

# Welcome to the candy shop! Conflicting representations of black masculinity

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## Abstract

*Mainstream hip hop videos have long been known for their images of scantily clad women, extreme materialism, and misogynist and homophobic lyrics. In this article I focus on how rapper 50 Cent's masculinity is constructed and expressed through music, lyrics and images in his video 'Candy Shop' from 2005. This is a classically modelled hip hop video, replete with markers of hypermasculinity: fancy cars, 'bling', and lots of beautiful, sexually available women. Several scholars have discussed how women are exploited in videos like this and reduced to props for the male star. However, few have explored how this macho masculinity is constructed. Through a close reading of this video, using socio-musicology and audiovisual analysis as my approach, I propose that the macho masculinity presented here is threatened when the male body is on display, but 50 Cent reassures himself (and his audience) through selective framing, involving both other performers and the music.*

## Introduction

There is a long tradition in popular music lyrics of using sugar or candy to evoke something desirable, including 'I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)' by the Four Tops (1965), 'Sugar, Sugar' by the Archies (1969), 'Brown Sugar' by the Rolling Stones (1971) and 'Candy Girl' by New Edition (1983), among others. This tradition is still alive and well. Christina Aguilera had a big hit in 2006 with the song 'Candy Man'. Madonna's 11th studio album was released in 2008 with the title *Hard Candy*, and she visited Europe, on her follow-up *Sweet and Sticky Tour* in the summer of 2009. The candy shop is many people's childhood dream but a place of temptation and hazard as well – we all had parents who knew that its contents were not good for us. As a metaphor, the candy shop also suggests a world far removed from everyday life; for most of us, anyway, real life is not a candy shop, where we can enter when we want and pick whatever we like from a vast supply of temptations. The candy shop, in the end, is as much a fantasy as a reality. In this article we will visit the rapper 50 Cent's 'Candy Shop', which is filled with both ear candy and eye candy, although they may not all be so sweet.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will examine the different characters 50 Cent performs in the video, in terms of their relationship to his own masculinity. I will then explore how these aspects of masculinity carry over into the musical realm. I will characterise his vocal style and examine how it contributes to the characters played out in

the video and the overall macho image of the artist. I will then turn to the subject of masculinity and exotic framing, in this case presented by a group of female dancers and a short melodic flute and string riff played in Phrygian mode, which evokes spectres of the exotic. I will further consider the conflicting expressions of masculinity that accompany the male body on display, focusing on how 50 Cent works to resolve them. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of 50 Cent's agency and the use of humour and parody in the video.

### The hip hop star

Of the many characters 50 Cent plays in this video the most important is undoubtedly 50 Cent himself. Just as fans of a TV series meet each new episode with certain definite expectations of just what their favourite character can say and do, so also with viewers of a 50 Cent video. Our image of the artist shapes our reception of the video in fundamental ways. Therefore, as the first step in this close reading, I will examine the personal narrative of the artist 50 Cent. Such a personal narrative is something quite different from a conventional biography. A biography typically tries to critically sift all the relevant sources for the subject's life, trying to peer behind the different tales and images to get at the real person behind them; a personal narrative, on the other hand, is all about the images. The personal narrative of an artist consists of a few highly mediated fragments of that artist's biography, which we as the audience in turn read into his/her performance (Hawkins and Richardson 2007, p. 607).

The short version of 50 Cent's personal narrative reads: 50 Cent was shot. This story – the rapper was ambushed outside his grandmother's house and shot nine times at close range on 24 May 2000 – permeates every aspect of his personal narrative, as expressed in his songs, videos, cover art, interviews and even magazine covers.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Biggie Small or Tupack Shakur who reached iconic status after their deaths, 50 Cent appears to be special as he survived the shooting accident and can enjoy iconic status while still alive. The other aspect of 50 Cent's life that he often refers to in interviews is his rags-to-riches story and consequent obsession with material wealth. His difficult background was also presented in the loosely biographical movie *Get Rich or Die Trying*. This slogan was also the title of his first album, and a phrase often emphasised in the discourse surrounding this artist.

50 Cent's misogynistic and explicitly sexual and confrontational lyrics are notorious, and while he has often been challenged in the media for his persistent references to black women as 'hoes' and 'bitches', he has remained unrepentant about his word choice, whatever its impact upon the normalisation of racist stereotypes of black women. 50 Cent is also controversial for the way he handles competition from other hip hop artists. He is quick to bash his colleagues ('beefing', in the hip hop vernacular).

As authenticity is crucial to the hip hop genre, 50 Cent's personal narrative also serves to testify to how 'real' he is. His story of growing up in poverty, difficult family relations and a criminal record are important to this image. As we shall see, the different characters he embodies in 'Candy Shop' all gesture towards different aspects of this tale of struggle towards stardom. After he spent seven months at a correctional boot camp in 1994,<sup>3</sup> he started to pursue a musical career, and his collaboration with the New York-based duo Trackmasters led to a record deal with a Columbia subordinate label. Just before the release of his debut album, *Power to*

*the Dollar*, however, he was shot, and Columbia promptly distanced itself from the now-controversial rapper and cancelled the release of his album.<sup>4</sup> After recovering from his injuries, he started producing mix tapes and performing at clubs, and slowly the rumours about the rapper again reached the record companies. When then-established rapper Eminem declared his admiration for 50 Cent on a radio show, a bidding war started that drove his signing price into the million-plus range. Eminem eventually signed 50 Cent and, with Dr Dre, produced his first major commercial success, the album *Get Rich or Die Trying*. Today, 50 Cent is one of the world's bestselling rappers.<sup>5</sup>

The fragments of 50 Cent's life explored above have been strongly used to construct this artist's image. We shall see how the personal narrative of 50 Cent informs his performance in 'Candy Shop'; in his choice of characters, in his vocal style and in the way he frames himself through music and images. But first we need to get an overview of the main characters and narrative of the video.

