (1977) has stated, the image is a compounded structure predicated on the imbrication of messages derived from the image per se and the linguistic discourse; the latter has the primary function of fixing the meanings and orientating the interpretation of the visual components (37-39). Barthes's understanding of the image plays a pivotal role in the representation of this pop star within the heteronormative ontology grounded on compulsory coupledness. In fact, in this music text where Martin never completes his physical approximation to a woman, that gap is filled with the essential function of the lyrics, exemplified by the following lines "muevete mamita que me vuelvo loco / Emborrachadita de la bomba estás" (line 7-8).⁷⁴

Therefore, this visual-discursive narrative reproduces the drama of heterosexuality that is charged with maintaining the status quo. The end of the video illustrates the materialisation of the symbolic order that relies on the Lacanian Law of the Father. According to Jacques Lacan, the sexed position was instituted in the psyche that produced a mental representation of the body dependent on the complementarity of sexes; whereas men assimilated the privileged having-phallus position, women constituted the being-phallus in the symbolic order (2006: 581-582). In relation to this articulation of heterosexual desire, Butler (1993) argued that these two positions relied on the process of psychic identification that could be approximated but never fully accomplished and whose prescriptive logic was materialised through corporeal acts (105-106). These ideas of the regulation of sexuality are clearly materialised in this music video because Martin moves closer to a female anatomy only at the end and even so, he never touches her. The scenes from this music video, burdened with heterosexual desire and the assertion of Martin's normative masculinity, are linked to his Puerto Rican identity as was noted above. In this regard, it is worth noting that

⁷⁴ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Martin's articulation of hegemonic masculinity is inserted within his belonging to a colonised political enclave, so his media text reproduces the drama of heterosexual desire that tactically operates on the basis of approximation to marked femaleness and Martin's agency as the transmitter of phallic power. Thus, he is an active participant in the political project of bolstering up Puerto Rican nationhood.

Another important example that accounts for this particular form of manufacturing the heteronormative gender dichotomy is "La Mordidita" (2015). The narrative provides an insight into the legitimacy of men as the sexed position that is seduced versus the marked woman endowed with the symbolic role of the naturalised temptress. In this media text, the singer performatively formulates the Christian myth of the complementarity of Adam and Eve; that is to say, this representation is predicated on the device of intertextuality, which reinforces the fiction of heterosexual desire, its linkage to Western culture and the determinism of this identificatory process. For Butler, gender was the effect of a forcible repetition of corporeal acts and actions that naturalised its cultural production, which is constituted as a stable category inasmuch as its praxes are circumscribed within the patterns of a rite that is relentlessly performed (2007: 17, 98). Similarly, the intertextual relation in this narrative exposes the necessity for constant repetition that derives into the material effect of the norm.

Once more, it is the link between the visual imagery and the linguistic discourse that reproduces this fantasy. The symbolic law is articulated right from the start. Martin identifies with the male heterosexual position complemented by the woman, objectified in this narrative. Significantly, the video had started with Martin biting this woman, thereby marking and transforming her into the object of desire as a sexualised body:



Figure 4.3 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2015)

It is in this context that after Figure 4.3, the pop star sings “si Dios puso la manzana fue para morder” (5)⁷⁵ whilst he is looking at the bitten woman, who symbolises lust in the video. The strong bond of this symbolism with normative sexual identity orientates the unmistakable legibility of the cultural signifieds. Further, the pop star’s gaze towards the bitten woman has the power of conceptual anchoring. Following Laura Mulvey, in a male-dominated world where men are the subjects of desire and women as the passive objects, the male gaze attributes gender—as their constructed fiction—to female anatomies that are reduced to objects to be exhibited and looked at (1975: 808-809). Thus, drawing on Freud’s notion of scopophilia, she explained the ways the cinematic apparatus triggered this kind of pleasure derived from the objectification of a person by the viewer (Mulvey, 1975: 806-808). Here, then, Martin’s gaze is the embodiment of that regulatory male gaze that appropriates women to inscribe their cultural fantasies on female bodies.

As mentioned above, the singer’s media texts used another mechanism of representation in order to reproduce obligatory heterosexuality. I will now proceed to analyse the ways these images represent a step further into the ideology of the heteropatriarchal structure. This pattern of articulating desire is implemented in his English hit “Livin’ La Vida

⁷⁵ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Loca” (1999) that catapulted him to fame in the American marketplace. Its visual-linguistic narrative encompasses the complex assemblage of the encoding of the fantasy of sexual difference, scopophilia, and the fulfilment of sexual desire by approximation.

At the first level, the heterosexual drama is triggered by the entanglement of both the visual representation of Martin and the go-go dancer as the embodiment of ‘*living la vida loca*’ lifestyle; that is to say, she is portrayed as a seductress in the song’s linguistic message when the media text starts. This fiction of gender is displayed below by implanting heterosexuality as the unifying thread in this cultural product through an image that is performatively reproduced in this video and thus this practice facilitates the fixation of meaning:



Figure 4.4

(“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

Here Martin appears to be titillated by this over-sexualised woman. This deployment of desire and gender hierarchy is inextricably reinforced by the linguistic message when this celebrity has the power to define her by singing:

She's into superstitions
Black cats and voodoo dolls
I feel a premonition
That girl's gonna make me fall. (1-4).⁷⁶

Consequently, he is reducing this voiceless woman to the role of the temptress, which is deeply ingrained in our Western culture and was summarised by Mulvey as the heteronormative dialectics of “woman as image, man as the bearer of the look” (1975: 808). Moreover, the singer is categorising this woman by the mark of gender and ethnicity when he incorporates “voodoo dolls,” a cultural element linked to his Puerto Rican culture that is subject to exoticisation since “*Livin' La Vida Loca*” became part of mainstream pop culture. As Foucault identified, classification was a fundamental technique to control difference in Western societies (1991: 184). The pervasive classificatory codes overlapping in this narrative are intimately connected to the singer's identification with heteronormative values as a stunt for marketing his cultural product on a global scale. As already mentioned, the anti-colonial construction of Puerto Rican identity—ingrained in non-Western culture and marked by ethnicity—was a masculinist project predicated on hegemonic masculinity and mandatory heterosexuality, that is, it brought with it the rejection of colonialism that had entailed the symbolic phallic penetration of bodies by difference (Asencio, 2011: 337, 339). In the light of this discussion, Martin's narratives encode those key elements related to the negotiation of his non-normative identity in the media as a source of empowerment and acceptance. So far, then, Martin is inserting his cultural product within a dominant ideology through the recurrence to the encoding of women by using misogynist and racist signifieds that are

⁷⁶ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

intelligible for the male white gaze. In short, it seems that his subjectivity is revealing the internalisation of the hegemonic codes of cultural intelligibility as a form of reversing the effects of colonialization.

This traditional narrative of heterosexuality as an indispensable element of the spectacle is intensified by another technique of reifying gender when Martin is displayed playfully looking at the woman. The technique of scopophilic sexual pleasure mobilised through the artist's gaze—as was deployed in “La Bomba” and “La Mordidita”—is a recurrent strategy in this media text as well in order to impose the hierarchy of gender. In addition, the media narrative goes further when the pop star materialises his desire, asserting control over that woman through the appropriation of her anatomy for pleasure and avoiding guilt by classifying her as the temptress.⁷⁷ This visual representation is performative in this cultural product, and the following image perfectly encapsulates the simulation of the performer's normative desire:



Figure 4.5

(“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

⁷⁷ An image when the model of the music video incites him to leave the hotel in order to live la vida loca has been included as an appendix to Chapter 4.

In the concert hall—venue of the fictional performance—there is no physical contact between Martin and the dancer. However, once outside that setting the singer and the woman physically articulate their desire. Both spaces inside-outside are imbricated on one another rather than work in opposition in order to reproduce the symbolic approximation of woman and man as part of the psychoanalytic ritual invested in ideological norms. So far, then, I want to stress here the excessive exaltation and reiteration of this compulsory desire. A mandatory reiteration that exposes the fictional nature of this technology of producing the body (Butler, 1993: 2). Butler's understanding of the adoption of a sexed position within the grid of heterosexual intelligibility is here applicable insofar as the plot of this music video is predicated on such constant iteration, exposing, then, the artificiality of these sexual drives.

In the evolution of this pop star, this manufacturing of normative desire is perpetuated by playing a significant role in the fabrication of his identity as a mainstream celebrity. Indeed, in an interview, Martin admitted that heterosexuality was an integral part of his persona as a strategy to maintain his popularity in the mainstream market. He stated that “for many years I thought I was, I was confused then when I was with a woman everything was perfect but the most important thing was that people loved to see me with women, so it was like ‘I’m gonna make this work’” (“ANTYHOMOFOB,” 2012). Martin's words reveal how he intentionally exploited heterosexuality because that was what society expected from him.

The Butlerian notion of the ‘naturalisation’ of heterosexuality (2007: 28, 72) through the imitation of norms is closely connected to Martin's Puerto Rican subjectivity. Here, Asencio's aforementioned analysis on how homosexual Puerto Rican immigrants in America succumbed to hegemonic masculinity and the imitation of heteronormative norms as a strategy for integration into mainstream society (2011: 343), is also useful to understand the mechanisms of normalisation deployed in society. With this in mind, Martin's words reveal the idealisation of heterosexuality as the hegemonic default setting whose transgression could

have ruined his successful career, highly dependent on his appealing image to heterosexual women on a global scale. In addition, it is worth noting that this public display of passion in this media text—that catapulted him to success in American popular culture—is a mutation of the old American fiction of the Latin Lover, a fabrication of Hollywood that includes Latin men that were portrayed as passionate and romantic in the public view; that is to say a product that was aimed to be consumed by white women (Lie, 2006: 133). Therefore, the heteronormative representation of Martin mobilises a fictional identity that was formed by the overlapping sedimentation of cultural meanings associated with his Puerto Rican identity and the racist stereotypes of the West, whose articulation worked within the precepts of hegemonic masculinity. In other words, they were mutually reinforcing and he fit the mould.

Within this context, his Spanglish version of the Puerto Rican reggaeton singer Wisin's "Adrenalina" (2014)—reggaeton being a genre relying on misogynistic heterosexual innuendo—fits into his strategical deployment of masculinity, especially if we consider that Martin had come out of the closet in 2010. As in the smash hit "Livin' La Vida Loca," the assemblage of the aforementioned three elements is displayed on screen with a tendency to the intensification of sexualisation through the naturalised distinction of the two genders and Martin's gaze titillated by an over-sexualised dancer that is visually represented as a sexual provocateur:



Figure 4.6

("RickyMartinVEVO," 2014)

The articulation of heterosexual desire is kept intact in this media text by the linking between the visual simulations and the verbal message that correlates with this image: “because your body is pure ADRENALINE / And I’m so high on you baby” (5-6).⁷⁸ According to Beatriz Preciado, 21st-century gender hierarchy still relies on the binary notions of femininity and masculinity; it was in this context that the current social order is heir to the legacy of 19th-century epistemology (2013: 223). This music video exemplifies well the regulatory legacy of reiterating these old fictions invested in prescriptive norms. Furthermore, de Lauretis’s argument that the cinematic apparatus relied on the conception of woman as an image to please the male gaze (1984: 37) is evidenced here (Figure 4.6) when the woman is overtly transformed into an object of display whilst Martin becomes the embodiment of the heteronormative gaze that objectifies and reduces women to objects of desire. In relation to this, the masculinity of the pop singer is produced through his passive masculine pose in combination with his eyes as an appendage to the camera gaze that globally reproduces this music video. In this visual-discursive construction of this celebrity, he was a mainstream consummate artist. Hence, Martin is intentionally exploiting the formulaic system of heteronormativity invested in the construction of the identity of his homeland and the social expectations of homosexual men in Western cultures, denying interstices where gender binaries could be re-negotiated towards a more fluid production of Puerto Rican maleness in America.

⁷⁸ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Moreover, the representation of sexual attraction between the singer and Jennifer López in the same video exposes the gradual pace of sexualisation in the fulfilment of desire:

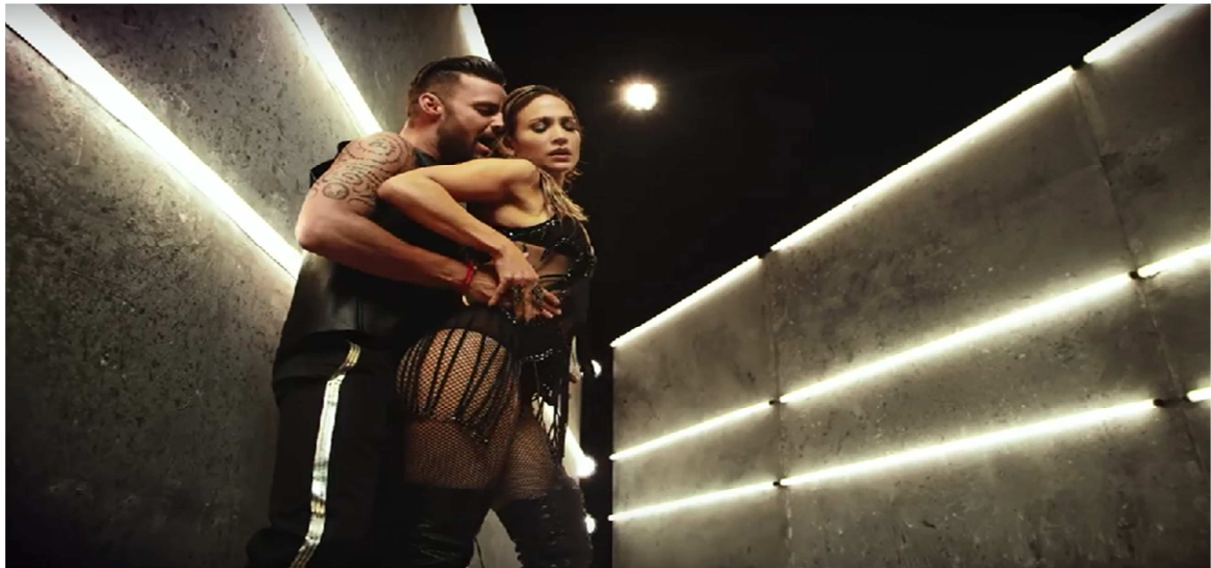


Figure 4.7 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2014)

The linearity of the heterosexual imperative constituted through the sexed identification in this media narrative works by the complementation of these two sequences in the narration that are mutually reinforcing. In relation to these normative positions, once more Butler’s theory about the approximation of two sexed bodies described above provides an interesting insight into this image even though acknowledging that according to her, Lacan stated that this fiction was compulsory and deterministic inasmuch as no one could avert it (2007: 119). This psychic and deterministic impossibility of the heterosexual drama is displayed by both the strategic link of the visual representation and the bridge of the lyrics. Although Martin sings “tú te apoderas de mis sentidos cuando me miras” (22) and she replies with “lo que empezamos tenemos que terminar” (27), the sexual act is never seen. Indeed, as noted by the the same scholar, the maintenance of obligatory heterosexuality correlates with “the materialization of regulatory norms that requires those identificatory processes” (Butler, 1993: 15). This process is pervasive here, since Martin and the women on screen are

reproducing and identifying with those invested norms but the act of consummation is erased from encoding.

Needless to say, this visual-linguistic narrative is noteworthy in relation to his public statements on his homosexuality, a fact that he disclosed in 2010 through a post on his official website: “I am proud to say that I am a fortunate homosexual man” (“Mail Online,” 2010). Martin’s discourse is revealing crucial aspects of his subjectivity and ideology. In this regard, the Spanish philosopher Beatriz Preciado wrote:

“I am a man,” “I am a woman,” “I am heterosexual,” “I am homosexual,” “I am transsexual”: these are units of specific knowledge about oneself, hard biopolitical nuclei around which it’s possible to assemble an entire collection of discourses and performative practices. We could call the “programming of gender” a psychopolitical neoliberal modelling of subjectivity that potentiates the production of subjects that think of themselves and behave like individual bodies, aware of themselves as private organic spaces and biological properties with fixed identities of gender and sexuality. (2013: 117)

In the light of this discussion, Preciado’s theorisation of how categorisation functions as a regulatory technique for producing the body and subjectivity that satisfies the capitalist interests is applicable here because Martin’s “homosexual man” is asserting his deviant sexuality but also he is highlighting his masculinity, since *homosexual* is usually associated with men and consequently, his privileged position as a *man*. Indeed, on Twitter after the Orlando nightclub massive shooting on June 12, 2016 when more than fifty people—many of them were Latin—were killed at *Pulse*, a very popular gay club (Barry, 2016), he posted “me duele como hombre, como ser humano, como gay” (Ricky Martin, 2016). Here, it is noteworthy to focus on the way the pop star proceeds to categorise and fix his identity by first selecting “man,” that is inherent to what has historically counted as a “human,” and placing at the very end, the non-normative component of his identity “gay.” Pertinent to my reading of

his statement is also Foucault's idea of how classification and the establishment of a hierarchy through labelling was a major technique in the history of controlling the abnormal (1991: 223). Clearly, Martin is succumbing to the normative process of the construction of identity as a fiction that cedes power to the media on the surveillance of all those individuals that deviate from the norm.

Therefore, he potentiates the ontological status of a man over his sexual identity. The essentialism of the singer's psyche partly justifies the pervasiveness of the heterosexual representation of his identity. Indeed, it is the cumulative effect of his performative identification with regulatory hegemonic masculinity in order to achieve upward mobility in mainstream popular culture, as pointed out earlier. Interestingly, Martin's statements in another interview six years later uncovered the reasons of his active participation in the legitimacy of obligatory heterosexuality. The singer stated that "I'm gay, men captivate me, but I like to enjoy sex in total liberty, which is why I am open to having sex with a woman if I felt the desire to, although I would not consider starting a sentimental relationship with her" later adding that "I know I'm attractive to both men and women and I don't believe in sexual labels, we are simply human beings with emotional and sexual needs" (Pocklington, 2016). Undoubtedly, his contradictory discourse of being against "sexual labels" while simultaneously fixing his identity, alongside his knowledge that the denial of attraction towards women could have negative impact on the commercialization of his cultural product, are behind the reformulation of his former statements. In other words, I contend here that Martin is well aware of the fact that heterosexuality is equated with money-making. Foucault identified the 19th-century biopolitical sexual identity that was crafted as a technique derived from the technology of sexuality to reproduce labour force for the emerging capitalism (1998: 140-141). Throughout these performances we can observe its mutation into a marketed product that is voluntarily internalised by the subject in order to trade on his own body.

According to Beatriz Preciado, 21st-century gender is a technique or commodity that can be imitated, commercialised, self-monitored and digitalised (2013: 129, 208), a statement clearly materialised in Martin's "Adrenalina" when the pop star is imitating heterosexual masculinity through the reproduction of practices and corporeal acts that follow the conventions of dominant ideology. This notwithstanding, as Butler pointed out, this compulsory repetition of the invested biopolitical norms as necessary for the materialisation of sexual difference unmasks the fictional nature of the heterosexist imperative (1993: 2). In this light, Martin's recurring performativity cannot be denied if we consider that these media texts, spanning a long period of time from 1998 to 2015, are deeply ingrained in this male-dominated structure. Significantly, the English pop star Robbie Williams, whose rise to fame was over the same period as Martin, similarly articulates the pathos of obligatory heterosexuality but his narrative, unlike the Puerto Rican celebrity's, is more dependent on the idea of romantic love and re-formulated love stories rather than the pervasive sexualisation of women's bodies through the visual representation or the linguistic message of the lyrics. Indeed, the obsession of Williams for being *the* only man, complemented by female dancers, that is represented in most of his media texts is connected to his failed strategy of becoming the object of desire, as we will see below.

In his performative imitation and identification with the fantasy of heterosexuality, the over-display of Martin's feminised hip moves connected to his ethnicity introduced an element of disruption within Western gendered norms that regulated masculinity. Therefore, what I aim to argue here is that this marked a transitional stage in his integration into mainstream American pop culture and so I examine next the techniques used to police his anatomy in the process of re-adjusting those corporeal acts according to the Western aesthetics with a view to assess and control the gender dichotomy. Indeed, in an interview for *The Guardian* held in 2011, Martin accepted he had spent most of his career constraining his

sexuality by stating that “if I had spent a quarter of the time that I spent manipulating my sexuality in front of a piano instead, I would be the most gifted piano player of my lifetime” (Cochrane).

The intensification of self-control is inextricably linked to his rocketing success since “*Livin’ La Vida Loca*” (1999) and the effects of his non-normative body in the mainstream media. Needless to say, the singer’s ethnicity may be considered as a signifying element that will partly challenge the dominant ideology at this stage of his career. According to Donna J. Haraway, situated knowledges, that is to say, those emanating from the particular political location of a subject, have implications on the anatomies marked by the technologies of the body such as sex and race, and therefore, they might turn out to become a mechanism of resistance against hegemonic discourses (1991: 111). Haraway’s concept must be taken into consideration here since Martin’s transitional official media texts are intrinsically connected to his cultural identity, as will be analysed below. Thus the integration of this axis of differentiation will aim to elude simplistic accounts of the representation of this celebrity’s masculinity.

Before his 1999 smash hit was released, “*La Bomba*” (1998) had encoded and widely mediated his anatomy, saturating the media with the otherness of his corporeal acts. Thus the display of Martin’s hip moves and sensual dance inscribed cultural meanings on his body far from the legitimate heteronormative masculinity, inasmuch as they conferred feminine attributes upon his anatomy which had far-reaching effects in representation. Importantly, Judith Butler established that the pathos of obligatory heterosexuality relied on the coherent and stable relation amongst sex, gender and desire (2007: 71-72). Therefore, the pop star’s bodily acts were interrupting this prescriptive formulaic system. Moreover, the visual representation of Martin’s non-normative corporeal moves problematizes the integration of the hip move—connected to his Latin culture and ethnic identity—into a consumer-centred

culture. Juliet McMains (2013) examined the ways “hip-centric dances” were negatively perceived in America because they constituted an evidence of unrestrained sexual desire, which posed a threat to Western purity; this resulted into a racist stereotype based on the idea that these extreme sexual drives justified their rational inferiority (1-2). In this respect, Martins’s dance poses a challenge to the heteronormative gaze in pop culture. The image below showcases the pervasive focus of the camera on his anatomy that characterises this music video:



Figure 4.8 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

Although the lyrics articulate the singer as a subject of sexual desire and a woman as the object, this particular visual simulation blurs the morphological distinction established by the binary divide of feminine-masculine. I stress this because the flexible mode of Martin’s maleness is connected to an intensification of the observation and examination of the camera gaze towards his anatomy that is pervasive in the narration of this media text. McMains emphasises that Latin dance was a strategy used by Latinos to reinforce their ethnic identity, which was viewed as an exotic performance in Western culture (2013: 3). Thus the focus of the hegemonic gaze on his body must be also understood within this context of a set of

practices aimed to contain non-normativity. In addition, according to Donna J. Haraway, the current technological eyes are neither passive nor neutral but they represent social reality in a partial and biased way (1991: 190), which is linked to Foucault's development of the principle of panopticism as a subtle and more efficient technique to supervise, control and discipline the body within a given ideology (1991: 209). These interconnected techniques are applicable here because we observe the repetitive pattern of the camera gaze through circular moves by gyrating and focusing on the singer's marked body. In other words, the non-Western morphology of Martin is highly visible from manifold angles in the video, even when he is surrounded by dancers. My argument, then, is that his otherness for mainstream pop culture constitutes this singer as an object of knowledge in response to his disruption of the hegemonic representation of gender attributed to men. These patterns of becoming visible are inextricably reinforced by Martin's move turning around and the reiterate chorus of the lyrics when he sings "bum, bum, dando media vuelta / Bum bum, otra vuelta más" (10-11) through several scenes in the music video.

The re-adjustment and refinement of the production of heterosexual desire attained through the over-sexualisation of women and physical contact neither restrained his feminised moves from permeating the media text of "Livin' La Vida Loca" nor the examination of the camera gaze.

The image below illustrates these ideas of the articulation of being male in the narrative that made him popular worldwide:



Figure 4.9 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

If, as Butler theorised, sex is materialised and reproduced through a performative process of the forcibly repetition of particular corporeal acts, then this mandatory reiteration exposes the fictional nature of this technology of producing the body (1993: 2). Although the anchorage of the linguistic discourse is focused on classifying the female protagonist as a temptress— “she’ll make you live her crazy life,” (11)—,the camera gaze zooms in on Martin’s hips and bodily moves that counter-produce a masculinity marked by otherness. Butler’s idea of the instability of sexed position here is fundamental to understand how his corporeal acts disrupt the linearity of the regulatory heterosexual coupledness by deviating from the Western ideal of masculinity. Hence his displayed feminised body is struggling against the political and performative exploitation of heteronormativity, that strongly permeates this media narrative. I argue here that despite the fact that the lyrics aim to mark the woman as the embodiment of *living la vida loca* lifestyle, the artist’s corporeality enables his identification with a female position. Drawing on the racist stereotype associated to Latin

dance, Martin is partially reversing the equation of hip moves with uncontrollable sexuality by destabilising the heteronormative gaze with the saturation of these moves that are excluded from the production of the corporeality of hegemonic masculinity.

Moreover, Figure 4.9 displays the camera's strategies to make Martin's disruptive morphology highly visible as a form of biopolitical regulation. The visual materiality of his bodily gestures posed the necessity to examine his anatomy, which reveals the media's aim to strive for the domestication of Martin's subversive corporeality that partly exposed the heterosexual narration as a fiction. As Laura Mulvey has stated, "the camera becomes the mechanism for reproducing an illusion of Renaissance space, flowing movements compatible with the human eye, an ideology of representation" (1975: 816). With Mulvey's idea in mind, one can perceive how the male camera gaze strategically combines these angles aimed to monitor his body and those represented by Figure 4.4, that orientates the decoding of Martin's masculinity within the conventions of naturalised heterosexuality alongside his active participation as the bearer of that gaze as mentioned above. As discussed above, it is true that this kind of dance had been a useful tool for dominant ideology in order to maintain the supremacy of Western societies, but in a 21st-century advanced capitalism whose pillar amongst others was the commodification of heterosexuality (Preciado, 2013: 223), the heterosexualisation of the pop star served its interests.

Nevertheless, his performance of heterosexual masculinity was not completely successful. Teresa de Lauretis stated that "it seemed to me that gender [sexuality] was not the simple derivation of anatomical/biological sex but a sociocultural construction, a representation, or better, the compounded effect of discursive and visual representations" (2008: 16). So far, then, the mainstream representation of Martin's straight manhood was to some extent flawed. Notwithstanding his efforts to dissimulate his non-normativity, "Livin'

La Vida Loca” as an integral part of his transitional stage in the dominant ideology was not convincing enough for the American mainstream media.

Not surprisingly, in 2000 the American journalist Barbara Walters, who is very well-known for inciting celebrities to label themselves—as she did with Miley Cyrus—, attempted to push Martin to clarify rumours about his sexual orientation. Martin’s answer was: “Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to express the rumors, but Barbara, for some reason I just don't feel like it” (Comer, 2010). This thwarted confessional act is neither neutral nor innocent. Obligatory confession was an old Western technique to manufacture truths about sex inasmuch as the confessing subject through his confession was constrained by the produced knowledge and by transferring power to the interviewer (Foucault, 1998: 59, 62-63). Martin’s denial of confession in order to produce an essentialist sexual identity allowed the pop star to use ambiguity as a stunt to maintain the fantasy of heterosexuality and to capitalise on his appealing image to women. He was aware that confession entailed classification and with it a negative impact on his cultural product, highly depending on his image as an upgrading version of the Latin lover.

This transitional stage (marked by the pop star’s unrestrained corporeal acts that contributed to the definition of Latin masculinity in correlation with feminine attributes) would eventually give way to a mutation that implied the normalisation of his moves with rare exceptions; for example his performance in “Pégate” (2006). Martin started a process of body modification through tattooing and body building that became evident when “Pégate” was released.

Therefore, despite his hip moves, that bodily alteration partly modified the cultural inscriptions on his corporeality, as displayed below:



Figure 4.10 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

For Rosi Braidotti, the politics of location—that is to say the knowledge derived from being marked as an outsider in dominant ideology—was a signifying praxis of resistance against the exclusionary tendency in Western culture (2013: 51). She makes an important point because it proves how this singer rejects the possibilities of subversion of his otherness; “Pégate” must be critically understood as Martin’s attempt to capitalise and appropriate Puerto Rican black roots within mainstream pop culture.⁷⁹ The effects of this cultural appropriation of black culture undermine the disruptive corporeal acts displayed in “La Bomba” and “Livin’ La Vida Loca.” Consequently, here, the meanings carried by Martin’s feminised moves have significantly been altered.

⁷⁹ In the linguistic representation of the song, the line “a bailar mi plena” (20) inserts this narrative within the Plena musical tradition. The Plena consists in using hand drums and panderetas whose origins can be traced back to the African heritage of slavery in Puerto Rico (“Smithsonian Folkways,” 2017). The fact that Ricky Martin dances barefoot on the stage links this media text to everyday life practices of the enslaved on the plantations. Indeed, the camera reiteratively zooms in on his feet, thus highlighting its oddness when this cultural inscription is associated with white maleness.

