German female rap: Crisis management of socially disadvantaged female adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a period of crisis in which young people cope with identity, insecurity, and orientation problems. The musical genre known as German Female Rap represents a medium of expression and distinction for establishing an identity that offers young listeners the scope to seek orientation. For some years now, women artists have been pursuing female self-empowerment by successfully rapping about issues such as sexuality, gender, body positivity, emotions, and ethnicity. Our explorative study is based on the findings of a research project conducted in Germany in 2022. We analyzed 20 song lyrics by female artists and eight guided interviews with young people and discuss how socially disadvantaged adolescent females establish agency in age-specific crises through Female Rap. All interviewees were adolescents between the ages of 14 and 19 with a post-migrant history. Encouraged by songs and protagonists, these young female listeners experience themselves as self-empowered actors with new ideas about self-presentation. However, identification with idols can also lead to stigmatization and exclusion. Appropriation between mimetic isomorphism and autonomous positioning should be considered as an actor-specific coping strategy during the adolescent crisis phase. For practical youth work, this study points to the high significance of informal fields of socialization beyond the limits of pedagogical settings.

Keywords: *Adolescent crisis, Agency, German female rap, Self-empowerment, Social disadvantage, Youth work, Youth.*

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Highlights of this paper

- As a subgenre of rap, female rap is a socio-critically inspired musical art form in which categories of inequality such as gender, body, ethnicity, and socio-economic status are addressed and criticized.
- Methodologically, the multi-perspective approach through song lyrics and interviews allows us to relativize ubiquitous discursive devaluations by juxtaposing ascriptions with the adolescents' individual interpretations.
- The adolescents' appropriation processes between mimetic isomorphism and autonomous positioning should be understood as actor-specific coping strategies during the adolescent crisis phase.

1. INTRODUCTION

Female rap is both a sphere of musico-cultural experience and a collective category of gender-specific inclusion and exclusion. Within the rap collective, which is dominated by cisgender males, public discourse since the 1990s has subsumed all female rappers within the structural category of gender, without taking into account the musical subgenres represented by individual protagonists. This scene exhibits a high degree of diversity (Süß, 2018).

The discourse about female rap to date has been dominated by analyses based on gender theory (for a detailed discussion, see (Pough, 2007; Süß, 2016). The structural category of gender has been discussed with a focus on sexuality and the body through the lenses of cultural studies (e.g., Manzke, 2007), post-structuralism (e.g., Wolbring, 2015), and the criticism of patriarchy (Klein & Friedrich, 2003; Rose, 2008). Fundamentally, these analyses focus on a critical reflection of female rappers' enactment of gender and body (see, for example, Bifulco & Reuter, 2017; Leibnitz, 2007; Şahin, 2019). From a normative perspective, the artists are accused of mimetically adapting to their cis-male colleagues via "female phallicism" (Mc Robbie, 2009) and habitually acting in accordance with this adaptation, so that, in this sense, they are not empowering actors. Instead, they are said to publicly re-enact the sexist and misogynist notions of gender. Outside of the gender debate, two aspects are neglected in the scientific discourse: First, the genesis of German rap music is closely linked to the discourse around German migration and its crises. Second, it is also related to the categories of socio-economic status and socio-ethnic origins as determinants of inequality.

The genesis of German rap must be examined in conjunction with the "guest worker" generation that migrated to Germany during the 1970s. In the course of the oil crisis of 1979/1980 and the rise in unemployment, modern housing estates at the fringes of metropolitan cities decayed into social dead ends devoid of prospects, becoming segregated neighborhoods for the socially disadvantaged. To this day, these areas are labeled 'ghettos' or 'social hotspots' in public discourse. Their residents are degraded and discriminated against as 'anti-social' and 'resistant to integration.' Together with their children and grandchildren, they were pushed further to the fringes of society simply by virtue of where they lived (Seeliger & Dietrich, 2012). As in the case of the linguistic liberation of marginalized African Americans in The Bronx, it was adolescent post-migrants in Germany who could use rap to engage with the status of an excluded minority. At the same time, they broke with dominant social strata and their claims of hegemony (Scharenberg, 2001).