## Synopsis

'Candy Shop', written by Scott Storch, features 50 Cent and the singer Olivia (Olivia Longott) both on the track and in the video. The music video opens with a fancy red car slowing down on a moonlit street. As we glimpse the contours of a castle ahead of us, the image changes, and we find ourselves driving through a big iron gate with the inscription 'Candy Shop Lane' overhead. The red car stops and, as the car door opens (vertically), the camera zooms in on a pair of new white sneakers. As the first sneaker hits the concrete, there is a clashing sound effect, and the camera zooms out to reveal 50 Cent emerging from the car. He looks somewhat anxious and cautiously crosses to the front door. An angelic choir sings an ascending sequence of falling triads<sup>6</sup> as the door opens to reveal a huge hall packed with scantily clad women; Olivia, their apparent leader, greets 50 Cent with the words 'Welcome to the candy shop'.

The music starts. A synthesised bass fills the lower register while a flute riff circles around a flat second. Inside the castle, the women begin to dance seductively in their sexy underwear. 50 Cent, in fact, appears almost ordinary in comparison, at least as he is dressed in this early scene. The video then alternates between the castle interior and the car in the driveway, with 50 Cent perched on the hood rapping about the things he wants to do with the women inside. Olivia ornaments the rap's refrain in a call-and-response pattern, repeating the chorus lines after 50 Cent.

We are presented with rooms in which different women present the rapper with different 'treats'. In the first room appears a woman I call 'the moviemaker' – her bed is videotaped, and she flirts with the camera while caressing and flirting with 50 Cent as well. The second room has red velvet walls surrounding a white doctor's bench, where a decidedly unorthodox nurse, dressed in a pink latex uniform, examines 50 Cent while simultaneously performing a lap dance. The third room has oval windows, lit candles and a dominatrix who lashes 50 Cent with a whip, tearing his shirt off. Then the roles switch and he stands in the middle of the room, bare chested and flexing, as the dominatrix admires him. After each room scene, the video returns to 50 Cent leaning on the hood of the car outside the castle.

In a middle section of the song, the video shows 50 Cent now rapping inside the castle, in front of an iron ornament depicting women posing in bikinis. As he

performs, the women in the ornament start to move or dance seductively to the music. The video then takes us to a big hall with enormous windows and a bathtub in the middle of it. A woman lies in the bathtub while another pours melted chocolate over her. When the bathtub is full, one of the women dips a red apple into the chocolate and eats it seductively. In one of the last scenes, Olivia approaches 50 Cent in a ballroom with a huge chandelier. 50 Cent now wears a white shirt, white pants and a white vest and tie. In this scene, Olivia looks like a Victoria's Secret model, in an old-fashioned corset and miniskirt. As she crosses the room, the tension in the synthesizers builds, and the images alternate rapidly among the different rooms in the castle and the car and gate. At the very end Olivia bends toward 50 Cent as if to whisper something in his ear but instead blows a bubble with her chewing gum that suddenly pops. Suddenly we return to what we then realise is 'reality', and find a dozing 50 Cent in a slightly more ordinary car outside an actual drive-through candy shop. Behind the counter stands Olivia, now in an unattractive uniform, shouting at him to pay for the candy he has ordered. He rouses himself, pays her and tells her to keep the change, and drives off into the night, alone.

### Characters and narrative

One of the ways black masculinity is represented in this video is through the several characters 50 Cent embodies. The first character is the 'ordinary guy', which reflects 50 Cent's rags-to-riches story. Except for his expensive sneakers and inexplicably fancy red car, he is in fact nothing special, particularly in relation to the beautiful, scantily clad women in the castle. This character draws upon the 'pizza delivery boy' convention of pornography – a regular Joe who happens to be in the right place at the right time and reaps some (otherwise apparently unearned) benefits as a result. The close-up of 50 Cent's face as the door opens to him for the first time indicates his surprise or naïveté while in this character, at least, and the angelic choir appears to reinforce the almost divine serendipity of his appearance. Nevertheless, those shoes and that car say it all: whatever he might pretend as the 'ordinary guy', for our (and his) entertainment, 50 Cent is not that person at all. Still, the character seems to evoke his personal narrative, as it points to both the past and the present. We know that sneakers were a desirable item that was out of reach for 50 Cent during his childhood, as he has repeatedly mentioned in interviews – it has also been depicted in the semi-autobiographical movie *Get Rich or Die Trying*. A closer look at his shoes reveals that they are Reebok G-Unit sneakers, his own brand. This detail represents his business acumen and points towards his journey from a poor, drug-dealing nobody to an international hip hop star. Shoes are also a prominent marker of hip hop success and have been so since Adidas' sponsorship of legendary old-school rappers Run-DMC. 50 Cent's car also underlines his success and masculine credentials. Although he feigns ordinariness in relation to this extraordinary luxury (while performing as the 'ordinary guy'), he nevertheless claims extraordinariness for himself, constantly reminding us of it by rapping to us from the hood of the luxury car. Still, authenticity is important, and this likely informs the plain clothing despite the exoticism of his surroundings. The ordinary guy brings street credibility, even to a castle.