Undeniably, the fact that the subjective camera—as happened in “La Bomba”—is displaying Martin from all angles together with its focus on the back side of his body is a confessional act by purposely showing the otherness of his masculinity. Nevertheless, this racist practice—predicated on the colonial construction of race—is here linked to the transitional state of becoming a more masculinised body according to Western standards. This implies the performative recurrence to the traditional trope of heterosexual desire articulated through the song by inserting a woman as the object of the gaze when he sings “mueve tus caderas muchacha morena, báilame ese ritmo con sabor a plena...pégate un poco más y mueve esas caderas, mamita cosa buena, que a mí me pone mal” (8, 13).⁸⁰ In this regard, Martin is revealing the transformation of his identity. Thus, this representation entails a double appropriation: the female body and black culture.

The mutation of Martin as a heterosexual performer-subject whose cultural inscriptions on his hips were modified in “Pégate” had reached the point of no return. What I want to stress here is that the biopolitical regulation of the singer is enabled by the domestication of his hip moves intrinsically connected to techniques of body building that would make his heterosexuality seem plausible by legitimising this fantasy as an overarching truth. Thus, first I will analyse those representations that evidence his control over his corporeal acts and second, I will aim to demonstrate that the modification of Martin’s body as a technique of self-surveillance is connected to his conscious marketing of heterosexual desire as a source of capital, providing continuity and stability to his cultural product despite his homosexuality.

⁸⁰ The lyrics of this song have been included as an appendix to Chapter 4.

In relation to the first level of analysis, “Adrenalina” (2014) is a quintessential example of this transformation. The subsequent image from the music video reflects this key change in his visual enactment:



Figure 4.11 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2014)

Not surprisingly, the obsessive observation of the camera gaze in conjunction with its performative rotatory moves that was present in “La Bomba” is not deployed in this media text. Or more exactly, the re-adjustment of Martin’s corporeal acts through an adaptive process reproducing heterosexual masculinity has replaced the regulatory and ideological function of the camera’s circular movements. In “Adrenalina,” this refinement of Martin’s bodily moves is performative and works by imitation. On this subject, Judith Butler pointed out that gender was the effects of discursive and bodily acts that naturalise the fantasy of stable identity, therefore, the drag exposed the imitative functioning of this fiction (2007: 267, 269). This notion of identity is crucial to fully understand the ways in which Martin’s heterosexual masculinity is the cumulative effect of an act of imitation; that is to say, his heteronormative corporeality is a fantasy of another fantasy. In relation to this, Asencio concluded that “through these interconnected social mechanisms heteronormative perspectives on gender, gender binaries, and power are incorporated into homonormative migrant Puerto Rican gay masculinities” (2011: 350). One might say that this visual enactment of Martin is a clear evidence of the strategical mechanisms employed by

homosexual Puerto Rican men to be accepted in mainstream American culture, which did not contribute to dismantling heteronormativity. In contrast to the Latino pop star, Robbie Williams's heterosexual representations of his corporeal acts have been encoded by incorporating queer attributes.⁸¹

Furthermore, Jennifer López is the only star visualised in this video moving her hips and buttocks, in contrast to the two male Puerto Rican artists. This media text is overtly under the control of the machinery of heteronormative regulation and linked to the surveillance enabled by the fluid and circular dome where Martin and the other two singers are also on display. The underpinning of this mechanism of supervision must be understood in terms of intertextuality and mutation. Its circular structure resembles the 1979 thunderdome, where male warriors fought in the movie *Mad Max*. The Foucauldian theory of the principle of panopticon as a crucial mechanism of control, “a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective” (1991: 209), permeates this visual narrative and its intertextual use demonstrates its mutation over the last decades. Within this context, the *Adrenalina* dome is employed to monitor and scrutinise bodies marked by their ethnicity and thus, their otherness is disciplined on a global scale. All the elements and techniques deployed in this pop star's narratives support the idea that Martin ‘sells’ heterosexuality.

Another example of this domestication of his iconic feminised hips is the English song “Come With Me” (2013), belonging to the genre of mainstream dance pop. This simulation of the celebrity's corporeality is a disavowal of Latinisation and non-normative corporeal acts. The following image supports my reading of the pop star's mutation:

⁸¹ It is significant that whereas Ricky Martin was a Latino in search of acceptance and upward mobility in American mainstream pop culture, Robbie Williams's political location (as a white English man from a country with a long history of imperialism) may explain why the English artist's non-normative corporeal acts were promptly condoned and endorsed by the media.



Figure 4.12 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2013)

This refined version of his body deliberately produces the effect of a Western masculinity reinforced by the English lyrics when he sings “I can tell that you’re a sinner / From behind your angel eyes” (1-2)⁸² and the effects of the spotlight as a signifying practice that highlights his privileged sexed position. Although the linguistic discourse does not reveal the gender of the “sinner,” the appearance of a female aerial hoop on screen anchors this media text in the articulation of heterosexual desire.

This examination of the domestication of Martin’s corporeality leads us to his body modification as a key component of this complex process of producing and materialising heterosexuality. The simulation of his *Adrenalina* body embodies the materiality of his 21st-century mutated masculinity, whose anatomy is far from the late 1990s simulation:



Figure 4.13 (“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2014)

⁸² The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

According to the scholar Beatriz Preciado, the third millennium gender was a malleable materiality, a product of an advanced capitalism that has fabricated the megaletch; to put it another way, the metrosexual man that was white and heterosexual turned into a mould to be reproduced in the global marketplace (2013: 48, 54). Preciado added that this evolution of the biopolitical regulation of the anatomy was more effective considering that the individual voluntarily assimilated and exerted self-surveillance over themselves (2013: 208). Preciado's observation is crucial here to perceive how the mutation of his corporeality is legible on this axis of manufacturing gender today. It is also important to note that these attributes conferred upon his morphology have been internalised by the artist. My argument is that mainstream American culture has thrived on assimilating his corporeality in order to performatively reproduce the hegemonic masculinity as a commodity that benefits the capitalist structure. This heterosexualisation of Martin is of particular significance here since Kimmel (2005) asserted that heteronormative rules were projected on homosexual men as a technique of control in order to perpetuate dominant ideology (37). Thus, the evolution of Martin's identity and the transformations in his body prove that he is a mirror of heteronormativity.

Moreover, I want to stress here that this re-adjustment of his gender quintessentially represents the optimisation of bio-political management of bodies aimed to produce surplus value in the era of the third millennium. According to the Spanish scholar, the 21st-century capitalism has refined its mechanisms of increasing profitability by technologically crafting binary gender and sexuality and consequently, expanding the lifespan of heterosexual economy predicated on the notion of eternal youth and beauty materialised by the techno-Barbie and the supermacho (Preciado, 2013: 220). Braidotti's work concurs with Preciado's in noting that this third regime of capitalism was highly dependent on making the subjects internalise the idea of eternal youth, therefore they would regulate their own bodies and

human capital could be maximised (2013: 114). Importantly, these ideas cannot be separated from the current embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Patterson and Elliott (2002) pointed out that normative masculinity had mutated through the incorporation of feminine attributes (metrosexual features) in order to adapt itself to the 21st-century consumer society, to the extent that men had internalised those images by inverting the gaze (235, 237). This technomodulation of a 42-year-old Martin reproducing an ideally young and fit masculine anatomy that denies the reality of aging makes evident the way he has integrated self-surveillance as a technique to adapt his body to the demands of this advanced capitalism that has transformed heterosexuality into a commodity that sells cultural products. Similarly, the transformative practices of body modification through tattooing and body building have also played a key role in the mutation of Robbie Williams's persona as a pop artist as he aged, as a form of preserving youth.

In relation to the internalisation of self-monitoring, his social media photos account for the effect of this dynamic of power on his subjectivity in order to self-regulate his identification with normative masculinity. On May 2016, he posted on his official Facebook account the intimate image below, where the artist poses in his dressing room before a performance:



Figure 4.14

As already discussed above, Preciado and Braidotti established the pervasiveness of relentless remodelling of sexed bodies by the deployment of upgrading technologies deeply embedded in the heteronormative advanced capitalism. In this regard, Preciado went further and identified ‘*potentia gaudendi*’ as the third millennium labour force extracted from the anatomies whose bio-codes were visually and discursively disseminated by the media in order to affect the fabric of society and culture (2013: 42, 51). Preciado’s work is helpful to understand the ways Martin’s encoding of his body is aimed to actively participate in the dynamics of this mutated capitalism inextricably dependent on the moulding of sexual subjectivity and the production of a particular modality of consumption. I would like to note that from the former body-building images, we can deduce that Martin’s strong emphasis on the body with its specific sexual inscriptions is connected to the trade on homosexual desire but particularly the ways in which it can appeal to women’s affects.

It is in this context that the next image posted on his Facebook in 2015 must be taken into consideration. It carefully exploits hyper-masculinity that is to a high degree adjusted to the demands of the dominant ideology:

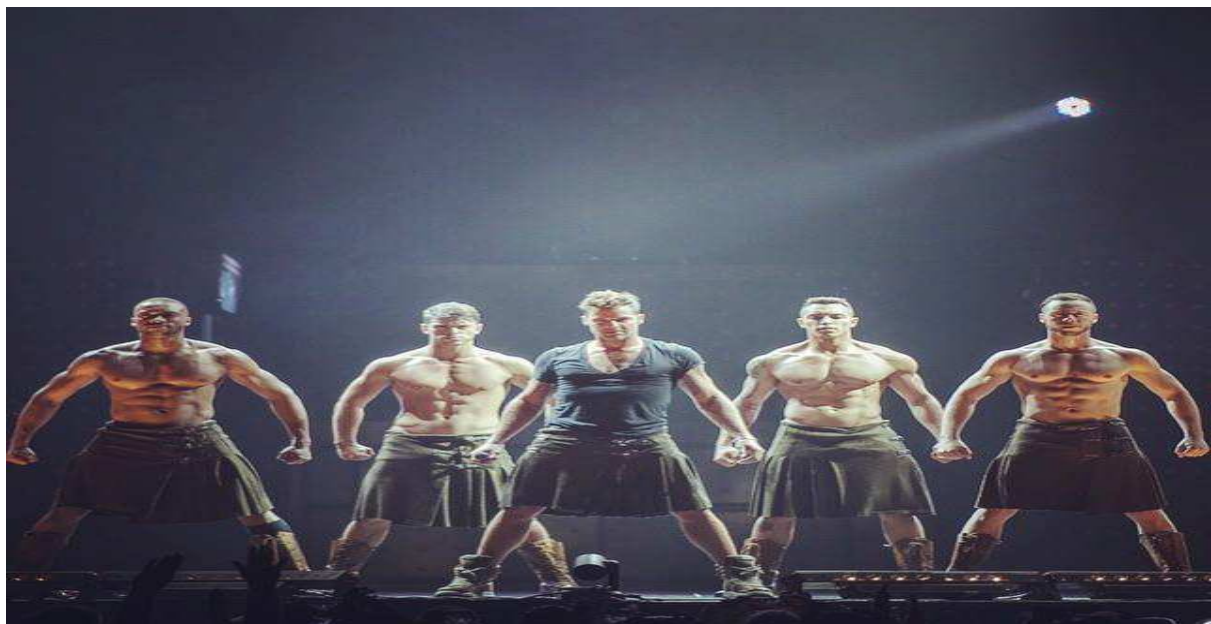


Figure 4.15

Interestingly, if we think of the meanings imbricated on this image, these men's body positions—including Martin's—imitate the corporeal act of the traditional haka performed by Maori indigenous people. According to Tengan, this is an ancestral tradition—pre-colonial war dance—associated with warriors as an assertion of their masculinity, authority and superiority over women; a practice that has been mainstreamed in a globalised world (2002: 250-251). Therefore, Martin is appropriating Maori culture that has gradually been commodified in order to assert his 'true' masculinity and promote heteronormative values that encode misogyny. So, then, he is anchored in an ideology that does not call into question either the Puerto Rican masculinity or Western hegemonic manliness.

In relation to this visual representation for his tour, in an interview for *The Sun*, Dan Wootton asked the artist about the sexual aesthetics that characterised his performances. Martin said:

During my concerts we all live our fantasies. I look at faces, I look at eyes, I look at people dancing. It's very sexual and I'm very ambiguous and androgynous. I have men in kilts with no tops on but I also have the sexiest women, and we all mingle. That's what I consider a perfect world. (2015)

In this respect, Martin makes clear that his cultural product is anchored in the heterosexual pathos, that is, the complementarity of the sexes displaying hypermasculine bodies and over-sexualised women. Therefore, his performances dismiss androgyny or non-normative bodies as an attempt to challenge the dominant grid of cultural intelligibility that controls the media. To put it another way, and borrowing here the terminology of Beatriz Preciado discussed earlier, Martin's video performatively reproduces the economy of the "megaslut" and "the megaletch" as a technique for profit. Moreover, I state that Martin's appropriation of female bodies by surrounding himself with the "sexiest" women is intrinsically misogynistic. According to Monique Wittig, women as the marked sex have

historically been transformed into sexual objects of desire (1992: 7). Although Martin is homosexual, he is nevertheless a man, understood as a category that constitutes him as still an integral part of the privileged signifier that trades on marked female bodies. In consequence, his alleged androgyny is masking the ideology of heterosexuality and the maintenance of the two re-adjusted traditional genders.

This celebrity's enduring heterosexual fantasy is reinforced by his sanitised social media, whereby he promotes his cultural product. English is the main language used and slang is excluded from his verbal messages on his official account. Moreover, he strives to present a carefully composed image of his private life embedded in heteropatriarchal clichés that includes ambiguous photos with his male partner.⁸³ An example of this is his fatherhood, attained through surrogacy. Thus in 2016 he posted the following photo on Instagram:



Figure 4.16

This facet of his life enables us to understand the ways his subjectivity reproduces the conventions of domination and the deeply embedded heteronormativity of his psyche. In an interview on his family and on the surrogate mother of his twins, he responded: “I’m gonna

⁸³ An Instagram photo with his male partner has been included in the appendix to Chapter 4 in order to exemplify the sanitised homosexuality he performs.

tell them ‘I wanted you in my life so bad that with the help of God everything lined up for you to be in my life...every family is different. I am mom and I am dad...I have the coolest family. I am part of a modern family’ (“Mail Online,” 2010). According to Martin, then, he has adopted the binary roles of “mom” and “dad” and consequently, they are defined as compulsory.⁸⁴ Judith Butler unmasked Freudian constitutive bisexuality as the psychic internalisation of binary gender that is the foundational pre-requisite to reproduce heterosexuality (2007: 132). In this regard, Martin’s discourse reveals the ways ‘unconsciousness’ never was unconscious at all and how his psyche is hardwired to the axis of gender differentiation as the primary cell of social organisation.

With this in mind, it is not surprising he has been unable (or unwilling) to reverse heterosexuality in his visual-discursive representations. This normative sexuality, then, or rather the over-display of heterosexual desire is the trademark of Martin as a 21st-century subject. As Althusser stated, on the one hand, the subject cannot escape ideology and on the other, ideology has a materiality crafted by particular practices (1971: 166, 171). Regarding this, Ricky Martin materialises, reproduces, and trades on the hegemonic epistemology that maintains the heterosexual divide intact which entails, in this case, the exclusion of the possibilities of transgression that his non-normative sexual identity may offer. In conclusion, he can be considered the embodiment of what Coston and Kimmel called the “hypermasculine gay man,” that is, “[t]he gay men who conform to hegemonic norms, secure their position in the power hierarchy by adopting the heterosexual masculine role and subordinating both women and effeminate gay men” (2012: 106). Thus, the cultural product of this artist has continued to work within the classificatory system that erased non-normative masculinity from representation.

⁸⁴ Moreover, his paternity-maternity invisibilises the exploitation of surrogate mothers, which conceals the ideological and capitalist structures that allowed him to ‘buy’ his sons. Since he is a pop star, somehow he becomes a role model for other homosexuals who will continue legitimising this exploitative practice.

4.2. Robbie Williams: the Negotiation of Hegemonic Masculinity

Robbie Williams is one of the most influential artists in the British recording industry. In 2016, due to his being the pop star who has won more BRITs Awards in history, he was granted a BRITs Icon Award, which is undoubtedly the highest honour bestowed on a singer by the British music industry, a recognition of his profound impact and contributions to this specific cultural identity (Brandle, 2016). Clearly, this accolade leads us to consider Williams as a social phenomenon, which indicates the stability of his cultural product and the long lasting effects of the cultural meanings associated with it.

As discussed above, Ricky Martin played the game of heterosexuality expertly in order to capitalise on his appeal to women. In relation to the English celebrity, I argue that he must be viewed inside of the heteronormative imperatives by thriving on visually and discursively representing heterosexual desire. Even so, he deliberately trades on homosexual allure in his performances—despite his normative sexuality—and thus, his enactment of queer heterosexuality is exploited as a route to more profit. In order to demonstrate this marketing strategy of manufacturing sexuality as a commodity, I will first analyse Williams's master-narratives, rife with clichés of romantic heteronormative love. The quintessential representation of this idea is his smash hit “Angels” (1997), whose script follows the conventions of the English gentleman who succumbs to the binary complementarity of sexes by portraying a femininity that fits traditional gender roles as loving and caring (figures 4.17 & 4.18 below).



Figure 4.17

("robbiewilliamsvevo," 2011)



Figure 4.18

("robbiewilliamsvevo," 2011)

Although it is undeniable that visual images can be plausibly read in different ways, Roland Barthes stated that the linguistic message was a fundamental technique to anchor its meaning (1977: 39). This notion of language as a practice may be linked to Althusser's formulation of ideology as a set of actions and practices that are ruled by normative rituals ingrained in deep-seated values or beliefs (1971: 168). Thus, these interwoven ideas are

essential to understand the ritualised function of this media text, in which the verbal religious discourse of the song, fixed in the lines:

Does an angel
Contemplate my fate
....
Cause I have been told
That salvation lets their wings unfold. (2-3, 7-8)⁸⁵

The discourse here turns the image in Figure 4.17 into the embodiment of the traditional ‘gentleman’ whose ideological views are overtly stated in terms of deep-seated cultural beliefs. This embodiment of masculinity is framed within the politicised category of British pop dandyism,⁸⁶ a construction that will be developed in other media texts and performances. Hawkins (2009) traces back the history of the dandy to the 18th and 19th centuries, when this term was a category for those British ‘gentlemen’ characterised by excessiveness, mannerism, rebelliousness and eccentric behaviour that established a site for renegotiating masculinity (2, 3). Hawkins’s study includes some British pop artists who can embody the pop dandy—for example, Robbie Williams—as a performer and a manipulator that constitutes his identity through performance as a locus for the contestation of gender norms; thus, in order to offer audiences what they want, the dandy through the masquerade and aesthetic transformations assumes many identities—that exhibit contradictions—; in fact, the dandy is an entertainer by definition (2009: 4-5, 10). As will be examined below, the singer can be considered a master of entertainment, as the title of his latest album *The Heavy Entertainment Show* (2016) and other media narratives indicate.

⁸⁵ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

⁸⁶ Although Robbie Williams is English, he has been included within the cultural category of British pop artist inasmuch as Stan Hawkins (2009) has asserted that the term British is a much more inclusive political term that recognises cultural and ethnic differences as a collective nationality (3-4).

Furthermore, through the verbal discourse of this media text, the instability of hegemonic norms comes to light: “When I’m feeling weak...She breathes flesh to my bones” (22, 27). Victor J. Seidler (1997) classified the fictions of masculinity that were key to the construction of manhood amongst which is included “the idea that men do not have needs of their own because if they are ‘strong’ they can get on by themselves. The traditional conception of the macho man [is of a man] who is in *control* of his life” (49). Nevertheless, the lyrics articulate the feature of weakness associated with masculinity and rephrase a line from the Hebrew Bible where God is the only one who has power to breathe life to all human beings.⁸⁷ In Williams’s song, it is a woman who plays the role of God. Therefore, in the formation of this pop identity, the subversion of some heteronormative codes is going to clash with other elements of hegemonic masculinity. For example, this ideological attribution—the dandy—inscribed on his anatomy cannot be separated from the romantic exhibition of love emanating from this media text, in which the female protagonist is similarly enacted following the Victorian ‘angel in the house’ conventions rather than becoming subject to sexualisation. According to Teresa de Lauretis, binary gender is the effect of representation—whose product effectively enables an array of power-differentiated meanings—that traditionally categorises women as an image with objectifying connotations; that is to say, they encapsulate the sedimentary debris of stereotypes that operates on the basis of opposition (1987: 5; 1984: 38). This is evidenced in the classical visual enactment of women alongside the lyrics that accompany Figure 4.18—“And through it all she offers me protection / A lot of love and affection” (30-31)—, which reduce her to an emotional being as the bearer of emotions historically associated with the idealised nurturing femininity. Thus Williams succumbs to the old Western fiction of the normative relationship between the romantic man and the naturalised affectionate woman reinforced by the visual technique of

⁸⁷ In the Hebrew Bible (Numbers 27: 16), it is stated that “may the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community” (“biblehub”).

black and white images that contributes to inserting this narrative within the heteropatriarchal order dependent on the maintenance of the hierarchy of gender and racial purity. Indeed black and white references classic love films like *Casablanca*. Here, then, the ‘dandy’ puts emphasis on the heteronormative codes of romanticism with a slight deviation of the plot, as pointed out above.

In the light of this representation, it would be worth noting that this image of masculinity (the English gentleman) gives way to other popular representations of “macho men” in later media texts: the archetypal representation of the American rebel cowboy marketed in “Feel” (2002) and the stupendously romantic gangster displayed in “Eternity” (2001), thus producing multiple versions of romanticised normative Anglo-American heterosexual masculinity (figures 4.19 & 4.20). In this sense, “Feel” strategically exploits the old fiction of the nomadic Western cowboy suffering from existential rumination and not ready for commitment and settling down. In relation to this particular encoding, Beatriz Preciado identified some predominant semiotic codes that reproduced bio-technical white heterosexual masculinity, amongst which are classical British and American heroes (2013: 121). This is also evidenced in Seidler’s work, when he argues that “myths of manhood” have played a major role in the process of socialisation of men who have internalised them by sustaining the superiority of men over women within a patriarchal culture (1997: 53). He encourages us to recognise the importance of myths in reinforcing cultural and political norms that invest manhood with its regulatory imperatives (Seidler, 1997: 54). Additionally, earlier we noted that Judith Butler pointed out that the practice of the parody of gender revealed that this technology legitimised its illusions by the recurrence to imitation of sexist codes (2007: 269). With this in mind, Williams’s performance relies on the performative praxis of imitation of dominant cultural fictional codes from “myths of manhood” that

maintain the status quo untouched owing to how the ultra-rapid circulation of the media enables the massive reproduction of this particular ideological subjectivity.



Figure 4.19

(“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)



Figure 4.20

(“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

This semiotic-technical representation of culturally specific privileged gender that displays the notion of the archetypal American macho (cowboy) in “Feel” and the British hero of “Angels” are mutually reinforcing, anchored in the hegemonic misogyny of national Western fictions. Seidler (2006) examined the ways cultural dominant masculinities are

intrinsically linked to colonialism, configuring masculinity within those axes of power that marked the colonised bodies (5). This media text that relies on the articulation of the old fiction of the cowboy is inserted in that history of colonial expansionist projects of the West, especially emphasised by the black and white references to old Western films.

Moreover, “Feel” also relies on the linguistic message to fix this visual narrative within the normativity of religious beliefs when he sings “I sit and talk to God” (5)⁸⁸ and in the context of the romantic chivalry displayed at Figure 4.20 stressed by the articulation of his desire “I just wanna feel real love” (9). The deployment of regulatory masculinity would not be complete without the complementation pattern of the cowgirl, who is inevitably attracted to fulfil heterosexual desire:



Figure 4.21 (“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

Although his visual narratives do not succumb to the over-sexualisation of women, their images are manufactured to embrace the social expectations of heteronormative visual pleasure without undermining the hegemony of the traditional cowboy, whose feelings are never fully developed as articulated by the lyrics:

⁸⁸ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Before I fall in love
I'm preparing to leave her
Scare myself to death
That's why I keep on running. (16-19)

The way his emotions are expressed gives us information about the myth of dominant heterosexual masculinity in our culture. Seidler made a significant point when he stated that men are scared of intimacy, considering that feelings pose a threat to their identities because they are perceived as signs of “weakness and femininity” (1997: 33). Further, the car scene in 4.21 proves that intertextuality is a recurring technique in the mainstream media in order to performatively reproduce the heterosexual pathos. This image from this music video reiterates the conventions displayed in *Titanic*'s famous car scene in 1997. Following Butler's perceptive account of repeated corporeal acts perpetuating gender dimorphism (2007: 17), we can conclude that Williams is the embodiment of the legendary cowboy and the car scene provides powerful encodings of historical repeated bodily gestures that ‘interpellate’ a prescriptive subjectivity within the domain of binary cultural intelligibility. Even within these heteropatriarchal structures, as discussed for “Angels,” the artist attempts to question the myth of dominant masculinity through the lyrics: “Not sure I understand / This role I've been given” (3-4). As the verbal message makes clear, his ‘role’ is not natural but it has been assigned to him. However, this disruption is not enough to destabilise the strong articulation of dominant official culture.

The production of Williams as an idealised romantic hero reached its climax in the technicolour elaboration of “Eternity” (2001) where a whimsical romance between a gangster (the singer) and his sexualised female partner enshrined him as the icon of male rebel coolness and the ultimate ‘bad boy’ attractiveness so pervasive in Western representations of the nation's culture. In this music video, the constructedness of complementary white

femininity reveals that the visual enactment of women in Williams’s media texts is both performative and archetypal as displayed below:



Figure 4.22

(“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)



Figure 4.23

(“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

Here, then, I want to stress that this media text—alongside the two former ones—strongly relies on the trope of the ‘good’ 21st-century gangster who becomes socially acceptable because he is subject to Western glorification. When it comes to the analysis of

meanings imbricated in this narrative, the device of intertextuality is employed here to retain and anchor the messages of these images when the audience is exposed to this simulation of Williams as the mutation of the modern rebel-‘dandy’ Jay Gatsby. Catherine R. Mintler has pointed out that Jay Gatsby was the embodiment of a new model of ‘dandy’: “the gangster dandy” that was created to negotiate American hegemonic masculinity by encompassing elements of normative masculinity and those codes that called into question the hierarchisation of social class and epitomised the crisis in American male identity (2010: 116-117). Gatsby was rendered as a gangster whose dandyesque dress code and criminality challenged conventional masculinity by being immersed in a masculine underworld where his non-normative masculinity could be fully accepted (Mintler, 2010: 121). In this respect, the representation of Williams here conceptualises this notion of sartorial eccentricity and rebelliousness. When this media narrative is set in motion, the female character problematizes the romanticism implicit in the attraction to a gangster as happened to Daisy—the female protagonist who fell in love with Jay Gatsby—in Western modern cultures.⁸⁹ This reveals how Seidler’s emphasis on the importance of the relentless reiteration of myths for the construction of masculinities as discussed earlier was essential to perpetuate what counted as dominant cultural masculinity.

In relation to the pop star’s consumption of female bodies, this commodification is attained through a twofold process: her sexualisation and the maintenance of power-differentiated relations enabled by the mutual reinforcement of the visual representation and the verbal messages. According to Teresa de Lauretis, the visual representation is a technology of manufacturing gender and the elaborated ideal of what counts as femininity is the effect of male-centred binary logic that places women as the embodiment of the

⁸⁹ The influence of this new type of ‘dandy’ must not be underestimated, as shown by the Spanish TV series “Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso,” released in 2008, whose male protagonist el ‘Duque’ represented this alternative masculinity.

misogynistic economy of desire leaving heterosexuality intact (1987: 19-21). This media narrative fulfils the phallic order's expectations when Williams defines this woman as a representation of a fantasy in which he finds satisfaction: "you were there for summer dreaming / And you gave me what I need" (11-12).⁹⁰ Moreover, she is visually circumscribed within the secured heterosexual structures of passivity and as an object of desire. Although these images are relayed when the singer attempts to become a protective rebel—as the song suggests: "we talked about your mum and dad / What they did that made you happy" (17-18)—, the image accommodates the female protagonist as the idealised femininity in the terms of the ideological hierarchy of gender. Within this tradition of alternative masculinity, the transformations of male codes do not disrupt either the pathos of heteronormativity or the romantic portrayal of female characters succumbing to the charms of the 'bad boy.'

In the light of this discussion, this phantasmatic parody of rebel manhood was made more plausible as an integral part of his trademark by the fact that his personal life has been linked to drug abuse that commenced at an early age. Thus in a 2009 interview, he stated that "when I started going clubbing at 16 we were on acid. Then acid and speed. Then it progressed into cocaine. Before the acid, heroin. I did that once" (Moore, 2016). The interrelated notions of Wittig's thought on the materiality of language and Foucault's identification of confession as a technique of producing truth (1992: 78; 1998: 59) are useful to understand how Williams's discourse transforms this fictional pastiche of maleness into a crafted 'truth' that legitimises this Western identity as valid and reliable in the social imaginary by producing a deliberate representation that serves the interests of the phallic world. Thus the music video culminates in the effective articulation of the wrongdoer that gains social acceptability.⁹¹ The same pattern of negotiating masculinity was observed in

⁹⁰ The lyrics of this song have been included in the Appendix to Chapter 4.

⁹¹ One of the closing images of this media text, when the character performed by Williams is arrested and taken away from the female protagonist, has been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Martin's confessional interviews, when he attempted to create an acceptable homosexual identity within the white, Catholic and heterosexual masculinity.