Rap music that focuses on disadvantaged lives serves as a projection screen not only for male adolescents of the second or third post-migrant generation. Their female peers likewise use rap to discuss issues such as growing up in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage inherited from their parents or grandparents, living in segregated areas with no educational aspirations, and suffering from gender discrimination. They are also disadvantaged protagonists who receive and represent German rap. Thus, it is all the more surprising that rap audience studies are still a desideratum in research, more so because rap was one of the most popular musical genres in Germany in 2022, with almost 42% of young people aged 14 to 19 describing themselves as fans (Ifd Allensbach). The few available studies about rap consumption in adolescents (Love, 2012) show that preferences are driven not only by the content of the

songs but also by their beat, as well as the artist's ethnic identity, voice, and overall image (Güler Saied, 2012). Over and above the gender debate, female rap is the source of a multifaceted complex of themes that has been little explored to date. This empirical study aims to shed light on these themes. This study consists of five parts. We begin with a history of the development of female rap in Germany before describing our methodological approach, the data source, and the concept of crisis and agency. We then present our results and conclude the study with a discussion.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE RAP

The history of German hip-hop and rap began in the 1980s, ten years after the emergence of the genre in Bronx County, New York (Keyes, 2004; Krause, 2020). In the early 1980s, German television aired documentaries about the squalid living conditions of African American residents in the social hotspots of the Bronx. These reports also showed footage of adolescents using hip-hop elements, such as graffiti, rap, and breakdancing, to cope with the monotony of their daily lives (Rick, 2008). In Germany, hip-hop first became a mass phenomenon when German cinemas screened the Hollywood productions "Beat Street" and "Wild Style" (Krause, 2020). The success of these films gave rise to graffiti, DJ, and breakdance subcultures that met at regular hip-hop festivals in the years that followed. Rap finally became mainstream with a focus on economic profit and the advent of the international music channel MTV during the 1980s (Raab, 2008). The commercialization and mediatization of music culture created a broader audience, not confined to the African American population, and lowered the threshold for participation. In Germany, it was adolescents from the so-called first guest-worker generation – the 'second migration generation' – who felt particularly drawn to this subculture thanks to their isomorphic everyday experiences. The songs offered them two options for engagement, both as consumers and producers: on one hand, they consumed the music in their crisis-ridden everyday lives and felt represented by their experiences of disintegration, segregation, discrimination, and racism. On the other hand, rap, as an emancipatory genre, simultaneously offered experimental spaces for self-presentation and creative expression.

The mid-1980s were regarded as the beginning of female rap in Germany (for a detailed account, see Braune, 2021). For the first time, female rap artists like Mansha Friedrich, aka Peace NT, and Sylvia Macco, aka Cora E., were performing, although they originally sang in English only. In addition to the English language, they copied the rap style and sound of their American counterparts. The 1990s brought about changes in that rappers began to perform in German and English. Famous artists of the time included Sabrina Setlur, aka Schwester S. The change of language not only enabled German rap to become mainstream but also brought about the commercialization of German hip-hop culture with all its accompanying effects (Szillus, 2012). This was also the period when the first successful hip-hop long-playing records (LPs) were released in Germany and began to place on the charts (Hitzler & Niederbacher, 2010). In the battle for success, money, and recognition, female artists now faced competition from one another and from their dominant, disparaging cis male colleagues. They reacted in three different ways: 1) By quitting. Women abandoned their musical careers; 2.) By withdrawing. They concentrated on the underground scene and consolidated their position there; 3.) By commercial breakthroughs. Female artists began to place on the charts and became permanent fixtures in the commercial rap scene. The rap crew TicTacToe, which sold two million records, still ranks among Germany's most successful rap bands. With attitudes that were 'somewhat bolshy, rebellious, and most importantly [...] emancipated' (Braune, 2021), they upended and revolutionized the hitherto predominant image of women both within the subculture and among the wider public. In addition to commercial successes, the rap underground also exhibited differentiation (Braune, 2021) in terms of song themes and artists, as can be seen in the examples of Aziza A. and Lady Scar. The themes fundamentally revolved around fields of social tension, which post-

migrant artists subjected to critical scrutiny: thwarted participation vs. self-determination, oppression vs. anti-discrimination, and violence vs. self-assertion.