The second character is the 'gangster', which resonates with the tale of 50 Cent's criminal record. Here, 50 Cent dresses in black with a burgundy hat. He is the most

physically passive of the three characters 50 Cent performs in this video, and his role is largely narrative – mostly, he stands in a dark room in front of the ‘magic’ iron ornament that comes alive while he raps. If the sneakers of the ordinary guy take us back to 50 Cent’s childhood, the bravado of the gangster evokes his early youth, and the criminal activity that led to his shooting.

The third character is the pimp. 50 Cent dresses in an extravagant grey fur coat and has a silver chain around his neck, big chunks of diamond in each ear and several rings on his fingers. Near the end of the video, the pimp also appears in the dressy white outfit in the ballroom, with a giant silver crucifix around his neck, a big expensive watch, and several more rings on his fingers. This character, notably, has a totally different relationship to the women in the video, as is obvious from Olivia’s deference to him; 50 Cent’s attitude in this scene is far from the wonder and bemusement of the ordinary guy. What, then, does this character evoke in 50 Cent’s personal narrative or the larger tradition of masculinity in hip hop?

The man’s fur coat, of course, has a long tradition in popular culture, particularly in relation to several 1970s blaxploitation movies with a pimp as the leading character.<sup>7</sup> In *Willie Dynamite* (1974), the leading character is a scrupulous pimp with a taste for spectacularly fancy outfits.<sup>8</sup> Willie wears a bright green suit, revival golden platform boots, and a fur coat with a matching fur hat. 50 Cent is generally less colourful and wears his typical hip hop uniform of T-shirt and jeans underneath his fur coat, which even has a hood, in true hip hop fashion.

This character is a favourite of several other hip hop artists, including Ice-T, Snoop Dogg, P. Diddy, Big Daddy Kane and Dr Dre. According to hip hop scholar Imani Perry, the pimp (or ‘player’) thrives on the acquisition of both female bodies and wealth: ‘His power is based on an interactive dynamic in which the player holds control through both his will and manipulation of the bodies and resources of others’ (Perry 2004, p. 132). We have already seen how sexually attractive women constantly surround 50 Cent in ‘Candy Shop’, but markers of excessive materialism are also ubiquitous. The video’s focus on material wealth, in and of itself, evokes aspects of 50 Cent’s personal narrative. His episode of *MTV Cribs*, titled ‘50 Cent Special’, starts exactly like the ‘Candy Shop’ video, as a car enters a big iron gate and drives up to 50 Cent’s mansion, which is in fact much bigger than the mysterious castle in the video. The entrance hall of the mansion is strikingly similar to the ‘Candy Shop’ castle (minus the women), and the rooms even resonate somewhat with the video – he has several rooms filled only with clothes and one dedicated to his many pairs of shoes. In the master bedroom, an iron ornament decorated with half-naked women recalls the one behind the gangster character in the video. In every room, pictures of 50 Cent cover the walls. There is also a recording studio, six kitchens, many bedrooms, a movie theatre, a gymnasium, outdoor and indoor pools, and a nightclub in the basement, replete with poles and swings ready for strippers. In the MTV special, after the tour inside, the rap star takes viewers outside to see more toys, including several expensive vehicles much like the one used in the video.

At the end of the video, of course, 50 Cent steps out of all of his characters as he wakes from his daydream. This is a telling moment, in that we are quickly made to see that no larger issues were in fact at stake in the ‘candy shop’ fantasy. It was simply that: a fantasy. While many early hip hop performers tried to fight oppression and expressed concerns and frustrations about drug abuse, imprisonment, poverty, gang violence, racism and white supremacy, none of these issues informs this video. 50 Cent merely imagines one way to escape from a boring, ‘normal’, everyday

life. In his fantasy, Olivia would do anything to please him; in reality, she is yelling at him to wake up and pay for his candy. Ironically, this 'reality' piece is where the video is most unreal. The three characters played in the fantasy all draw on 50 Cent's personal narrative. When 50 Cent steps out of the fantasy and wakes up to 'reality', however, the discrepancy between this and his personal narrative becomes the most profound.

We have now seen some of the workings of the masculinity represented in this video as they are expressed through the resonances between the characters depicted in 'Candy Shop' and the personal narrative of 50 Cent. It's now time to thicken the analysis by focusing on the music. We'll explore how the music plays an intrinsic part in the construction of these masculine characters. But music isn't bricks and mortar; it often does its own thing. In 'Candy Shop' we'll see how certain unruly musical details threaten to undermine the macho masculinity constructed by the lyric and the visual imagery.

## Vocal style

According to hip hop scholar Alyssa Woods, the voice is crucial to the MC's performed identity and, as we shall see, 50 Cent aligns his rapping style to a reiteration of his masculinity. Important aspects of rap vocal practice include vocal quality such as resonance, timbre, colour, technique of lyric delivery such as flow, tempo, articulation, declamation, pronunciation, and physical qualities such as register, range, pitch and intonation. These elements all work to underpin rap's performative conventions, which include braggadocio, sexual assertiveness, aggression, toughness, confidence and seductiveness (Woods 2010, p. 9). Added to the voice are the lyrics, which both communicate actual content and contain insinuations of gender – for example, it is considered masculine to be able to talk and write well and feminine to be an irrational, emotional chatterbox. In one of the first books on rap's musical workings, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, Adam Krims distinguishes among three rap deliveries:

One style I will call 'sung' rhythmic style, referring to rhythms and rhymes equivalent (or parallel) to those of much sung pop or rock music. [...] Characteristic of the sung style are rhythmic repetition, on-accent, regular on-beat pauses, and strict couplet groupings. [...] The other two rhythmic styles will both be labeled as 'effusive' styles, one of them 'percussion-effusive' and the other 'speech-effusive'. The common term between the two refers to a tendency in rap music to spill over the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, the couplet and, for that matter, of duple and quadruple groupings in general. (Krims 2000, p. 64)

Krims notes that, while the speech-effusive and percussion-effusive styles have much in common, the MC uses the voice itself as a percussion instrument in the latter, performing various combinations of 'off-beat attacks that accentuate the counter-metric gestures' (Krims 2000, p. 50). The speech-effusive style is more similar to spoken language, but 'the rhymes are irregular and complex, weaving unpredictable poly-rhythms' (Krims 2000, p. 51). Rappers transgress rhythmic boundaries in a number of ways, drawing upon a staggering of syntax or rhymes, an uneven subdivision of the beat, the repetition of off-beat accents, and the use of polyrhythms. Speech-effusive delivery and enunciation is closer to actual spoken language, while percussion-effusive delivery emerges from the sorts of composed rhythms or beats that one might play on the drums (Krims 2000, p. 64).

In the chorus of 'Candy Shop', 50 Cent sings with Olivia in a call-and-response pattern. In the verses, he alternates between 'sung rhythmic style' and 'speech-effusive style', delivering his rhymes in a laid-back, deliberate fashion that signals the sensuality of the song and underlines the theme of the lyrics. He writes in an African American vernacular and is known for his mumbling pronunciation, but in 'Candy Shop' the lyrics comes over as relatively clear and comprehensible. Physically, his vocal timbre is hoarse and almost raspy, and he raps in a very low range, again a conventional marker of both virility and the potential for badness or evil. 'A rough quality [to the performing voice] can contribute to a hard, edgy sound, which, when combined with appropriate lyrics and imagery, helps to characterise a rapper as tough and masculine' (Woods 2010, p. 10). For 50 Cent it has a further dimension, deriving from his personal narrative; that is, his hoarse voice came about after he was shot. 50 Cent emphasised how his voice changed in an interview with *Time Magazine* and further highlights the shooting episode as a defining moment that was meant to be:

It changed my voice. I still have a fragment of a bullet inside my tongue. And I have a hole in the back of my mouth. This is the voice that works, though. This is why I believe it happened for a reason. The voice before I got shot was the one that not many people listened to. (50 Cent's interview with *Time Magazine*, 10 September 2007, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1661690,00.html>, accessed 12 November 2011)

50 Cent's vocal transformation has often been discussed in the media; for instance, the entertainment online magazine *Contactmusic.com* printed an interview with the artist under the headline '50 Cent Shooting Gave Rapper His Voice'. A significant change in both timbre and texture is obvious in a comparison of 'Candy Shop' with, for example, a pre-shooting track like 'How to Rob'.<sup>9</sup> In this earlier song, his voice is less hoarse and gritty and his pitch is higher, which may indicate that he has since lost the upper range in his voice. Still his statement and new vocal sound is an important fragment of his self-presentation. The hoarseness in his voice may be a result of the shooting but could also be a gimmick to further highlight the shooting and buttress his macho image. There is also a significant change in his flow that I argue has more to do with his change of status than with his recovery from the shooting. While his voice is generally clearer in earlier tracks, it also displays a hungry and aggressive quality that is lacking in his post-shooting songs. In 'How to Rob', for example, his delivery is faster and he frequently relies upon a speech-effusive flow that results in complex and irregular rhymes. In 'Candy Shop' and other later work he mostly relies upon a sung-effusive flow that features strict couplet groupings, on-beat accents and regular on-beat pauses. His later style seems to signal his new confidence. As an example, I will show the difference in creativity with both rhythm and lyrics as I compare part of a verse from each song. 'How to Rob' also has a more creative lyric voice, as the song tells the story about 50 Cent robbing several famous commercially successful African American artists.

I caught Blackstreet on a black street in a black jeep  
 One at a time get out and take off your shine  
 Did you ever think that you would be this rich?  
 Did you ever think that you would have these hits?

In this verse he explains how he would have robbed a very successful R&B group called Blackstreet. Here we see that 50 Cent is a bit more humorous in the lyrics,

playing with the words Blackstreet/black street/black jeep. He emphasises the word black in these three examples and this makes the rhythm spill over the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, a characteristic quality of effusive rap style (Krimms 2000, p. 64).

If we look at one verse from 'Candy Shop' we see that the lyrics express more blunt sexual prowess and the simplicity of the rhyme is reflected in the way he delivers it:

I'll break it down for you now, baby it's simple  
 If you be a nympho, I'll be a nympho  
 In the hotel or in the back of the rental  
 On the beach or in the park, it's whatever you into

This verse is rapped in a laid-back and slow 'sung' rhythmic style. The rhythm is repetitive and the couplets have the same meter. As he reinvented himself following the shooting, he developed a new, less forced delivery, as if he already had less to prove. This confident vocal style also informs the characters he performs in the 'Candy Shop' video, as he raps with a 'chill' and relaxed flow that signifies his prowess, both sexually and otherwise.

