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A Multimodal Stylistic Analysis of the Foregrounding Techniques Used to Highlight Misogyny in Jessie Reyez's (2018) Song *Body Count*

Risa Tomioka

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Supervisor: Dr Violeta Sotirova

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Contents

1. Introduction

Jessie Reyez's (2018) song *Body Count* points out the double standards between men and women in terms of slut-shaming. An examination of both the linguistic elements of the lyrics (see Appendix) combined with a multimodal investigation of the music will enable a comprehensive analysis of the piece. The music consists of elements of both rhythm and blues (R&B) and soul as the emotional vocals are accompanied by a strong bass beat and rhythmic chords on the guitar. This song fits under the umbrella term of 'popular culture'. Critics such as Williams (2011) define work under this term as 'inferior... [and] deliberately setting out to win favour' (199). However, Kukkonen (2011) argues that 'this distinction between popular culture and high culture is not grounded in any essential difference between popular and avant-garde texts' (14). What changed were the tags prescribed to these texts; for instance, Shakespeare's plays were regarded as popular entertainment during his lifetime but are now viewed as part of canonical literature. Furthermore, Emmott (2002) observes that popular texts (as well as literary texts) 'can evoke responses of empathy, suspense, fear and many other types of emotional involvement' (97). Therefore, it is worth analysing the stylistic techniques of popular texts such as *Body Count* to understand how they produce such responses. Moreover, it could be argued that pop music's 'more modern sense of [being] well-liked by many people' (Williams 2011: 199) makes these texts worth studying as they demonstrate current sentiments.

To analyse the lyrics in their context, like most modern popular songs, it demands 'its listeners look outside the text to understand it' (Ben-Merre 2011: 81). Reyez's audience consists mostly of western women who would most likely agree with the song's feminist stance. They would be aware of the prevalence of misogynistic double standards and sexual harassment in their society and will likely have experienced the effects of sexist beliefs. These listeners will understand that 'traditionally men are granted more sexual freedom than women' (Endendijk, van Baar, Deković 2020: 163).

Indeed, Hill and Kearl's (2011) study found that girls experienced a higher amount of slut-shaming compared to boys. Furthermore, Uggen and Blackstone (2004) show sexual harassment to be a real problem for women as 'more females than males in [their] sample' (82) had experienced sexual harassment. The lyrics will be analysed using the foregrounding method to determine what elements stand out. A multi-modal investigation of the music will use van Leeuwen's (1999) methods and will paint a rounded picture of the entire song.

2. Linguistic Analysis

2.1 Foregrounding

The theory of foregrounding originated from Czech and Russian formalism in the early 20th century; some of the most prominent among them were Jan MukaiLovský and Viktor Šklovsky. It was introduced into English by Garvin's English translation of MukaiLovský's work in 1932. Foregrounding refers to defamiliarization, 'the opposite of automatization... [which] schematizes an event' (MukaiLovský 1964[1932]: 19). Defamiliarization reverses this process as it 'renews readers' awareness of the world around them' (Hakemulder 2004: 197). As Šklovsky (2012[1917]) states, 'the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar''' (12). Indeed, foregrounding occurs when 'the language is sufficiently deviant to draw attention to itself and thereby prompt an interpretation of extra meaning' (Emmott and Alexander 2014: 329). Reyez's lyrics (see Appendix) carry a strong message against slut-shaming and the process of defamiliarization may prompt listeners to question what they perceive to be an everyday occurrence. Another purpose of foregrounding includes 'evoking a schema for an extreme emotional state... [and] presenting heightened but familiar positive or negative emotions' (Emmott 2002: 99). The rhetorical devices used in the lyrics might intensify the listeners' own feelings of defiance and anger at a patriarchal society.

The results of foregrounding are realised through external and internal deviation. The former refers to when the broken norm 'lies outside the limits of the poem [or literature in general] in which the deviation occurs' (Levin 1965: 226). Internal deviation occurs when the 'features of language within that text may depart from the norms of the text itself' (Leech and Short 2007: 44). Foregrounding also involves 'meaning connections reinforced by repetition of words and phrases' (Leech and Short 2007: 64).

2.2 Deixis

Social deixis is a key feature of *Body Count* due to the prevalence of personal pronouns. The song uses the first person singular pronoun 'I' in the verses, such as in 'I think you might feel some type of way' (Appendix: line 5). In literature, the poetic speaker or the narrator is frequently collapsed with the author. The distinction between narrator and author becomes more difficult to maintain in a song because of the physical presence of the singer. Ben-Merre (2011) notes that this is a common problem in pop music which is 'by its very nature a metaleptic form' (65) due to their frequent references to the outside world. This is especially the case with contemporary music; 'replicating sincerity' (Klosterman 2004: 263) appears to be an important part of today's pop music. Most listeners will interpret this song to be autobiographical; they will assume Reyez is singing about her own authentic experiences. Since listeners will likely understand *Body Count* to refer beyond the fictional world of the song, this metalepsis gives the song a sense of immediacy and intimacy. Hence, for the sake of clarity I will refer to the narrator as Reyez, collapsing the distinction between the singer and the narrator.