During the 2000s, the dominant subgenre in Germany was gangsta rap (Wolbring, 2018), a platform for the artistic representation of hegemonic masculinity (Goßmann & Seeliger, 2013). The practices of 'battling' and 'boasting' serve to position the artists in a contest and showcase hypermasculinity, unemotional toughness, realness, and coolness (Süß, 2018). The most prominent example is the independent label Aggro Berlin, which, along with its protagonists, had the greatest commercial success. Katharina Löwel, aka Kitty-Kat, was the first and only female rapper to sign with this label. Not only did she attract attention with her rhymes, but she also sang parts in other colleagues' songs and displayed impressive rap skills. Nevertheless, for three years, she remained virtually invisible both within the subculture and in public (Gantenbrink, 2021) while her cis-male counterparts basked in their own hype. On the subject of women, the songs focused on the 'saint-whore dichotomy,' the clichéd exaltation and denigration of femininity in the shape of the devout, silent, role-compliant virgin versus the uncontrollable, man-hunting, nymphomaniac vampiress. Female artists also copied the stylistic devices of their cis-male colleagues and thus gained a place in the male-dominated world of gangsta rap. On the fringes of the rap scene, a growing number of female rappers continued to deal with political and socially critical themes and thus established markers of identity against issues such as sexism, racism, and violence, and for equality of the sexes. In the early 2010s, the first woman began rapping about issues that had previously been the exclusive domain of her cis-male colleagues in the subgenre of gangsta rap. The former sex worker Ewa Malanda, aka Schwesta Ewa (Goßmann & Seeliger, 2015), motivated by her own biography, achieved success with her raps about drug abuse, sex work, and sexualized violence within the milieu, always in the persona of a credible gangster. From 2015 onwards, the rap scene became increasingly diverse and achieved mainstream visibility. An increasing number of post-migrant black and/or Muslim female Master of Ceremonies (MCs), such as Ebru Düzgün, aka Ebow, Josy, or Jordan Napieray, aka Badmomzjay, and Ronja Zschoche, aka Haiyiti, made themselves heard with their raps about misogyny, queer-phobia, empowerment, and transsexuality (Braune, 2021). The variety and number of female rappers taking the stage from 2015 onwards represented a spectrum of themes and styles that individual artists specialized in Böhm and Höllein, 2021). During this period, the (since disbanded) rap duo SXTN (disemvoweling of sixten), comprising the artists Juju and Nura, played the role of trailblazers. They consciously protested against cis-male dominance and misogyny in public life. Their songs reflect and criticize the social image of women from a male perspective (Chastukhina, 2021). Since 2019/2020, two protagonists have dominated the scene: former YouTubers Barbara Schirin Davidavicius, aka Shirin David, and Katrin Vogel, aka Katja Krasavice (Hallenstein, 2021). Both cultivated the image of the 'boss bitch' (Psutka & Grassel, 2021): committed, successful businesswomen exaggerating their femininity. A lively debate has been in progress ever since about whether, and if so, with what stylistic devices – the self-declared goal of female empowerment is achieved by the 'boss bitches' and other female artists (see, for example, (Machulla, 2023; Riggert, 2019)). To date, many female MCs in Germany and elsewhere in Europe still find it more difficult to access agencies and labels in the music business. This was the background against which the music promoter, blogger, freelance author, and DJ Lina Burghausen, aka Mona Lina, founded the rap label 365XX, which aspires to provide professional frameworks for promoting female and queer talent as 'Europe's first all-female hip hop label' (Herzog, 2020).

3. FRAMING: CRISIS AND AGENCY

Female rap is a youth-centric form of expression that offers multiple options for negotiation. It provides support in the search for identity, possibilities for distinction and self-positioning, and affective regulation of emotional and psychological sensitivities during puberty. It can be used to negotiate social and cultural positions or counter-

positions and preferences of taste, all of which can be expressed to make them visible to the protagonist and others. In socio-communicative terms, female rap meaningfully encompasses adolescent communitization.

Adolescence is a period of crisis in that it is the phase of life during which young people must surmount an identity crisis with all of its concomitant insecurities and problems of orientation (Erikson, 1968). In the process, they must engage with their own identity as well as with their environment and reactions to their biological and psychosocial changes. They experience pressure from high social expectations, including the necessity of positioning themselves in society, while simultaneously going through an intensive transitional phase involving changes in their own bodies. Socially disadvantaged adolescents face special challenges in striving for social recognition and acceptance as they are confronted with poorer options for participation due to the paucity of economic and social resources (Bourdieu, 1983). Both the public and scientific discourse label them in terms of the categories of class, body, gender, ethnicity, and educational attainment as 'left behind' and as losers in the time of flexible meritocracies. Thus, youth is not only a time of crisis; it is also a socially unequal time of crisis.

Nevertheless, young people have faith in their own agency and develop various crisis management strategies. A degree of ambivalence emerges here: on one hand, coping with developmental tasks is a challenge, but on the other hand, issues such as heterogeneous body and gender identities, multiple peer and pair configurations, and options for situating affiliation offer scope for experimentation and facilitation (Witte, Schmitt, & Niekrenz, 2021). To portray this ambivalence, it is useful to adopt a relational reading of crisis and agency from an analytical perspective (Armbrüster, Niekrenz, Schmitt, & Witte, 2016). In doing so, it is possible to avoid one-sided attributions to the phase of life and to perceive the conflicting priorities of that phase from the perspective of the subjects. A relational perspective of agency and crisis explores not only the experience of crisis and agency but also the processes that help or hinder this experience (Raitelhuber, 2012). It facilitates a focus on adolescents' agency without disregarding the problems that create the crisis.