Lastly, the production of his voice contributes to the masculinity portrayed here. A very common technique in pop and hip hop involves the double-tracking of the lead singing/rapping voice, which thickens it and creates a 'larger than life' sound (Woods 2010, p. 12). Hip hop scholar Justin A Williams points out how rap is rarely 'one line of flow, but could be double- or triple-tracked to emphasise certain moments' (Williams 2009, p. 2). In 'Candy Shop', 50 Cent's backing vocal doubles the conclusion of each line of rap, allowing him to dominate the musical texture much as he appears to dominate the women in the video. His status and manliness is further emphasised through the sung choruses, where he leads and Olivia, as aural as well as visual window dressing, submissively follows.

### Framing the exotic subject

Although his voice functions as a potent signifier of masculinity in many ways, 50 Cent still joins most of his other fellow rappers in not playing a musical instrument in the 'Candy Shop' video. According to Richard Middleton, singing alone, as opposed to playing an instrument, has gendered connotations. This seems to be valid regarding rapping as well:

All performers are, in a particular, codified way, on display, objects of consuming attention; but singers stand naked, their bodies not mediated by external instruments. Display, in this context, is an already sexualised site, heavily coded feminine (which means that men who sing, especially in live situations when their bodies are on display, are already in danger of being seen as feminised or queer). (Middleton 2006, p. 94)

In line with Middleton, Freya Jarman-Ivens, in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, also points out that the male body on display causes tension. To be objectified has traditionally been coded as feminine and that is why a male body on display risks being perceived as effeminate and gay. Different strategies are used to deflect this anxiety. Jarman-Ivens explains a common way to release tension used by competitive bodybuilders:



Photographic representations of the male body builder either see the male body draped with a female model or straining against a heavy weight or else flaunting his strength through the flexed muscle. (Jarman-Ivens 2006, p. 212)

She argues that the weights and the women work as a 'veil that must be negotiated before the male body can be seen' and in a sense mediate the difficult attention much like musical instruments do in Middleton's example. 50 Cent's half-naked body is very much on display in this video as he performs with no instrument to mediate him. How does he protect himself, then, from associations of his vulnerability (and hence femininity or queerness)? We find the answer in how he frames his own body with many equally exposed female bodies. The women in 'Candy Shop' have a similar function to a veil, working to release the tension much in the same way as female models complement male bodybuilders and protect them from being perceived as effeminate and/or gay.

One of the most problematic general aspects of male performers' hip hop videos is the way women are represented and this becomes particularly so when we begin to unpack the relationship these typically numerous female bodies have to the typically unique male body they are meant to frame. Despite (or perhaps because of) the numbers, the advantage lies clearly with the male, and this is certainly the case in 'Candy Shop', whatever the apparent power of 50 Cent's female counterpart, Olivia Longott, the only woman in the video with an actual voice (though not an independent one: her vocalisations, as mentioned, serve only to echo or otherwise ornament his). All of the women in the video are physically exposed and sexually aggressive, which taps into stereotypes about black women analogous to those regarding black men exploited by 50 Cent. In the chorus of the song, for example, Olivia sings seductively to 50 Cent that she will make him 'spend all he's got'. In the sixth verse of the song, 50 Cent raps appreciatively: 'As soon as I come through the door, she get to pulling on my zipper; it's like a race – who could get undressed quicker?' We will also recall the nurse and dominatrix characters, as well as the women enjoying the chocolate-filled bathtub. This problematic and essentialist representation of African American women has become the norm in hip hop videos. Collins depicts the trend with precision:

Contemporary music videos of Black male artists in particular became increasingly populated with legions of young black women who dance, strut, and serve as visually appealing props for the rapper in question. The women in these videos typically share two attributes – they are rarely acknowledged as individuals and they are scantily clad. One Black female body can easily replace another and all are reduced to their bodies. (Collins 2005, p. 129)

Carol Vernallis, in her book *Experiencing Music Video*, agrees that representations of African American women in music videos are obviously sexist but seems to qualify this by observing that the body, music and pleasure have always been closely linked. She notes that popular music has long dealt with transgression, most explicitly and powerfully through race and sex, and that different genres seem drawn to different female physical ideals; she gives the link between genre and ideal body a phenomenological explanation:

African American women's bodies in videos are often eye-poppingly beautiful, Amazonian sculptural forms that achieve a semiotic pitch that the image needs in order to match the speed and density of the music. [...] Perhaps the particular depictions of African American women's bodies and contemporary pop sound are linked somehow; rap music sits in the

lower register with heavy drum and bass beats and the women are strong and voluptuous, which stands in stark contrast to the soaring guitar and vocal work of the 1980s metal videos, with thin gazelle-like women with long thin white legs. (Vernallis 2004, p. 72)

Vernallis' take on African American women in hip hop videos seems to downplay to the purely conventional in the linking of music and image. She assumes that some music fits certain images better than other music, and further that 'the image can be shaped so that it mimics the experiential qualities of the sound' (Vernallis 2004, p. 175). She later links images to the phenomenological qualities of sound as well (Vernallis 2004, p. 177) so, for example, if we saw images of battle and explosions but heard soft, gentle music, we would experience a disconnect (and either resent or appreciate it). But when Vernallis attempts to link conventional hip hop to images of African American women, she surely takes too great a leap, because it is not ultimately the macho rap star's music that demands the image of beautiful African American women, it is the construction of Western patriarchal masculinity. Until we critique the construction of masculinity enabled by these particular background performers, they will never be effectively 'liberated'.

So, if the women in 'Candy Shop' are not experientially linked to the sound of hip hop, what are they doing in the video? I agree with Collins that women in hip hop videos are generally reduced to props for the male star, but this does not mean that they are irrelevant to the semantics of the music or the visual gestures of the video. The audiovisual representations of black masculinity in this video present a number of conflicting markers.