Internal deviation occurs as the chorus switches from the first person singular pronoun 'I' to the plural form 'we', such as in 'We don't need no one' (Appendix: lines 10, 29). 'We' consists of 'I' and an implied and generalised 'you'. Due to the metaleptic nature of the song, this 'I' in 'we' involves Reyez while the 'you' addresses her listeners. Hence, the chorus addresses the audience, making the lyrics of the song more significant

for the listeners. However, this only works if 'the addressee belongs to the same group and shares the speaker's views' (Wales 1996: 59). As discussed in section 1, Reyez's female audience will likely have experienced slut-shaming and therefore identify with *Body Count*'s defiant message. Wales (1996) also suggests that 'we' might be used instead of 'I' 'to resist the egocentricity of a potential *I*; yet an egocentric "meaning" will often be re-asserted' (63) (author's emphasis). This occurs in *Body Count*; although the chorus uses the first person plural, both verses and the outro revert to the singular use of the first person. This can be seen in the first person possessive pronoun 'my' in 'my own damn tune' (Appendix: line 28) and 'my ex' (Appendix: line 40) in the outro. The latter clarifies who the addressee of the second person pronoun is in the verses and, as Wales (1996) observes, reasserts Reyez's own experience. However, Reyez uses both the singular and plural form of the first person to apply her personal experience to address the wider societal issue of slut-shaming. Furthermore, the personal nature of the singular form and the inclusiveness of the plural form have the foregrounding effect of heightening the listeners' feelings of injustice.

In terms of the second person pronoun 'you', a process similar to what Herman (1994) calls 'double deixis' (381) occurs. Double deixis is when the referent of 'you' exists both 'in the world of the narrative' and is 'actual or at least actualizable in our world' (Herman 1994: 380). The accusatory tone of the verses such as 'I think you might feel some type of way' (Appendix: line 5) refers to the narrator's fictional former partner as well as Reyez's previous boyfriend in the real world. Demjén (2011) observes that the reader (or in this case the listener) will only empathise with the 'you' referent if 'the descriptions, actions and attitudes of the *you* protagonist do not clash dramatically with those of the reader' (5) (author's emphasis). It is very unlikely that Reyez's audience will identify with the verses' addressee. Indeed, they are more likely to oppose someone that would judge them for their 'body count' (Appendix: lines 2, 21). However, as discussed above, the chorus' 'we' consists of an implied 'you' to involve the audience.

The 'you' in 'Time won't let you stay young' (Appendix: lines 11, 30) also applies to the listeners as it is part of the inclusive message of the chorus. Therefore, *Body Count* engages in triple deixis; the 'you' refers to the listener, the narrator's fictional ex-boyfriend, and Reyez's former partner in the real world.

The referent of the third person plural 'they' also changes. The chorus' 'We don't care what they say' (Appendix: lines 12, 19, 31, 38) appears to refer to a judgemental society rather than a specific person. However, the 'they' of the outro in 'I know they did me dirty' (Appendix: line 42) indicates a targeted recipient; her disloyal ex-boyfriend (both real and fictional) and perhaps his lover. Internal deviation occurs again as, unlike the verses where the second person pronoun refers to her former partner, the outro refers to him in the third person. While the use of the second person pronoun suggests an accusatory tone, the use of the third person excludes him. Indeed, the 'they' in the chorus and of the outro have the same effect. This pronoun creates an 'us vs them' mentality and produces 'a site of antagonism' (Wales 1996: 60). *Body Count* follows the pattern Wales (1996) notes: '*they* are most likely to be agents' (60) (author's emphasis). In 'they did me dirty' (Appendix: line 42) Reyez's former partner and his lover are placed in the subject position and associated with the active verb 'did'. In contrast, Reyez places herself in the passive object position. Moreover, Wales (1996) observes the referent of 'they' to often be in 'a position of some power' (60). The third person pronoun of 'We don't care what they say' (Appendix: lines 12, 19, 31, 38) aligns with this as it refers to the judgemental notions pushed by those in power – in other words, men who hold authority over women in a patriarchal society.

2.3 Tense

The differing tenses used in the song indicate Reyez's emotions. Demjén (2011) links 'emotional upheaval... to an increase in the use of the present and future times' (10). The majority of the lyrics are in the present tense, such as 'I dodge dick on the daily'

(Appendix: line 6). The future tense is used in 'we gon' love who we wanna love' (Appendix: lines 13, 16, 20, 32, 35, 39), the most repeated line in the song. Both examples demonstrate the sense of anger and frustration at a sexist society. Internal deviation occurs as the past tense is introduced in the outro, such as in 'I saw my ex and then I swerved' (Appendix: line 40). This might appear to demonstrate the singer's 'emotional balance' (Demjén 2011: 13) and aligns with the singer's claim that 'I don't hold any anger' (43). This use of the present, future and past tenses may indicate that although she has moved on from the personal insult from her ex, she is still angry at the main problem: the normalisation of a slut-shaming mindset. However, this simplistic interpretation of the outro will be shown to be more complex than it first appears in the following discussions.