Music, in particular, can support and foster the experience of self-efficacy, for example, through body practices, movement practices, and consumption habits. Self-fashioning and performance while dancing, listening, or even rapping along represent experiences of self-efficacy that create identity, since, in the pursuit of self-empowerment, young people often find that their 'only weapon' (Farin, 2017) to engage with their personal and social challenges is their body.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCE

This study reconstructs the coping strategies of adolescent female rap listeners. We seek to show how adolescents create agency through female rap during age-specific crises. We began by analyzing 20 song texts by female artists, asking what crises are addressed and dealt with in the songs. To achieve maximum contrast, we selected songs that featured in German charts and were performed primarily by post-migrant female rappers in the underground. The different genres were considered by including songs from the subgenres of gangsta rap, trap, porno rap, polit rap, and party rap.

The second step was to conduct eight guided interviews with adolescents to establish their motivation for listening to rap. The interviews also addressed crisis situations during adolescence and music consumption as a coping strategy. The study sample comprised the following factors: socioeconomic status, age, sex, and ethnic affiliation. All interviewees were female adolescents aged between 14 and 19 years who came from socio-economically disadvantaged homes and whose parents had no tertiary education. The adolescents themselves have a post-migrant history. Defining the sample in terms of these parameters facilitates an empirical look at those adolescents who have received little or no attention to date: socially disadvantaged, post-migrant female rap listeners. The analysis was dominated

by the following questions: Why do these adolescents listen to female rap? Does this relate to the world of their own experiences? What crises do they reflect on and cope with? Does the data reveal moments of self-empowerment through the consumption of female rap?

All adolescents gave their verbal consent to the interview. Both the consent to the interview and the interview were recorded and subsequently transcribed and anonymized. After transcription, the recordings were deleted to protect the personal rights of the interview participants. The interviews and song texts were subjected to structured content analysis, according to Kuckartz (2018). The first step was to perform fundamental sequential analysis of the material. The next step was to create inductive categories by interpreting the empirical material. The categories were created based on the topics addressed in the song texts and interviews (deductive category creation). The aim was to group the subtopics thematically without distorting the content and essence of the material. Subsequently, anchor examples were identified that could serve as specific example texts to summarize content in terms used by the rap artists and adolescents themselves. The result is an overall picture from multiple perspectives, which we present below.

5. RESULTS

Our presentation of the results is divided into two parts: song lyrics and interviews.

5.1. Song Text Analysis

The song texts represent a form of social critique that exposes injustices in the context of structural inequality, discrimination, and racism, combining the narration of subjective experiences with criticism of public discourse. The songs both confront and process experiences of stigmatization while also describing crisis-ridden biographical advancement. The narratives have two perspectives: exterior and interior. The exterior perspective represents the discursive construction of reality, whereas the interior perspective depicts the subjective construction of reality. This dual reference allows us to categorize song contents in three respects: socio-spatial, socio-economic, and socio-cultural.

The socio-spatial respect denotes the problematization of coming from so-called social hotspots. The 'bad address' results in the labeling and denigration of residents: in the 'ghetto', everyone is simultaneously criminal, violent, dirty, dangerous, and anti-social. The protagonists respond to these ascriptions by exposing their social labeling as a result of a normative discourse of homogenization and exclusion, whose dynamics exacerbate the problems of the residents of these areas. The rapper Sookee encapsulates this when she sings: 'Germany selects and mass cleanses itself [...] white Germans decide about identities, about lives, about survival' (song: Zusammenhänge, artist: Sookee). In reflecting these dynamics, female rappers glorify the 'rough life in the quarter' while legitimizing deviant, milieu-specific practices in the context of authenticity and recognition. Thus, the rapper Schwesta Ewa not only presents herself as violent and criminal in her songs by speaking about crimes such as mugging, drug offenses, and pimping, she also describes these things as natural elements of her everyday family life: 'Dad's inside, LS [life sentence] with PD [preventive detention]. My brother's lucky, gets out after two-thirds (Schwätza, Schwesta Ewa). Additionally, the artists disassociate themselves from stigmatizing ascriptions and draft alternative self-images, such as 'Because this Kanak girl [...] is too educated, looks too good. Shatters your boxes for Muslim women' (Punani Power, Ebow). The rappers criticize institutional discrimination in central educational settings, such as school, which they perceive as reproducing unequal positions of power and reinforcing exclusion. In the song Schule, SXTN reproduces their own biographical experiences from the perspective of teachers who practice discrimination: 'Nura, stop that shit, it's time. Your future's screwed, you gotta watch where you'll end up. Won't get far.' (Schule, SXTN).

However, the songs do not confine themselves to criticizing experiences of stigmatization and discrimination, but also discuss the theme of respect. In this context, respect is an important keyword that gains increasing importance in a time of the dissolution of social boundaries (Sennet, 2002).