The former stereotypical formulation of the classic romantic male rebel is bound up with the complex visual-discursive materialisation of heteronormative violent misogyny that reflects the mutation of his cultural product as the embodiment of Western nation's culture in the third millennium. One of its key examples is his media text "Candy" (2012, Figure 4.24), that is clearly inserted within the heterosexual economy grounded on the axis of differentiation between Williams, enacted as a queering guardian angel who protects the female protagonist from her careless behaviour, and Candice, whose womanhood is irremediably defined in terms of emotional instability, lack of intelligence, promiscuity and superficiality by turning the female body into an object whose 'natural' function is to arouse male sexual feelings without consent; elements that make the singer fail to step outside of the phallic social order.



Figure 4.24 ("robbiewilliamsvevo," 2012)

As the first part of the video progresses, the visual representation mobilises the gender dichotomy of men as strong and violent in opposition to women as a mere flat image. Significantly, this display of male strength incorporates violence against women as

acceptable in the encoding of this type of manhood. Right from the start, the visual and linguistic discourses are mutually and inextricably reinforcing in this production of heterosexual fantasy that overtly works by opposition. As already noted, Barthes highlighted the power of language to orientate the audience's reading of a narrative always imbued with ideological content (1977: 40), which is crucial to apprehend the political implications of the singer's post on his official website—"I will attempt to decode the lyrics for you"—by anchoring the meanings of the media text. There he explained that Candice was about a pervasive female stereotype existing on a global scale: "the song 'Candy' is about a girl called Candice she's kinda real kinda not....just an observation on girls I've seen or been around in LA...In fact seen or been around all over the world" (Williams, 2012).

To borrow Lacan's terminology, this cast light on Williams's position as the privileged position "having-the phallus" that has the power to mark the Other, for the male phallic position is entitled to produce signifieds through the patriarchal language (Lacan, 2006: 578). This Lacanian notion may be interlinked to Foucault's idea of panoptic observation as a technique aimed to homogenise the social body, so that the observer has the power to transform what is seen into codes for controlling individuals (1991: 202, 207). Consequently, Williams occupies his privileged position in order to fabricate biased 'truths' about women as the marked gendered object. Importantly, the verbal discourse establishes the pop star's role as a panoptic observer when he sings "I was there to witness / Candice's inner business" (1-2).⁹² The fact that the artist is represented as an invisible angel contributes to articulate the principle of panopticon as a discreet and omniscient mechanism of power. Moreover, here, the male control over the representation of femininity can be noted by classifying Candice as both a provocateur and as unintelligent: "she wants the boys to notice her rainbows and her ponies / She was educated / But could not count to ten" (4-6).

⁹² The lyrics of the song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Consequently, de Lauretis's notion of the "rhetoric of violence" that identifies gender as a form of representation constituted by violence (1987: 32-33) is inseparable from the display of heteronormative femininity in this media text, where Candice as a stereotype enables the dehumanisation of femaleness by means of classification and the denial of a voice.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it could be suggested that the visual representation and his corporeal acts deviate from heteronormative masculinity; but this is what transpires from diverse photos on his official social media like the following 2015 post extracted from Facebook:



Figure 4.25

However, *Candy's* narrative contradicts the aforementioned media texts and undermines the queering possibilities of these images since the encoding is profoundly ingrained in our heteropatriarchal culture. In other words, Williams's 'queerness' is condoned by the mainstream media inasmuch as it serves the purposes of the dominant ideology.⁹³ Returning to the narrative unfolding in "Candy," Williams strives to become her protector due to her lack of agency. The singer as the "privileged signifier" that has gained knowledge

⁹³ Significantly, a comment from one of his female followers on Williams's post backs up this interpretation as plausible when she wrote: "pink for a man?.....it's only for a macho man !!!!!!! Robbie I love you!"

of her subjectivity due to panoptic surveillance enables the categorisation of the female protagonist who is deemed submissive. Her passivity is determined by the role of her mother in the family, which is encoded in the song: “Mother was a victim / Father beat the system” (25-26). Lacan renovated Freudian theory by asserting that men adopted an active role in the act of conferring meaning on women as the Other (2006: 578: 583). With this in mind, one might state that the artist is undoubtedly maintaining the sexual difference constituting women as submissive objects in opposition to men as agents of action, which enables the binary gender identificatory process that hinges upon the heteronormative mode of intelligibility.

The development of these oppositional relations is strengthened by Williams’s parody of an anachronistic chivalry of a medieval angel and the emphasis on his physical strength to protect a weak Candice from her own irrationality (Figure 4.26).



Figure 4.26 (“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2012)

A dominant Western version of masculinity is encoded in this pastiche at Figure 4.26. Although once more Williams is playing the role of the queering dandy whose eccentric performance proves his ability to reinvent himself, enacting a masculinity that is narcissistic, he symbolically reproduces the heteronormative codes of white masculinity that establish the

ontological foundations for a normative male identity base on being brave, rational, practical and well-balanced (Hawkins, 2009: 56; Coston and Kimmel, 2012: 98), whilst Candice is represented as ‘needy’ and emotionally unstable.

The point I want to make here is that to understand the artist’s restrictive representation of her subjectivity necessitates the consideration of the role of the underlying symbolism of female irrationality in the deployment of obligatory heterosexuality. In other words, the figure of ‘dandy’ that is presented as an alternative masculinity is altering neither male dominance nor the binary logic. According to Foucault, the pathologisation of female bodies that relied on their sexualisation was a technological prerequisite to fix women within the capitalist ideological structure that ensured the status quo (1998: 104). This classificatory technique is used by Williams in the song: “Either a little too high or a little too low / Got no self-esteem and vertigo / Cause she thinks she’s made of candy” (36-38). The Foucauldian analysis of female anatomies is applicable in this media text because the beginning of the linguistic discourse had sexualised her anatomy, which is reinforced by the visual representation, and the singer himself admitted in his explanation of the encoding of “Candy” that the reiterative “high” and “low” inserted in the chorus referred to her bipolarity (singer’s official website).⁹⁴ This allows us to analyse Candice as a type of medicalised femininity that defines her sexed position in opposition to the male angel as the protector of fragile women. Consequently, whereas maleness is defined in terms of active agency, women are represented as a mere commodity dependent on men’s supervision and classification.

Along with these renewed misogynistic conventions, “Mixed Signals” (2016) inevitably represents heteronormative love perpetuating male control over women and propagates a new form of violence against women through the use of technology; this new

⁹⁴ For more information on Williams’s guidelines for the decoding of this song provided to the audience, see his blog entry posted on his official website on November 2012 “I will attempt to decode the lyrics for you.”

mechanism serves to condone the old dangerous idea that men's display of jealousy is a sign of romantic love as the masking of phallic surveillance. Seidler (2006) argued that violence against women is a form of imposing male superiority over women and conforming to social expectations of masculinity, which essentially operates within a culture where men have internalised that aggressiveness is an assertion of their virility as well as a rejection of conducts that can be categorised as 'feminine' (55, 57). Hearn (2014) added that this type of violence emerges out of material and discursive practices that are normalised and assumed as 'natural'; centrally operative, the masculinist praxes in the media and other institutions are seen as crucial to understand the differentiations that cause inequalities (9-10). In the era of Internet, technological apparatuses are contributing to the perpetuation of these standards of hegemonic masculinity and male identities. Indeed, the Association for Progressive Communications defined the role of technologies in the assertion of male dominance at the 57th Commission of the Status of Women as follows:

Violence against women that is mediated by technology is increasingly becoming part of women's experience of violence and their online interactions. In the same way we face risks offline, in the streets and in our homes, women and girls can face specific dangers and risks on the internet such as **online harassment, cyber stalking, privacy invasions with the threat of blackmail, viral 'rape videos' and for young women in particular, the distribution of 'sex videos' that force survivors to relive the trauma of sexual assault** every time it is reposted online, via mobile phone or distributed in other ways. ("APC," 2015)

Therefore, this 'subtle' visual-discursive representation ("Mixed Signals") of an act of male dominance and psychological abuse has deep implications since Williams as an icon in pop culture—that is to say a role model—with this kind of narrative is fuelling gender-based violence. Thus, he is actively participating in the new modality of violence against women

that has emerged in the third millennium as a way of controlling women's invasion of public sphere traditionally held as a male prerogative.

In relation to this technical management of women's subjectivity and violent attempt of constraining their movements, these violent practices are clearly exemplified through the text (Figures 4.27 & 4.28), which represents the present mutation of the principle of panopticism. As can be appreciated in this music video, the male normative gaze operates to maintain gender ideology untouched because Williams appropriates the sexualised body of the female protagonist to implant his male eyes as an extension of his corporeality in order to visually enact the regulatory inspection of women from within their anatomies by meaningfully materialising the miniaturisation of hegemonic control mechanisms and the ways our current "cyborg ontology" can contribute to the stability of the dominant social order. In this respect, Williams has been transformed into multimedia machinery, compounded of his body and technological prosthesis that are fused to impose his phallic control. Thus this media text relies on the fluidity of the mechanisms of supervision and production of the political body as the epistemology of the 21st-century heteronormative biopolitical organisation. This evolution of mechanisms of control is understood within the Foucauldian notion of the mutation of the principle of Panopticon to create spaces of effective surveillance for the interests of the capitalist market (1991: 205, 209), idea that was developed by Preciado who noted the emergence of a "microprosthetic" inspection out of the old disciplinary device of the modulation of subjectivity voluntarily absorbed by the body (2013: 39, 78-79). This new vision of the production of the subject correlates with the prosthetic body (or cyborg) that incorporates miniaturised elements as appendage to the human corporeality (Haraway, 1991: 153). As already mentioned, in this narrative, the pop artist is the epitome of today's corporality that fuses with the machine.

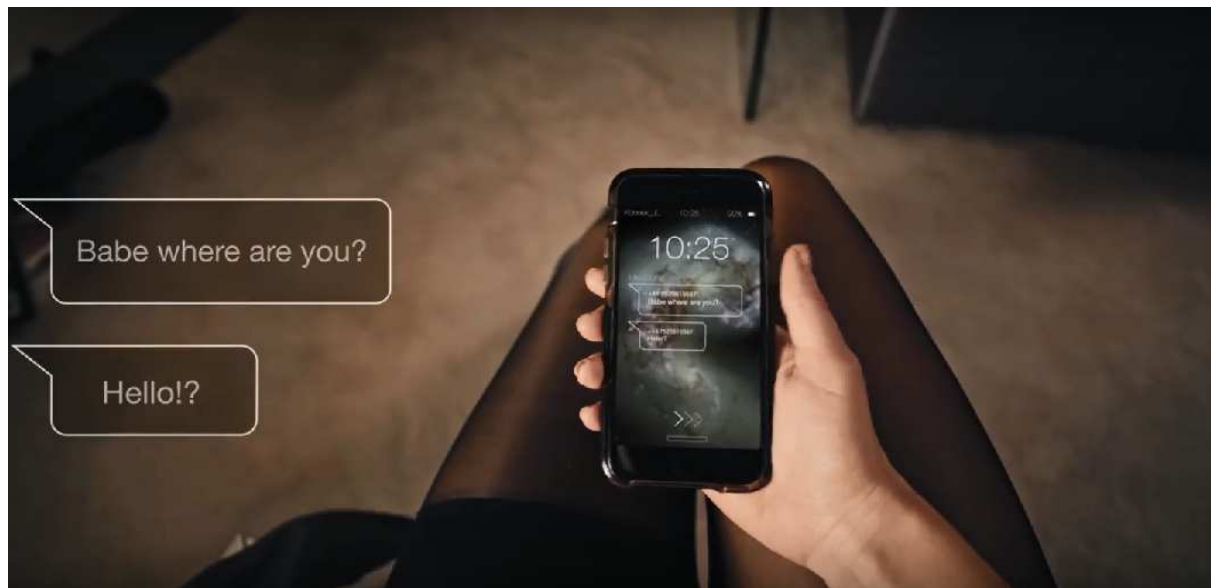


Figure 4.27

(“Robbie Williams,” 2017)



Figure 4.28

(“Robbie Williams,” 2017)

In this visual representation as was mentioned above, Williams’s gaze uses the female model’s body as an appendage to his own anatomy in order to expose her actions to the audience from his perspective. This media text lucidly reveals that women’s current self-monitoring is the effect of the internalisation of the male gaze. Indeed, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) developed the objectification theory that entailed the integration of male’s perspective as part of female subjectivity (177). It is undeniable that this pop star’s “Mixed Signals” backs up this heteronormative mechanism of moulding the female psyche and body.

The upgraded version of the ideal femininity entails the ‘voluntary’ incorporation of the dominant subject into the cognitive system

We find that Williams’s male gaze is enforced by both his use of technological devices and appropriation of the female protagonist’s eyes. Williams is thus deemed to be the embodiment of the “cyborg” ontological status in order to control this woman. Even she is blamed for his obsessive need to know her location encoded through the lyrics that is performatively reiterated: “But you are sending me mixed signals” (18).⁹⁵ Thus the former images are connected to the section of the song when the singer unmasks his obsessive need of supervision: “I tried your number at 9 but no avail / Tried again at 11, got sent straight to voicemail...But that don’t explain why you’re not picking up the phone” (1-2, 4). Although the images prove that she has not been unfaithful to him, this visual-discursive narrative insists on legitimising men’s right to break out this much subtler psychological violence against women when he is performatively and obsessively asking: “what does he look like?” (15), as displayed below:

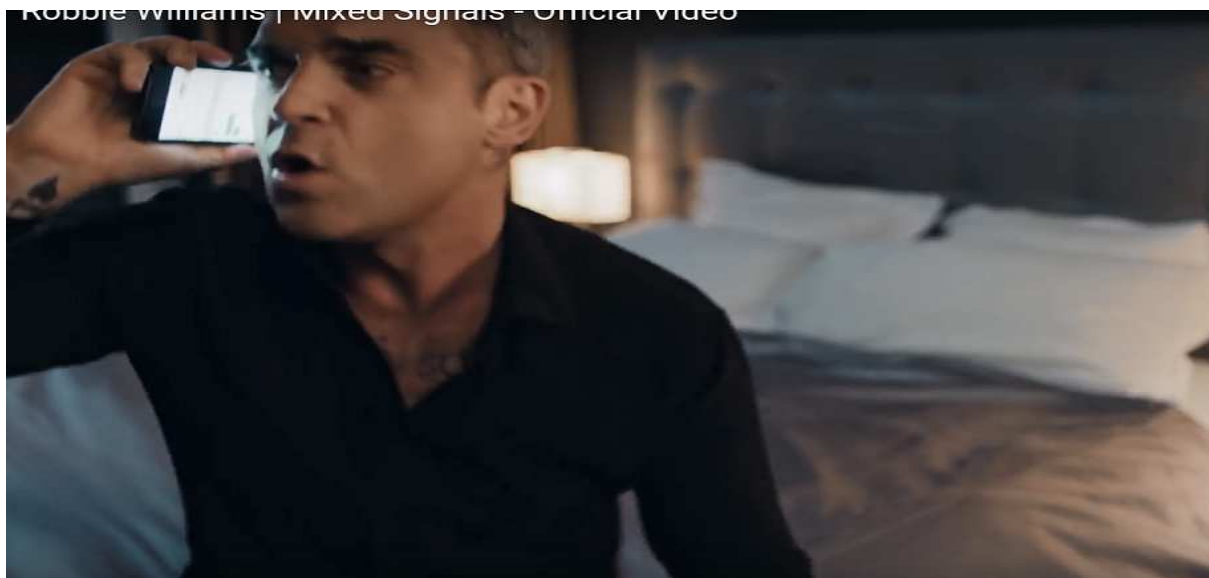


Figure 4.29

(“Robbie Williams,” 2017)

⁹⁵ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

Significantly, the pervasiveness of this shift towards the new ontology of the subject that incorporates technology as an extension of the human body to amplify the effects of its ideological cultural products reaches its climax here, when Williams is using the media to allow his followers to choose an alternative end to this narrative. According to Braidotti, the current blurred lines between the human and the machine as the 21st-century essential cultural construction have transformed the dominant subject into a cyborg that uses the ultra-rapid media codes to impose its subjectivity (2013: 89-90). Needless to say, the English artist is trading on the opportunities offered by the media with the display of a different version of the official video end when the female protagonist visits Williams's room. Thus the singer expertly uses his official website and Facebook to encourage the audience to vote for one of the different ends. The subsequent alternative version is the most significant for the purposes of this research:



Figure 4.30 (“robbiewilliams.com”)

This end displays the *Mixed Signals* woman visiting Williams's wife Ayda Field as an attempt to articulate lesbian desire as the justification for her unfaithfulness. As Butler has pointed out, lesbian desire has traditionally been defined as a by-product of a primary

repudiated heterosexuality since the hegemonic observer is male and heterosexual libido is the only acceptable one in our Western societies (2007: 124). This Butlerian notion of the disavowal of true lesbian desire mobilises this media text insofar as the female protagonist's gaze is denied through the imposition of Williams's eyes; therefore, this encounter with Ayda is a direct result of the artist's articulation of heterosexual fantasy with his own partner. In other words, here, lesbian desire is articulated to satisfy the male heterosexual psyche.

The effectiveness of his encoding of heteropatriarchal sexism, deeply embedded in the ritual of the complementarity of sexes, is amplified by the pervasive representation of Williams alongside over-sexualised female dancers. Thus I will now examine a 2016 Instagram post (fig. 4.31) where Williams recovers the symbolism of his 2004 music video "Radio" by upgrading it as a signifying practice in the formation of his cultural identity as a musician in connection with phallic attributes:

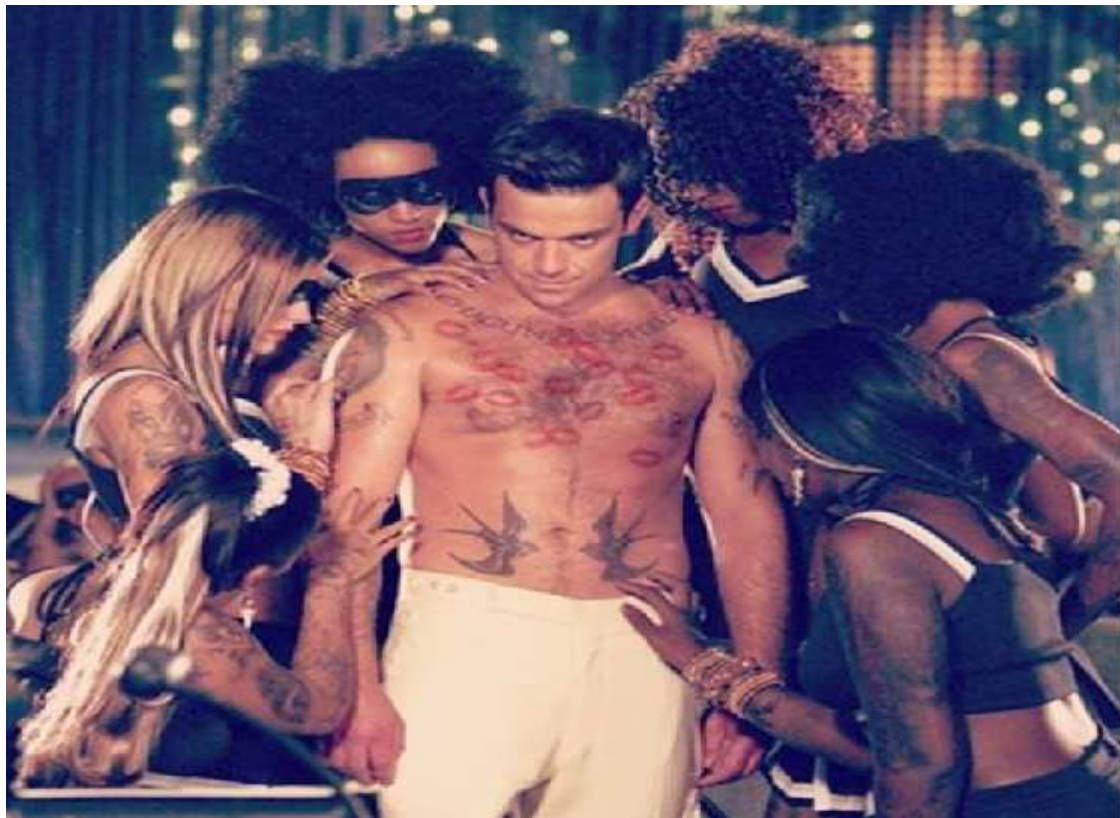


Figure 4.31

One might argue that this image represents the embodiment of the singer as the object of desire versus women occupying the privileged position of the subject of desire, thus reversing the heteronormative conceptualisation of sexual drives. However, Judith Butler (2007) unmasked the heteronormative sexed positions established by Lacan that forcibly compelled women to being-the phallus (or the object of male desire) and men as having-the phallus (or the privileged subject); positions that are the prerequisite to be intelligible and ‘normal’ within the dominant ideology (115-116). Therefore, this visual representation must be read within this grid of intelligibility that marks women as gendered objects, a position that is supported by the official video, in which this part of the media text displays the former version of Figure 4.31 with Williams’s sex organ moving in his trousers, thus returning him to the position of subject (and not object) of desire.⁹⁶ Indeed, the phallic burden of “Radio” is intensified by exhibiting that organ as a simulation of a snake, which constitutes a meaningful code in this economy of male’s appropriation of female’s sexualised anatomies to satisfy their unrestrained sexual desire as shown below:



Figure 4.32

(“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

⁹⁶ For watching these suggestive movements, please visit the video posted on Robbie Williams’s official Vevo in 2011.

It is true that Braidotti (2002) stated that hybridisation and in-betweenness were strategic places to disrupt the effects of male-dominated social formations (13). Nevertheless, this fantasy of Williams as a hybrid of human and animal cannot be inserted within the posthuman transgression, since it covertly legitimises sexual assault without consent. Once more, Hearn's thought on violence as constitutive of normative masculinity (2014: 9) is useful to understand that this type of act is incorporated in the visual representation of his celebrity image.

Another significant element that correlates with Williams's projection of the dominant binary social and cultural formations is his obsession with the practices of body building alongside the insistence on youth maintenance; a pervasive ideology in the West that has had deeper effects on this artist's subjectivity than on Martin's due to the deterioration brought about by drug abuse. "Rock DJ" (2000) marked the transitional stage of the modification of his body through the practice of tattooing on his arms and maintaining his chest hair, associated with traditional manliness (fig. 4.33):



Figure 4.33

("robbiewilliamsvevo," 2011)

As mentioned above, Butler established the performative reiteration of bodily gestures as the key to materialise gender (1993: 2). This particular materiality of his body is intertwined with a video where the pop star strives to be desired by the female DJ through displaying and imitatively reproducing those corporeal attributes that have constituted the ideal of traditional masculinity. As in the case of “Radio,” once more he failed to become the object of desire for two major reasons. First, the predominance of the cultural construction of the female anatomy as the gendered subject must be considered. Second, this exhibition of his body building is intentionally exploited in a heteronormative context fixed by the linguistic discourse in which man is the hegemonic subject: “Boys getting high and the girls even more so / Wave your hands if you’re not with the man” (1-2). As Monique Wittig (1992) claimed, the dichotomy of gender is marked by opposition and further, language is a political instrument that had material effects on the individual’s subjectivity (29-30). Although the artist argued that “it’s a party song and party songs usually have insane lyrics that mean nothing” (singer’s official website), the binary gendered axis of differentiation mobilised by the lyrics in which he defines himself as “the man” dismisses the possibility of neutrality.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4. The linguistic connotations of multiple words prove that Williams’s language was not innocent at all, for example, the slang expression contained in the line “can I kick it?” since “kick it” has the meaning amongst others “to keep intimate company with someone” (“urban dictionary”). If we think about the heteronormative pathos of the song, this meaning seems the most plausible one reinforced by the use of words such as “pimping” in the bridge, whose sexual innuendo cannot be denied.

Furthermore, interestingly, this deliberate trading on his body in mutation is inserted within the posthuman notion of the body without disrupting the ideology of gender. On the contrary, it is used to intensify the regulatory and voyeuristic male gaze, as in the closing scene of this music video:



Figure 4.34 (“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

According to Braidotti, the blurring of death and life is a core assumption of the biopolitical functioning of the posthuman praxis as an attempt to destabilise the dichotomous splits that have historically shaped Western subjectivity (2013: 115). Williams’s transformation into a living skeleton in the image above might seem to undermine the female/male divide. Nevertheless, he failed to attain this purpose because whereas the female DJ maintains the mark of gender, the artist preserves his ontological status as the unmarked gender. Therefore, I believe I have demonstrated that the subversive possibilities of the posthuman praxes are a double-edged sword because it depends on the ways they are deployed.

Whereas “Rock DJ” represents that early transitional stage of his body modification, the evolution of those transformations and the profound messages carried by it were made visible in November 2016 when Williams posed naked for the gay magazine *Attitude*. An example of his nudity practices can be found on his Instagram account (2017, January 19):



Figure 4.35

As the case of Ricky Martin proved, it seemed that body building through signifying practices that inscribed cultural meanings on the anatomy captured the crafting of the 21st-century male subjectivity in order to perfect the self-capitalisation of the bodily forces in the market. According to Preciado, the traditional macho's corporeality had mutated into a morphology moulded by fitness and microprosthetic techniques that fused with the body; therefore, this resulted into the voluntary materialisation of sexual identities as malleable and noticeable organic matter (2013: 34-35, 220). For Preciado, “it is the body desiring power, seeking to swallow it, eat it, administer it, wolf it down, more, always more” (2013: 208). Williams's body is the embodiment of this new materiality of the body that preserves its old essence but, at the same time, whose masculinity has been refined. Indeed, the artist has admitted to the use of body-altering surgery as an attempt to delay ageing: “I am going to

have everything done...I am going to have a facelift, the chin can go, liposuction...the midlife crisis theory has been creeping up on me for some time” (McNally, 2013). In this respect, Patterson and Elliott’s thought about how men had been incited to orientate the gaze at their bodies in order to increase profits in the era of an advanced capitalism (2002: 237) are even more evident than in the case of the Puerto Rican singer due to the physical deterioration of Williams’s body, as already mentioned. These words prove that Williams’s new millennium body reflects the biopolitical effects of a subjectivity that has internalised surveillance and monitoring to specifically manufacture a subject that fits the global mould of the advanced capitalist market. To put it another way, it seems that Martin’s and William’s altered anatomies confirm that the mutation of panopticism examined above cannot be stopped and at the same time, this renewed mechanism of supervision is about fluidity that intensifies the effects of examination.

As a result, I want to stress here that his body corroborates Preciado’s theorisation on how the transformation of sexual identity into a material reality is an intrinsic feature of current capitalism and the ways hegemonic masculinity has been adapted to maintain its status but at the same time, serving the interests of the capitalist marketplace. Williams’s corporeality embodies the tangible matter of heterosexual maleness in our Western culture. In addition, in his interview for *Attitude*, he explained his preference for homosexual spaces:

And then all of a sudden we were introduced to La Cage nightclub in Manchester and what struck me instantly was the safety that I felt there and a feeling of instantly being accepted...instantly I wanted to know [from the gay people I met] everything about why and how and when did you first become and what does it mean? (Bagwell, 2016)

Williams’s words crystallise his sexual subjectivity by determining that homosexuality was equated with acceptance, as well as attempting to establish its essentialist

elements. Turning once more to Preciado, Western culture had attained the fabrication of homogeneous sexual identities as material illusions that marked the binary divide between the normal and the pathological; and thus, heterosexuality thrived on maintaining the status quo by managing and moulding the individual's body-mind (2013: 69, 71). So the singer's discourse that demands the identification of those attributes associated with a non-normative identity is failing to fall outside of the workings of dominant ideology inasmuch as it is reproducing the Western obsession for categorisation and normalisation. It is in this context that Seidler's and Hearn's critique of the concept of hegemonic masculinity must be read because it creates the illusion of the existence of a unified and coherent masculinity (2006: 70, 72; 2014: 10). And this is precisely what the singer is doing, he takes for granted that gay means acceptance and thus, his statement creates a 'gay' as a homogeneous category.

Moreover, in relation to his own identity, he plays tactically to escape rigid fixation within our hegemonic sexual hierarchy. In an interview, the artist was asked about his identification with homosexual people. He responded: "the truth is with me and gay is that I can't get round the cock thing...you know I have male crushes. Big male crushes. A lot, I crush a lot. But I just can't do the cock. I don't enjoy looking at mine that much. So I can't get round that bit" ("NME," 2016). From his discourse, we can deduce two essential aspects of Williams's sexual subjectivity and his identity as an artist. First, the phallus as a male signifier, as a fundamental category that governs the symbolic order, must be understood as a psychoanalytical position of power rather than the anatomical sex organ in order to found heterosexuality (Lacan, 2006: 576). Regarding this, Williams's lack of interest for his sex organ proves that this anatomical constitution of masculinity is not a prerequisite to occupy a privileged sexed position. Indeed, his establishment of power-differentiated relations in his media texts backs it up. On the other hand, if Martin's openness to experience heterosexual intimacy contributes to maintaining his trademark stable and profitable, Williams's

acceptance of non-carnal love for men is aimed to capitalise both sexual identities: the normative and the non-normative as a strategy of market expansion. Homosexuality also means money-making in the 21st-century advanced capitalist economy. Therefore, when Preciado stated that gender and sexuality had been transformed into tangible commodities to satisfy the demands of the market (2013: 34-35), these two artists' packaging of them exemplifies the mutation of these old fictions that enable the perpetuation of heteronormativity and its essentialist epistemology.

