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Formal Essay Two
11/09/2017

Boys, men, and children of the hood: the violence they perpetuate

Only in the trap community- a subgenre of Hip-hop that glorifies drugs, sex and money- can an artist like XXX-Tentacion beat a pregnant woman, be called disgusting by the media, and still manage go platinum without so much as a scratch in his career. Beating a pregnant women is not enough for a trap artist like Tentacion to be affected negatively in his sales. Infact, atrocities, such as the one mentioned before, propel trap artists in their careers: it makes them *realer*. Rapping about selling and consuming drugs, beating woman, killing on the basis of a colored bandana, committing drive-bys, and shooting at police are just a few examples of what classifies as *real*.

This deluded idea of *real* floods every ghetto in America. It is marketed towards and exposed to every male of color in America. Many of those males live in urban cities with high levels of poverty and violence(areas which I will now refer to as ghettos) who then make being *real* their way of life. Although the idea of *real* may seem like a new and foreign concept to most, it bares a striking resemblance to a more familiar idea: socially constructed masculinity.

Masculinity is a crucial part of many societies and cultures around the world, including our own, which sociologist Michael S. Kimmel devotes many of his time attempting to understand the effects of masculinity. In Kimmel's text *Masculinity as Homophobia* he states that the idea of masculinity encourages men to be rude, sexist, and violent. Although Michael S. Kimmel may have written about the relationship between masculinity and males of the general

population, his text, *Masculinity as Homophobia*, explains how violence in the ghetto is perpetuated.

According to many researchers to be seen as masculine a male must never be themselves. You can never cry, be emotional or sensitive; you can never show any basic human trait. In fact, when the idea of masculinity runs your life, rules the way in which you are raised, you are conditioned to be emotionless. Being called anything but a man is a threat to your person. As Kimmel states, “the fear of being seen as a sissy dominates the cultural definitions of manhood”(104). In other words, in a world dominated by masculinity, a male can never drop his persona; he can never be anything, but masculine. This, of course, means that a male can never be weak; they must bottle their emotions. In the ghetto this bottling of emotions is called being “hard”. To act *hard* in the ghetto is seen as a necessary trait if one wishes to have respect: having respect makes it less likely for you to be targeted by people. To act *hard* one simply has to deal with the oppression of the ghetto, and sorrow in general, without complaint.

To keep up the persona of masculinity, males are encouraged to degrade each other; to greet each other with derogatory terms. Males are trained to point out and humiliate their friends whenever they act soft[unmasculine]. Softness is femininity and femininity is the enemy of masculinity. Kimmel comments of this, “homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men”(104). When a male calls another male a fag or calls the actions of his fellow male “gay” he is not calling him a homosexual, but rather letting him know that he has dropped his act.

In the ghetto we are taught to be hard; we are told to never be soft. The crip would rather kill an unmasculine man rather than his masculine counterpart: the blood. Consequently, being seen as feminine, even for second, can make you the target of any gang.

In the ghetto, there are many ways we act to seem masculine; ways I needed to act to survive the ghetto in which I was raised. One thing we do to seem masculine is degrade women with our words and actions. Gloria Anzaldua, a Chicana author who is known for criticizing machismo, the hispanic version of masculinity, states, “Women at least have had the guts to break out of bondage. Only gay men have had the courage to expose themselves to the woman inside them and to challenge oppression”(392). To simplify Anzaldua’s quote, males dread the idea of being seen as unmasculine; they fear it. As stated before femininity is the enemy of masculinity, and masculinity is needed to survive in the ghetto; therefore, in the ghetto wives are beat, women are hoes, and the fag is killed. The hood follows the law of Self Preservation, and femininity will get you killed.

In the ghetto, nothing is harder than killing because nothing is manlier than violence. In fact, Kimmel demonstrates this by describing a bet. He claims that if he ever placed a bet on the basis that he could make any boy fight all he would have to do is divide them on the basis of masculinity. Specifically by asking the boys on the playground who is the least manliest amongst them. Such is the dynamic of the hood. Every single gangster, pimp, drug dealer, and abusive husband is simply a boy on a playground establishing his masculinity.

In the ghetto, violent behavior begins at a young age because the goal of every young boy is to be the “man” of his street; to gain the most power. To control his hood by being the most manliest, realest, and violent individual that he can be; to control his hood with fear. However,

what many children perceive as “coming up”, what they perceive as succeeding, is a lie. They become their own oppressor. By buying into the ideals of masculinity, by being *real*, they perpetuate the very violence that they hoped to escape.

I was once one of those boys. I am a Chicano from MacArthur, Los Angeles: a hood. I was birthed by a woman who was denied education due to the archaic ideology of machismo: which her and my father ironically then raised me with. To survive the violent ghetto that I lived in I had to believe that women were hoes, bloods were bitches, and drugs were dope. I was raised to perpetuate the very violence which I hated. The very violence which took many of my friends.

Although I survived the ghetto by being masculine, I made it out by embracing my femininity: by allowing myself to know and express my emotions. I allowed myself to be discontent with the ghetto rather than be content with what I saw; I rejected being *hard*. I stopped caring whether I dropped my “guard”, my shackles, and focussed more on whether I was being who I needed to be: myself.

To escape the ghetto, I accepted my femininity. When I disregarded masculinity, machismo, I accepted blame for the wrong that I had done intentionally and for the wrong that I will do by simply being a male in a masculine society. If one grows around hate, to change one must actively seek love. One must actively promote love. Males have caused great pain to our sisters; therefore, it is our duty to apologize and help.

Works Cited

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