In the socio-economic context, the song lyrics address an implied reluctance to study or work. Here, the ascriptions involve laziness, refusal to learn, refusal to work, and a lack of ambition to improve oneself. In response to these labels, the artists create a contradictory image that is dichotomous in structure: themselves, as subjects aspiring to advancement, versus others, who reproduce exclusion and impede advancement. For example, rapper Ebow names the social differences by which she is marked and excluded for being different: "Differences through the name. Through the color of my hair. Through my dark complexion. Prejudice and distance" (Baba Bak, Ebow). Against the background of conditions that impede or outright prevent advancement, they tell the story of their rise. With lines like "Fight, don't run away, we shine like champions" (Giftig, Eunique), the rappers serve as motivators for a rocky but ultimately successful biographical advancement. Amid the adversity of relocations, disrupted relationships, disparagement, and competition on one hand, and social support, individual discipline, and perseverance on the other, they claw their way upward into a hitherto unknown social sphere. Shirin David looks back on her childhood and adolescence: "We were broke as hell; she [her mother] wanted the best for her kids. What I didn't have, I cut out of Vogue and hung it in my room" (Bramfeld-Storys, Shirin David). She describes her mother as a "fighter" who made sacrifices for her children's welfare. Nina Chuba, Newcomer of the Year in 2022, reached No. 1 in the German charts with lyrics such as "High speed, no one can stop me" (Mangos mit Chilli, Nina Chuba). Rapper Schwesta Ewa describes her career from social marginalization into high society in words such as: "Schwesta Ewa, once the hooker from the station. Today [...] on the beach of Monte Carlo" (Escortflow, Schwesta Ewa). Lines such as these are metaphors for the obstacle-ridden rise, the success of which is anything but guaranteed, towards a life of social and economic independence. Conspicuously, social ascent and economic success are embedded in the logic of capitalism. The rappers are able to purchase luxury goods as status symbols and rap about their economic freedom: "Managers that ask, 'Which Rolex do you want?' I'll get my Rolex myself" (Giftig, Eunique).

In the socio-cultural respect, the songs deal with the confrontational negotiation of gender, bodies, and clothing. With lyrics like: 'They say: "You're a woman. Be careful when you're out at night. Your skirt's so short and the guys are too drunk," (Fair, Nura), the artists criticize the unequal distribution of power between the sexes, linking male power with the violation of boundaries such as physical molestation and sexualized violence. Specifically, they address the submissiveness of women demanded by cis men, as well as the objectification, exotification, and hyper-sexualization of the female body – in short, the reification and oppression of women in the patriarchal system. The artists' articulations follow the heteronormative gender order, from songs about 'the ordinary chaos of love' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1990) to detailed descriptions of toxic relationships. The difference between the two sexes is performatively constructed as a line of distinction, and women are defined in terms of a standard set by males. The rapper Antifuchs offers the provocative summary 'you just want to fuck me' (Baklava und Bitches, Antifuchs). Her self-assured answer is: 'To hell with fuck-boys, gimme fries instead' (ibid.). The battle of the sexes is narrated from the perspective of the woman, a subject with personal interests whose voice is not heard in public. Some artists, notably Shirin David and Katja Krasavice, do so by employing the stylistic device of exaggeration in the shape of hyper-femininity. The performative construction of being female is expressed by over-emphasizing the body and options for body modification. 'Your nails are longer than your shorts, baby, give it to him' (Gib ihm, Shirin David). Lyrics like 'I rake in a year's wages in every town with my shows. Such big concert fees, I'm at the plastic surgeon's every day' (Dicke Lippen, Katja Krasavice) present their exaggerated body image as an established norm.

Their enactment can be summed up in the equation: being sexy + being successful = boss bitch. In the role of

the boss bitch, they repudiate their cis-male colleagues' prerogative of interpretation over themselves as women and colleagues, and even go one step further by objectifying men and reducing them to their economic capital: 'Meeting him at one, no idea what his name is. But uh-huh, he's rich – we love it' (Lieben wir, Shirin David).

In summary, at the socio-spatial, socio-economic, or socio-cultural level, the artists' level criticism at entrenched structures of power and inequality, as well as their inherent mechanisms of exclusion and denigration. They call for equal social status and social participation for women while exploring the scope of autonomy and agency to provide female empowerment.

5.2. Interview Results

Music was a core part of the everyday lives of all interviewees (I.).[1] Female rappers help them cope with developmental tasks. One adolescent explained, "Yes, it's important in life because it just helps. Sometimes, in some situations, it calms you or helps you feel better. It also fills up your time, and sometimes the lyrics make you think" (I. 2: L. 97–9). Female rap helps adolescent girls cope with daily life, reflect on their everyday situations, and structure their days. It regulates their emotional and psychological states and organizes their time. Depending on the lyrics, it also initiates reflection on social positions in hierarchical societies.

Specifically, the results of this study can be grouped into three categories, each of which reveals specific strategies for coping with adolescent crises by listening to female rap. The categories are: growing up disadvantaged, negotiating gender affiliation, and body and body shaming.