In keeping with the discourses on femininity and masculinity, his “Heavy Entertainment Show” (2016) reveals the zenith of this refinement of the normative machinery of producing truths. Thus, at the 2017 BRIT Awards, his performance establishes the mutually reinforcing connection between the media and celebrity culture for the commodification of sexual identity, exceeding the traditional function of mere entertainment:



Figure 4.36 (“Robbie Williams,” 2017)

This visual representation displays the product he is promoting: the perfected versions of binary gender. Williams turns out to become the quintessential embodiment of current celebrity. According to Chris Rojek, celebrities had replaced the sovereignty of monarchy

and the traditional power of God, whose ideological power has been weakened in popular culture, turning into agents of distraction (2001: 13, 90). This pivotal role is clearly stated by the linguistic message of that media text when he starts with “good evening, children of cultural abandon / You searched for a saviour, well here I am” (1-2).⁹⁸ Nevertheless, his sphere of influence pushes further this traditional role of celebrity as an entertainer, since his “Heavy Entertainment Show” is about an effective machinery of producing the materiality of the economy of heterosexuality as a form of biopolitical control. It was stated above that Hawkins identified Williams as a modern ‘dandy’ for his skilful transformations and bold behaviour in his eccentric performances (2009: 56). Indeed, this performance proves his dexterity in reinforcing gender binaries whilst he incorporates queer corporeal acts and a dress code that challenges the conventional sartorial correctness associated with dominant masculinity. To put it otherwise, his negotiation of masculinity is not accompanied by a challenge of mandatory sexualisation for women.

Here it is worth noting that his involvement in the consolidation of this historical structural organisation undeniably correlates with queer corporeal acts and performances that add a more complex layer of meaning to his contribution to the meta-stabilisation of dominant ideology. In his progression as a celebrity, the emulation of the aesthetics of *Kiss*⁹⁹ in “Let Me Entertain You” (1997) enabled a queer representation of masculinity through the use of intertextuality that rendered him an arbiter of a changing taste for manliness. The following image exemplifies this period:

⁹⁸ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

⁹⁹ *Kiss* is an emblematic American hard rock band from the 1970s and well-known for their flamboyant costumes and make-up.



Figure 4.37 (“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

In this way, Williams’s imitation of the conventions of a band associated to a masculinised genre by incorporating movements that can be categorised as ‘feminine’ is stretching the limits of masculine bodily gestures considered as acceptable within the heterosexual imperative. In relation to the subversive possibilities of repetition of heterosexist codes, Judith Butler argued that the pastiche of the traditional fictions of gender denaturalised and called into question that binary ontology as essence (2007: 95). With this in mind, this artist’s parody of an original that had formerly altered the masculine codes of rock in which he includes his charismatic corporeal acts exposed the instability of gendered codes rather than their fixity.

The elaboration of this re-formulated masculinity is reinforced by the verbal discourse, for example, when he uses the story of Little Bo Peep¹⁰⁰ as an intertextual tool: “Little Bo Peep has lost his sheep / He popped a pill and fell asleep / The dew is wet but the

¹⁰⁰ This is a traditional English nursery rhyme about a shepherdess who is warned not to fall asleep when she is at work (“rhymes.org.uk”).

grass is sweet, my dear” (21-23).¹⁰¹ Within this context, the implications of integrating this traditional rhyme and the masculinisation of Little Bo Beep mobilise the fluidity of this representation of gender.

Another significant example of such queering practices can be extracted from his official Facebook account when in 2015 he posted a photo of himself wearing a skirt, similarly to what Martin did (see above):

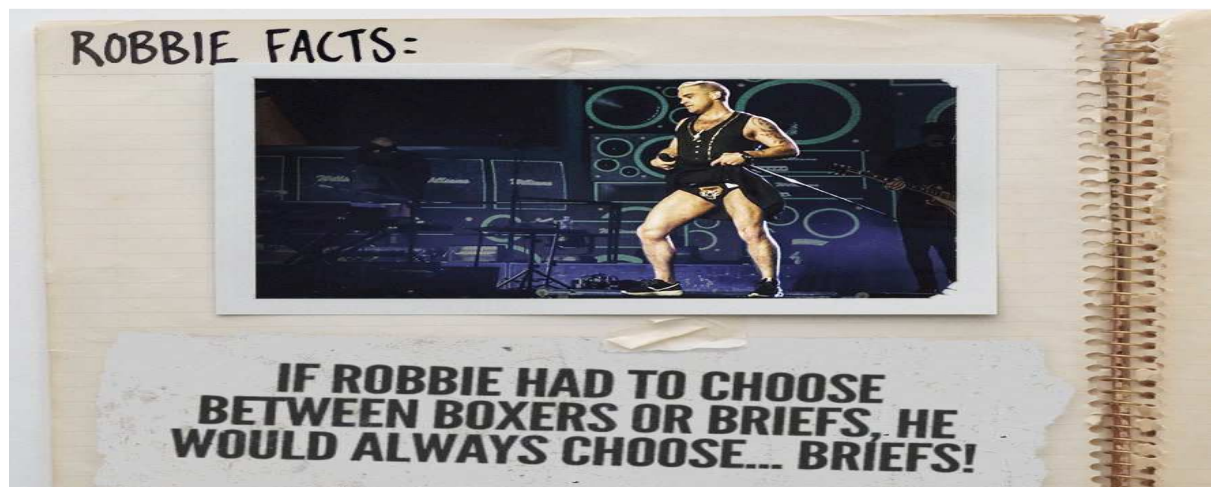


Figure 4.38

Strikingly, whereas Martin used this type of costumes to enact normative hypermasculinity as Figure 4.15 shows, Williams’s representation imitatively reproduces a feminine pose. Following Butler’s notion of the subversive potential of imitation, the singer’s pose exposes that gender is the effect of performative bodily acts materialised through repetition within the grid of cultural intelligibility, which allows us to define this action as feminine. Further, the fact that Williams chose the word “briefs” exploits the double meaning of the word either as men’s or women’s underwear.¹⁰² Although the pop star incorporates queer elements in the visual representation of his anatomy, this does not entail undermining effects on the axes of differentiation that underpin the heteronormative regime. Indeed, the

¹⁰¹ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 4.

¹⁰² The female dancers of “The Heavy Entertainment Show” wear this type of lingerie.

aforementioned misogynistic media texts dispel this possibility. What is important here is the fact that the 21st-century materialisation of heterosexual masculinity has been adapted to the new market by condoning non-masculine codes for the sake of capitalism. Undoubtedly, Williams's heterosexuality and Western privileged status facilitate this process without the risk of becoming labelled as non-normative; that is to say, outside the subject of representation that produces abjection. In other words, this English celebrity has expertly proved his mastery of trading on gender and sexuality by transforming his corporeality into a commodity, as the following post on his 2015 Facebook evidences:



Figure 4.39

Unlike Martin's social media platforms, the English pop star's posts prove that his visual simulation has not been subject to a sanitising process. On the contrary, it continues to display photos of his past life, marked by drug abuse and non-traditional enactments of masculinity. I want to emphasise here that this is proof of the glorification and tolerance of masculine rebelliousness in our Western culture when the subject is included within the privileged categories of male, heterosexual and white.

I will conclude this chapter with some final remarks. First, the cases of Ricky Martin and Robbie Williams prove that the manufacturing of Western masculinity relies on both the materialisation and commodification of sexual identity, which accounts for the mutation of

the techniques of the capitalist regime alongside its two pillars: gender and sexuality. Second, in relation to Martin, the internalisation of dominant codes and performative imitation triggered his integration into the mainstream pop culture. Third, the evolution of Williams suggests that the mutation of the iconic English dandy-esque ‘gentleman’ has been indispensable to stabilising the cultural intelligibility of the humanist binary logic. Finally, both artists have succumbed to the workings of heteronormativity by perpetuating the dominant ideology, that involves the maintenance of the subhuman ontological status of women. In this regard, Martin’s heterosexualisation and Williams’s queerness should be seen merely as the extreme ends of the same normative continuum, and therefore as an attempt to expand the codes of heterosexuality in order to capitalise on them.

Chapter 5:

A Model of Resistance and Disidentification with Dominant Ideology:

Sinéad O'Connor

In this chapter, I will critically examine the case of the Irish activist, singer and songwriter Sinéad O'Connor, who rose to prominence in the late 1980s and whose 1992 protest against the cover up of systematic child abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland was very detrimental to her career. Importantly, her career as a rock star has been a platform for her forthrightness in addressing child abuse, women's rights, mental health issues and the transgenerational traumatic effects of the historical British oppression of Ireland. Unlike the former four singers, Sinéad O'Connor composes her own songs on socio-political and personal topics that range from Ireland suffering British oppression to independent women.¹⁰³ As we have discussed in the former two chapters, those four artists eventually succumbed to the pressure of heteronormativity and the complementarity of the sexes, and they became commodities as well as turning sexual identity and gender into marketed products. In striking contrast to them, the Irish musician Sinéad O'Connor has genuinely resisted objectification inasmuch as she has become a counter-celebrity that mobilised the political production of a non-official version of what counted as truth. It is in this context that I also proceed to demonstrate that the underpinnings of her counter-narrative are her performative desexualisation, her anchorage in a peculiar Irish idiosyncrasy, and her relentless opposition to one of the traditional heteronormative institutions: the Catholic Church.

As an attempt to unravel and identify those essential aspects that have constituted O'Connor as a subject of resistance, I will analyse the ways she articulates her agency in the

¹⁰³ Although Miley Cyrus, Nicki Minaj, Ricky Martin and Robbie Williams co-write some of their songs, they are based on superficial topics as was examined in Chapters 3 and 4.

interpellation of her identity¹⁰⁴ by focusing on the interconnections between the visual and linguistic representations taken from music videos, performances, social media,¹⁰⁵ interviews and open letters from the late 1980s to the second decade of the 21st-century, in order to understand her strong political opposition to oppressive socio-cultural practices that strived to delegitimise and medicalise her non-normative discourse alongside the complex process of O'Connor's subject formation.

First and foremost, the guiding thread that assembles the essential elements of this artist's resistance narrative is her political location in Ireland. Such grounding, in line with Donna J. Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges," can enable the production of a subversive subjectivity that transforms gendered individuals-bodies into active agents for the destabilisation of the Western capitalist and colonialist machinery (1991: 111).¹⁰⁶ Thus, in relation to this artist, it is impossible to divorce the far-reaching effects of the legacy of oppression on her mental health and O'Connor's experience of gender in Ireland when she posted on Facebook: "And welcome to ireland. Where it is still a crime to be a woman" (Strang, 2015). Indeed, I want to argue that this singer's transgressive desexualisation is the intrinsic result of the transgenerational trauma that would trigger her early awareness of the danger of becoming a sexualised woman in the music industry. In this attempt at grappling with the disruptive force of undermining gender dimorphism, we will start with its profound implications for O'Connor's artistic sphere and later we will discuss how her "situated

¹⁰⁴ Another sharp difference between this singer and the other celebrities is that the distinctions between her public and private selves are non-existent.

¹⁰⁵ The only platform she used to express her ideas— Facebook—is currently deactivated. O'Connor's Facebook account was her tool to disseminate her outbursts due to family matters, her mental health problems and political views. In the last two years, it has been deactivated on several occasions, but for the purpose of this research the most significant posts have been collected from other sources in order to highlight the pervasive control over her subjectivity.

¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding its Western and white culture, the history of Ireland is linked to a colonial past that started with the imperialism of Henry II of England in the 12th-century that reached its peak between 1845 and 1851 when in a colonised Ireland, the government ruled by the British statesman Viscount Palmerston starved poor Irish population as a strategy of ethnic cleansing (Ibeji, 2011; Coogan, 2013: 44), which would mark the folk memory, including this artist's subjectivity.

knowledge”—anchored in Ireland— is inseparable from her experience of gender constraints, elements that are crucial for the fabrication of a counter-hegemonic truth through her oeuvre.

Within this context, O’Connor’s performance of the love song composed by Prince “Nothing Compares 2 U” (1990) would interrupt the heteronormative pathos of this narrative as a consequence of her aesthetics. In other words, here the constitution of the singer as a subject required a process of disidentification with the regulatory and fixed category of gender that entailed a sexualised position, as the image from the media text below displays:



Figure 5.1 (“Nick Macchiavelli,” 2015)

Whereas Cyrus’s “Wrecking Ball” was inspired by this media text and she also aimed to imitate O’Connor’s physical appearance as an act of rebelliousness against Hannah Montana—incorporating the over-sexualisation of her body—, the Irish singer opted for a desexualised image that disrupted the heteronormative standards of beauty for women in the 1990s. José Esteban Muñoz has asserted that “disidentificatory performances” were a technique employed by transgressive individuals in order to create new modes of resistance against the hegemonic subject (1999: 5). In this regard, O’Connor situates herself in opposition to the normative materiality of female gender, that works by systematic

identification and reproduction of rigid corporeal acts that are naturalised; thus her agency causes interferences within this traditional narrative articulated by the lyrics: “I could put my arms around every boy I see / But they’d only remind me of you” (line 15-16).¹⁰⁷ In relation to the production of identity, Butler posed two central elements of queer practice: first, gender is a productive apparatus embedded in prescriptive norms that are materialised through the performative and reiterated deployment of bodily gestures fabricating the heteronormative body; second, the capacity of the marked corporeality for disidentification leads to fail deliberately to identify with the invested signifiers, whose failure must be reiteratively repeated in order to destabilise the hegemonic framework of intelligibility (1993: 2, 219-220). Here, Butlerian notions are fundamental to understand O’Connor’s subversion since she purposely intervened in the crafting of her body, whose desexualised traits have performatively been maintained during her career by mobilising the potential of performativity to be disloyal to dominant ideology. Further, the counter-production of the bald woman is not simply failing to imitate the standards of female beauty; her shaved hair is, in fact, a political mark inextricably associated to women.

In 2014 she was interviewed by Oprah Winfrey, who asked the Irish singer about what meant for her to sign her first contract at the age of 17. O’Connor explained her experience as a female artist with the music industry in the late 1980s and why being a woman was connected to her decision to shave her head:

I got into the record business at a time when you know, record executives were a little frisky. Put it that way, not in a manner that they would cross the line if you said no, but they would certainly try their very best. You know! In some ways, you had to protect yourself straight off. You know what I mean. You’d be better to have a bag on your head, really! But they wanted me to grow my hair really long and wear miniskirts and all that kind of stuff because

¹⁰⁷ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

they reckoned I'd look much prettier and all the stuff so, I went straight around to the barber and shaved the rest of my hair off. I had grown up in a manner which...I'm sure a lot of women will relate to, where it was dangerous to be a female. So, I always had that sense that it was quite important to protect myself –make myself as unattractive as I possibly could. (“OWN,” 2014)

Her words are revealing a subjectivity that fully understands the criteria of intelligibility for marking women as sexualised morphologies. Indeed, Monique Wittig (1992) argued that sex worked branding women as sexualised by turning them into disposable bodies for men's consumption; thus, one of the pre-conditions for that was to make particular 'female' anatomical features visible and legible (7). Therefore, O'Connor's shaved head was one of her effective strategies to make her “unattractive” from the heteronormative perspective as an attempt to confound the male gaze used to categorise bodies according to the binary logic. To put it simply, the artist has striven to escape the mark of gender.

Furthermore, her discourse when she articulates “I had grown up in” and “I always had that sense” is much more connected to her Irish “situated knowledge,” to borrow Haraway's terminology; therefore, the meaning of her bald head is intensified by reversing female shaving as a gendered punishment for women into a source of resistance and empowerment. We should not underestimate her experience in An Grianán Training Centre¹⁰⁸ when she was confined for 18 months in that centre for ‘fallen women’ when she was fourteen and its connection to her perception of being a female that permeated her artistic career. Thus, in 2010 O'Connor replied to the pope's apology for sexual child abuse by revealing the ways she was abused in that reform school:

¹⁰⁸ Although An Grianán reform school was, at least initially, excluded from the Magdalene scheme, an investigation uncovered that both this training centre and High Park Magdalene Centre exploited children (Ó Fátharta, 2015).

When I was a young girl, my mother—an abusive, less-than-perfect parent—encouraged me to shoplift. After being caught once too often, I spent 18 months in An Grianán Training Centre, an institution in Dublin for girls with behavioral problems, at the recommendation of a social worker. An Grianán was one of the now-infamous church-sponsored “Magdalene laundries,” which housed pregnant teenagers and uncooperative young women. We worked in the basement, washing priests’ clothes in sinks with cold water and bars of soap. We studied math and typing. We had limited contact with our families. We earned no wages. One of the nuns, at least, was kind to me and gave me my first guitar. (O’Connor, 2010)

To further grasp the political implications of the artist’s confinement in a Magdalene laundry, we must examine the major role of this institution as a disciplinary enclave aimed to correct the non-normative behaviour of Irish women, especially those conducts classified as ‘promiscuous’ in a male-dominated Catholic state. Clara Fischer (2016) analysed how the sexuality of Irish women was institutionalised and subject to strict surveillance in order to preserve the purity of the nation (823). According to this scholar, the fact that they were separated from society was a technique of branding their bodies as ‘abnormal’ depending on the type of deviation; thus its inmates were compelled to work as slaves as a mechanism of ensuring discipline (Fischer, 2016: 832-833, 835). Indeed, many of these women decided to leave Ireland after their stay in a Magdalene country in order to conceal the mark of “shame” (Fischer, 2016: 836-837). However, O’Connor reversed the role of shame imposed on these Irish women through the articulation of her experience as a survival strategy within the public sphere that was a space restricted to the ex-inmates of that institution. In doing so, she creates a narrative to negotiate the enforced fixed identity assigned to her—and other women—as ‘mentally insane’ in the Magdalene laundry. As a survivor¹⁰⁹ of abuse, the artist used her

¹⁰⁹ I use the term ‘survivor’ instead of ‘victim’ because the latter contributes to the disempowerment of people who have gone through traumatic experiences, denying their agency.

visibility in the public sphere to give voice to the traumatised body of women who were dehumanised through that experience.

Furthermore, O'Connor's confession also politicises the practice of shaving her head¹¹⁰ as a technique of body modification that blurs the distinction of binary gender, which is connected to her stay at that institution as an uninhabitable space for women but a location for imposing bodily disciplines on marked bodies. Foucault identified the emerging disciplines as an array of technologies of controlling the body that were developed to normalise the anatomical practices and mould subjectivity within a particular modality of power; in this sense, this economy of punishment was heir to a political machinery that punished the individual by branding their bodies; in fact, the Western technique of confession was used to produce what counted as an overarching truth (1991: 47, 137-138; 1998: 59). Although the dimension of gender was not included, his ideas are the key to understand how O'Connor's confession and voluntary branding through her hair are reversing the regulatory effects of disciplines by desexualising her anatomy and using the force of exclusion to refuse docility. In this regard, her shaved head, encoded as a stigma for women punished for their disaffection for the assigned gender, became a technique of producing powerful androgyny rather than abjection. What I want to emphasise here is that O'Connor actively intervenes in the shaping of her psyche and body, undermining the constitutive process that transforms women into objects of desire instead of subjects. Clearly, the singer appropriates language and her own anatomy—which had historically been properties of the hegemonic subject—as a mechanism of identity politics that disrupts normative cultural formations.

¹¹⁰ Indeed, campaigner Mary Merritt reported how, after having been raped by a priest in her attempt to escape from one of those institutions, when she was back the nuns shaved her hair in order to stigmatise her (Greenway & Metcalfe, 2015). In the short movie *Pelonas*, the directors exploit the dichotomy of the different meanings associated with the bald head; on the one hand, for Lola, shaving as a specific gendered type of punishment is a mechanism to bring back memories of the Spanish Civil War; on the other, for Elena as a young woman it is about rebelliousness (Zambrano & Fontecha, 2003). However, O'Connor fuses both meanings due to her past as a 'fallen girl' within her national identity by developing a technique of transgression that highlights the artist as the embodiment of transnational resistance through the appropriation of the masculinist mechanism of branding female bodies that is turned into a symbol of flourishing pride.

Crucially, then, the media text “No Man’s Woman” (2000) embraces the bald woman to disavow male appropriation of female bodies and the subjection to heteronormative marriage by disrupting the linearity of Western narratives, since she includes the hybrid viability of Catholic priestesshood intertwined with Rastafari culture-religion¹¹¹ for women and re-articulates the historical linkage between black and Irish oppression; thus, race and religion are triggering subversive signifiers that thrive in the deformation of Western normative master-narratives that dehumanise outsiders. It is within this context that this music video must be understood, so the following images entangled with the linguistic discourse illustrate those anchored cultural meanings conferred upon her identity and the ways they are communicated:



Figure 5.2

(“Sinead O’Connor,” 2012)

¹¹¹ O’Connor’s Rastafari influences are well-known and performatively maintained. In the early 20th-century Rastafari religion emerged as a set of beliefs derived from the oppression of black people in Jamaica; importantly, it establishes connection to Africa as homeland and it is a hybrid of Catholic religion and African heritage that repudiates normative rules, Western linearity and the pope; in other words, it is a peace movement (Grant & Snider, 2002). In relation to O’Connor’s identification with elements of black idiosyncrasy, Negus (1997) suggested that this is related to the fact that they share a colonial legacy of ‘slavery’ and as a symbol of the encounter between the Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean diaspora and the diaspora of Irish people in both geographical locations (187).



Figure 5.3 (“Sinead O’Connor,” 2012)

Undoubtedly, the overlapping of image and text lies at the core of the message of this counter-narrative. Although the video starts with the stereotypical image of a heteronormative couple with O’Connor imitating regulatory female gender through the wig, the linguistic discourse disarticulates the dynamics of institutional Western marriage when she sings: “I don’t want to be no man’s woman / It don’t make me happy this mantrolling” (1-2).¹¹² According to Monique Wittig, the heterosexual contract has imposed regulatory institutions on women in order to legitimise this type of relationship that reproduces the normative social order that rests on the exchange of women identified by Lévi-Strauss (1992: 28, 43). In this respect, O’Connor rejects the compulsory institution of marriage that has systematically triggered the exchange of women in our Western culture. Moreover, she is articulating the hegemonic male control over women by denying that forcible subjection. Therefore, the encoding of this media text mediates a subjectivity that is highly politicised; that is so say, it

¹¹² The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

brings with it an essential feminist demand: her right to be a full citizen emancipated from male surveillance.¹¹³

Indeed, O'Connor materialises this emancipation by running away and by her acceptance for the bald woman as an integral part of her identity when she confesses that "I got a lovin' man but he's a spirit" (18). By focusing on the artist's embrace of non-conventional Catholic beliefs, the most plausible reading of this linguistic anchorage is she is talking about God. Finally, this music video enacts the transfiguration of O'Connor into a Rastafari-Catholic priestess enabled by Rastafari black spirits:



Figure 5.4 ("Sinead O'Connor," 2012)

Importantly, if we consider that women cannot be ordained as Catholic priestesses, this counter-visual representation of O'Connor is inextricably linked to her personal life because in 1999, she was made a priestess by a member of the dissident Irish Catholic branch (Jonze, 2014). Moreover, it also articulates her political vindication of the rights of women not to be discriminated in the Catholic Church, as she declared in an interview: "But my identity as a Catholic priest has to do with my being Irish...It's about reclaiming a place for women and for Irish women" (Anderson-Minshall, 2010). We need to recall with Rosi

¹¹³ Once more O'Connor's political location Ireland is fundamental to fully understand the subversion of this music video. In Ireland, the institution of marriage was so strong that divorce was not introduced until 1995 and the legislation on this issue was passed in 1996; indeed, 2015 statistics proved that Ireland had the lowest rate of divorce in Europe (Holmquist, 2015).

Braidotti that we must not underestimate “the importance of where one is actually speaking from. Differences of location between centres and margins matter greatly, especially in relation to the legacy of something as complex and multi-faceted as Humanism” (2013: 16). Furthermore, this scholar pointed out that postsecularism was a crucial aspect of posthumanism, which entailed that spiritual beliefs could be a source of transgression and renegotiation of normative invested norms; thus, they moulded counter-subjectivities since secularism as a male-dominated doctrine had failed to be inclusive and egalitarian (Braidotti, 2013: 35). In the light of this discussion, O’Connor’s partial location thrives in disrupting the grid of intelligibility that operates on an exclusionary system whose major aim is to leave the gender hierarchy intact. Indeed, here I argue that the possibilities of subversion mobilised by this artist cannot be fully comprehended without her anchorage in Ireland and its legacy of oppression that pushed this country to the margins of the Western centre.

As a consequence, the artist shifts away from the traditional Humanist tradition through the hybridisation of her Catholic beliefs and Rastafari spirituality by embracing the positive otherness of black Rastafarian spirits, whose visual representation distorts the stereotypical Western enactment of white citizens as the bearers of dominant religious beliefs. In other words, O’Connor’s partial¹¹⁴ located subjectivity articulates alternative views that celebrate the encounter between gender and race in terms of diversity rather than opposition. Unlike Miley Cyrus, the Irish singer explores the possibilities of incorporating marked identities without succumbing to cultural appropriation; that is to say, this representation proves that different axes of differentiation can conflate in order to undermine dominant ideology. Significantly, the transfiguration of the performer mobilises the

¹¹⁴ It is important to note here that with the term ‘partial’ I refer to those located spaces of belonging that could generate useful knowledge to undermine the pillars of dominant ideology, particularly associated to those identities that deviate from the norm.

emancipation of women—"I only want to be my own woman" (29)—away from the binary gender, delinked from the forcible complementarity of sexes.

Another essential aspect of the Irish singer's disruptive and transformative force marked by her hybrid spiritual beliefs is her active involvement in the production of a counter-truth that turns her into the epitome of Braidotti's process of "becoming-minoritarian," whose right to fabricate universal truths has historically been denied to women. This notion is a borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, who identified the universal identity of man as the majoritarian, as well as those becoming-minoritarian that had started a process of moving away from the norm (man), which could activate a mode of micropolitics to resist the conventions of domination (2005: 291-292). This disidentificatory process is crucial for Braidotti's constitution of the posthuman. Within this context, Braidotti explained that the process of "becoming-minoritarian" enabled the production of a counter-narrative that persistently defied the binary logic by distorting the privileged signifier of the dominant male subject including its normalising patterns of language (2002: 119). By focusing on our analysis above, O'Connor clearly distances herself from the colonial mainstream culture through her anchoring in the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the Irish nation. As a matter of fact, her 1992 appearance at *Saturday Night Live*¹¹⁵ when she tore up the picture of the pope John Paul II as a protest against the cover up of the culture of child abuse perpetrated by the Catholic Church in Ireland constituted a crucial moment in her "becoming-minoritarian."

¹¹⁵ Saturday Night Live hereafter will appear as SNL.

The image below is a symbolic representation of O'Connor's technique to produce a non-official version of what counted as the official truth:



Figure 5.5 (“TFYFWYA,” 2011)

As we have already discussed, O'Connor's Catholic beliefs are influenced by Rastafari religion owing to the connection of the colonial legacy of black people and Irish people. With this in mind, it is not surprising the singer rephrased Bob Marley's "War" on racism as the intertextual device to uncover child abuse in her country as she sang:

Child-abuse, yeah, child-abuse yeah
Sub-human bondage has been toppled

....

Children, children
Fight! (25-26, 38-39).¹¹⁶

Consequently, O'Connor had aimed to give voice to those disposable bodies that occupied the margins in Irish society; that is to say, she mobilised a version of History that remained silent. She displaced their perspective from the Irish cultural periphery to America and television as centres of producing dominant discourses. The ideological manufacturing of what counts as absolute truth may be approached by the Foucauldian analysis of the

¹¹⁶ Both songs—Bob Marley's and Sinéad O'Connor's version—have been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

development of Western techniques to produce legitimate knowledge. According to Foucault, hegemonic power manufactured and moulded the individual's body-subjectivity; as a direct result of this, it had crafted those techniques to produce ideological truths that served the interests of the established political regime through its biased lens (1991: 194). Since O'Connor occupies a non-privileged position in terms of gender, political location, and as one of those abused children, her political act reversed the mechanisms identified by Foucault, deviating from her role of supporting dominant ideology if she had kept her prescriptive status as voiceless in terms of who has authority to write History.

Furthermore, within the domain of dominant ideology, her rebelliousness surpassed the limits of acceptable transgression when at the end of the performance she ripped up the picture of the pope, shouting "Fight the real enemy!" (44). Thus, the artist's act of disobedience was politically unconceivable insofar as her truth had penetrated the domains in which ideology was reproduced. We need to draw again from Althusser's identification of religion and mass media as Ideological State Apparatuses, whose function was the reproduction of ideology by using masked repression as a mechanism of ensuring its effectivity (1971: 143,145). In addition, the Spanish philosopher Beatriz Preciado (2013) had noticed that these two institutions were apparatuses of producing white heteronormative codes; to put it another way, they were breeders of the naturalised heterosexuality (74, 121). This casts light on the reason why the Irish artist's disruption was highly transgressive and 'dysfunctional,' because she had encountered the heterosexual rationale of those two institutions in which those who challenge its norms are criminalised, especially if that

counter-truth came from a marginal partial location where child abuse was not yet a real issue.¹¹⁷

It would be appropriate to state that O'Connor's "becoming-minoritarian" is associated with her pivotal role as the bearer of Irish collective memory that aimed to expand the limits of the human by including the sub-human ontological status of abused Irish children. The day after her appearance on SNL, O'Connor was interviewed in relation to that controversial performance and her reasons for doing it. She responded:

Em, I wanted to create an opportunity for people including myself, em, to say how they feel. There didn't, there didn't seem to be, one I found out, I couldn't find any way of, of saying it anywhere and there didn't seem to be any way for anybody else to say it. So I thought, well fuck it, [her hands simulate when she tore up the picture of the pope] you know, that it would make an opportunity, that it would be something that would get attention and provide an opportunity for people to say how they felt. ("Reggae Video Vault," 2014) [My transcription]

These words seem to support the former idea of the artist as the transmitter of historical and personal memory of disposable bodies, including her own. As Judith Butler claimed in *Bodies That Matter*, what constituted the human was a set of attributes based on the exclusion and repudiation of abject bodies whose visibility was denied; importantly, gender was a technology that acted upon the anatomy prior to the category of the human (1993: 7-8). This Butlerian notion here is essential because O'Connor—marked as a woman as well as an abused child—was automatically expelled outside the borders of the human.