2.4 Repetition

Repetition is central to stylistic analysis as it can show what is 'foregrounded and backgrounded' (Toolan 2012: 25). Indeed, Leech and Short (2007) speak of 'the reinforcing effect of repetition' (76) which can be seen in *Body Count*'s use of the technique. Both phonetic and lexical repetition are present in the song. In terms of phonetic repetition, the alliteration of plosive sounds heightens the feelings of anger throughout the song. From the beginning of *Body Count*, the alveolar plosive /d/ and the bilabial plosive /b/ in 'You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count' (Appendix: lines 2, 21) evokes Reyez's rebellion. The harsh plosive /p/ further signals her rage in 'Got the papers to prove' (Appendix: line 9). Since this line refers to 'I bought this Mercedes all by myself' (Appendix: line 8), it demonstrates her anger at the need to prove her possession of an expensive car. Listeners are again required to possess real-world knowledge of the concept of the 'gold digger' (Blakemore 2015: para 1). This term allows a patriarchal society to restrict women's financial success and independence while simultaneously vilifying them as being 'money-hungry' (Blakemore 2015: para 1). Reyez

asserts her independence from patriarchal powers by affirming her possession of a Mercedes. Plosive sounds are again used for emphasis in 'Baby, I ain't gonna post you on my page' (Appendix: line 22). The bilabial plosives /b/ and /p/ show her determination to keep to her word. Moreover, the alliterative sounds in 'bullshit for the birds' (Appendix: line 41) emphasise her use of an expletive and therefore suggests her anger at her former partner. This complicates the initial observation made in section 2.3. She claims not to 'hold any anger' (Appendix: line 43) but her use of phonetic repetition implies her indignation. Moreover, the velar plosives /g/ and /k/ in ''Cause odds are that goodbyes are cumming soon' (Appendix: line 23) highlights the sense of heightened emotions in the song. In contrast, the softer nasal /m/ sound is used in 'some nights I would rather make love to myself/Singing to my own damn tune' (Appendix: lines 27-8). The muted quality of this sound implies the personal and intimate nature of this act and allows her to reclaim her sexuality which women have traditionally been unable to do.

As is typical in song lyrics, lexical repetition is prevalent in *Body Count*. It is still worth noting key moments in the song as it emphasises the song's meaning. The most repeated line of the song, 'We gon' love who we wanna love' (Appendix: lines 13, 16, 20, 32, 35, 39) occurs six times. It effectively summarises the whole song and resists the stigma attached to women who have multiple sexual relations. Furthermore, both verses begin with 'You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count' (Appendix: lines 2, 21) which recalls the title. The repetition suggests her ex-boyfriend's insistence on telling her about his 'body count' despite her repeated resistance. Reyez also addresses serious issues with the repetition of 'I know it's funny but it's true' (Appendix: lines 7, 26). This line comes after the allusion to sexual harassment as it is sung after 'I dodge dick on the daily' (Appendix: line 6) and ''Cause all your friends want my baby' (Appendix: line 25). Lines 7 and 26 imply the way offensive quips are often regarded as humorous by those who make them. Additionally, it suggests the need to clarify the gravity of her claims since misogynistic societies often 'believe that women fabricate or exaggerate sexual

harassment claims' (Bongiorno, Langbroek, Bain, Ting, and Ryan 2020: 12). A more positive instance of lexical repetition involves the numerous utterances of 'yeah' which is used both as exclamations and uttered by the background singers. This repetition enforces Reyez's lyrics in an affirmative manner. This adverb occurs most frequently in the chorus such as in the overlapping lyrics of 'Yeah, Yeah, Yeah' in 'We don't need no one (Yo) tryna take our freedom' (Appendix: line 10) to reinforce the message of defiance. It also helps to create an image of female solidarity that is discussed further in section 3.

2.5 Modality

Fowler (1996) writes that modal devices make clear '*announcements* of beliefs' (168) (author's emphasis) as they are 'the means by which people express their degree of commitment to the truth of the propositions they utter' (166). Reyez's use of deontic modality makes her firm in her stance. This includes 'gotta' in 'You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count/I don't gotta know your ex's name' (Appendix: lines 2-3). 'Gotta' in this case is a contraction of 'got to' which is used colloquially to mean 'have to'. 'Have to' is sometimes used in place of the deontic modals 'must' or 'ought to'. Similarly, 'gonna' in 'I ain't gonna post you on my page' (Appendix: line 22) is a contraction of 'going to'. Here it is used as a future reference and signals her certainty; hence, it is used in an epistemic sense. Moreover, Reyez's assuredness is expressed in the epistemic modal 'won't' in 'Time won't let you stay young' (Appendix: lines 11, 30) and the lexical verb 'know' in 'I know'. The latter is used in an epistemic sense as it demonstrates her knowledge in 'I know it's funny but it's true' (Appendix: lines 7, 26) and 'I know they did me dirty while I still had the title' (Appendix: line 42). This verb phrase demonstrates Reyez's power as she assumes knowledge of the addressee's feelings and actions. This is especially the case in line 42 where the addressee likely wished his actions to be hidden from her.