5.2.1. Growing Up Disadvantaged

All respondents were from migrant backgrounds. Self-ascriptions such as 'Turkish' (I. 1: L. 13; I. 4: L. 10; I. 6: L. 12), 'Kurdish' (I. 2: L. 11; I. 5: L. 7), 'Albanian' (I. 8: L. 14), or 'My parents come from [name of country]' (I. 3: L. 13; I. 7: L. 9) spotlight the issue of multiple ethnic affiliations, which is also a dominant theme of the song lyrics. Identifying as a member of a migrant community rather than the dominant society still results in exclusion, stigmatization, and discrimination. One young woman, for example, reports: 'My mother and I were always abused because everyone always said "the foreigners that came here, they've only got so many kids because of the child benefit payments" and stuff like that' (I. 3: L. 414–7). Labeled as a 'foreign benefit scrounger kid,' she experienced denigration because of her family's migrant origins and grew up with the stigma of 'those foreigners.' This stigma has been passed down through generations. The adolescents perceive the artists as observers of social reality, whose music processes their subjective experiences in their often-hostile everyday environments. The socially disadvantaged residential districts about which they rap are less important and serve mainly as the point of departure for the idea of breaking free from structures of disadvantage and denigration. The adolescents hear about 'how they worked their way up' (I. 8: L. 347). Shirin David comes from a broken home: She 'grew up without her father. He left her, her sister, and her mother in the dirt to fend for themselves' (I. 3: L. 296–7). In the artist's biographical narrative, this experience of familial loss and disappointment culminates in exaggerated motivation. She raps and simultaneously protests 'to show her father: "Hey, I don't need you, I can get by without you"' (I. 6: L. 462). The message is unambiguously liberation from social, economic, and emotional dependence in order to improve oneself in life. One of the young women described the rappers' motivation as follows: 'Because now lots of girls want to become rappers so that they can earn money too [...] They just mostly want to earn money with it [...] because they see that it brings in money' (I. 2: L. 88–90). The narratives are isomorphic to the adolescents' striving for autonomy 'to be able to live on their own' (I. 1:

[1] All personal data of the eight interviewees have been anonymised 'L.' represents the line number in the transcript.

L. 40) and 'live their lives in peace' (I. 8: L. 48). This touches on the central developmental challenges in adolescence. However, the interviewees were interested in more than just songs. They looked at the artists holistically and described them in terms of their social media accounts, posts, video clips, and interviews. They know that 'they're on YouTube, everything's on Spotify, and then they're on TikTok as well' (I. 4: L. 592). They perform cross-media searches for what they are looking for, displaying high media competence in their use of diverse platforms to find the channels of their stars. One young woman describes her method: 'So there was this little part on TikTok and I thought it was interesting, so I watched the YouTube video [...] by Shirin David for example' (I. 2: L. 111–13). The trial-and-error strategy strikes them as a highly promising method. They put their media experience to work with self-assurance and confidence in the success of their searches: 'So I just found her on TikTok and took it from there' (I. 6: L. 365).

What is paramount for adolescents is for the artist to be perceived as 'real.' Questions like 'Is the artist real or fake? Can I believe her story?' are crucial for accepting her as a role model. The artists evoke identification potential in the interplay between the lifeworld, song lyrics, and biography. Inspired by their role models, adolescents seek to achieve seemingly impossible goals, formulating ambitious plans for their future education. Based on the fundamental goal of 'making one's own life perfect', (I. 7: L. 28), they define specific plans for action, such as 'next year I'll go to a vocational grammar school and do my Abitur [school-leaving examination] there' (I. 2: L. 14–5), or 'I'm going to do vocational training now'(I. 5: L. 19). In the process, their educational ambitions collide with their disadvantages, such as social origins, familial lack of affinity for education, and migrant backgrounds. However, despite these cumulative problems, they cling to the idea of advancement through knowledge and education. Female rap has both a supporting and motivating effect since 'they push you'(I. 2: L. 305). They listened to the songs all the time outside the classroom: on the way to school, during breaks between lessons, on the way home, while hanging out, eating, taking selfies, studying, or meeting friends. The songs are present even when not being actively listened to because 'you get this earworm [...] and even at school it's going through your head all the time'(I. 1: L. 99–101). The music need not be the focus of activity; it is also present as a background factor, creating atmosphere and serving as a constant companion in the listeners' everyday lives.