¹¹⁷ When the scandal of child abuse was uncovered and investigated by the government, it was proved that rape as well as psychological and physical torture had been endemic in the Catholic Church's institutions in Ireland. When Sinéad O'Connor made her public statement, just a few cases had been in the spotlight with no real impact across the media; it would not be until the mid-1990s that they became a public and political issue in the country and society became aware of how this problem had been concealed (Lalor, 1998: 38-39).

Indeed, the outsider status of O'Connor from normative discourses was lucidly summarised by the journalist Michael Agresta, who stated that O'Connor's protest was widely misunderstood because the connection between the Irish Catholic Church and child abuse was an anathema and unfamiliar for dominant Western culture due to her specific cultural location (2012). Importantly, this experience effectively enables the conception of this artist within the posthuman framework of intelligibility. According to Beatriz Preciado, useful techniques of fabricating the body were historically extracted from the knowledge gained of colonised bodies—restrained and constrained within heteronormative institutions—whose sub-human ontological status dissolved the boundaries between the human and non-human (2013: 153-154). Undoubtedly, O'Connor's experience in the Magdalene laundry and the disciplinary Irish family situated her at the borders of non-human ontology. Therefore, when Mayhew (2006) suggested that the singer's religious beliefs were a sign of her queerness, which characterised her "eccentricity and oddity" (181), she completely dismissed the importance of O'Connor's "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1991: 111) and gendered experience inasmuch as she can be considered as the symbolic embodiment of the postcolonial penetrated bodies of Irish women and children.

Moreover, I would like to highlight here that another significant aspect of O'Connor's postsecular reformulation is her questioning of the overarching truth produced by the Church together with her articulation of an alternative set of Catholic beliefs that calls into question the pillars of that institution. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the scandal of child abuse in Ireland by issuing a public statement where he condemned that crime (Bates). The artist wrote an article in response to the pope's apology that was posted on her official website:

The Vatican strategy, as shown in Saturday's letter, from the Pope to Irish Catholics, is to sell the Irish Catholic hierarchy down the river, by making it

seem they were acting independently of the Vatican when they covered up abuse. That is a lie...Why are not they telling the truth? Which is that they, like nazis, were following explicit orders...What victims deserve, the world over, is a full confession from the Vatican, that they ordered the cover up. And that they are now trying to cover up the cover up. (O'Connor, 2010)

By focusing on this institution as working for the maintenance of dominant ideology, O'Connor's discourse is uncovering the Vatican's efforts not to have their power undermined. Thus, her demands of confession are subversive in terms of gender and political location because she is attempting to undo the logic of confession against the institution that politically managed Irish bodies by turning them into objects of biopolitical consumption and controlling their sexuality (Foucault, 1998: 23). In other words, as a minoritarian subject she is articulating the attempt of making empowerment viable for Irish people through the Foucauldian tandem power-knowledge, as an enabling disruption of the exclusionary operations of our Western societies. In this regard, she used her website to demand the humanisation of Irish population in contrast to mainstream artists' websites, which as we have seen above, are transformed into artefacts to capitalise their cultural products, gender and sexual identity.

In relation to this counter-truth, O'Connor discussed her alternative beliefs, which pose a threat to the established Catholic hierarchy that rests on materialism and fixed narratives. The artist responded:

I think centuries of disembowelments and burnings at the stake put fear of challenging them into our dna.. But.. let's not let them fool us into thinking TRUE Catholicism isn't beautiful...I love The Holy spirit... don't matter if u call it Allah, Jehovah, God, Krisna, jah, fred or daisy.. it's all the same Spirit. I am certain the biggest shift in human thinking in the 21st century is happening now... we can love religion as we need rituals.. BUT... The Holy Spirit is a bird, free to fly and land where it likes... and we will come to see, very soon,

that we don't actually need 'religion' in order to have a relationship with.
("The Washington Post," 2010)

Here the artist has succeeded in the postsecular challenge suggested by Braidotti in order to become dissidents within or outside dominant ideology when she stated: "The double challenge of linking political subjectivity to religious agency and or disengaging both from oppositional consciousness, and from critique defined as negativity, is one of the main issues raised by the posthumanist condition" (Braidotti, 2013: 35). Notwithstanding the stigma of child abuse, O'Connor has been able to re-postulate a counter-religious discourse by the denial of religion and of a fixed corporeality of God. Hence she uses this discourse to help generate a widespread discussion on the illegitimacy of Church hierarchy, the role of women as submissive sufferers, and the criminalisation of Catholic actions. In other words, Catholic agency and politics can be fused as compatible elements to question the normative social order.

In this counter-production of truth, her role as the bearer of collective truth-memory is inextricably linked to her own personal experiences with her mother, which shape her subjectivity that turns into the embodiment of the transgenerational reproduction of historical trauma by intensifying the effects of her subversion, since stigma is culturally and politically inscribed on her own body and psyche. Symbolically, O'Connor tore up the picture of her own mother as a symbol of systematic child abuse in Ireland in connection to her own:

Sexual and physical. Psychological. Spiritual. Emotional. Verbal. I went to school every day covered in bruises, boils, sties and face welts, you name it. Nobody ever said a bloody word or did a thing. Naturally I was very angered by the whole thing and I had to find out why it happened...My mother was a Valium addict. What happened to me is a direct result of what happened to my mother and what happened to her in her house and in school. (Agresta, 2012)

Here, O'Connor's 'non-legitimate' discourse is unmasking the ways the institution of the Irish family served the Catholic Church as one of the heteronormative pillars of dominant

ideology to performatively reproduce control over abject bodies. According to Foucault, the Western family was a strategic political enclave for the functioning of power and the intensification of its effects on the entire social body (1998: 100). Thus, she unmasked how Irish families were used to conceal the abusive disciplinary mechanisms of the Catholic Church in order to maintain its hierarchical position of power in this country. By considering the Butlerian notion of performativity analysed earlier in connection to the reiteration of particular social formations, O'Connor's counter-truth proves that this was also the precondition for the reproduction of power-differentiated relations in terms of gender and colonised bodies in Ireland. Yet this artist's partial knowledge was an instrument to exert counter-power against the pervasive implantation of disciplines in her homeland.

So far, then, we have discussed the tight connections between her artistic life—in performances and music videos—, her statements and her private life by dissolving its distinctions. The next narrative is focused on the conciliation between her traumatic experiences with her mother after her death as the transmitter of the transgenerational trauma through the institution of family. “Troy” (1987) is a media text that mobilises both this blurring of the binary logic and a posthuman visual representation of the body, as the following image accurately represents:



Figure 5.6

(“SineadOConnor,” 2012)

In relation to this visual-discursive simulation of O'Connor's confessional "Troy," the singer narrates her feelings about her mother when she died:

I'll remember it
And Dublin in a rainstorm
....
We were so young then
....
Oh, does she love you?
....
Do you love her?
Is she good for you?" (1-2, 7, 28, 31-32)¹¹⁸

The singer herself admitted to the autobiographical nature of this song: "I wrote that when I was 17, when my mother died and I don't feel angry like that anymore. I don't feel that terrible pain that I felt then" ("The Sinéad O'Connor Site"). As Braidotti (2013) argues, the post-human dynamics challenges the linearity of Western conception of time aimed to fix rigid narratives of power (165). By considering "Troy" within the production of this singer's cultural identity, her oeuvre—fusion of the private-public split—, her familial relations, child abuse, the Irish nation amongst other issues will create a discontinuous flux of memories that runs against the chronological linearity of macro-narratives. In fact, the role of memory is the cornerstone of this artist's resistance. On this subject, Braidotti (2004) had stated that "a location is an embedded and embodied memory. It is a set of counter-memories which are activated by the resisting thinker against the grain of the dominant representations of subjectivity" (3). As described above, O'Connor's memories on her childhood are circumscribed within the posthuman notion of the subject in order to empower herself, that challenges the 'erased' memory of the Irish nation.

¹¹⁸ The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

This disruptive memory is compounded by the rendering of her body disidentified with the ideal of heteronormative femininity by enabling a political counter-ontology of the female penetrated body. In this regard, Haraway's notion of the cyborg is essential to orientate my reading of this construction of identity because "the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private...Nature and culture are reworked" (Haraway, 1991: 151). The posthuman conceptualisation of a subversive biopolitical notion of the self is applicable to O'Connor's production of her body in connection to the cultural inscriptions deriving from her rooted subjectivity, an anatomy that has altered those cultural prostheses that signified regulatory and naturalised femininity by shifting towards a 'perverse' deviant from binary gender.

Henceforth the ritual of confession has been a key technique in her agency to produce truth, in which the singer marked by gender has relentlessly attempted to step out of the ideological mechanisms of control in order to claim her right to be a speaking subject. An example of the obstacles she has encountered due to her gender is the confessional letter for her brother Joseph O'Connor that she originally published in *The Irish Times* in 1993. She wrote: "It is important for it to be seen that not everyone's experience is the same. That people experience the same situation differently. What is true for Joe is true for Joe and what is true for me is true for me. These are my truths" ("tripod.com").¹¹⁹ Therefore, as we discussed above, once more she reverses the technique of confession to articulate a truth that her brother—as belonging to the privileged gender—had tried to de-legitimise by proving that masculinity is another category that serves the hegemonic institutions to act against the marked individuals in the domains of dominant discourses.

¹¹⁹ The whole letter has been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

As discussed above, O'Connor's performative desexualisation is clearly connected to her political enclave, Ireland, whose culture is deeply ingrained in its colonial past and the strict surveillance kept by the Catholic Church of women's sexuality. Therefore, this kind of resistance must be understood in relation to the ontological categories enforced by the tacit obligatory heterosexuality. As Monique Wittig (1992) suggested, the compulsory coupledness of woman and man is inserted within the deployment of heteronormativity (27). Indeed, O'Connor has performatively reproduced this disruption of the imperative of the norms. Asked about men in an interview, she responded: "I want to be complete myself. You can be incomplete with a man. What I'm aiming for is to be a complete person. And if that means a man is with me, great, but I'm not complete because he's with me" (Guccione, 2015). In other words, she produces a discourse that challenges the Western heterosexual fiction of the forcible tandem woman-man.

Here, then, her awareness of gender and of the sexualisation of female bodies would reach its climax in 2013 with her confrontation with the pop star Miley Cyrus, when the latter stated that her "Wrecking Ball" video was inspired by O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2 U" (Calnan, 2013). O'Connor reacted with an open letter to the American artist in which she wrote:

I am extremely concerned for you that those around you have led you to believe, or encouraged you in your own belief, that it is in any way 'cool' to be naked and licking sledgehammers in your videos. It is in fact the case that you will obscure your talent by allowing yourself to be pimped...it is absolutely NOT in ANY way an empowerment of yourself or any other young women, for you to send across the message that you are to be valued (even by you) more for your sexual appeal than your obvious talent...They [music business] will prostitute you for all...You also said in Rolling Stone that your look is based on mine. The look I chose, I chose on purpose at a time when my record company were encouraging me to do what you have done...Real

empowerment of yourself as a woman would be to in future refuse to exploit your body or your sexuality in order for men to make money from you...Women are to be valued for so much more than their sexuality. We aren't merely objects of desire. ("The Guardian," 2013)

Clearly the Irish singer is counter-attacking the major premises of postfeminism, highlighting the process of sexualisation of female bodies in male-dominated spaces and the ways objectification poses a threat to women's empowerment. Rosalind Gill (2007a) identified how postfeminism as a sensibility had permeated media culture by enabling the commodification of the sexualised female body through women's internalisation of surveillance and objectification; therefore, they assimilated that sexual allure and sexualisation were sources of empowerment and free choice (148-149, 153). O'Connor's discourse uncovers this type of empowerment and free will as false notions in our culture. On the contrary, she has a clear perception of this representation of Cyrus as the effects of the conventions of male domination that relies on the trade on female bodies for the production of capitalist surplus value.

Additionally, by focusing on Teresa de Lauretis's theorisation on the cinematic apparatus as a machinery of turning women into mere images through the prevailing techniques of representation, whose anatomies were the surface where sexual meanings were inscribed (1984: 37), O'Connor is encouraging Cyrus to step out of that trapping heteronormative logic where female artists are limited and marked by sexuality as the only mechanism of becoming visible across the media. To put it another way, the Irish singer is offering an alternative outside the norm through resistance and an active intervention in the production of her own body in order to construct a version of femininity far from the truth of gender invented-normalised by the male-controlled media manipulation.

Cyrus's response was some posts on Twitter mocking O'Connor's protest of sexual abuse and mental health.¹²⁰ The Irish artist sent a second open letter where she produced a counter-narrative that undermined the American mainstream star's attempt to pathologise O'Connor's behaviour. She wrote:

Who the fuck is advising you? Because taking me on is even more fuckin' stupid than behaving like a prostitute and calling it feminism...I'm staggered that any 20 yr old woman of the 21st century could behave in such a dangerous and irresponsible manner as not only sent the signal to young women that its ok to act like prostitutes but also to the signal that those who have suffered or do suffer mental health problems are to be mocked and have their opinions invalidated...you are such an anti-female tool of the anti-female music industry...By mocking it you mock every child who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of priests and had it covered by the Vatican. You could really do with educating yourself. (Hernandez, 2013)

O'Connor's forthrightness is disclosing here two important aspects of Cyrus's postfeminist subjectivity: on the one hand, the masking of that type of femininity as 'feminist,' which in fact disguised an underlying misogyny and, on the other, covert 'prostitution' as a constitutive part of the marketing of 21st-century female celebrities, which had transformed women into "sexual entrepreneurs." As Natasha Walter's research revealed, the workings of advanced capitalism had attained stabilisation and maximisation of its labour forces through turning all women—including those who did not work as sex workers—into sex workers to satisfy male desire (2015: 62). It is undeniable that the Irish star is articulating one of the main issues faced by modern feminism by exposing the masculinist ideology that lies at the core of Cyrus's 'feminism.' Another significant element of this confrontation is the ways Cyrus's anchorage in American mainstream pop culture regulated by the male gaze

¹²⁰ These posts have been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

fails to understand O'Connor's otherness shaped by mental health issues¹²¹ and child abuse that were unintelligible within the matrix of imperialist encoding. Therefore, once more, this artist's political and geographical enclave turns into a vehicle to negotiate the fictions fabricated in Western cultures.

Within this particular context, "8 Good Reasons" (2014) displays her artistic evolution in the representation of idiosyncratic constitutive elements of Irish identity: the taboo of mental health issues and suicide. This media text epitomises her post-human identity. In this regard, the subsequent image illustrates her more recent visual representation:



Figure 5.7 ("NettwerkMusic," 2014)

In her latest project *I'm Not Bossy, I'm the Boss*, this piece of her art has an autobiographical resonance conveyed by "you know I don't much like life...you know I love to make music / But my head got wrecked by the business" (19, 21-22),¹²² anchoring the connection between the theme of the song, suicide as a social problem in Ireland—associated with the aforementioned effects of post-traumatic stress caused by historical oppression—and her own rooted identity. Hence she articulates suicide, a taboo in Irish society, by opening up

¹²¹ Mental illness is a widespread problem that is experienced by thousands of Irish people; a mental condition that is still a taboo in Irish society and associated with stigmatisation ("Mental Health Ireland"). As we also discussed earlier, child abuse in Ireland or, for example, the case of Magdalene laundries have become very sensitive issues in this culture, where abuse was systematic to such an extent that it has been called "the culture of child abuse."

¹²² The lyrics of this song have been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

possibilities to handle this sensitive issue in the public sphere as an attempt to posit that mental illness was an integral part of Irish national identity.¹²³ As a result, the artist was creating a site for debate of this effect of biopolitical regulation reproduced generation after generation. Indeed in 2015, she posted on her official Facebook account about her right to die—“iWantMyRightToDieAndIWillClaimit” (Wareing)—, a publication preceded by a distressed letter on her mental health state, which governed her subjectivity:

I have taken an overdose. There is no other way to get respect. I am not at home, I'm at a hotel, somewhere in Ireland under another name. If I wasn't posting this, my kids and family wouldn't even find out. Was dead for another fortnight since none of them bother their hole with me for a minute...Because apparently I'm scum and deserve to be abandoned and treated like shit. (Kreps, 2015)

I argue here that O'Connor's eclectic counter-subjectivity, far from stable, moves away from the colonial dominant culture towards an “alternative becoming” that has created “situated” interstices to challenge Western biopolitical control that expertly operates on the deviant-normal divide, in which the former are medicalised in order for them to be confined in the margins. Rosi Braidotti (2013) has stated that alternative becomings entail a process of disidentification from fixed and national identities in the pursuit of effective transformations; therefore, suicide or any self-destructive practice thereof, could be perceived in terms of inner struggle against the mechanisms of an advanced capitalism that has turned life into an ideological commodity subject to upgrading praxes, and consequently, it strives to blur the binary logic that produces predominant normality (54, 114). In relation to this re-formulation of non-normative identity, O'Connor thrived on disidentifying from her national idiosyncrasy, which has refused to challenge the legacy of oppression and its devastating psychological effects, by visibilising repudiated taboos and revealing the necessity to build

¹²³ In a country where suicide was illegal until 1993, research on the suicide rate in Ireland proves that the average rate has remained at 12.2 suicides per 100,000 people; the ebb and flow of these figures changed during the Celtic Tiger of Ireland (Foxe, 2016).

livable spaces for Irish colonised bodies; that is to say, the construction of sites where acceptance of the past and healing are possible in order to disarticulate the production of Irish subjectivities constrained by the internalised debris of colonial legacy.

Further, this view explicitly rejects the commodification of celebrity life, which was strategically expressed in “8 Good Reasons” when she argued: “You know I’m not from this place / I’m from a different time, different space...To be stuck somewhere you just don’t belong” (5-6, 8). According to Kristin J. Lieb, pop stars were packaged as brands that were perceived as aspirational commodities to be traded on, and the ways gender and sexuality were fundamental elements of the capitalisation of the artists’ bodies (2013: 13). However, as we have thoroughly discussed, O’Connor falls outside these techniques of manufacturing gendered celebrities, coming from a period of time when she opted for desexualisation and protest songs aimed to counter-attack the demeaning and stereotypical representations of female singers and the constraints of Irish national identity. To put it simply, this artist’s performative production of her identity interrupts the linearity of current female singers that fit into the heteronormative mould.

Crucially, also, this performance as a priestess materialises a posthuman conception of Catholic beliefs not constrained by repression. On the contrary, it interpellates a postsecular subject that challenges the hierarchy of gender and the disciplinary repudiation of mental illness by claiming the affection for death that dislocates the Western political economy of life as surplus value for the capitalist reproduction of power-differentiated relations.

It is undeniable that the Irish singer’s performative desexualisation has been a key technique to challenge the heteronormative gaze. However, in the evolution of this artist in the third millennium, her media text “Take Me To Church” (2014) exploits a sexualised

image of O'Connor through the device of makeover that shifts away from the stable counter-normative morphology maintained over the last three decades, as the following image proves:



Figure 5.8 (“NetzwerkMusic,” 2014)

Notwithstanding this drastic transformation, this imitation of the fiction of a regulatory sexualised femininity is undermined by the following elements: the lyrics connected to her partial political subjectivity, the masculine gestures displayed in the video, and the consistence of the performative desexualised O'Connor. As was mentioned above, the troubling relation of the singer with the Catholic Church as part of her Irish identity is the topic of this song when she sings: “Yeah, Take me to church / But not the one that hurts / `Cause that ain’t the truth” (18-20). This message must be read within the Irish context, in which children were abused as part of the History of this country as explained above. Thus, the singer is embracing an alternative Catholic religion that condemns paedophilia by interrupting the rigid codes of her visual representation.

Moreover, by focusing on the reproduction of the bald woman, we should turn once more to Butler, who insisted on the production of gender through the forcible repetition of corporeal acts materialised in the long run; therefore, imitation was the primary technique to fabricate the illusion of gender (2007: 266, 269). In consequence, the materialisation of her

body—through the exclusion of sexualisation—had consolidated the desexualised morphology as an intrinsic feature of the constitution of her identity that irremediably dispels this visual representation as credible; thus it becomes a parody of the 21st-century corporality imposed on female artists. This is supported by the last part of the media text, when O'Connor removes the prosthetic wig:

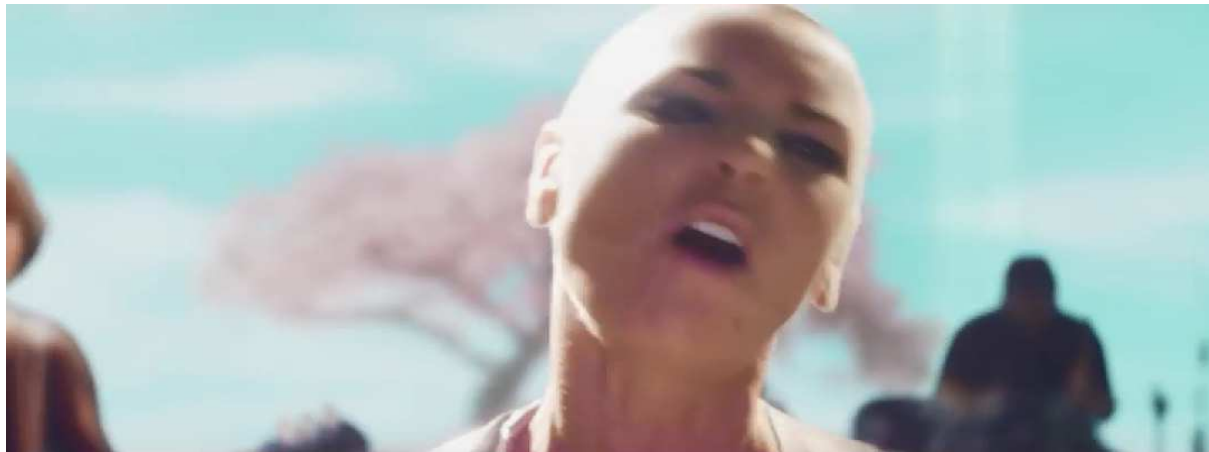


Figure 5.9 (“NettwerkMusic,” 2014)

Importantly, this transition is discursively articulated by the linguistic message: “I’m the only one I should adore” (41), embracing her performative bald subjectivity. The fact that a constituted androgynous identity like this singer’s is enabling an effective imitation of a disavowed ideal, as she had reiteratively claimed, proves that this simulation denaturalises the binary gender logic, which is revealed as an anatomical manipulation according to purported fictions of the self. In other words, “Take Me To Church” was a failed attempt to produce a heteronormative body.

Indeed, in an interview the artist revealed that she was aware of the effects of this strategy of sexualisation in order to trade on this rejuvenated visual image of her body. She said:

Well, I don't necessarily think that donning some hair and wearing a dress equates to being sexual. I think the fact that I have never looked particularly

like a female — I've always dressed very male...it was supposed to be a couple of publicity shots, which I wanted to do because I knew that it would draw attention. People would run the shots and go, "Oh my God, look at the sight of her with hair,"... No, it was really just a publicity stunt, if I'm 100 percent honest. I know what you're saying, but at the end of the day, I'm clothed from neck to knee. It was more based on, "Guess what Sinéad O'Connor looks like when she makes an effort?" ("nprmusic," 2014)

Suffice it to say that she failed to approximate this materialisation of gender because this media text could not consolidate the fixity of corporeality inside the imperative of heteronormativity inasmuch as we discussed above that a coherent materiality relies on repetition and consistency. Further, her discourse alongside "Take Me To Church" visual representation highlighted two important elements of the pre-requisites to produce regulatory gender. In relation to how the category of sex is reproduced, Butler has stated that "the citation of the law is the very mechanism of its production and articulation. What is "forced" by the symbolic, then, is a citation of its law that reiterates and consolidates the ruse of its own force" (1993: 15). Therefore, when Sinéad responded "guess what Sinéad O'Connor looks like when she makes an effort?" she was uncovering the forcible and repetitive performance of the law as an essential mechanism in the perpetuation of gender norms rather than the effects of nature. At the same time, the artist was revealing the true 'nature' of gender in the third millennium. Thus, Beatriz Preciado defined the features of this technology in the following terms: "it is spliced, cut, moved, cited, imitated, swallowed, injected, transplanted, digitized...falsified, fabricated" (2013: 129). The artist's pastiche of femininity is displaying the prosthetic materiality of the reproduction of female sexed bodies through techniques of body modification that derive into a mirror of the compulsory laws that produce a naturalised effect of them.

In the consolidation of her desexualisation, O'Connor's articulation of her sexuality has contributed to confound the male gaze, refusing legibility. In the forming of her identity, sexuality is inextricably linked to the partial location in Ireland and the moulding of her sexual subjectivity in connection to her past as an abused child there. As we discussed earlier, the perspective where you speak from matters in the formative production of counter-identities. Consequently, her rumination on her four marriages and four children reveals the ways the Western dominant cultural intelligibility is disrupted. She wrote: "I wish I hadn't ever got married. Silly cow. Four times. What a twat...Clearly, I'm a crap wife, I think I was trying to be normal" (Neill, 2015).¹²⁴

In a conservative heteropatriarchal society such as Ireland's,¹²⁵ O'Connor's words are uncovering the pillars of a Western culture that relies on compulsory heterosexual coitus. According to Monique Wittig, heterosexuality as a political regime was dependent on ideological techniques that derived into female bodies and anatomies that conformed to the imperative of the law; thus the woman's body was naturalised as the effect of those regulatory norms (1992: 9). In this respect, those women who attempted to step outside of this obligation were condemned to abjection. In short, O'Connor's failed marriages and motherhood are exposed as an effect of those rules internalised during the process of socialisation that make women believe that maternity is a natural desire; therefore, her disappointment proves that 'natural' component of women as a fiction that must be reproduced.

¹²⁴ 'Silly cow' and 'twat' are Irish slang words considered coarse language. However, this use of swearing and cursing language is very common in everyday use of language, and more specifically of women of Dublin, so since O'Connor is from this county, her use of language can only be fully understood in relation to her partial geographical location.

¹²⁵ The constitutional ban on abortion and the ways women with fatal pregnancies are forced to give birth to their children who will not survive (Simmons, 2016) are examples of the pro-life organisational structure of Irish society.

Notwithstanding this, over the last two decades O'Connor's statements on her sexual identity have confounded the media. In this regard, she has offered manifold versions of her preferences. One of the most significant statements is the one written below that epitomises the ebb and flow of her disidentification with the normative identity that relies on fixity, linearity and coherence:

Don't believe in labels of any kind, put it that way. If I fall in love with someone, I wouldn't give a shit if they were a man or a woman... What I'm trying to say is, I'm old enough not to be going by my dick. It's not about what gets my dick hard or not. I'm old enough for that to *not* be the point. But I think maybe females are different—what makes us want to have sex with someone is that we like their personality. Guys, whether they're gay or straight, you all just like to fuck and think later. (Nichols, 2014)

Here it seems crucial to unravel the mixed messages imbricated in her discourse: her denial of classification, appropriation of the “dick” as a male attribute and the definition of maleness in relation to the centrality of their sex organ. The artist's answer is the result of the mainstream media apparatus' obsession with attaining the homogeneity of the entire social body. This technique is non-neutral if we muse on the way Foucault established that disciplinary societies had developed mechanisms to classify, supervise and legitimise a hierarchy to maintain the status quo (1991: 223). Therefore, O'Connor unintelligible answers throughout her career have triggered the relentless questioning on her sexual identity alongside the different versions she has produced, so her statements reveal how identity is a fluid category always subject to re-negotiation.

This idea is reinforced by the fact that, unlike Martin and Williams, O'Connor refuses to trade on sexual identity as a profitable commodity. She has been adamant about sexualisation of women in the music industry, her performative androgyny and her past as an abused child in Ireland. Within this context, her invocation of the phantasmatic “dick” is of

utmost importance in relation to the production of her counter-subjectivity. Jacques Lacan provided us with an ample spectrum on how the psychoanalytic phallus had the power to fabricate meaning and how women were invested in terms of lack in the symbolic order (2006: 576, 579). Moreover, Beatriz Preciado (2011) pointed out that the displacement of the dildo on the body mobilised identificatory positions that undermined the heteronormative order because the pastiche of a cultural norm triggered its potential subversion (21, 41). By interlinking these two ideas, I would suggest that O'Connor's "dick" is an articulation of that symbolic phallus that has traditionally been denied to women; in this way, her appropriation is triggering the displacement of that privileged signifier from its compulsory maleness. So, O'Connor's "dick" is a phantasmatic-prosthetic element that imitates dominant gender discourses by destabilising its natural status and blurring the distinction between its carnal signifier and the potentiality of the artist as an imitator; as a result, nature and artifice are confused.