I will turn to the formative insights of *Feminine Endings*, where Susan McClary discusses the 'inverted framing effect'. In her reading of Monteverdi's *Lamento della Ninfa*, a chamber piece depicting a madwoman, the main character is framed by a trio of tenors. While the madwoman sings chromatically, the trio comments on her song with safe, predictable cadences, eventually arriving at the most conventional key of all: C major. This trio protects us from the threat of the madwoman and this is signified in the musical material itself. The madwoman is out of control and sings chromatically, and the three tenors are sane and restrain her madness through harmonic cadences. In 'Candy Shop' it is the women who frame 50 Cent, and this is also expressed in the music. 'Candy Shop' relies upon a synthesised string riff of only five notes: F#, G, A, B and E. This sequence derives from the Phrygian mode and features a flat second, a flat third, a flat sixth and a flat seventh. The Phrygian mode, in the West, has historically been used to signify femininity, the Orient and the generally exotic, as opposed to the Dorian mode, as Susan Fast notes:

The Greeks (specifically Aristotle) differentiated between Dorian and Phrygian modes, coding Dorian as calming, strengthening, and 'virile' and Phrygian as inducing frenzy and being 'effeminate', on the basis, it is now thought, that the latter contained semitones while the former did not, that is, the tension produced by semitone movement from dissonance to consonance was emotionally destabilising and even erotic. (Fast 2001, p. 43)

The string riff circles around semitones, as the riff starts in the base register with the tonic F#, then continues on the flat second G, proceeds to the flat seventh E and the flat third A, then arrives at the tonic. If we accept its associations with exoticism, then this riff might be seen, in the context of the video, to evoke the idea of a harem, a space that is as physically fantastic as the Phrygian mode is aurally fantastic. The visual reference that evokes the concept of a harem is the number of women and the

activities they engage in: dancing seductively, caressing each other in the bathtub and sexually satisfying the only man in the castle. As opposed to the orgy possibilities depicted in the videos for Madonna's 'Justify My Love' or Prince's 'Get Off', for example – in which neither artist appears to be in complete control – 'Candy Shop' shows a brothel, plain and simple, that becomes a harem because of the string riff. The harem fantasy historically derives from the European fascination with and consequent exoticisation of the Other which, as Scott points out, has more to do with *us* than with *them*: 'When orientalism appropriates music from another cultures, it is not used simply to represent the Other: it is used to represent our own thoughts about the Other' (Scott 2003, p. 155). Hip hop is only the latest in a number of artistic pursuits to indulge in this theme – several operas contain harem scenes, for example, and plenty of artists have painted harem motifs as well. Many movies have also taken advantage of this powerful fantasy. 50 Cent uses it in 'Candy Shop' to further buttress his representation of masculinity. He is, in the majority of the video, the only man in a castle full of women; in addition, his hoarse, low rapping voice sounds particularly manly when paired with the exotic flute and string riff representing the harem. Like other rap artists, he may have taken his inspiration from the big screen, whether *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or *Prince of Persia*. Pop stars of every stripe have likewise explored the harem's possibilities, from Elvis Presley in the movie *Harum Scarum* to English classical crossover singer Sarah Brightman's 2003 album *Harem* and *Harem World Tour* the following year.

In order to understand the impact of 50 Cent's framing devices, we might try to picture how the audiovisual text would work without the dancing group of women, Olivia, the moviemaker, the nurse or the dominatrix. The string riff, bereft of its harem context, would transfer its exotic visual associations directly to 50 Cent, which would in fact threaten his masculinity rather than reinforce it. We sense a bit of this unhelpful transfer even as the gangster character raps alone in front of the iron ornament. The video only risks a few seconds of this before the women come alive and take upon themselves the string and flute connotations. It also occurs, verging upon the homoerotic, in fact, as an oiled and bare-chested 50 Cent performs alone in the castle. The bodybuilders mentioned above are already in danger of being perceived as homoerotic because of the feminine connotations 'to be looked at' brings. When music with feminine connotations are added to this picture the stakes are even higher.

Some music videos use this effect intentionally, as for instance Madonna in her 1989 hit 'Express Yourself'. The star inverts traditional gender norms as she plays the role of a factory boss in charge of a group of hard-working and good-looking men. The camera zooms in on the men as they work bare-chested in the rain. Madonna's men pose more than they work and even engage in a choreographed dance routine to the sound of the catchy disco dance tune early in the video. The feminine connotations of the music, the dancing and the male bodies on display are stronger than the masculine connotations of physical labour and the result is that the men come over as homoerotic. This is obviously intentional as Madonna is playing with gender norms in this video and reaches a wide audience of both straight and gay fans.

In several hip hop videos and especially in 'Candy Shop' where the homoerotic connotations are unwanted, they have to get averted by framing the male star surrounded by legions of sexually attractive women. Without the women as a mooring, then, 50 Cent's boat would drift dangerously off course.

Still, there is another central factor that differentiates the men in Madonna's video and 50 Cent, namely ethnicity. According to Imani Perry, black masculinity

has always been constructed both by and against dominant discourses of masculinity, and specifically those of whiteness. Under the white male gaze, black men (along with women) have been labelled 'the other'. According to Donald L. Mosher, hypermasculinity is defined as the exaggeration of stereotypical male behaviour, especially emphasising sexuality, physical strength and aggression (Mosher 1984). Perry and hooks both argue that black men have long been objectified by the white patriarchy and, by extension, feminised; hooks further sees hypermasculinity as a strategy black men have used to fight back. Exaggeration is fundamental to hypermasculinity and often spills over into parody. How does 50 Cent use parody and humour as a strategy to gain agency in this video?