However, modality can also imply uncertainty. The forcefulness of the deontic modal 'should' in 'So maybe you should put a rubber on your heart before it breaks' (Appendix: line 24) is softened by the adverb 'maybe'. Furthermore, the hedge 'I think' and the epistemic modal 'might' in 'I think you might feel some type of way' (Appendix: line 5) suggests an unwillingness to commit to her statement. 'I swear I said throw it on ya' (Appendix: line 48) cements this unconvinced effect as it is the last line of the song. In the context of the song, 'I swear' refers to Reyez's certainty. The phrase is often used when the speaker is in fact uncertain of their following statement. Her uncertainty evokes the stereotype of women as weak-minded; as Zafarullah (2000) found, women have traditionally been seen as 'less capable... mentally, and emotionally' (199). Thus, the use of deontic and epistemic modality creates some ambiguity in the strength of Reyez's convictions and although she strives against such stereotypes she is still bound by them.

2.6 Negation

Negation is an 'essentially foregrounding process' (Werth 1999: 250). Therefore, the prevalence of the contraction 'don't' in *Body Count* is significant. This word can be seen in the repeated first line of both verses in 'You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count' (Appendix: lines 2, 21) which highlights the dogged persistence of her previous partner. It also engages in the process of defamiliarization because as Nahajec (2009) observes, 'we only negate something where there is a reasonable expectation of the opposite' (120). Hence, negation allows Reyez to oppose the accepted notion of shaming others for their previous sexual encounters. Additionally, the negation in the first line of the chorus, 'We don't need no one tryna take our freedom' (lines 10, 29) draws attention to women's lack of freedom from societal expectations. The use of the double negation of 'don't' and 'no one' in this line makes the defiant sentiment that is expressed more forceful.

Negation can create 'an implicit rather than explicit meaning' (Nahajec 2009: 109). Reyez's claim that 'We don't care what they say' (Appendix: lines 12, 19, 31, 38) may only be true to a certain extent. She embraces her sexuality despite the critiques of others but her concern is apparent; as shown in sections 2.3 and 2.4, her use of repetition as well as the present and future tense suggests her frustration. Hence, her use of negation in the oft repeated 'don't' adds to the anger expressed throughout the song. Likewise, its use in 'I don't hold any anger, I just swerve' (Appendix: line 43) implies her resentment towards her previous partner and counteracts her assertion. Therefore, her claims of apathy towards others' judgements and her former partner's infidelity may be more aspirational than reality.

2.7 Dialect

Speakers are able to construct their identities through their dialect, whether it be unintentional or deliberate. Reyez's dialect can be seen in her colloquial use of 'gotta' instead of 'have to' and the abbreviated ''bout' instead of 'about' in 'You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count' (Appendix: lines 2, 21). Interestingly, she chooses not to use Standard American English which 'can be conceived as a geographically neutral dialect' (Kövecses 2000: 82). Reyez's non-standard speech style signals her pride in her Colombian heritage; as Lopez (2019) notes, 'Colombia feels close to her' (para 4). Moreover, she demonstrates her membership of a multicultural community in her early upbringing as she lived in a diverse part of Toronto where 'she remembers most of the children in school having accents like she did' (Lopez 2019: para 4). As discussed in section 2.2, this emphasises the autobiographical nature of this song which creates a more personal experience for the listener.

Standard English is also associated with the high social standing of the 'well-bred and well-informed' (Smart 1836: xl). Although Smart is referring here to dialects in the United Kingdom, Standard American English works in a similar fashion. Billings' (2005)

study in the United States found that 'speakers of standard dialect were deemed competent, whereas speakers of substandard dialect were not' (71). However, despite the classification of non-standard English as 'vulgar' (Smart 1836: xl), Trudgill (1972) observes the effects of 'covert prestige' (183). Hodson (2014) claims that compared to standard speech styles, non-standard dialects are often associated with 'trustworthiness, warmth and friendliness' (33). Therefore, this technique encourages empathy from her listeners and thus foregrounds the emotional force of the song.

Interestingly, Labov (1990) found that women tend to use Standard English (and therefore associate themselves with high social class) more than men. He conjectures it is because 'women are said to rely more on symbolic capital than men because they possess less material power' (Labov 1990: 214). Reyez's declaration that 'I bought this Mercedes all by myself/Got the papers to prove' (Appendix: lines 8, 9) combined with her non-standard dialect demonstrates her 'material power' and positions her as an equal to men. Labov's research was conducted almost three decades before *Body Count* so Reyez's dialect indicates the material power women have gained in western society since that research took place. Her use of her dialect also aligns with Trudgill's (1972) findings that 'very high covert prestige is associated with WC [working class] speech forms by the young of both sex' (191). Although his research is based on the urban British English of Norwich, it may be the case that Reyez's non-standard dialect indicates her youth, positioning her as a progressive and modern woman.

2.8 Gendered Language

Folk-linguistics has encouraged a stereotyped idea of how women use language. Poynton (1985) observes that one of the longest held stereotypes is that women are 'indefatigable talkers' (26) when in reality 'topics are determined by, or in deference to, men' (Poynton 1985: 26). In fact, West and Zimmerman (1983) found that in cross-sex conversations, 'males... interrupted more in every exchange' (102-3) that they observed.