In her provocative challenge of the phallic burden, the Irish artist went further by disrupting the reduction of women to mere objects of desire to be displayed and observed. On her official website, she published an advertisement on her search for a man due to her sexual needs, "Sinead on a manhunt":

The man who runs my site will protectively suggest I may want to visit the bathroom for a few intimate moments and a subsequent cold shower before deciding to post this on the site but I will of course ignore him...My situation sexually/affectionately speaking is so dire that inanimate objects are starting to look good as are inappropriate and/or unavailable men and/or inappropriate and/or unavailable fruits and vegetables. I tell you yams are looking like the winners...Am in desperate need of a very sweet sex-starved man...I must end now as I have a hot date with a banana. Applicants can apply through my secretary. ("The Sinead O'Connor Site")

This kind of discourse has entailed the exclusion of the feminine from the right to articulate desire in our Western culture. Judith Butler deconstructed Lévi-Strauss's theory on the exchange of women and Lacan's essentialism that trapped women within the heterosexual matrix in order to suggest that the masculinist system of intelligibility constitutes women as objects whose sexual desire is constrained; consequently, women cannot be the law but the mark that secures its distribution (2007: 118). This Butlerian notion is the key here to understand O'Connor's transgression of the paternal norm. Significantly, her start of the post about the cold shower shows the way she appropriates masculinist discourse to subvert it. Moreover, her forthright statements mobilise the articulation of female desire as a subject instead of accepting the objectified sexed position assigned by the normative social order.

Not surprisingly, this artist's use of language—characterised by Irish slang and swearing language—is an integral part of her strategies to subvert the rigid norms of gender by negotiating a more flexible space for the constitution of women's identities. In the interviews examined above, we have some examples of O'Connor's particular language, deeply ingrained in her Irish culture. In order not to provide a simplistic account of these singer's transgressive linguistic messages, we should focus on two aspects: first, the socio-cultural elements of slang and second, the layers of meaning added by her partial location. According to Bróna Murphy, expletives were non-neutral words that conveyed emotions and were more recurrent in male speech; moreover, her research highlighted that women in their 40s related this type of language to uneducated and lower class people (2009: 85, 93, 99). In this respect, O'Connor's coarse language is transgressing norms of gender and age. In addition, the singer herself explained the reasons why she 'excessively' cursed:

And because I speak very directly and have one of those faces that sometimes doesn't express what my feelings are or what my words are – I just look angry or pissed off. But I'm not. I'm an Irish woman. I invite anyone in America to

go to Ireland and study Irish women. I am your average Irish woman, particularly your average Dublin woman. We're hard women. We're soft women, as well, but we are hard and we don't fuck around. And we curse a lot. (Guccione, 2015)

Here, for this mainstream American magazine, her expletives were unintelligible inasmuch as its grid of intelligibility works within dominant ideology. As Haraway (1991) stated, the gaze mobilised the male position that occupied its privileged position by branding those identities excluded from hegemonic culture associated with capitalism and colonialism; thus, situated knowledges were fundamental to counter-attack the alleged objectivity of the gaze (188). From the perspective of mainstream culture, O'Connor's language in relation to her marked gender was not appropriate, turning her into an outsider, so she is distorting the notion of hegemonic culture as truly universal insofar as dominant ideology's fantasy of idealised femininity dismissed her political location and the possibilities of a counter-version of that ideal from her particular social enclave.

In the last part of this chapter, I will examine her agency in the negotiation of women's role in the re-writing of History, more specifically, about those issues concerned with historical events that have excluded women. The difficult task of this singer as a producer of a counter-historical-narrative also led her to design an artistic performance that called into question the historical linguistic category of the Irish 'famine' by articulating a crucial event of the legacy of British oppression as the trigger for current problems of mental health in today's Ireland.

A paradigmatic example is her media text “Famine” (1994), represented by the subsequent image below:



Figure 5.10 (“SinéadOConnor,” 2012)

This non-traditional form of producing History is a complex assemblage of signifying practices. Richard Dyer defined image as “a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs. This configuration may constitute the general image of stardom or of a particular star” (1979: 38). O’Connor’s “Famine” is one of the most significant examples of the complexity of a media text to articulate meaning. In it, the entanglement between the visual representation and the lyrics for producing a non-official version of the so-called “famine” and its psychological effects on the subsequent generations after 1852 are expressed in the following way:

OK, I want to talk about Ireland
Specifically I want to talk about the “famine”
About the fact that there never really was one
....
All of the other food
....

Were shipped out of the country under armed guard
To England while the Irish people starved

....

But they lose contact with the memory
And this leads to massive self-destruction
Alcoholism, drug addiction

....

We're suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder

....

I see the Irish

As a race like a child. (1-3, 6, 8-9, 17-19, 55, 64-65)

Throughout this artist's consciousness of exclusion from History and visibility, she has gradually moved closer to the notion of the de-centred posthuman subject. Rosi Braidotti (2013) pointed out that European Humanism had become a normative cultural matrix of intelligibility whose Eurocentrism was grounded on binary splits; as a result, it was necessary to constitute the marked Others (or difference) as abject bodies permeated by classificatory axes of differentiation: sexuality, race and gender, whose lives were not worth living (14-15). Braidotti's theorisation on Humanism supports O'Connor's counter-history, told from the perspective of a disposable body, as a form subverting and re-negotiating the male model of Historicity embodied by the English oppression as the representative of imperialist Humanism, pervasive in our Western culture. Indeed, the fact that O'Connor calls the Irish a "race" symbolises the status of Irish people in the British colonial system since as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the "famine" was an attempt of ethnic cleansing, thus Irish people were systematically racialized.

As regards alcohol abuse and mental health issues in Ireland, it has been suggested that, on the one hand, one of the effects of the "famine" was the increase of alcohol consumption amongst Irish people as a strategy to cope with starvation and, on the other

hand, it seemed that mental illness was one of the effects of the tremendous psychological stress caused by the Irish “famine” and Catholic repression; indeed, during the post-famine period the mental asylum and the prison were part of the same governmental system to discipline Irish population even when there was no evidence of insanity (O’Dwyer, 2001; Smith, 2016; Walsh, 2005: 22). These recent historical studies support O’Connor’s claims in her artistic performance articulating what had been excluded from History; a counter-truth that was aired out before prominent academic research was conducted or held a high profile in the public spotlight.

Moreover, the representation of two black people who use sign language to transmit O’Connor’s message highlights two important elements of the singer’s subjectivity. First, the aforementioned common legacy of colonial oppression that binds black and Irish people is displayed. Second, the singer’s attempt to contribute to the re-writing of History that counter-produces the official version and thus, the massacre of the Irish population through starvation is proclaimed. Finally, the inclusion of allusions to remembering proves that the production of a historical memory denied by dominant regimes is an integral part of her technique to re-write History from the perspective of the oppressed, and more specifically O’Connor’s, whose body is also marked by gender:

And if there ever is gonna be healing
There has to be remembering
And then grieving
So that there then can be forgiving
There has to be knowledge and understanding. (23-27)

Moreover, I want to stress here that her condition of a disposable body and “becoming-minoritarian” triggers her posthuman identity.

All the aforementioned constitutive elements of this artist's counter-celebrity identity consistently lead us—not surprisingly—to her ontological opposition to the imperialist male subject embodied by the British Empire; in fact, she anchors her subjectivity in the Easter Rising of 1916. According to Rosi Braidotti, resistance against linearity and memory was the *sine qua non* for the production of the posthuman nomadic subject, whose re-writing or re-telling of History challenged the fictitious unitary conception of absolute truth imposed in our Western humanist culture (2013: 167, 169). Braidotti's argument is suitable for the case of O'Connor insofar as her memories of childhood, collective memory of child abuse, mental health, and colonial oppression defied the reliability of the official version of History. In this light, one may read her performance of "The Foggy Dew" (1919) as a generative artistic device that actively re-articulates the disavowed history of the colonised bodies, by becoming the counter-national anthem within and/or against dominant discourses of Irish national identity. Importantly, in 2015 her performance of this rebel song—inextricably linked to the Easter Rising—at the entrance of the Irish fighter Conor McGregor at UFC 189 in Las Vegas symbolises her deeply rooted political subjectivity. The following image displays this idea:



Figure 5.11

(“Rich Bernal,” 2015)

From a queer perspective, O'Connor articulates a song that is rife with masculine codes that exclude Irish women from the 1916 Easter Rising, an exclusion encoded in the lyrics: "When armed line of marching men, in Squadrons passed me by" (3-4). In this performance, the artist materialises and mobilises an androgynous identity in a very masculine scenario that blurs the distinction between those spaces traditionally considered either feminine or masculine. It was Beatriz Preciado who defined the body as a prosthetic materiality of cumulative cultural biocodes whose dissidents can become hackers of gender to such an extent that they may transition and/or materialise the dominant male gender by displacing gender from its privileged position in master-discourses, thereby helping to transform it into biopolitical experimentation that is predicated on the mode of disidentification (2013: 395-397). This active political strategy of displacement must be interlinked with the conservative role assigned to women in post-independent Ireland. On this subject Gerardine Meaney pointed out:

Anxiety about one's fitness for a (masculine) role of authority, deriving from a history of defeat or helplessness, is assuaged by the assumption of sexual dominance. Women in these conditions become guarantors of their men's status, bearers of national honour and the scapegoats of national identity. They are not merely transformed into symbols of the nation, they become the territory over which power is exercised. The Irish obsession with the control of women's bodies by church, state, boards of ethics and judicial enquiries, has its roots in such anxieties. (1991: 7)

Within this context, through a performance anchored in a national identity which traditionally entailed the use of female bodies as a purifying device of the colonial past—a task symbolically accomplished by the Magdalene laundries—the artist moves within the continuum to claim her agency in the production of the collective memory of the nation. This indicates that she disarticulates that hold over her body as a territory of disciplinary cultural inscription, which means that her desexualised anatomy constitutes a site for political agency

of those female bodies that have been stigmatised when they drifted away from their familial roles as pure mothers and wives established by the Irish political agenda. In short, she displaces herself from marginality to the male centre of power in her urge to engage with independent nationalism.¹²⁶

It is important to stress that what emerged from her disruptive strategies and active agency as the embodiment of Irish collective memory that challenged the hegemonic version of truth was a counter-celebrity, whose “becoming-minoritarian” identity confronted the rigid Western classificatory regime that medicalised her behaviour as abject. As Foucault (1998) has pointed out, the figure of the hysterical female body was one of the underpinnings of 19th-century disciplinary societies, in which the ruling power invested these anatomies with prescriptive biopolitical codes as an attempt to control their sexuality to serve the interests of our Western capitalist societies (104). To put it another way, this gendered technique emerged as part of an array of mechanisms deployed to normalise and optimise the entire social body by deriving into the binary normal-deviant that domesticated the perverse through its exclusionary legibility (Foucault, 1998: 44,139). This Foucauldian notion rings true for O’Connor because this was precisely the mechanism used to domesticate the artist’s body and subjectivity.

In her letter to Joseph O’Connor, the singer herself described the way she was labelled as a “problem child” when her father brought her to a psychologist because she could not adapt to family life with him and her stepmother after a childhood of abuse (web). Throughout her artistic career, this technique became the norm; she has stated that “it became fashionable to call me crazy” (DiGiacomo, 2014). In addition, she has been categorised across the mainstream media as “the crazy woman in pop’s attic,” “mad” or a “troublemaker”

¹²⁶ The cover of her album *How About Be Me (and you be you)?* (2012) is a symbolic example of her notion of political identity and the role of Irish children in the construction of national identity. A picture of this cover has been included in the appendix to Chapter 5.

(Neill, 2015; Deevoy, 2014). Indeed as we discussed earlier, Miley Cyrus's response branding O'Connor's behaviour as the result of mental health to delegitimise O'Connor's statements on the American artist's over-sexualisation exemplifies the dominant ideology's strategy for disciplining the Irish artist's conduct. The pervasiveness of this disciplinary device deployed by the media reveals both the productive and 'radical' non-normativity of O'Connor and simultaneously, the media as a set of apparatuses governed by dominant discourses of identity aimed at the production of the "normal" body.

My account of the Irish artist's materiality of her body and subjectivity, profoundly rooted in the production of Irish national identity, has demonstrated that the complex interlinks among her role as the bearer of collective memory, personal transgenerational trauma—performatively reproduced through generations—and the desexualisation of her biopolitical morphology have enabled O'Connor to become the embodiment of the posthuman "becoming-minoritarian" that creatively counter-attacks Western master-discourses of the privileged subject.

On the whole, one might say that she has effectively materialised what Braidotti called the posthuman ethics. This scholar defined it as "an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical humanism, or from the moral universalism" (2013: 190). Thus, O'Connor has produced a posthuman counter-subjectivity far from the narcissistic individuality that characterises today's commodified celebrity culture by prioritising the dehumanised lives of Irish abused children over fame. Whereas celebrity is conceived as "the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere...celebrity status always implies a split between a private self and a public self (Rojek, 2001: 10-11), O'Connor has shattered the dynamics of the manufacturing of this cultural formation by becoming the quintessential counter-celebrity.

Finally, I would like to highlight the ways O'Connor's resistance has been dismissed and/or criticised as non-[post-] feminist. An example of this was a letter from the American singer-songwriter Amanda Palmer when the Irish artist accused Miley Cyrus of marketing her sexuality:

Dear Sinéad. I love you. I grew up worshipping your music and your bold attitude and, especially your refusal to sign up to the bullshit beauty standard...Here's where I think you're off target. Miley is, from what I can gather, in charge of her own show. She's writing the plot and signing the checks...and room for Miley to rip a page out of stripper culture and run around like a maniac for however long she wants to. (2013)

Within this context, celebrity culture as an apparatus that has assimilated postfeminism as an attempt to de-politicise and domesticate disruptive feminist discourses through selling the idea that female over-sexualisation is empowering and an effect of free choice, O'Connor's disloyalty alongside the counter-attack of postfeminist dominant discourses do not serve the interests of media mechanisms to maintain the meta-stability of heteronormativity. In this regard, the Spanish philosopher Beatriz Preciado (2013) identified what she called "state feminism" as that white liberal feminism that has been an accomplice of the mainstream culture in order to maintain dominant ideology intact (230-231). Therefore, I will conclude that Sinéad O'Connor's too much, too far posed a threat to the sophisticated postfeminist trap of empowering female celebrities that titillate the hegemonic male gaze. To put it simply, rephrasing Simone de Beauvoir and Gilbert and Gubar, O'Connor was not born "the crazy woman in pop's attic," this was the product of distorted ideological media manipulation.

Conclusions

This doctoral study established the need to examine the ways celebrity culture inextricably tied with mainstream mass media has manufactured and encoded dominant identities through visual-discursive practices predicated on the intersection of the technologies of gender, sexuality and race. Thus, it was aimed to verify if they produced bodies/subjectivities that continued reproducing and normalising the fictions of femininity and masculinity within the binary logic of the heteronormative regime alongside its normative grid of cultural intelligibility; that is to say a system with its pervasive tendency to impose the opposition between the normal and the abnormal.

In order to do that, this study concentrated on examining the complex representation of five musicians: Miley Cyrus, Nicki Minaj, Ricky Martin, Robbie Williams and Sinéad O'Connor from different social backgrounds, gender, ethnic origins and sexual orientation in the media, extracting data from manifold sources to avoid a simplistic account of the fabrication of their star image. Data was examined through the lens of queer and posthuman theories entangled with the major paradigms of celebrity studies. Moreover, their agency in the crafting of their identity was taken into consideration by assessing their discourses—encoded in interviews and letters—and the visual construction of their anatomies through the use of the social media. Once the data has been analysed, I proceed to draw the overall conclusions based upon the identities materialised by the aforementioned artists.

By focusing on Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj, this analysis revealed that they produce feminine subjects that succumb to the precept of white hegemonic femininity, which was not void of tensions and contradictions. The former, anchored in dominant ideology with its privileged status, attempted to take distance from Hannah Montana (an idealised fiction of femininity produced by Disney) as the embodiment of American white hegemonic

femininity. However, the attributes incorporated to her performances—especially the appropriation of black female and male bodies and elements of black culture—have proved that, on the one hand, she has internalised her dominant ontological status as well as racist codes that account for the supremacy of race and, on the other, the use of those white heteronormative codes through the over-sexualisation and infantilisation of her body have turned her into the epitome of postfeminist culture. This said, Cyrus has embodied an upgraded version of femininity of old stereotypes that serve the interests of neoliberal feminism, commodity culture and 21st-century capitalism.

It is also undeniable that she has attempted to fall outside the heteronormative mould through the deployment of some visual-discursive strategies that disrupted the pillars of dominant ideology, but those representations have clashed with powerful hegemonic deep-seated values as well as techniques that have maintained the pathos of heterosexuality intact. In other words, she is trapped within the normative identity politics linked to the postfeminist phenomenon. In our analysis of this artist, we have also explored the dangers of becoming a celebrity integrating bodies marked by different axes of differentiation in her spectacle without adopting a critical perspective that integrates intersectionality. Consequently, the result was the dehumanisation of those excluded from the normative social order. Through this pop star, we have noted how [white-hegemonic] postfeminist discourses are deeply ingrained in Western popular culture in the guise of female artists' sexual emancipation.

The latter, Nicki Minaj, coming from a non-privileged status whose body is doubly marked—by gender and race—has negotiated her identity as a black female rapper in a male-dominated music genre. If Cyrus reinforced those signifiers that promote a new version of white femininity without disrupting the stability of gender, Minaj relentlessly reproduced an upgraded version of the fiction of black femininity fabricated by the West during the slavery era, whose main features are fragmentation, mirroring white norms, sexual bestiality and

exoticism. Significantly, she does not merely materialise the racist illusion of black female anatomies, but so do those black women and men integrated into her spectacle. Minaj becomes a postfeminist subject whose racialization makes her occupy a sub-postfeminist ontological status that contributes to the maintenance of the hierarchy amongst women; in this respect, normative white femininity prescribes the dominant qualities that a woman must have in society.

Similarly to Cyrus, Minaj produced some powerful performances that attempted to negotiate the cultural meanings inscribed on her body/subjectivity along the scale of differentiation produced by Western culture. Nevertheless, the performative reproduction of the new version of the (ex-)captive black woman dismissed the possibilities of creating a powerful black female consciousness and anatomy that deviated from the delusional fiction created by her (white heterosexual male) oppressor. In the light of this discussion, I argue that both simulations of femininities complement one another: Cyrus as the mirror of 21st-century hegemonic femininity and Minaj as the reflection that looks in that mirror. And at the same time, both artists have become the materialisation of the improved versions of hypersexualised women that emerged out of heteronormative codes. Notwithstanding this, to state that these two singers have fixed identities would entail to fall into the trap of the mechanisms of surveillance of the mainstream mass media inasmuch as through the complex examination of their oeuvre, we have verified that those tensions and contradictions implicit in their image star as already mentioned mobilise a much more fluid identity than the one legitimised by the media.

The study of masculinities has also been included in this doctoral research through the Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin and the English pop star Robbie Williams. Although they come from different ethnic backgrounds (Martin as a Latino and Williams fixed to dominant ideology) and sexual orientations—whereas the former is homosexual, the latter is

heterosexual—, the two of them have contributed to the reinforcement of heterosexuality as the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ sexual identity, which entailed the appropriation of women’s bodies and their objectification, subject to the control of their gaze.

Regarding Martin, we have examined the ways he internalised the gaze of dominant ideology to conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, especially through the self-domestication of his hip moves as a corporeal sign that displayed his otherness in mainstream pop culture. Indeed, he has been able to relentlessly reproduce heteronormative plots that were plausible despite his non-normative sexual identity. Unlike Cyrus and Minaj, the physical transformations in Martin’s body display his capacity to adapt to the re-adjusted version of masculinity distributed by the media and which reinforces those attributes associated with masculinity in order to satisfy the demands of the male-dominated consumer capitalism. Therefore, his refined masculinity has conformed to the precepts of the heteronormative social order that assimilates those anatomies branded as non-normative into its system of cultural intelligibility in order to secure its stability. I also contend that the perpetuation of this old fantasy has entailed the encoding of misogyny in his media texts. In this regard, women were reduced to props through the sexualisation of their bodies. Thus, they were interpellated through visual enactments that turned them into objects to titillate the male gaze.

Like Martin, Williams legitimises the old fantasy of heterosexual love and compulsory coupledness. Nevertheless, it is true that the identity/body of Williams has not been so strictly monitored insofar as his subjectivity is profoundly embedded in dominant discourses. In this postfeminist moment, in which women are encouraged to be sexually available, Williams’s cultural product has mutated into the modern ‘dandy’ whose visual-discursive renderings uncover the hierarchy of gender and the maintenance of harmful stereotypes about women, even condoning gender-based violence. Therefore, these two pop

icons' negotiation of masculinity entails the maintenance of gender binaries, hegemonic masculinity—with slight concessions if the subject is not marked by axes of differentiation—and gender conformity and consequently, they vigorously support heteronormativity backing up the binary logic. Importantly, both male singers have used techniques of body-building and physical modification; thus, they fit the mould of current Western masculinity that is meta-stabilised as an assertion of male-dominance and to serve the interests of an advanced capitalism that has transformed gender into a profitable product.

Through the examination of these four artists, my argument here is that the 21st-century upgraded simulations of femininities and masculinities are constructed within those heteronormative codes that normalise compulsory heterosexuality; they perpetuate the complementarity of sexes and the supremacy of the white race by excluding other versions that could undermine this political regime. In this regard, the control over the perpetuation of the normative social order is maintained by both female and male artists, who function as mirrors for audiences in a globalised world.

In relation to the techniques employed to produce their identities/bodies, the data that has been analysed demonstrate that there is a long history behind those technologies of fabricating the political body, which have gradually mutated in the third millennium in order to have hold over the population. Amongst those devices, we find the pervasiveness of classification, homogenisation, the principle of panoptic surveillance, confession, the political category of identity, gender, racialization process, the medicalisation of the abnormal and normative sexual identity. If we focus on surveillance, unlike in the 19th-century, this doctoral thesis has proved that these celebrities have internalised monitoring. Thus, the media have turned into a device of producing/distributing fluid and ultra-rapid codes that follow the principle of the Panopticon, aimed to classify these celebrities into more rigid categories that do not accurately correspond to their identities as an attempt to enforce them to conform to

the imperatives of heteronormativity. Moreover, we have examined through the data gathered how 21st-century gender, race and sexuality have become commodities to trade on them, that is, they have been transformed into capitalist products for massive consumption and to produce surplus value in the economic marketplace. This accounts for the mutation of the technologies of the body. Dominant ideology has strategically thrived in turning political categories into tangible-material realities that fuse with the body and that can be commercialised through these artists that are a mould to be massively reproduced. For example, the mainstreaming of twerking proves how Cyrus's cultural product mobilises corporeal acts that are popularised in Western culture. Additionally, the examination of the aforementioned celebrities has also demonstrated that the stability and perpetuation of heteronormativity is dependent on gender, race and sexuality since the hegemonic subject is white, male and heterosexual and his object of desire: women must materialise whiteness and heterosexuality as the bearers of national identity. The facts that Minaj mobilises the racist identity created by the West and that Martin succumbs to the domestication of his hip moves [sign of his otherness] uphold this idea.

Nevertheless, the Irish artist Sinéad O'Connor has been included in this dissertation as a model of resistance against master-discourses and the materiality of the hegemonic femininity. Her case study shows that the production of a posthuman subject who interpellates an identity within and across binary boundaries, which confounds the male gaze, is indeed possible. Her "situated knowledge" anchored in Ireland with a colonial legacy that reduced Irish people to disposable bodies for the dominant ideology and for one of the traditional heteronormative institutions par excellence, the Catholic Church, her desexualisation—that materialised an androgynous morphology—, her hybrid religious beliefs, and the articulation of taboos on sexuality and mental health issues have derived into a subjectivity that has challenged hegemonic cultural meanings. These elements account for

the process through which she is the embodiment of the “becoming-minoritarian” and how she became a counter-celebrity for two major reasons. First, her identity has rejected commodification. And second, she has stepped outside of the pivotal role of celebrities (entertainment) insofar as her art is a form of political activism.

This study has also identified the mechanisms used by the mainstream popular culture to normalise non-normative subjectivities. The medicalisation of O’Connor’s behaviour and counter-discourses has been the main technique employed to police her disruptive conducts. The labelling of O’Connor as “mad” was deployed to delegitimise her actions and resistance against heteronormativity so that the public sphere turned into an unlivable space for the Irish singer. Therefore, it has been observed that celebrity culture and mainstream mass media fiercely counter-attack when the performer does not play the pivotal role as an entertainer, above all if the artist’s practices pose a real threat to the normative social order. In the case of O’Connor, her challenge was intensified by bearing the mark of gender and her political location in a postcolonial country, whose bodies had historically been appropriated by the dominant subject. Surprisingly, despite her successful desexualisation and relentless political activism, it has been noted that some voices self-identified as ‘feminist’ have rejected O’Connor as a model of resistance. This is a noticeable evidence of how postfeminism has been integrated into dominant discourses that legitimise Cyrus and Minaj as models of empowerment for women.

So far, this qualitative study has enabled to demonstrate the ways heteronormativity as a meta-stable system of domination is gradually incorporating new institutions for maintaining its hegemony and privileges untouched. Thus, we should not underestimate the role of celebrity culture in the reinforcement of the hierarchy of gender. The analysis of celebrities included in this study—except for Sinéad O’Connor—has revealed that the role of

their virtual simulations—even when they articulate contradictions that disrupt the compulsory fixity of identity—is to reproduce dominant identities.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that this research project presents some limitations. This study shows some restrictions in terms of generalisations of results because of the limited number of artists included in the corpus. In addition, findings concerning audiences have not been taken into consideration in order to examine the effects on spectators' subjectivities. This being said, what this dissertation has revealed is that postfeminism seems to be the dominant tendency in popular culture, which has aimed to de-politicise the powerful micropolitics of feminism and discourses on intersectionality inasmuch as they can create livable interstices for those who resist the imperatives of the current system of domination. To conclude, this dissertation also opens possibilities for future research in which comparative studies are conducted and narratives that disrupt the dominant tendency in celebrity studies dominated by postfeminist discourses may be created.

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&checksum=E21E6C4A31EC80EF72E4B6CD5765D2DB](http://2/13822373_073_01-02_s01_text.pdf?expires=1494460061&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=E21E6C4A31EC80EF72E4B6CD5765D2DB)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Material Connected to Chapter 1

A.1.1. Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond

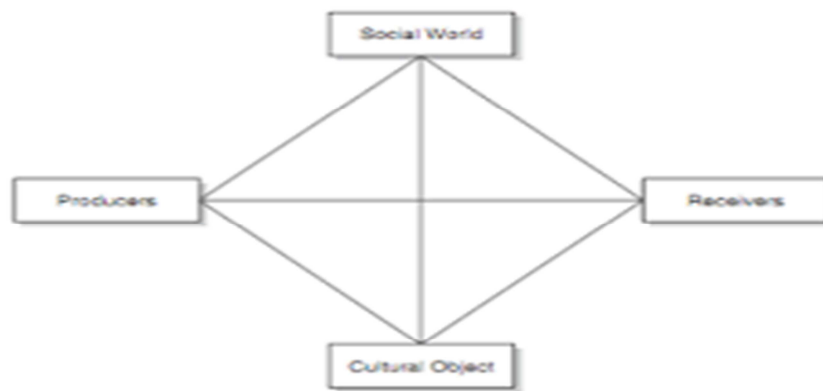
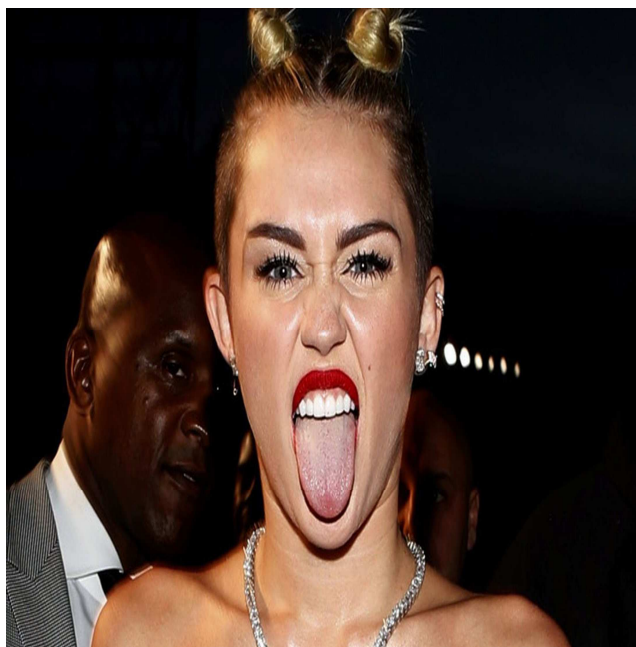


Figure 1.1 The Cultural Diamond

(Griswold, 2013: 16)

A.1.2. Profiles of the artists

Miley Cyrus



(Gaudin, 2014)

Name: Miley Cyrus

Age: 24

Nationality: American

Professional Activity: singer

Key albums:

- *Can't Be Tamed* (2010)
- *Bangerz* (2013)
- *Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz* (2015)

Social Media: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. ("Miley Cyrus," n.d.)