5.2.2. Negotiating Gender Affiliation

All participants in the survey regarded the search for gender identity as one of the tasks of adolescence. In a society still dominated by a gender binary, they demonstratively act out masculinity or femininity, sometimes transgressing boundaries in order to recognize them as boundaries in the first place. The interviews revealed that all young people reproduce gender affiliation in terms of the binary code of men and women. They identify themselves as 'girls' (l. 4: L. 98), 'chicks' (I. 6: L. 39), or 'women' (ibid.) who encounter 'men' (I. 3: L. 104), 'boys' (I. 7: L. 42), or 'guys' (I. 5: L. 272). The songs, too, even those of the most commercially successful female rappers, provide a limited spectrum of gender identities. The adolescents address and 'celebrate' (I. 2: L. 91) exactly two gender models: the loud, hyper-feminine, heavily made-up, and styled woman versus the hyper-masculine, oppressive, hypocritical, and sexist man from whom she must liberate herself. The adolescents take these stereotypical, heteronormative ascriptions for granted, even in exaggerated depictions of the female sex. They regard the artists with their hyper-sexualized performance of femininity as 'ambassadors' (I. 3: L. 421) who 'stand behind women, behind women's rights' (ibid.: L. 422). Their art is interpreted as a political expression and public protest. They are perceived as supporting women's interests and 'championing feminism' (I. 1: L. 276). The adolescents were aware that 'the songs were written for women [...]. They help women to show that women do not need men and can manage just fine without men' (I. 8: L. 232–5). The adolescents know that 'women earn less' (I. 6: L. 401) and that 'we women are discriminated against'

(I. 1: L. 283). They regard female rap as an approved knowledge pool and an accepted platform for gender-specific issues. While other settings, such as politics or school, communicate gender inequality in lengthy debates and occasionally talk the subject to death, feminist, female rap puts feminist and socially critical attitudes into practice. For the adolescents, the song texts are a type of true-to-life reflection that exposes fundamental social injustices. This reflection goes beyond reductionist debates, such as the issue of the 'gender star'[2]. Rather, it focuses on 'the real problems in life' (I. 6: L. 397) from the women's perspective: lack of money, jobs, and freedom. The adolescents learn from their role models: 'that we women are strong, and that what men can do, we can do too, and that we don't need to be scared of doing anything' (I. 5: L. 264–6). The comment by one of the adolescents that 'girls support girls' (I. 2: L. 217) illustrates female empowerment and the rappers' refusal to 'take any crap from anyone' (I. 6: L. 489–91). In the eyes of the adolescents, these rappers present an emancipated image of women: self-assured and independent, eloquent and provocative, political, and critical. How exactly the artists create this image is almost irrelevant: the listeners encounter empowering actors fighting for equal access to social resources, each in her own unique way. Even in the eyes of the adolescents, however, this strong-willed protest remains tied to the patriarchal masculine norm, which is the ubiquitous standard of comparison.

5.2.3. The Body and Body Shaming

During puberty, adolescents must come to terms with radical changes in their bodies and learn to accept their new appearance and the ways in which their environment responds to them. The study participants also reported changes in their bodies: "Your hormones go nuts, suddenly you start acting crazy, and you just want to eat all the time" (I. 7: L. 693–4). Protagonists of female rap re-enact physical practices (twerking, "iconographical gestures of crotch grabbing" (Sandve, 2017), stretching, and putting on lascivious expressions) and body images (tight clothing, bare midriffs, full-face makeup, gold and gemstone jewelry) that code as "typically" (I. 4: L. 334) female. They unashamedly present the "bad bitch vibe" (I. 3: L. 385), which the interviewees assessed as ambivalent. On the one hand, they perceived these practices as empowering for females. For example, they reflected that "just because you dress and undress a bit more provocatively, that doesn't make you a slut" (ibid, L. 453–4). In a mimetic appropriation process, the adolescents rap along, move to the songs of their stars, "and really feel it" (I. 1: L. 317). While they model their makeup and style on that of the artists, they do so not in pure imitation but with subtle variations reflecting their personal tastes, which are not shaped exclusively by the styles the artists affect. Rather, they are also influenced by their own personalities and the codes specific to their life situation of becoming underprivileged. The combination of these factors is habitually inscribed in the adolescents' bodies and shapes their individuality. Their search for identity takes place in alignment with the standards and values espoused by their families and peer groups, as well as with the experiences of stigmatization to which they are exposed every day. One adolescent imagined listening to a rap song in her parents' presence: "it would feel weird because they'd be thinking, 'What on earth is she listening to?'"(I. 5: L. 463).