### Parody as entertainment

Regarding the whole notion of performative agency, we meet the fundamental dilemma which Judith Butler describes as 'the bind of self-expression' – that is, the subject is not outside the language that structures it but it is not wholly determined by it either. The subject can intervene and negotiate its 'I' (Butler 1990). When the given subject is a rapper as well, one expects a significant verbal element in this negotiation in the subject's construction. An artist is neither an omnipotent controller over his or her art, nor a puppet worked solely by the music industry. In much of the biographical material 50 Cent has published and the interviews he has given we sense an artist self-consciously constructing his personal narrative. Therefore, it seems that 50 Cent chooses to exploit (and even literally embody) black stereotypes invented long ago by a white patriarchy. According to Byron Hurt, the director of the documentary *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, if you want to be perceived as masculine in mainstream hip hop, you must conform to certain norms: 'You have to be strong, tough, have a lot of girls, you have to have money, be a playa or a pimp, be in control, dominate other men and other people'.<sup>10</sup> As discussed, all of these attributes are performed by 50 Cent through the characters he embodies in 'Candy Shop'. According to bell hooks, these ideals (and the characters who embody them) derive from old stereotypes of African American men imposed by white prejudice:

Negative stereotypes about the nature of black masculinity continue to overdetermine the identities black males are allowed to fashion for themselves. [...] Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. (hooks 2004, p. xii)

hooks notes that there are very few alternatives available to black men if they seek visibility in any public arena and laments the relative lack of intervention regarding those stereotypes. But there are also examples showing that such intervention can be executed through parody, as performers seek to gain agency *from within* (rather than in opposition to) those roles. Hypermasculinity can also be read as parody in this context, as the hip hop star flaunts various masculine markers in an exaggerated way.

According to Stan Hawkins, much of the pleasure of watching music videos arises from the way in which we identify and empathise with the star. In *Settling the Pop Score*, he describes how the Anglo-Irish artist Morrissey uses his overly dramatic performance of the song 'Satan Rejected My Soul' to invite his fans to 'partake in sentiments of self-pity and loathing' (Hawkins 2002, p. 85). Morrissey first charms

his fans and then invites them to imagine life in his shoes in the scenario described in his song. As Hawkins explains:

Through reflexive performance, words and phrases are intensified in a deeply personal way that entices the listener into the singer's world in a very different manner from that of just speaking the lines in a non-musical context. (Hawkins 2002, p. 85)

Unlike Morrissey, 50 Cent invites the viewer/listener to the 'Candy Shop' as a multilevel metaphor for his world of fame. While Morrissey's world is dark and full of doubt, 50 Cent displays power, popularity and wealth in 'Candy Shop'. One moment in the video perhaps exposes the parody at work here. The final line in the first verse is a statement of sexual prowess: 'I'm trying to explain baby the best way I can, I'll melt in your mouth girl not in your hand, ha ha.' This line is meant to be shocking and provocative but it should also make us laugh due to its tightly woven intertextual web, as it refers to a number of old commercials for m&m chocolate that 'melts in your mouth not in your hand'. These commercials are especially meant to appeal to the mother in a 'standard' core family who can finally give her children treats without worrying about chocolate-stained clothes. The m&m commercials could not be further from 50 Cent's 'Candy Shop'. For 50 Cent to use this slogan in his video to describe oral sex becomes comical and there are several layers to this joke. Most obvious is the contrast between a white bourgeoisie picture-perfect happy family and 50 Cent's promiscuous behaviour in his private harem. He also chimes in with the candy metaphor throughout the song. That black artists refer to themselves as chocolate is not uncommon. Perhaps the most famous group to do so is The Parliament with their album *Chocolate City*. Here they describe a Washington, DC taken over by black people because of immigration. Surrounding *Chocolate City* are the vanilla suburbs where of course the white people live. 50 Cent's reference to m&m could also be a pun and a nod to Eminem, whose stage name plays off his own initials (Marshall Mathers).<sup>11</sup> The way 50 Cent delivers this line lets us in on the joke. In his typically self-assured, laid-back manner, he raps this line in the character of the ordinary guy sitting on the doctor's bench while the sexy nurse caresses him. His facial expression and the tone in his voice are serious as he faces the camera. Then the image suddenly switches and we see him in the pimp character, looking down and cracking a smile as he utters 'ha ha'. In this moment we seem to be shown how the star really feels about this provocative line and its intertextual layers. Almost embarrassed, he looks down and laughs, indicating that he *knows* this time it is over the top. We are invited to laugh with him, and his laughter relieves the tension of his offensive words. Still, this is the only moment in the video where 50 Cent drops his straight face, unless we are inclined to see the whole dream scenario as another means of relieving the boorishness of the imagery. This is similar to what Freya Jarman-Ivens describes as a distancing strategy in her research on several hip hop groups and performers.