Body Count challenges this socially accepted male dominance as the female lead singer and the female-only backup singers ensure women control the conversation.

Coates (2013) observes a widely held belief that 'women's language is more polite, more refined' (13) compared to male language use. Indeed, De Klerk (1997) observes that although studies have shown this belief to be false, 'expletives . . . have become associated with power and masculinity in Western culture' (147). Reyez opposes this false belief and interpretation of masculinity by using expletives such as 'bullshit' (Appendix: line 41). She also speaks about sexual topics in what might be considered crude language. She mentions her experience with sexual harassment as she claims she 'dodge[s] dick on the daily' (Appendix: line 6) and uses the colloquial term 'rubber' (Appendix: line 24) to reference contraception. The mention of taboo words and subjects enables Reyez to establish herself in a traditionally male arena and reclaim the authority that is associated with it. Furthermore, this obtaining of power from a subordinate position could be seen as an act of aggression and highlights her angry tone. The use of expletives in particular heightens the emotional force of the song as 'swearing... can be used to signify a number of emotions' (Timothy 2009: 155).

Amongst such taboo topics, the exclamation of 'Hallelujah' (Appendix: lines 44, 46) at the end of *Body Count* stands out. 'Hallelujah' is often uttered in Christian gatherings as a word of praise to God. As will be discussed in section 3, Reyez has admitted her struggle 'to reconcile her religious views' (Mench 2020: para 13). Christianity is known for its sexually restrictive views and is the main religion of western society; therefore, it forms the basis of the western patriarchal hierarchy. The inclusion of 'Hallelujah' among such explicitly sexual and expletive language challenges the Christian teaching of sexual purity and uses the force of religious meaning to reinforce the secular content. Although this is the only allusion to Christianity in the lyrics, the multimodal analysis in section 3 will delve deeper into the religious aspects of the music. Moreover, the aforementioned crude words are only used in reference to men. Whe

speaking about her own sexuality Reyez uses the term 'make love' (Appendix: line 27) which involves romantic connotations. Indeed, the lines 'But some nights I would rather make love to myself/Singing to my own damn tune' (Appendix: lines 27-8) allude to the act of self-pleasure in a metaphorical manner and therefore avoids what might be considered vulgar terminologies. Reyez's differentiation between male and personal sexual pleasure means that she prioritises herself before her partner. As Higgins and Hirsch (2007) note, there are 'broad social and cultural forces that make pleasure-seeking easier and more important for men than for women' (244). Women have traditionally been denied sexual pleasure so by focusing on her own enjoyment, Reyez reclaims her own sexuality.

Body Count embraces the positive aspects of gendered speech such as its use of minimal responses. Coates (2013) observes that women use minimal responses more than men, especially 'at points in conversation which indicate the listener's support for the current speaker' (87). This aligns with her claim that some 'women are resisting the androcentric discourse norms of the public sphere' (Coates 2013: 204) and are instead using 'their own more cooperative speech style' (204). The lyrics and exclamations of 'Yeah' (Appendix: lines 1, 6, 10, 24, 26, 45, 47) and 'Yup' (Appendix: line 25) as well as the backup singers' multiple interjections of 'Yeah' throughout the choruses (such as in the overlapping lines of line 10) demonstrate these women's agreement with and support for the main lyrics. Furthermore, Coates (2013) provides a transcript of her female participants' conversation to highlight the 'skilfully placed' (87) nature of the minimal responses. They are 'not overlapping... nor interrupting the flow' (Coates 2013: 87). I have attempted to demonstrate the placement of the backup singers' interjections in the Appendix; their 'Oh's and 'Yeah's are placed in-between Reyez's utterances such as in lines 10-15. The sense of unity created by this 'cooperative speech style' (Coates 2013: 204) makes the singers' condemnation of a slut-shaming culture more credible.

2.9 Humour

Coates (2013) also observes an existing stereotype that 'women do not have a sense of humour' (206). The double entendres present in *Body Count* challenge this notion. The title itself has two meanings; *Body Count* can refer to the number of people one has killed or to the number of past sexual partners. The former meaning recalls the persecution of women historically and today, especially in 'honour killings' (D'Lima, Solotaroff and Pande 2020: 22) which refer to murdering women (and sometimes their partner) for engaging in sexual activities outside of marriage. There are two more instances of double entendres in addition to the title. 'Cumming' (an informal term for orgasming) in ''Cause odds are that goodbyes are cumming soon' (Appendix: line 23) is a play on 'coming', a phonetically identical word. External deviation occurs as the lyrics deviate from the expected use of 'coming' which creates a humorous effect and assigns a new sexual meaning to the line. Interestingly the explicit meaning is only evident in the written form of the lyrics. The sexual pun is made clearer in the following line 'So maybe you should put a rubber on your heart before it breaks' (Appendix: line 24). Reyez suggests in this line that the addressee should protect his feelings with a 'rubber' – a colloquial term for a condom – as she is uninterested in a serious relationship. Indeed, *Body Count*'s use of humour regarding sexual topics aligns with Pizzini's (1991) observation that 'joking remarks [are often made] in reference to sex' (481). Although this observation was about her analysis of gender differences in obstetrical and gynaecological settings, it can be applied to *Body Count*. Reyez reverses the stereotypical notion of women as the emotional partner interested in a committed relationship and of men as being attracted to a more informal relationship. Thus, she invades a traditionally male role and takes male authority for herself.