Nicki Minaj



(Gallo, 2014)

Name: Nicki Minaj

Age: 34

Nationality: Trinidadian-born American

Professional Activity: rapper

Key albums:

- *Pink Friday* (2010)
- *Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded* (2012)
- *The Pinkprint* (2014)

Social media: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. (“Biography.com,” 2017)

Ricky Martin



(“Guioteca,” 2015)

Name: Ricky Martin

Age: 45

Nationality: Puerto Rican

Professional activity: singer

Key albums:

- *Vuelve* (1998)
- *Ricky Martin* (1999)
- *A Quien Quiera Escuchar* (2015)

Social media: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. (“Biography.com,” 2017)

Robbie Williams



(Robertson, 2013)

Name: Robbie Williams

Age: 43

Nationality: English

Professional activity: singer

Key albums:

- *Life thru a Lens* (1997)
- *Sing When You're Winning* (2000)
- *Escapology* (2002)
- *The Heavy Entertainment Show* (2016)

Social media: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. ("Biography.com," 2016)

Sinéad O'Connor



("Celebrity Network")

Name: Sinéad O'Connor

Age: 50

Nationality: Irish (Republic of Ireland)

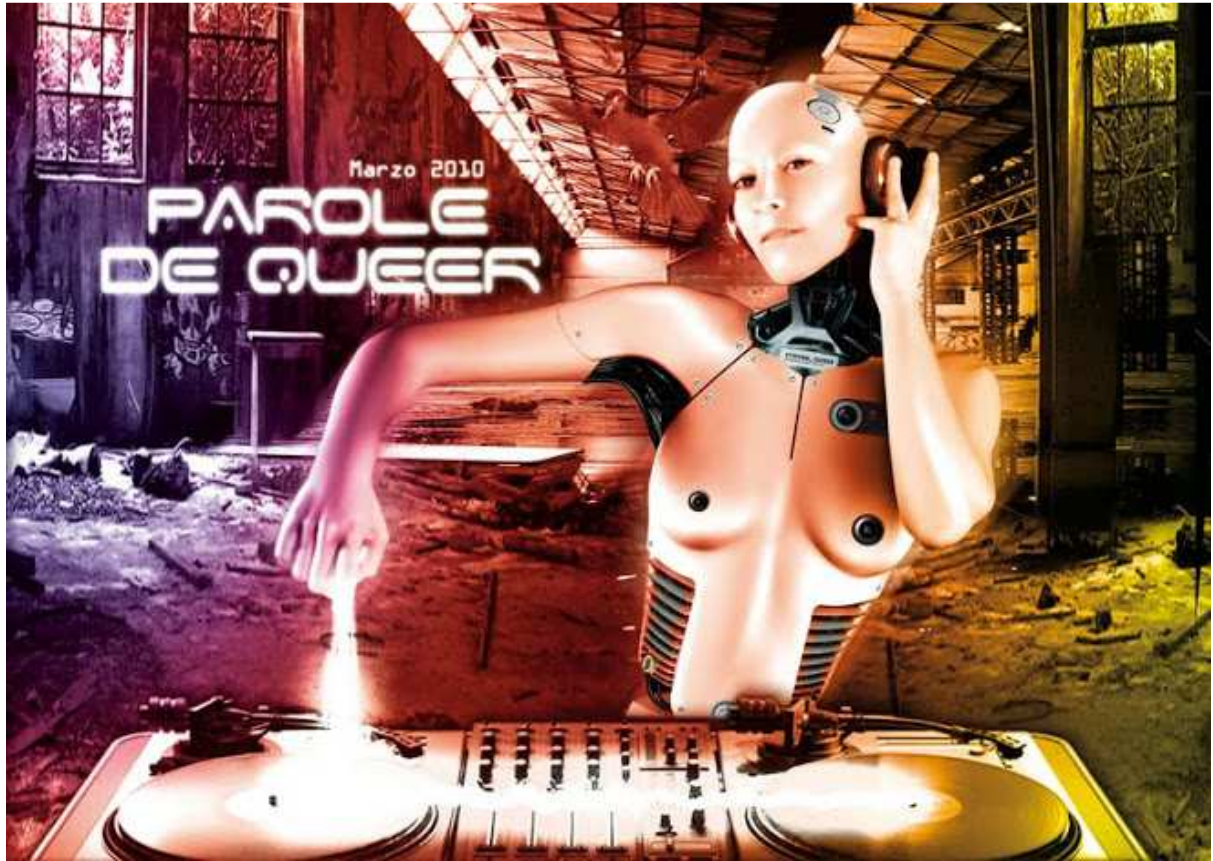
Professional activity: singer and song-writer

Key albums:

- *The Lion and the Cobra* (1987)
 - *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* (1990)
 - *Faith and Courage* (2000)
 - *I'm Not Bossy, I'm the Boss* (2014)
- ("AllMusi," n.d.)
-

Appendix 2: Material Connected to Chapter 2

A.2.1. Image that illustrates the current “cyborg ontology.”



(“Parole de Queer”)

Appendix 3: Material Connected to Chapter 3

A.3.1. Lyrics of “Can’t Be Tamed” (2010)

For those who don't know me, I can get a bit crazy Have to get my way, yep 24 hours a day, 'cause I'm hot like that Every guy, everywhere just gives me mad attention Like I'm under inspection I always gets a ten, 'cause I'm built like that I go through guys like money flying out the hands They try to change me, but they realize they can't And every tomorrow is a day I never plan If you're gonna be my man understand I can't be tamed, I can't be tamed I can't be blamed, I can't, can't I can't, can't be tamed I can't be changed, I can't be tamed I can't be, can't, I can't be tamed If there was a question about my intentions, I'll tell ya I'm not here to sell ya or tell you to go to hell I'm not a brat like that I'm like a puzzle, but all of my pieces are jagged If you can understand this, we can make some magic I'm wrong like that I wanna fly, I wanna drive, I wanna go I wanna be a part of something I don't know And if you try to hold me back, I might explode Baby, by now you should know I can't be tamed, I can't be tamed I can't be blamed, I can't, can't I can't, can't be tamed I can't be changed, I can't be tamed I can't be, can't, I can't be tamed	Well, I'm not a trick you play I'm wired a different way I'm not a mistake, I'm not a fake, it's set in my DNA Don't change me, don't change me Don't change me, don't change me (I can't be tamed) I wanna fly, I wanna drive, I wanna go I wanna to be a part of something I don't know And if you try to hold me back, I might explode Baby, by now you should know I can't be tamed, I can't be tamed I can't be blamed, I can't, can't I can't, can't be tamed I can't be changed, I can't be tamed I can't be, can't, I can't be tamed

A.3.2. Image from “Can’t Be Tamed” that illustrates how Cyrus is forcibly restrained.



(“MileyCyrusVEVO,” 2010)

A.3.3. Lyrics of “Wrecking Ball” (2013)

We clawed, we chained, our hearts in vain	Yeah you, you wreck me
We jumped, never asking why	I came in like a wrecking ball
We kissed, I fell under your spell	Yeah, I just closed my eyes and swung
A love no one could deny	Left me crashing in a blazing fall
Don't you ever say I just walked away	All you ever did was wreck me
I will always want you	Yeah, you wreck me
I can't live a lie, running for my life	I never meant to start a war
I will always want you	I just wanted you to let me in
I came in like a wrecking ball	And instead of using force
I never hit so hard in love	I guess I should've let you win
All I wanted was to break your walls	I never meant to start a war
All you ever did was wreck me	I just wanted you to let me in
Yeah you, you wreck me	I guess I should've let you win
I put you high up in the sky	Don't you ever say I just walked away
And now, you're not coming down	I will always want you
It slowly turned, you let me burn	I came in like a wrecking ball
And now, we're ashes on the ground	I never hit so hard in love
Don't you ever say I just walked away	All I wanted was to break your walls
I will always want you	All you ever did was wreck me
I can't live a lie, running for my life	Yeah you, you wreck me
I will always want you	I came in like a wrecking ball
I came in like a wrecking ball	Yeah, I just closed my eyes and swung
I never hit so hard in love	Left me crashing in a blazing fall

All I wanted was to break your walls
All you ever did was wreck me

All you ever did was wreck me
Yeah, you wreck me

A.3.4. Image of Cyrus's 'manspreading' posture



("Lauvi iHD," 2014)

A.3.5. Images from Miley Cyrus's 2013 VMA performance



("MTV TELEVISION," 2015)



(“MTV TELEVISION,” 2015)

A.3.6. Lyrics of “We Can’t Stop” (2013)

It’s our party we can do what we want
 It’s our party we can say what we want
 It’s our party we can love who we want
 We can kiss who we want
 We can screw who we want
 Red cups and sweaty bodies everywhere
 Hands in the air like we don’t care
 Cause we came to have so much fun now
 Bet somebody here might get some now
 If you’re not ready to go home
 Can I get a "hell no"?
 Cause we gonna go all night
 Till we see the sunlight, alright
 So la-da-di-da-di we like to party
 Dancing with Molly
 Doing whatever we want
 This is our house
 This is our rules
 And we can’t stop
 And we won’t stop
 Can’t you see it’s we who own the night?
 Can’t you see it we who bout that life
 And we can’t stop

And everyone in line in the bathroom
 Trying to get a line in the bathroom
 We all so turnt up here
 Getting turnt up yea yea
 So la-da-di-da-di we like to party
 Dancing with Molly
 Doing whatever we want
 This is our house
 This is our rules
 And we can’t stop
 And we won’t stop
 Can’t you see it’s we who own the night?
 Can’t you see it we who bout’ that life
 And we can’t stop
 And we won’t stop
 We run things, things don’t run we
 Don’t take nothing from nobody
 It’s our party we can do what we want
 It’s our party we can say what we want
 It’s our party we can love who we want
 We can kiss who we want
 We can screw who we want
 It’s our party we can do what we want to!

And we won't stop
We run things, things don't run we
Don't take nothing from nobody
It's our party we can do what we want
It's our party we can say what we want
It's our party we can love who we want
We can kiss who we want
We can screw who we want
To my homegirls here with the big butt
Shaking it like we at a strip club
Remember only God can judge ya
Forget the haters, cause somebody loves ya

It's our house we can love who we want to!
It's our song we can sing if we want to!
It's my mouth I can say what I want to
Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Eh!
And we can't stop
And we won't stop
We run things, things don't run we
Don't take nothing from nobody

A.3.7. Image from Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda" (2014) that performatively displays her buttocks.



(“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2014)

A.3.8. Nicki Minaj's Instagram post: she represents herself as a "prostitute."



A.3.9. Lyrics of "Super Bass" (2010)

This one is for the boys with the booming system Top down, AC with the cooler system When he come up in the club, he be blazin' up Got stacks on deck like he savin' up And he ill, he real, he might gotta deal He pop bottles and he got the right kind of build He cold, he dope, he might sell coke He always in the air, but he never fly coach He a muthafuckin trip, trip, sailor of the ship, ship When he make it drip, drip kiss him on the lip, lip That's the kind of dude I was lookin' for And yes you'll get slapped if you're lookin', ho I said, excuse me you're a hell of a guy I mean my, my, my, my you're like pelican fly I mean, you're so shy and I'm loving your tie You're like slicker than the guy with the thing on his eye, oh Yes I did, yes I did Somebody please tell em who the eff I is I am Nicki Minaj, I mack them dudes up, back	Excuse me, you're a hell of a guy you know I really got a thing for American guys I mean, sigh, sickenin' eyes I can tell that you're in touch with your feminine side Yes I did, yes I did, somebody please tell him who the eff I is I am Nicki Minaj, I mack them dudes up, back coupes up, and chuck the deuce up Boy you got my heartbeat running away Beating like a drum and it's coming your way Can't you hear that boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass Got that super bass boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass Yeah that's that super bass Boom,boom,boom.... Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass he got that super bass Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass, he got that super bass See I need you in my life for me to stay No, no, no, no, no I know you'll stay

coupes up, and chuck the deuce up
 Boy you got my heartbeat running away
 Beating like a drum and it's coming your way
 Can't you hear that boom, badoom, boom,
 boom, badoom, boom, bass
 Got that super bass boom, badoom, boom,
 boom, badoom, boom, bass
 Yeah that's that super bass
 Boom,boom,boom,boom.....
 Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom,
 bass he got that super bass
 Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom,
 bass, he got that super bass
 This one is for the boys in the polos
 Entrepreneur niggas and the moguls
 He could ball with the crew, he could solo
 But I think I like him better when he dolo
 And I think I like him better with the fitted cap
 on
 He ain't even gotta try to put the mack on
 He just gotta give me that look, when he give
 me that look
 Then the panties comin' off, off, uh

No, no, no, no, no don't go away
 Boy you got my heartbeat runnin' away
 Don't you hear that heartbeat comin' your
 way
 Oh it be like, boom, badoom, boom, boom,
 badoom, boom, bass
 Can't you hear that boom, badoom, boom,
 boom, badoom, boom, bass
 Boy you got my heartbeat running away
 Beating like a drum and it's coming your
 way
 Can't you hear that boom, badoom, boom,
 boom, badoom, boom, bass
 Got that super bass boom, badoom, boom,
 boom, badoom, boom, bass
 Yeah that's that super bass
 Boom,boom,boom.....
 Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom,
 boom, bass he got that super bass
 Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom,
 boom, bass, he got that super bass

A.3.10. Image from “Super Bass” (2010): the representation of black female’s “carnal lust.”



(“NickiMinajAtVEVO,” 2011)

A.3.11. Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" (1983)

I come home in the morning light	They just wanna
My mother says, "When you gonna live your life right?"	They just wanna...
Oh mother dear, we're not the fortunate ones	(Girls just wanna have fun...)
And girls—they wanna have fun	Girls...
Oh, girls just wanna have fun	Girls just wanna have fun...
The phone rings in the middle of the night	When the working
My father yells, "What you gonna do with your life?"	When the working day is done
Oh daddy dear, you know you're still number one	Oh, when the working day is done
But girls—they wanna have fun	Oh, girls...
Oh, girls just wanna have...	Girls just wanna have fun...
That's all they really want	They just wanna
Some fun	They just wanna...
When the working day is done	(Girls just wanna have fun...)
Oh, girls—they wanna have fun	Girls...
Oh, girls just wanna have fun....	Girls just wanna have fun...
Girls	They just wanna
They want	(When the working...)
Wanna have fun	They just wanna...
Girls	(When the working day is done...)
Wanna have...	They just wanna
Some boys take a beautiful girl	They just wanna...
And hide her away from the rest of the world	(Girls...)
I wanna be the one to walk in the sun	(Oh, when the working day is done)
Oh, girls—they wanna have fun	(Oh, girls...)
Oh, girls just wanna have...	(Girls just wanna have fun...)
That's all they really want	Girls just wanna have fun...
Some fun	They just wanna...
When the working day is done	They just wanna...
Oh, girls—they wanna have fun	They just wanna...
Oh, girls just wanna have fun...	[Fades]
Girls	
They want	
Wanna have fun	
Girls	
Wanna have	
They just wanna	
They just wanna...	
(Girls...)	

They just wanna
(Girls just wanna have fun...)
They just wanna...
(Girls just wanna have fun...)
Girls just wanna have fun...
They just wanna
They just wanna...
They just wanna
They just wanna...
(Girls...)

A.3.12. Nicki Minaj's Instagram post: the embodiment of the "living doll."



A.3.13. Lyrics of “Pound the Alarm” (2012)

Oh, oh, oh	I just want you tonight, night
Come fill my glass up a little more	Baby, we won't do it for life
We 'bout to get up and burn this floor	Music makes me high
You know we getting hotter, and hotter	Oh, oh, oh
Sexy, and hotter, let's shut it down	Come fill my glass up a little more
Yo, what I gotta do to show these girls that I	We 'bout to get up and burn this floor
own them?	You know we getting hotter, and hotter
Some call me Nicki, and some call me Roman	Sexy, and hotter, let's shut it down
Skeeza, pleeza, I'm in Ibiza	Pound the alarm!
Giuseppe Zanotti, my own sneaker	Pound the alarm!
Sexy, sexy that's all I do	Pound the alarm
If you need a bad bitch	Pound the alarm!
Let me call a few	Pound the alarm!
Pumps on, and the little mini-skirts is out	Pound the alarm!
I see some good girls, I'mma turn 'em out	Oh, oh, oh
Ok bottle, sip, bottle, guzzle	Come fill my glass up a little more
I'm a bad bitch, no muzzle, hey?	We 'bout to get up and burn this floor
Bottle, sip, bottle, guzzle	You know we getting hotter, and hotter
I'm a bad bitch, no muzzle, let's go	Sexy, and hotter, let's shut it down
Music makes me high	Pound the alarm!
Oh, oh, oh	Pound the alarm!
Come fill my glass up a little more	Pound the alarm!
We 'bout to get up and burn this floor	
You know we getting hotter, and hotter	
Sexy, and hotter, let's shut it down	
Pound the alarm!	
Pound the alarm!	
I wanna do it for the night, night	
So get me now, and knock this over	
I wanna do it like you like, like	
Come get me, baby, we're not getting younger	

A.3.14. Image from “Monster”: the representation of black women’s “bestiality.”



(“Os the3 Polemics,” 2016)

A.3.15. Nicki Minaj’s verse [3] in “Monster” (2010)

Pull up in the monster automobile, gangsta
With a bad bitch that came from Sri Lanka
Yeah I'm in that Tonka color of Willy Wonka
You could be the king but watch the queen
conquer
OK, first things first I'll eat your brains
Then I'm a start rocking gold teeth and fangs
Cause that's what a motherfucking monster do
Hair dresser from Milan that's the monster 'do
Monster Giuseppe heel, that's the monster shoe
Young Money is the roster and a monster crew
And I'm all up, all up, all up in the bank with
the funny face
And if I'm fake, I ain't notice cause my money
ain't
So let me get this straight, wait, I'm the rookie?
But my features and my shows ten times your
pay?
50K for a verse, no album out
Yeah, my money's so tall that my Barbiez got
to climb it
Hotter than a Middle Eastern climate, violent
Tony Matterhorn, dutty wine it, wylin'

Nicki on them titties when I sign it
That's how these niggas so one-track-
minded
But really really I don't give a F-U-C-K
Forget Barbie, fuck Nicki cause she's fake
She on a diet but her pockets eating
cheesecake
And I'll say bride of Chucky is child's play
Just killed another career, it's a mild day
Besides 'Ye, they can't stand besides me
I think me, you and Am should ménage
Friday
Pink wig, thick ass, give 'em whiplash
I think big, get cash, make 'em blink fast
Now look at what you just saw, this is what
you live for
Aaaah, I'm a motherfucking monster

A.3.16. Nicki Minaj's mirror scene at the 54th Annual Grammy Awards



(“Marcos Monster,” 2012)

A.3.17. Lyrics of “Roman Holiday” (2012)

Take your medication, Roman	Take your medication, Roman
Take a short vacation, Roman	Take a short vacation, Roman
You'll be okay	You'll be okay
You need to know your station, Roman	You need to know your station, Roman
Some alterations on your clothes and your brain	Some alterations on your clothes and your brain
Take a little break, little break	Take a little break, little break
From your sanity	From your sanity
There is so much you can take, you can take	There is so much you can take, you can take
I know how bad you need a Roman holiday	I know how bad you need a Roman holiday
Roman holiday, a Roman holiday	Roman holiday, a Roman holiday
You done, you tight?	Come all ye faithful
You suck at life?	Joyful and triumphant
You don't want a round three? You done suffered twice	I am Roman Zolanski
Worship the queen and you might could pass	Come all ye faithful
Keep it real, these bitches couldn't wipe my ass	Joyful and triumphant
Anyway, stylist, go get Bvlgari	I am Roman Zolanski
I am the ultimate Svengali	Come all ye faithful
You, you bitches can't even spell that	Joyful and triumphant
You, you hoes buggin' - repel that	I am Roman Zolanski
Let me tell you this, sister	Talking bout me, you talking about me?
I am, I am colder than a blister	I dare a motherfucker to be talking about me
Cause my flow's so sick, and I'm a lunatic	That bitch must be smokin' a couple of OZs
And this can't be cured with no Elixir	They want the outline, I give them a goatee
Cause y'all know who the fuck, what the fuck I do	Goddamn motherfucker, you talking about

I done put the pressure to every thug I knew
Quack, quack to a duck and a chicken too
Put the hyena in a freakin' zoo
Take your medication, Roman
Take a short vacation, Roman
You'll be okay
You need to know your station, Roman
Some alterations on your clothes and your brain
Take a little break, little break
From your sanity
There is so much you can take, you can take
I know how bad you need a Roman holiday
Roman holiday, a Roman holiday
Witch, twitch, bitch!
Motherfucking right, this is World War 6
This right here might make a bitch die
And this right here is gonna make a bitch cry
And if we being honest I am such a great guy
And this what I do when a bitch breaks flock
I'mma put her in a dungeon under, under
No them bitches ain't eating, they dying of hunger
Motherfucker I need
Who the fuck is this hoe?
And yes, maybe just a touch of tourettes
Get my wigs, Terrence, go and get my beret

me?
I dare a motherfucker to be talking about me
That bitch must be smokin' a couple of OCs
A-buh-buh-buh now give then a goatee
Take your medication, Roman
Take a short vacation, Roman
You'll be okay
You need to know your station, Roman
Some alterations on your clothes and your brain
Take a little break, little break
From your sanity
There is so much you can take, you can take
I know how bad you need a Roman holiday
Roman holiday, a Roman holiday

Appendix 4: Material Connected to Chapter 4

A.4.1. Lyrics of “La Bomba” (1998)

Es una bebida Que va cambiando tu vida
Una gotita de nada Te vuelve loca
Loca divertida
Agua de risa Con unas gotas de rosa
Y una aceituna sabrosa
Y en lo caliente Esa es la bomba
Muevete mamita Que me vuelvo loco
Emborrachadita de la bomba estas
Cosa Linda, Cosa Mona Sube, sube que la bomba va
Bum, bum, dando media vuelta
Bum, bum, otra vuelta mas
Bum, bum, y en cada esquina nena dame mas
Que noche con vida
Intensamente vivida
Te vas quedando colgada
Inofensiva Pura enamorada
Mira guapa Sale volando la ropa
Sigue bailando la luna
Luna gatuna Esa es la bomba
Muevete mamita

A.4.2. Lyrics of “La Mordidita” (2015)

Ihhh-yo!	Quiero pensar, que no eres real
Ihhh-ye!	Me parece natural, letal, así te pones a bailar
Sonó la campana y el fin de semana se deja ver	No te pones freno cuando te pones a sudar
(Sha-la-la, la-la-la)	Vamo' a lo low, para sentir tu flow
Vestido, de traje, lujuria salvaje bajo mi piel	Pa' enseñarte niña, pa' llamar la atención
Si Dios puso la manzana fue para morder	Te mantiene en tensión, sin bajar la presión
Ay, Dios! Pequemo' abrazaditos hasta el amanecer	El sudor tiene cura pa' frenar la tensión
Llego la fiesta, pa' tu boquita	Dé-ja-me moderte, estoy vampiro bien demente
Toda la noche, todito el día	Dé-ja-me moderte, te lo juro y si la gente
Vamo' a bañarnos en la orillita	Dé-ja-me moderte, bien despacito y búscame
Que la marea está pica'ita-ita-ita	Dé-ja-me moderte, amarradito bien demente
Una mordidita, una mordidita	Llego la fiesta, pa' tu boquita
Una mordidita, de tu boquita	Toda la noche, todito el día
Una mordidita, una mordidita	Vamo' a bañarnos en la orillita
Una mordidita, de tu boquita	Que la marea está pica'ita-ita-ita
Tus labios, mis dientes	Una mordidita, una mordidita
Bocado crujiente, rico pastel	Una mordidita, de tu boquita
	Una mordidita, una mordidita

Fuego en tus pupilas, tu cuerpo destila tequila y miel	Una mordidita
Si Dios puso la manzana fue para morder	Está pica'ita-ita-ita
Ay, Dios! Pequemo' abrazaditos hasta el amanecer	Está pica'ita-ita-itaLlego la fiesta, pa' tu boquita
Llego la fiesta, pa' tu boquita	Toda la noche, todito el día
Toda la noche, todito el día	Vamo' a bañarnos en la orillita
Vamo' a bañarnos en la orillita	Que la marea está pica'ita-ita-ita
Que la marea está pica'ita-ita-ita	
Una mordidita, una mordidita	
Una mordidita, de tu boquita	
Una mordidita, una mordidita	
Una mordidita, de tu boquita	

A.4.3. Lyrics of “Livin’ La Vida Loca” (1999)

She's into superstitions	She'll make you take your clothes off
Black cats and voodoo dolls	And go dancing in the rain
I feel a premonition	She'll make you live her crazy life
That girl's gonna make me fall	But she'll take away your pain
She's into new sensations	Like a bullet to your brain
New kicks in the candlelight	Come on!
She's got a new addiction	Upside, inside out
For every day and night	She's livin la vida loca
She'll make you take your clothes off	She'll push and pull you down
And go dancing in the rain	Livin la vida loca
She'll make you live her crazy life	Her lips are devil red
But she'll take away your pain	And her skin's the color mocha
Like a bullet to your brain	She will wear you out
Come on!	Livin' la vida loca
Upside, inside out	Come on!
She's livin la vida loca	Livin' la vida loca
She'll push and pull you down	Come on!
Livin la vida loca	She's livin' la vida loca
Her lips are devil red	Upside, inside out
And her skin's the color mocha	She's livin la vida loca
She will wear you out	She'll push and pull you down
Livin' la vida loca	Livin' la vida loca
Come on!	Her lips are devil red
Livin' la vida loca	And her skin's the color mocha
Come on!	She will wear you out
She's livin' la vida loca	Livin' la vida loca

Woke up in new york city in a funky cheap hotel She took my heart And she took my money She must've slipped me a sleeping pill She never drinks the water And makes you order French champagne Once you've had a taste of her You'll never be the same Yeah, she'll make you go insane Come on! Upside, inside out She's livin la vida loca She'll push and pull you down Livin la vida loca Her lips are devil red And her skin's the color mocha She will wear you out Livin' la vida loca Come on! Livin' la vida loca Come on! She's livin' la vida loca	Come on! Livin' la vida loca Come on! She's livin' la vida loca

A.4.4. Image from “Livin’ La Vida Loca” (1999): the female protagonist as the “temptress.”



(“RickyMartinVEVO,” 2009)

A.4.5. Lyrics of “Adrenalina” (2014): the Spanglish version

Te di but you keep playing harder	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
When you work out, damn you know how to move!	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
You like to play me, and tease me with your lips	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
Es puro sexo soul the thing that you do	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
Because your body is pure ADRENALINE	Dame un minuto, contigo disfruto
And I'm so high on you baby	Se vuelve y me deja bruto
I'm on the edge, I'm falling apart	Si me das la verde, ejecuto
Because your body is pure ADRENALINE	Si tu eres la jefa, me recluto
And I'm so high on you baby	Deja que ocurra
I'm on the edge, I'm falling apart!	Caliente que el tiempo transcurra
Sube la adrenalina, sub!	El ambiente la pone ardiente
Sube la adrenalina, sub!	Se pega y en el oído me susurra
Sube la adrenalina, sub!	Abusa y me engatusa
Ok!	La falda más cara, combina con la blusa
Hay una sensación rara en tu cuerpo	Se mete en mi mente como una intrusa
Sientes que pierdes el control	Yo le pido que lo haga y no se rehúsa
Jennifer Lopez, duro!	Dame más
Escucha baby, si solo supieras	Yo te llevo en la nave si tu te vas
Que tienes algo que me hace vibrar	Y quizás, me digas que quieres más, más
Tus movimientos a mi me aceleran	Yo quiero saber lo que tu das
Cuando empezamos no puedo parar	Tu te apoderas de mis sentidos cuando me miras
Tu te apoderas de mis sentidos cuando me miras	Cuando me tocas yo comienzo a temblar
Cuando me tocas yo comienzo a temblar	Un beso tuyo, es como mi medicina
Un beso tuyo es como mi medicina	Llévame al cielo a volar
Llévame al cielo a volar	Si tu te fueras yo no se lo que haría
Si tu te fueras yo no se lo que haría	Lo que empezamos tenemos que terminar
Lo que empezamos tenemos que terminar	Volvamos hacer el amor como aquel día
Volvamos hacer el amor como aquel día	Lleva mi cielo a volar
Lleva mi cielo a volar	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
Because your body is pure ADRENALINE	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
And I'm so high on you baby	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
I'm on the edge, I'm falling apart	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
Because your body is pure ADRENALINE	Sube la adrenalina, sub!
And I'm so high on you baby	
I'm on the edge, I'm falling apart!	