It may well be that comedy is deployed as a distancing strategy by the group, such that the offensive potential is somewhat lessened by an implicit caveat emptor: 'It's just a joke'. More overtly, Eminem concludes a tirade of misogynist violence with the line, 'I'm just playin' ladies – you know I love you'. (Jarman-Ivens 2006, p. 200)

50 Cent's laughter, then, signifies that he's just joking, and the same comic relief effect occurs when the fantasy bobble pops. While many issues concerning gender,

ethnicity and social class are thrown in our faces by the video, they are never addressed, discussed or challenged. The dream scenario, however, packages them as more of a commodity for our entertainment. Still, Patricia Hill Collins cautions:

Mass media's tendency to blur the lines between fact and fiction has important consequences for perceptions of Black culture and Black people. [...] In this context, some representations of Blackness become commonsense 'truths'. (Collins 2005, p. 151)

In the case of 'Candy Shop', 50 Cent's hypersexual, controlling pimp appears to play off a 'commonsense truth' about black men. This semantic blurring occurs first because we as the listener/viewers of the video are not able to see any songwriters, managers, music journalists or video directors but rather, as Simon Frith points out, experience the artist as the sole 'author of what we see' (Frith 1998, p. 225). So rather than encounter the *representation* of black masculinity in 'Candy Shop' as a complex cultural expression consisting of many voices, we encounter what we believe to be the *real* 50 Cent. Related to this ongoing blurring of fact and fiction is the fact that the rap audience experiences some representations of 'blackness' as more authentic than others. This derives from a mindset that sees blackness as an essential quality and not as a term in constant flux. In this video, 50 Cent appears 'really black', although the look and behaviour that earn this designation have changed and will continue to change over time. As Collins further argues, it is a problem when the black masculinity we encounter in hip hop videos 'appears to be more authentically "Black" than Black men who [for example] study' (Collins 2005, p. 152).<sup>12</sup>

Most people find pleasure in popular music because it is entertaining and fun, and 'Candy Shop' can certainly be read as nothing more than a parody of one black male's fantasy (and therefore, to an extent, of the racist stereotypes of the hypersexual black man that underpin it). Still, humour is a double-edged sword and parody, as Butler points out, is always at risk of validating the very thing it seeks to mock (Butler 1990, p. 188). When 50 Cent parodies the 'primitive' African American man as a mere body, he is also, in a sense, sustaining the stereotype. We may also wonder whether the humour in his parody might not be lost in translation when the images, the sheer physicality, the gendered signifiers in the music and his verbal dexterity all conspire to seem very serious indeed. Rather than understanding that these images are a constructions of black masculinity and that it does not directly reflect the reality of black male experiences, an international audience who listen to hip hop might easily be led to believe that most African American men are like those 50 Cent performs as in 'Candy Shop'.

## Conclusion

In my analysis of 'Candy Shop' I have tried to shed light on the ways in which black masculinity is represented as controlling, dominating and misogynistic. These attributes, of course, derive from very old yet still potent stereotypes of African American men, including especially what hip hop now recognises as the pimp. I have shown how 50 Cent's personal narrative is constantly evoked by these characters as the listener/viewer is encouraged to read his mediated life story into them. I have also shown how the representation of masculinity carries over into the musical realm, to be further supported by 50 Cent's flow and vocal production. And I have

shown how 50 Cent's masculinity and heterosexuality rests on the way he is framed in the images (scantly clad women surrounding him) and by the music (exotic string and flute riff). But I have also hinted at the potential fragility of this masculinity as, when the exotic string and flute riff suddenly seems to threaten his masculinity and even his heterosexuality, the women are absent. This brings several new questions into the debate that needs to be dealt with. What does 50 Cent say about changes in pop music when hip hop is now mainstreamed? How does his produced sound raise issues of eroticism and entertainment? Why might he feel as a Black male that his gender representation needs to be framed as heterosexual? With this in mind, we see that the implications of musical structures and processes powerfully encode the images we perceive which, from the vantage point of the consumer, not only offer the materiality for musical enjoyment and pleasure, but also underline a cause for ongoing social and political concern.

## Endnotes

1. The video can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRcnJd15BA> (accessed 21 November 2013). My socio-musicological approach, using audiovisual analysis as my main method, is strongly informed by Andrew Goodwin, Stan Hawkins, Anahid Kassabian and John Richardson.
2. In 2003, for example, *Rolling Stone* pictured the star scowling over his shoulder at the camera, next to the headline '50 Cent: Mastering the Art of Violence'. While his name is printed in black, the zero in it is rendered as a gun sight in red, an obvious reference to the shooting.
3. See <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/50-cent-let-girl-hold-bag> (accessed 9 May 2013).
4. See <http://www.50cent.com/> (accessed 27 February 2011).
5. See <http://www.50cent.com/> (accessed 27 February 2011).
6. This is a manipulated sample from The Salsoul Orchestra's 1983 hit 'Ooh, I love it'.
7. Several of the African American stereotypes we find in 'Candy Shop' derive from the minstrel stage. This is a subject greatly in need of detailed scholarly study, but it has not been my aim to do so in this article. For an in-depth study of minstrel shows' influence on popular culture, see Lhamon (1998). For a more thorough analysis of blaxploitation than I can provide, see Christopher Sieving (2011).
8. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n79yYY17fcs>.
9. This track is from 50 Cent's first album, *Power to the Dollar*, which Columbia Records refused to release after the shooting. It is heavily bootlegged, according to <http://www.50cent.com/> (accessed 27 February 2011).
10. See <http://www.bhurt.com/beyondbeatsandrhymes.php> (accessed 25 April 2013).
11. See <http://www.poemhunter.com/lyrics/eminem/biography/>.
12. The few times we are presented with characters of African American men with academic ambition in popular culture, they are often presented as un-cool, 'whiteish' nerds. A good example of this is the character Carlton from the television sitcom *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. He is represented as a straight-A student who lacks social skills and dances funny.

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