Furthermore, the use of humour 'decreases the social distance between those present' (Pizzini 1991: 483). Therefore, 'if a subordinate uses humour, it is likely to be considered an aggressive act' (Pizzini 1991: 483). As a woman, Reyez is subordinate to

male authority in western society. The line 'I know it's funny but it's true' (Appendix: lines 7, 26) in each verse contains confrontational tones. In verse 1, it follows the provocative line 'I dodge dick on the daily' (Appendix: line 6) which draws attention to the serious topic of sexual harassment. In verse 2, it comes after ''Cause all your friends want my baby' (Appendix: line 25). This line may also refer to her constant objectification or, in another interpretation, it may be an acknowledgement of her desirability. An unspoken rule of misogynistic cultures dictate that women should not enjoy nor recognise their own attractiveness. In either case, Reyez challenges sexist mindsets as she confronts such accepted behaviours and beliefs.

Mills (1995) notes 'humour is very often used to defuse a potentially difficult or taboo subject' (29). Therefore, the use of double entendres might make the difficult topics of death and sex more approachable. Although Reyez opposes the aforementioned stereotype of women as 'more polite, more refined' (Coates 2013: 13), it is still necessary for her to soften the effects of taboo topics by using the hedging effect of humour.

3. Multimodal Analysis of Music

3.1 Instrumental

Since listeners engage with *Body Count* through its designed medium – a song – a multimodal analysis of the music will enable a more thorough interpretation. As mentioned above, *Body Count* is a mixture of both R&B and soul music. Both genres' African American roots must be acknowledged. Although Reyez is not African American herself, the feminist message of *Body Count* fits into the activist messages of past songs in these genres. Marcoux (2015) states that soul music is 'a thematic and political continuation of rhythm and blues' (29) and links the music to 'both the civil rights and more activist movements' (29). Moreover, Smitherman (1997) observes how the female black community is sometimes referred to as a sisterhood. The soul sister 'emphasize[s]

solidarity and unity' (Smitherman 1997: 56-7) due to their link to 'black female liberationists and other such black sisterhoods' (Marcoux 2015: 38). Reyez's employment of only female backup singers suggests the creation of her own 'sisterhood'. Therefore, the use of these musical genres enforce the defiance and progressive attitude of *Body Count*. Reyez's song is more sexually explicit than the 'covert sexual content' (Marcoux 2015: 37) of the R&B songs of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, like these past songs, the sexual subject is 'a radical departure from the puritan mindset of white America' (Marcoux 2015: 37). This 'puritan mindset' refers to Christian teachings which limit and shame female sexuality.

Interestingly, *Body Count*'s instrumental is linked to Christianity. The majority of the song is accompanied by two guitar chords. The second chord involves a tritone interval (a gap between two of the notes). This tritone was so dissonant that in the medieval period 'ecclesiastical authorities described it as *diabolus in musica* ('the Devil in music') and banned it' (Anonymous 2016: 200) (author's emphasis). The use of this tritone emphasises Reyez's challenge to Christian notions of sexual purity (particularly in regards to female sexuality). The tritone is highlighted further when the drums and bass are added with the first chorus. They are silent when the tritone is played which draws more attention to the music's rebellious nature. However, the chords in the outro introduce a level of ambiguity. These chords are known as a plagal cadence which is 'traditionally known as an "Amen"... cadence' (Nagley and Whittall 2011: para 10) due to their frequent use in church music. As mentioned in section 2.8, Reyez has struggled with her belief in Christianity; the use of both the tritone interval and the plagal cadence might reflect her religious journey.

3.2 Voice

Body Count engages in iconicity which Leech and Short (2007) describe as 'the imitation principle' (187). Although these two authors engage with iconicity in purely linguistic

terms, Reyez uses her voice to reflect her heightened emotions in the chorus. The note and volume of the singer's voice rises to mirror her anger. The chorus also recalls gospel music – another musical genre linked to both African Americans and Christianity. The two 'Hallelujah's (Appendix: lines, 44, 46) in the outro suggest the gospel genre as they are sung in a higher note compared to the surrounding notes. Line 46's 'Hallelujah' is surrounded by quieter notes in lines 45 and 47 which simply consist of repetitive 'Yeah's; this emphasises the louder volume of the 'Hallelujah' and mimics the sentiments of worship connoted by the exclamation. In addition to this, the accompanying backup singers who simultaneously sing line 44's 'Hallelujah' suggest a choir of gospel singers. Furthermore, the iconicity created by the accompanying group of singers add new meaning to the aforementioned first person plural pronoun 'we' (discussed in section 2.2). Van Leeuwen (1999) observes that in western music it is common for 'solo performers to accompany themselves... so as to internalize social interaction' (72). The overlapping choir of female voices produces a similar effect. This can be seen particularly in the chorus, such as in 'We don't need no one tryna take our freedom' (Appendix: line 29). The 'we' now includes the backup singers as well as the listener and the singer. This makes the lyric's defiance more impactful as it suggests many share her feelings, thus demonstrating a sense of solidarity. Moreover, some overlapping lines are identical to the main singer's lyrics, such as where they join in the statement to 'love who we wanna love' (Appendix: lines 16, 32, 35). Since this technique occurs most frequently in this particular line, it highlights the phrase as the song's most foremost message to the listener.