Selective imitation practices ultimately have an identity-establishing effect on young people, even in their interactions with their environment, which responds heatedly and confrontationally to displays of the 'bad bitch mode' during the crisis of puberty. Classmates engage in aggressive body shaming. Remarks like 'Oh my God, how much

[2] There are three grammatical genders in the German language. Like the Romance languages, German has historically employed the generic masculine to denote both masculine and feminine genders. Those who perceive this practice as making women invisible may, instead of writing out both the male and female version of each word, employ various symbols or punctuation to encompass both sexes in a single word. The 'gender star' or asterisk is one such strategy (e.g. 'Studen t*innen' for 'Studentinnen und Studenten').

weight have you gained' (I. 6: L. 692) or 'Yeah, you want to flaunt your arse' (I. 8: L. 527) plunge young women with their hyper-female styles into new body image crises. One adolescent gives voice to her fears about sexualized violence in the context of imitation: one could 'get groped' (I. 7: L. 279). To avoid falling into additional crises due to body shaming or fear, young women would almost inevitably have to reject female rap entirely, but they do not. During the learning process, they reflect critically on the 'totally half-naked, altered' bodies (I. 5: L. 549), describe them as 'unrealistic' (I. 1: L. 167) or 'really gross' (I. 3: L. 522), disavowing this exaggerated image of women's bodies. The listeners are also critical of the resignification of defamatory expressions, such as bitch, cunt, or slut (Psutka & Grassel, 2021). These words denote an extreme permissiveness that they interpret not as affirmation but as denigration of the female body. Specifically, they regard them as 'insults and abusive words that are really disgusting and go too far' (I. 1: L. 211), which they reject. While the adolescents criticize certain lyrics and words, they do not criticize the rapper as a person. They regard themselves as 'just more mature' (I. 8: L. 617) and listen to 'her songs even though she represents her body like that' (ibid.: L. 701–2). In accordance with their subjective morality and value systems, they distinguish between what they consider 'exaggerated' (I. 4: L. 290) and what they regard as 'cool' (I. 1: L. 176). One young woman concludes: 'I've learned that myself by now, there's a limit; you don't leave the house looking like that' (I. 3: L. 493–5). While they imitate the sprechgesang of female rap, they gauge the reactions of their social environment and take a critical view of the body images and presentations of some artists, which they problematize as possible manifestations of social marginality.

6. DISCUSSION

As a subgenre of rap, female rap is a musical art inspired by social criticism. The artists give voice to a social reality of discrimination versus privilege, which they expose as inherently unequal. Working with categories of inequality such as gender, body, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, they criticize the ruling patriarchal structure and call for the equal treatment of marginalized groups in society. Their texts and enactments express protests against heteronormative relationships of dominance while simultaneously facilitating alternative readings of individual self-empowerment and social advancement, in particular, by presenting life scripts for women as equal, empowering options for identification.

The interviews showed that female rap, with its special appeal to young people, is a vehicle for expressing experiences of inequality and social deprivation. However, it is more than merely a specific form of expression; it also enables the creation of agency in crises caused by adolescence and the milieus in which young people live. Encouraged by songs and protagonists, young female listeners can experience themselves as self-empowered actors with alternative self-presentation ideas. They consume rap independently and in response to their own needs while critically reflecting on the artists' messages and comparing them with their own personal experiences of crisis. However, identifying with their idols can also result in stigmatization and exclusion. The adolescents are aware of this possibility and therefore reject exaggerated representations of the body, not only because they fear experiencing discrimination from others but also because they regard presentations of exaggerated female bodies as inappropriate in everyday life. They are especially critical of the enactments of hyper-femininity and messages associated with such enactments. While they approve of the feminist concept of female empowerment inherent in the artists' unconventional presentations, they are simultaneously skeptical of the visual exaggeration practiced by the stars.

Our study also shows that adolescent female rap consumers are critical of the public and academic discourse, as it brings too much theory to bear on gender inequality and female empowerment, and is thus perceived as unworldly. In contrast, the adolescents hold that female rappers do not confine themselves to theoretical appraisals of social gender roles and their inequality. From their perspective, the artists are authentic experts in a directly experienced,

hostile everyday life replete with social deprivation and oppression. In their vivid narratives, they combine the disadvantaged categories of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status to provide an immediate perspective on the realities of underprivileged life.

The adolescents' appropriation processes between mimetic isomorphism and autonomous positioning should be read as actor-specific coping strategies during the adolescent crisis phase. Simultaneously mimetic and autonomously rebellious, they use female rap to negotiate the crises typical of their period of life, but they do so without surrendering to the vision of an unrealistic, unlimited social world. They distinguish between what is useful for coping with everyday life and what is not useful.

Methodologically, the multi-perspective approach via song lyrics and interviews allows us to relativize ubiquitous discursive devaluations by juxtaposing ascriptions with the adolescents' individual interpretations.

For practical youth work, this study points to the high significance of informal fields of socialization beyond the limits of pedagogical settings. To date, success in helping adolescents cope with developmental tasks has tended to be attributed to the classical agents of socialization, such as the family and the school, thereby legitimizing the pedagogical value of these institutions. This study, however, reveals that informal contexts, such as listening to female rap, are also highly significant for coping with youth-specific crises and should therefore be given greater attention by pedagogical youth research. Additionally, classical youth pedagogy should be open to adolescents' preferences in their everyday lives and should strive to recognize the possibilities for identification inherent therein.

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