A.4.6. Lyrics of “Pégate” (2006)

Le lo la ay le lo le lo, yo vengo con cosas buenas para mi pueblo Traigo amor, traigo ese suero que alegra a los corazones del mundo entero Pa'l dolor, pa'l mal de amores, nada como el repique de mis tambores Que hay que tirarse a la calle dejando atrás los problemas Que como decía mi madre, bailando todo se arregla Pégate un poco más, pegando a los tambores, olvida los temores, que el tiempo se nos va, Mujer! Pégate un poco más y mueve esas caderas, mamita cosa buena, que a mi me pone mal Mueve tus caderas muchacha morena, báilame ese ritmo con sabor a pena Ay, una pesetita para esa vellonera, para que te olvides de todas tus penas Y esta noche quiero más, esta noche quiero fiesta, hoy no habrá mal que por bien no venga Unamos los corazones, hoy todos somos multicolores Pégate un poco más, pegando a los tambores, olvida los temores, que el tiempo se nos va, Mujer! Pégate un poco más y mueve esas caderas, mamita cosa buena, que a mi me pone mal Y que venga el coro Que venga Con todo el amor Que venga Para nuestros niños Que venga Que venga la paz Que venga Que vengan todos Que venga	A bailar mi plena Que venga Ahí bien pegadito Que venga Con mucho cariñito Que venga Y que vengan ríos de bondad a todos los pueblos de la tierra, que no nos podemos olvidar Que el amor puro libera y la mentira envenena Que como decía mi madre, bailando todo se arregla Pégate un poco más, pegando a los tambores, olvida los temores, que el tiempo se nos va, Mujer! Pégate un poco más y mueve esas caderas, mamita cosa buena, que a mi me pone mal Le lo la ay le lo le lo Traigo el suero Le lo la ay le lo le lo (Para mi pueblo) Ay si Le lo la ay le lo le lo (Cosa buena) Para quien quiera la noche entera (Le lo la ay le lo le lo)

A.4.7. Lyrics of “Come With Me” (2013)

I can tell that you're a sinner	We'll hit the finish line together
From behind your angel eyes	Way beyond the morning light
A beautiful deceiver	Oh oh oh
But I can handle anything you try	Tonight, tonight
Your finger's on my trigger	Come with me tonight
You play it like a winner	Tonight
You're pulling me tight	Come with me[x2]
Let's stop talking about it	Tonight
Just stop thinking about it	Come with me
Let's get crazy about it	Tonight
I got you now	Come with me
I'm going to take you to the edge tonight	Are you coming?
I, I'll show you how	I got you now
So won't you come with me tonight	I'm going to take you to the edge tonight
Come with me tonight, oh oh oh	I, I'll show you how
Come with me tonight	So won't you come with me tonight, oh oh oh
There's no limit to forever	Come with me tonight, oh oh oh
And there's no ceiling in the sky	Come with me tonight[x6]

A.4.8. Ricky Martin's Instagram photograph with his partner.



A.4.9. Lyrics of “Angels” (1997)

I sit and wait	And I know I'll always be blessed with love
Does an angel	And as the feeling grows
Contemplate my fate	She breathes flesh to my bones
And do they know	And when love is dead
The places where we go	I'm loving angels instead
When we're grey and old	And through it all she offers me protection
Cause I have been told	A lot of love and affection
That salvation lets their wings unfold	Whether I'm right or wrong
So when I'm lying in my bed	And down the waterfall
Thoughts running through my head	Wherever it may take me
And I feel that love is dead	I know that life won't break me
I'm loving angels instead	When I come to call
And through it all she offers me protection	She won't forsake me
A lot of love and affection	I'm loving angels instead
Whether I'm right or wrong	And through it all she offers me protection
And down the waterfall	A lot of love and affection
Wherever it may take me	Whether I'm right or wrong
I know that life won't break me	And down the waterfall
When I come to call	Wherever it may take me
She won't forsake me	I know that life won't break me
I'm loving angels instead	When I come to call
When I'm feeling weak	She won't forsake me
And my pain walks down a one way street	I'm loving angels instead
I look above	

A.4.10. Lyrics of “Feel” (2002)

Come and hold my hand	And I need to feel real love
I wanna contact the living	And a life ever after
Not sure I understand	I can not get enough
This role I've been given	I just wanna feel real love
I sit and talk to God	Feel the home that I live in
And he just laughs at my plans	I got too much love
My head speaks a language	Running through my veins
I don't understand	To go to waste
I just wanna feel real love	I just wanna feel real love
Feel the home that I live in	And a life ever after
Cause I got too much life	There's a hole in my soul

Running through my veins
 Going to waste
 I don't wanna die
 But I ain't keen on living either
 Before I fall in love
 I'm preparing to leave her
 Scare myself to death
 That's why I keep on running
 Before I've arrived
 I can see myself coming
 I just wanna feel real love
 Feel the home that I live in
 Cause I got too much life
 Running through my veins
 Going to waste

You can see it in my face
 It's a real big place
 Come and hold my hand
 I wanna contact the living
 Not sure I understand
 This role I've been given
 Not sure I understand
 Not sure I understand
 Not sure I understand
 Not sure I understand

A.4.11. Lyrics of “Eternity” (2001)

Close your eyes so you don't fear them
 They don't need to see you cry
 I can't promise I will heal you
 But if you want to I will try
 I'll sing this summer serenade
 The past is done
 We've been betrayed
 It's true
 Someone said the truth will out
 I believe without a doubt, in you
 You were there for summer dreaming
 And you gave me what I need
 And I hope you find your freedom
 For eternity...
 For eternity
 Yesterday when you were walking
 We talked about your mum and dad
 What they did that made you happy
 What they did that made you sad
 We sat and watched the sun go down
 Picked a star before we lost the moon
 Youth is wasted on the young
 Before you know it's come and gone to soon
 You were there for summer dreaming

And you gave me what I need
 And I hope you find your freedom
 For eternity
 For eternity
 For eternity
 I'll sing this summer serenade
 The past is done
 We've been betrayed
 It's true
 Youth is wasted on the young
 Before you know it's come and gone to soon
 You were there for summer dreaming
 And you are a friend indeed
 And I hope you find your freedom
 For eternity
 You were there for summer dreaming
 And you are a friend indeed
 And I know you'll find your freedom
 Eventually
 For eternity
 For eternity

A.4.12. Image from “Eternity” music video when Williams is arrested.



(“robbiewilliamsvevo,” 2011)

A.4.13. Lyrics of “Candy” (2012)

I was there to witness	Either a little too high or a little too low
Candice's inner business	Got no self-esteem and vertigo
She wants the boys to notice	Cause she thinks she's made of candy
Her rainbows and her ponies	Hey ho here she goes
She was educated	Either a little too loud or a little too close
But could not count to ten	There's a hurricane in the back of her throat
Now she got lots of different horses	And she thinks she's made of candy
By lots of different men	Liberate your sons and daughters
And I say liberate your sons and daughters	The bush is high but in the hole there's water
The bush is high but in the hole there's water	As you will, she'll be the whole of the law
You can get some when they give it	And if you don't feel good
Nothing sacred, but it's a living	What are you doing it for
Hey ho here she goes	What are you doing it for
Either a little too high or a little too low	What are you doing it for
Got no self-esteem and vertigo	Hey ho here she goes
Cause she thinks she's made of candy	Either a little too high or a little too low
Hey ho here she goes	Got no self-esteem and vertigo
Either a little too loud or a little too close	Cause she thinks she's made of candy
Got a hurricane at back of her throat	Hey ho here she goes
She thinks she's made of candy	Either a little too loud or a little too close
Ring a ring of roses	Got a hurricane at the back of her throat
Whoever gets the closest	And she thinks she's made of candy
She comes and she goes	Hey ho here she goes
As the war of the roses	Either a little too high or a little too low
Mother was a victim	Got no self-esteem and vertigo
Father beat the system	Cause she thinks she's made of candy

By moving bricks to Brixton
 And learning how to fix them
 Liberate your sons and daughters
 The bush is high but in the hole there's water
 As you will, she'll be the whole of the law
 And if it don't feel good
 What are you doing it for
 Now tell me
 Hey ho here she goes

Hey ho here she goes
 Either a little too loud or a little too close
 Got a hurricane at the back of her throat
 And she thinks she's made of candy

A.4.14. Lyrics of "Mixed Signals" (2016)

I tried your number at 9 but to no avail
 Tried again at 11, got sent straight to voicemail
 You said you needed a calm, quiet night alone
 But that don't explain why you're not picking up the phone
 Now I'm driving through the city like a bullet in my seat
 And I hold my breath when I hit your street
 You were restless when you told me everything was alright
 One quiet night alone
 If nothing is wrong
 How come you're not home
 And it's almost 3AM
 When you decide to show?
 You're gonna tell me where you've been
 Don't spare me details, I wanna know
 What does he look like?
 What does he talk like?
 Thought you wanted to make this work
 But you're sending me mixed signals
 With lowered emotion
 You greet me and I'm overcome
 'Cause your body language is speaking in another tongue
 First you tell me that you needed some excitement in your life
 Then you grab the handle and turn the knife

And it's almost 3AM
 When you decide to show
 Accusations of obsessive misbehaviour
 Like we ain't been down to hell and back
 And made untrue
 I thought that was you
 Thought you wanted to make this work
 But you're sending me mixed signals
 And in the dusk we fall apart
 The sun's got his elbow
 In the rib cage of town
 I'm breaking down
 And it's almost 3AM
 When you decide to show
 You're gonna tell me where you've been
 Don't sugarcoat it, girl, I want the blow-by-blow
 What does he look like?
 What does he talk like?
 Thought you wanted to make this work
 But you're sending me mixed signals
 Yeah, sending me mixed signals
 Darling, darling believe me
 Know that, no you don't need me
 Break up, you know it won't please me
 Sweetheart, let me down easy
 Cut me loose, baby, don't tease me
 Oh Lord, let me down easy
 Sending me mixed signals

You're gonna tell me where you've been
Don't spare me details, I wanna know
What does he look like?
What does he talk like?

A.4.15. Lyrics of "Rock DJ" (2000)

Me with the floor show kicking with your torso	Ground control, can you feel me?
Boys getting high And the girls even more so	Need permission to land
Wave your hands if your not with the man	I don't wanna rock DJ
Can I kick it? (Yes you can)	But you're making me feel so nice
I got (funk), you got (soul)	When's it gonna stop DJ
We got everybody	Cause you're keeping me up all night
I've got the gift gonna stick it in the goal	I don't wanna rock DJ
It's time to move your body	But you're making me feel so nice
Babylon back in business	When's it gonna stop DJ
Can I get a witness?	Cause you're keeping me up all night
Every girl, every man	Pimping ain't easy
Houston, do you hear me?	Most of them fleece me
Ground control, can you feel me?	Every night
Need permission to land	Pimping ain't easy
I don't wanna rock DJ	But if you're selling it
But your making me feel so nice	It's alright
When's it gonna stop DJ	Come on
Cause you're keeping me up all night	I don't wanna rock DJ
Singing in the classes, music for your masses	But you're making me feel so nice
Give no head no backstage passes	When's it gonna stop DJ
Have a proper giggle I'll be quite polite	Cause you're keeping me up all night
But when I rock the mic, I rock the mic (Right)	I don't wanna rock DJ
You got no love then you're with the wrong man	But you're making me feel so nice
It's time to move your body	When's it gonna stop DJ
If you can't get a girl but your best friend can	Cause you're keeping me up all night
It's time to move your body	
I don't wanna be sleazy	
Baby just tease me	
Got no family planned	
Houston, do you hear me?	

A.4.16. Lyrics of “The Heavy Entertainment Show” (2016)

Good evening, children of cultural abandon
You searched for a saviour, well here I am
And all the best ones are dying off so quickly
While I'm still here, enjoy me while you can
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
The charisma's non-negotiable
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
I'm about to strip and you're my pole
We are so glorious
Why not leave your job and come on tour
with us?
Before I drop dead and die
Good evening, lovers of quality
entertainment
Good evening to the others that don't know
hit
Even you will leave here with a t-shirt and a
programme
Got a house in LA, I'm still paying for it...
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
It's just the tip but no one will know
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
All the girls (Robbie!), the boys go (No!)
You are magnificent
Maybe come on stage and be a part of it
I said maybe, baby, baby oh
Come leave the life you're living
Show me the light you're giving
I'll give it all then a little bit more, oh-oh-
woah
“He would sell his children
For a hit in Belgium
God knows what he's done
For a number one”
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
Where the more you see, the less you know
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
Where Eminem meets Barry Manilow
I am notorious

For making all the crowd sing the chorious
I just made up that word
Come love the life I'm living
Bathe in the light I'm giving
“He'll give it all and a little bit more”
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
I'm a volcano that's about to blow
Welcome to the Heavy Entertainment Show
This is how I'd like to say “Hello”

A.4.17. Lyrics of “Let Me Entertain You” (1997)

Hell is gone and heaven's here
There's nothing left for you to fear
Shake your ass come over here
Now scream
I'm a burning effigy
Of everything I used to be
You're my rock of empathy, my dear
So come on, let me entertain you
Let me entertain you
Life's too short for you to die
So grab yourself an alibi
Heaven knows your mother lied, mon cher
Separate your right from wrongs
Come and sing a different song
The kettle's on, so don't be long, mon cher
So come on, let me entertain you
Let me entertain you
Look me up in the yellow pages
I will be your rock of ages
You see through fads and your crazy phrases,
yeah
Little Bo Peep has lost his sheep
He popped a pill and fell asleep
The dew is wet but the grass is sweet, my
dear
Your mind gets burned with the habits you've
learned

But we're the generation that's got to be heard
You're tired of your teachers and your
school's a drag
You're not going to end up like your mum
and dad
So come on, let me entertain you
Let me entertain you
Let me entertain you
He may be good he may be out of sight
But he can't be here so come around tonight
Here is the place where the feeling grows
You gotta get high before you taste the lows
Let me entertain you
Let me entertain you
So come on, let me entertain you
Let me entertain you
Come on, come on, come on, come on
Come on, come on, come on, come on
Come on, come on, come on, come on
Come on, come on, come on, come on
Come on, come on, come on, come on
Come on, come on, come on, come on

Appendix 5: Material Connected to Chapter 5

A.5.1. Lyrics of “Nothing Compares 2 U” (1990)

It's been seven hours and fifteen days	'Cause nothing compares
Since you took your love away	Nothing compares to you
I go out every night and sleep all day	All the flowers that you planted, mama, in
Since you took your love away	the back yard
Since you've been gone I can do whatever I	All died when you went away
want	I know that living with you, baby, was
I can see whomever I choose	sometimes hard
I can eat my dinner in a fancy restaurant	But I'm willing to give it another try
But nothing... I said nothing can take away	Nothing compares
these blues	Nothing compares to you
'Cause nothing compares	Nothing compares
Nothing compares to you	Nothing compares to you
It's been so lonely without you here	Nothing compares
Like a bird without a song	Nothing compares to you
Nothing can stop these lonely tears from	
falling	
Tell me, baby, where did I go wrong	
I could put my arms around every boy I see	
But they'd only remind me of you	
I went to the doctor and guess what he told	
me, guess what he told me?	
He said, "Girl, you better try to have fun no	
matter what you do," but he's a fool	

A.5.2. Lyrics of No Man's Woman (2000)

I don't wanna be no man's woman	I don't tell everything about the love I get
It don't make me happy this mantrolling	I got a lovin' man but he's a spirit
Thing that you got for me so I become	He never does me harm never treats me bad
No man's woman	He'd never takes away all the love he has
I don't wanna be no man's woman	And I'm forgiven oh a million times
I've other work I want to get done	I'm never tired of it
I haven't travelled this far to become	And I'm not scared of it
No man's woman	'Cause it doesn't cause me pain
No man's woman	Like a man can fake you
'Cause I'm tired of it	Take your soul and make you
And I'm so scared of it	Never be yourself again
That I'll never trust again	I never wanna be no man's woman

'Cause a man can fake you	I only wanna be my own woman
Take your soul and make you	I haven't travelled this far to become
Miserable in so much pain	No man's woman (x3)
My friends think I'm alone but I've got secrets	

A.5.3. Bob Marley's "War" (1976) and Sinéad O'Connor's version of this song

Bob Marley	Sinéad O'Connor
Until the philosophy which hold one race superior And another Inferior Is finally And permanently Discredited And abandoned Everywhere is war Me say war That until there no longer First class and second class citizens of any nation Until the colour of a man's skin Is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes Me say war That until the basic human rights Are equally guaranteed to all Without regard to race Dis a war That until that day The dream of lasting peace World citizenship Rule of international morality Will remain in but a fleeting illusion to be pursued But never attained Now everywhere is war - war And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes That hold our brothers in Angola In Mozambique	Until the philosophy Which holds one race superior And another inferior Is finally and permanently Discredited and abandoned Everywhere is war Until there is no longer first class Or second class citizens of any nation Until the color of a man抐 skin Is of no more significance then The color of his eyes I抐e got to say "war" That until the basic human rights Are equally guaranteed to all Without regard to race I抐l say "war" Until that day the dream of lasting peace World-citizenship and the rule of International morality will remain Just a fleeting illusion to be pursued But never obtained And everywhere is war Until the ignoble and unhappy regime Which holds all of us through Child-abuse, yeah, child-abuse yeah Sub-human bondage has been toppled Utterly destroyed Everywhere is war War in the east War in the west War up north

South Africa	War down south
Sub-human bondage	There is war
Have been toppled	And the rumors of war
Utterly destroyed	Until that day
Well, everywhere is war	There is no continent
Me say war	Which will know peace
War in the east	Children, children
War in the west	Fight!
War up north	We find it necessary
War down south	We know we will win
War - war	We have confidence in the victory
Rumors of war	Of good over evil
And until that day	Fight the real enemy!
The African continent	
Will not know peace	
We Africans will fight - we find it necessary	
And we know we shall win	
As we are confident	
In the victory	
Of good over evil	
Good over evil, yeah!	
Good over evil	
Good over evil, yeah!	
Good over evil	
Good over evil, yeah!	

A.5.4. Lyrics of “Troy” (1987)

I'll remember it	Oh, I love you
And Dublin in a rainstorm	God, I love you
And sitting in the long grass in summer	I'd kill a dragon for you
Keeping warm	I'll die
I'll remember it	But I will rise
Every restless night	And I will return
We were so young then	The Phoenix from the flame
We thought that everything	I have learned
We could possibly do was right	I will rise
Then we moved	And you'll see me return
Stolen from our very eyes	Being what I am
And I wondered where you went to	There is no other Troy
Tell me when did the light die	For me to burn

You will rise	And you should've left the light on
You'll return	You should've left the light on
The phoenix from the flame	Then I wouldn't have tried
You will learn	And you'd never have known
You will rise	And I wouldn't have pulled you tighter
You'll return	No I wouldn't have pulled you close
Being what you are	I wouldn't have screamed
There is no other Troy	No I can't let you go
For you to burn	And the door wasn't closed
And I never meant to hurt you	No I wouldn't have pulled you to me
I swear I didn't mean	No I wouldn't have kissed your face
Those things I said	You wouldn't have begged me to hold you
I never meant to do that to you	If we hadn't been there in the first place
Next time I'll keep my hands to myself	Ah but I know you wanted me to be there oh
instead	oh
Oh, does she love you	Every look that you threw told me so
What do you want to do?	But you should've left the light on
Does she need you like I do?	You should've left the light on
Do you love her?	And the flames burned away
Is she good for you?	But you're still spitting fire
Does she hold you like I do?	Make no difference what you say
Do you want me?	You're still a liar
Should I leave?	You're still a liar
I know you're always telling me	You're still a liar
That you love me	
Just sometimes I wonder	
If I should believe	

A.5.5. Sinéad O'Connor's open letter to her brother Joseph O'Connor

The Irish Times
June 26, 1993,

All we have to do is love each other unconditionally
Last Saturday, Sinead O'Connor's brother Joseph wrote of his bewilderment on reading the poem by Sinead published in The Irish Times on June 10th. His article has prompted, the following response from Sinead

By SINEAD O'CONOR

MY brother has made a serious misinterpretation of some of the lines of my poem. The problem is that, as a family, we do not communicate. Therein you have the answer to

everything. How can we claim to know what each other's truths are when we don't know each other's experience? When we don't even speak to each other. There are some lines in the poem which read: I have run away from the pain of not being held. For all my life. Until now. Three lines. My brother has read them as one, and consequently I feel I have been misrepresented. If he had discussed the poem with me personally, or if he had spoken to me at all over these last years, feel sure he would have understood what I was saying. I did not say that I have never been held, I am aware that my father lived with us for a number of years until 1977 and must have held us. I don't remember. I am sure that our mother did not hold me! I can't speak for anyone else on that, but I am sure of my own experience. I am also aware that I lived with my granny for a short time when I was a baby and she held me. However, my father was away a lot. There are quite significant periods of time during which he was not there. This is not something I blame him for, I do not know how I would cope with what he had to cope with. Plus, I am aware that he was working hard to make a life for us. My father I remember as being very lovely. Once me and my sister beat a girl up in kindergarten because she said her dad was better-looking. Once we made rock buns and threw them at each other in the garden. I have not said that he was not a lovely father. I have absolutely never suggested (or meant to suggest) that he was either physically or sexually abusive. I have only said the truth, which is that fortune took him away from me and in fact I haven't had him as a father. Because of life he has not been "available" and this has been the cause of great agony to me. Even without my knowing it. It is important for it to be seen that not everyone's experience is the same. That people experience the same situation differently. What is true for Joe is true for Joe and what is true for me is true for me. These are my truths. My parents split up when I was nine. My experience of our house-hold up until then was that it was terrifying. My mother was terrifying. My father was the protector, their fights were terrifying. His absence was dreaded and feared. My sister sprained her ankle jumping out the window once to get away. She used to hide in the boot of his car when he was going to work. I ran away quite a bit when I was that young as well. Always had to go back, though. He got custody of us after a while, and myself and my sister and my younger brother went to live with him and Viola (my stepmother). Joe stayed with my mother. I don't think we stayed very long. I think not quite a year. I missed my mother. I did love her. So did my younger brother. I feel that we were in very great pain. My father was away a lot then also. I think he found it hard, to bear the pain of seeing us in pain. I used to lie under my bed "keening" according to my step-mother (and I remember it), and my father would be out in the garden mowing the lawn. I don't think he could bear to listen and so healing did not take place. He

didn't know what to do when we displayed the evidence of our grief and distraction. I don't blame him for this. But it is reality for me that my grief has not been heard yet. Or healed. With love I need to say that, in fact, I feel I have been punished for its expression. WE went back to my mother, foolishly, and I lived there until I was 13. These years were particularly terrifying and insane. I plucked up the guts to run away twice to my father's house. (Usually if you run away, you always end up having to go back. Or someone brings you back! Thinking they're doing a good thing.) Both times he was away on holiday. Fortune is a hard bitch. So I had to go back. Finally I ran away for good. I went to my father. He took me in. My sister arrived later the same day. I think Joe stayed for a year or so. John stayed with her until her death. I didn't adjust very well to "normal" family life. I had no idea what planet I was on having just come from "there". I bunked off school. I stole money off my sisters and my dad. I was angry and difficult and a cause of great disturbance in the house. And great strain on the relationship between my father and stepmother. They brought me to a shrink who said I was a "problem child" so I got up and left. I finally got caught stealing a pair of golden shoes from the BHS in O'Connell Street. They weren't even for me! My father and my stepmother were worried that I might "end up on the wrong side of the tracks", so they sought the advice of a social worker. Between them they came up with the suggestion which they made to me, that I go to live in a "nice boarding school" where I could learn typing in the afternoons. Where my behaviour would be restricted and I would simply not be able to steal because I wouldn't be allowed out. It was called An Grianan, The Sun House. Its title is that of a "rehabilitation centre for girls with behavioural problems". I agreed to go because I was worried about myself. I went when I was 14. The people there were good to me. The sister in charge bought me my first guitar. But my complaint has been that they also failed to provide healing. In all of the discussions which took place between social workers and shrinks and parents and "rehabilitation" centre, not one of them raised the subject of child-abuse and what I had been through at home which might have given an insight into my "behaviour" and therefore a possible cure - which I suggest may have been tender loving care and a proper family, which we have never been. And so I felt punished and rejected. Unfortunately the system failed to provide healing. I was not rehabilitated. I was frightened into stopping stealing and I'm glad about that, but at no stage did anyone sit me down and talk to me about my family. So that I ended up feeling blamed. Not understanding why I was such a bad person and unable to bear the pain of not being with my family. Particularly Joseph. They were actually going to go on holidays without me until I kicked up such a fuss that they took me! And my dad couldn't stand it anyway and went back home. I caused a lot of trouble on

that holiday. I still have the reputation in the family, as we can see, for being the "troublemaker." It is still going on you see, for me. An Grianan had a system of punishment which very much pushed home the message of rejection. It was called "out of the sitting-room". What it meant was that for whatever transgression (usually running away in my case!) you had committed, you had to eat your dinner at a table by yourself. You had to sleep on the floor beside your cubicle. Or sometimes upstairs in the old people's infirmary. You weren't allowed to talk to anyone and they weren't allowed to talk to you. It was left this way until the following Wednesday when there would be a group meeting during which you would be questioned about your "behaviour" and basically bullied into admitting that you had "misbehaved" and accepting some menial punishment. You'd be told not to have "an attitude" if you tried to actually discuss your feelings and be fairly heard. One's pain was never to be discussed. It certainly was no excuse for "bad behaviour". When you accepted whatever it was you had to accept, they'd all suddenly be talking to you again. People who had been silent and disapproving since possibly the previous Thursday! I feel that that system of punishment was not rehabilitating in any way. Again I say that healing was not provided. DIDN'T see my family. I did not often see my father. I stayed there until I was ready to go into fifth year at school. Then I was allowed to leave on condition that I agree to go to boarding school. So I did. I spent a summer at my dad's house and then I went to Waterford. I didn't see my family much. I went home about every three weeks. My dad wasn't great at writing letters. I went home for the summer holidays, during which time I joined a band. When I went back to sixth year, I missed the singing and I left school when I was almost 8. I got a bedsit in Dolphin's Barn. I have not lived with my family since then. All in all, I feel I have not actually lived with my family since I left my mother for any significant length of time. We as a family had not really ever lived together under any kind of "normal" conditions. Yes, my father paid my rent for me. Yes, they all showed up at my gig in Dublin, but that was nearly six years ago. It was an occasion. I don't feel that it means they have been "supportive" of 20my career. In fact, I don't feel that I have been supported emotionally at all in my life by my family. Except by my sister and occasionally my step-mother, who is a good woman. In actual reality, I have been accused by my family over the last three years of rejecting them when I became famous. Of surrounding myself with acolytes and arselicking deacons". Of not caring about anyone except myself. Of being the archetypal "pop-star". This is what is responsible for all this madness. I have been trying to illustrate the ways in which I feel I am being blamed for manifesting my family's dysfunction. I did separate from my family. I did it when I was 14 - and I'd been doing it before then. I did it because I had to,

because they were not "there" for me. I feel that they separated me from them It is not because I'm "on some sort of upward spiral" and some kind of pop-star trip. I was separated long before Nothing Compares 2U ever came out. Do people ever listen to the songs? In actual reality, my brother hasn't really spoken to me for years. My father does not respond well to me, either. That is the cause of all this pain and so-called "crazy" behaviour. I have been accused of being everything I would hate to be. I feel that I have been wrongly and unfairly blamed and punished for manifesting my pain. Our family is very messed up. We can't communicate with each other. We are all in agony, I for one am in agony, That's why I'm doing all this screaming and shouting. In the hope that someone will hear and a miracle might take place. Just because people say they love you doesn't mean they do Love is not supposed to be conditional or material. I can see how our family's situation mirrors that of the whole human situation. We can't communicate. We can't, hear each other because we are all in such pain. We haven't healed it yet or resolved it and we are making it worse because we are taking it out on each other and blaming and hating each other. We don't know how to love each other and understand each other. We don't really know that we can stop all this hurting if we want to. All we have to do is want to. All we have to do is love each other unconditionally, All it takes is for us to realise that we are separated from each other. That fortune has divided us and taken us away from the truth. Which is that we were never meant to live like this. So far away from God, if we love each other it will stop. And then healing can take place, The last few weeks have served to illustrate a very important point which is this, a situation exists wherein it becomes impossible for those of us who are feeling "crazy" and "mixed-up" to say so and be helped for fear that it will be used against us - as it is - as a term – of abuse. We find that we cannot break down when we need to and ask for help for fear that we will be hurt for needing it, This is very dangerous. Yes, I am a "crazy mixed-up kid?', How can I be expected to be anything else? Why should I be insulted for being that? Why should I not ask the world to help me? I am a member of the human race,

Love.

Sinead O'Connor

("tripod.com")

A.5.6. Miley Cyrus's Tweets mocking O'Connor's protest against child abuse in Ireland and her mental health as a response to her open letter to Cyrus on the pornification of her image in the music industry.



(Hernández, 2013)

A.5.7. Lyrics of “8 Good Reasons” (2014)

Don't know if I should quite sing this song
 Don't know if it maybe might be wrong
 But then again it maybe might be right
 To tell you 'bout the bullet and the red light
 You know I'm not from this place
 I'm from a different time, different space
 And it's real uncomfortable
 To be stuck somewhere you just don't belong
 But I got 8 good reasons to stick around
 8 good reasons, well maybe nine now
 I had a dream one night
 About a bullet and a red light
 You know it felt alright

Like a child, I would have found me mum
 Like a bird I would have been flown
 You know I don't much like life
 I don't mind admitting that it ain't right
 You know I love to make music
 But my head got wrecked by the business
 Everybody wanting something from me
 They rarely ever wanna just know me
 I became the stranger no one sees
 Cut glass I've crawled upon my knees
 I had a dream one night
 About a bullet and a red light
 You know it felt alright

You know it actually felt quite nice
If I could have gone
Without it hurting anyone

You know it actually felt quite nice
[Chorus x2]

A.5.8. Cover of O'Connor's album *How About Be Me (and you be you)?* (2012)



(“Genius”)