An investigation of the 'dimensions of voice quality and timbre' (van Leeuwen 1999: 129) demonstrates the ways Reyez uses her voice to create an emotional yet steadfast image. However, a limitation of this method must first be acknowledged. Van Leeuwen (1999) admits that 'the same component of sound quality may attract many different adjectives' (130). For instance, a tense voice can be interpreted as both 'clear'

and 'piercing'. These adjectives offer different connotations for the original description of 'tense'. A 'clear' voice suggests positive notions such as a talented singer or qualities such as honesty and integrity; on the other hand, 'piercing' voices might imply a shrill voice and an unpleasant personality. This demonstrates that subjectivity may make analysis difficult. However, as van Leeuwen (1999) states, 'we need to go beyond the adjectives... [and consider] how they are actually materially produced' (130). This will enable an examination into the 'range of meanings and values they can therefore potentially become associated' (van Leeuwen 1999: 130).

A sound's level of roughness or smoothness possesses certain connotations. Reyez's voice contains a roughness that might be described as 'raspy' or 'gravelly'. Van Leeuwen (1999) observes that globally, rough voices are more common in men and that it is 'strongly correlated to the degree to which boys are trained for assertivity' (132). Furthermore, van Leeuwen observes that 'the meaning of roughness lies in what it is: rough' (van Leeuwen 1999: 132). Reyez's raspy voice invades a traditionally masculine space and the meaning attached to roughness suggests her opposition to the refinement associated with women (discussed in section 2.8). Her rough vocals also recall the aforementioned gospel music. Courlander (quoted in Williams-Jones, 1975) observes that the rough voices of gospel singers 'often seems to be valued' (377), unlike the smooth voices of western classical music. Furthermore, van Leeuwen (1999: 134-5) examines the effects implied by the inclusion or exclusion of vibratos. In *Body Count*'s case, the lack of vibrato has a similar 'unwavering' (van Leeuwen 1999: 135) effect to van Leeuwen's example of choir boys. This non-trembling effect emphasizes Reyez's unmoving stance on the matter; she is convinced in her anger against people 'tryna take our freedom' (lines 10, 29) and will not stop in her protestations.

Reyez's fluctuation between softness/loudness and high/low pitches signify the difficulty of navigating stereotypes. She begins in the lower pitch range 'which is assertive' (van Leeuwen 1999: 134) while her softer tone indicates intimacy. This

combination suggests a stereotypical caricature of women as 'dark and dangerous seductresses' (van Leeuwen 1999: 109). Although Reyez sings about her sexuality such as in 'some nights I would rather make love to myself/Singing to my own damn tune' (Appendix: line 27-8) to reclaim her sexuality, this stereotype may cause some listeners to view her in an objectifying manner Ð the very thing Reyez wishes to avoid. Furthermore, her volume increases and she moves to a higher pitch range for the chorus and the second 'Hallelujah' (Appendix: line 46). This is more likely to be interpreted as a sign of her determined stance to 'love who [she] wanna love' (Appendix: lines 13, 16, 20, 32, 35, 39). However, for listeners offended by the taboo topics and feminist message, a loud and high voice might evoke a stereotype of women as 'shrill and strident' (van Leeuwen, 1999: 134). This might particularly be the case in 'I dodge dick on the daily' (Appendix: line 6) and ''Cause all your friends want my baby' (Appendix: line 26). The inclusion of unrefined language use (discussed in section 2.8), combined with her louder and higher voice might remind some listeners of the sexist stereotype. Such interpretations make it difficult for Reyez to free herself from patriarchal views.

Reyez's voice remains tense throughout the song; much like rough sounds, van Leeuwen (1999) observes that a tense sound 'not only *is* tense, it also *means* "tense"' (131) (author's emphasis). Tenseness is associated with a variety of emotions from '"aggression", "repression, [and] "excitement"' (van Leeuwen 1999: 131). Additionally, Fónagy and Magdics (1972[1963]) note that tense voices can reveal emotions such as 'scorn' and 'sarcasm' (286). In *Body Count*'s case, Reyez's tense vocals express aggression and anger at the double standards women face. Sarcasm can also be found in the song, especially in her use of humour in lines such as 'So maybe you should put a rubber on your heart before it breaks' (Appendix: line 24). Tenseness is linked to nasality. Van Leeuwen (1999) speaks of the 'muscle tension' (136) that is required to produce nasal sounds. 'Nasality is thus closely related to tension' (van Leeuwen 1999: 136) and is therefore connected to the 'sounds of pain, deprivation and sorrow' (Lomax

1968: 193). This can be seen in *Body Count* as Reyez's anger is reflected in her nasal voice. Moreover, nasality holds connotations of 'inhibition and repression' (van Leeuwen 1999: 136). Thus, Reyez's nasal vocals reflect the way which female sexuality has been repressed. Indeed, cultures which 'strongly condemn pregnancy outside of approved relations [and therefore sexual activities outside of these accepted partnerships] tend to have female singing styles with greater nasality' (van Leeuwen 1999: 136). Therefore, Reyez's nasal voice suggests the slut-shaming society that she sings about. Interestingly, in such cultures nasal tones are viewed as 'stimulating, erotic and pleasurable' (Lomax 1968: 194). Ironically, Reyez's voice is pleasing to those who criticise her. This contributes to the struggle for power that occurs in this song. On the surface Reyez appears to take the power back but she cannot escape the male gaze.

4. Conclusion

The foregrounding method emphasises Reyez's heightened anger and her attempts to challenge those who criticise her. Defamiliarization asks the listener to confront their own acceptance of the social norm of slut-shaming. *Body Count* highlights misogynistic viewpoints, especially the double standards between men and women in terms of sexual activity. However, despite Reyez's celebration of her own sexuality, she constantly needs to reaffirm her claims, such as in her repeated line 'I know it's funny but it's true' (Appendix: lines 7, 26). The multimodal analysis supports this interpretation; Reyez is angry but cannot change societal expectations. The subjective nature of multimodal analyses should be noted. Many listeners may not be aware of the significance of her nasal voice nor the religious history behind the chords although some listeners may realise it subconsciously. Nevertheless, the investigation into the music offers a new interpretation. This is significant since *Body Count* will be heard in this multimodal medium. Song lyrics have not yet been examined a great deal but they are played every day in today's music-streaming world. Popular songs show current social values and

offer an insight into different viewpoints. Future research could involve investigations into today's songs to find out what sentiments are being broadcasted and therefore the potential implications of these social values. Although *Body Count* is full of defiance, the male gaze can still be felt. Further research could encourage a more powerful representation of women to prompt traditional mindsets to change.

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Appendix

Lyrics transcribed from Reyez, Jessie (2018). 'Body Count'. *Jessie Reyez*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--YgtVuvWGo [Accessed 7 January 2021]

Key: V = Verse
C = Chorus
O = Outro
// = Overlapping in Performance
( ) = Exclamations
[ ] = Female backup singers

1 (Yeah)

2 V1: You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count
3 I don't gotta know your ex's name
4 'Cause if it just so happens that you turn around and ask me
5 I think you might feel some type of way
6 I dodge dick on the daily (Yeah)
7 I know it's funny but it's true
8 And I bought this Mercedes all by myself
9 Got the papers to prove (Huh)

10 C1: //We don't need no one (Yo) tryna take our freedom (Yeah)
//[Yeah] [Yeah] [Yeah]
11 //Time won't let you stay young
//[Yeah] [Yeah]
12 //So we don't care what they say
//[Yeah]
13 We gon' love who we wanna love
14 //Oh oh oh (Yeah) oh oh oh
//[Oh oh oh] [oh oh]
15 //Oh oh oh
//[Oh oh]
16 //We gon' love who we wanna love
//[love who we wanna love]
17 //Oh oh oh
//[Oh oh]
18 //Oh oh oh (Yeah)
//[Oh oh]
19 //We don't care what they say
// [Oh] [oh]
20 We gon' love who we wanna love

21 V2: You don't gotta tell me 'bout your body count (No, no, no)
22 Baby, I ain't gonna post you on my page (Haha)
23 'Cause odds are that goodbyes are cumming soon
24 So maybe you should put a rubber on your heart before it breaks (Yeah)
25 //'Cause all your friends want my baby (Yup)
//[friends want my baby]

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A Multimodal Stylistic Analysis of the Foregrounding Techniques Used to Highlight Misogyny in Jessie Reyez's (2018) Song *Body Count*

26 //I know it's funny but it's true (Yeah)
//[I know it's funny but it's true]
27 But some nights I would rather make love to myself
28 Singing to my own damn tune

29 C2: //We don't need no one tryna take our freedom
//[Yeah] [Yeah] [Yeah]
30 //Time won't let you stay young
//[Yeah] [Yeah]
31 //So we don't care what they say
//[care what they say]
//[Yeah]
32 //We gon' love who we wanna love
//[We gon' love who we wanna love]
33 //Oh oh oh oh oh oh
//[Oh oh oh oh oh]
34 //Oh oh oh
//[Oh oh]
35 //We gon' love who we wanna love
//[love who we wanna love]
36 //Oh oh oh
//[Oh oh]
37 //Oh oh oh
//[Oh oh]
38 //We don't care what they say
//[Oh] [oh]
39 We gon' love who we wanna love

40 O: I saw my ex and then I swerved (Sue me)
41 Miss me with that bullshit for the birds (Sue me)
42 I know they did me dirty while I still had the title
43 But I don't hold any anger, I just swerve
44 //Hallelujah
//[Hallelujah]
45 Yeah, yeah, yeah

46 Hallelujah
47 Yeah, yeah, yeah
48 I swear I said throw it on ya