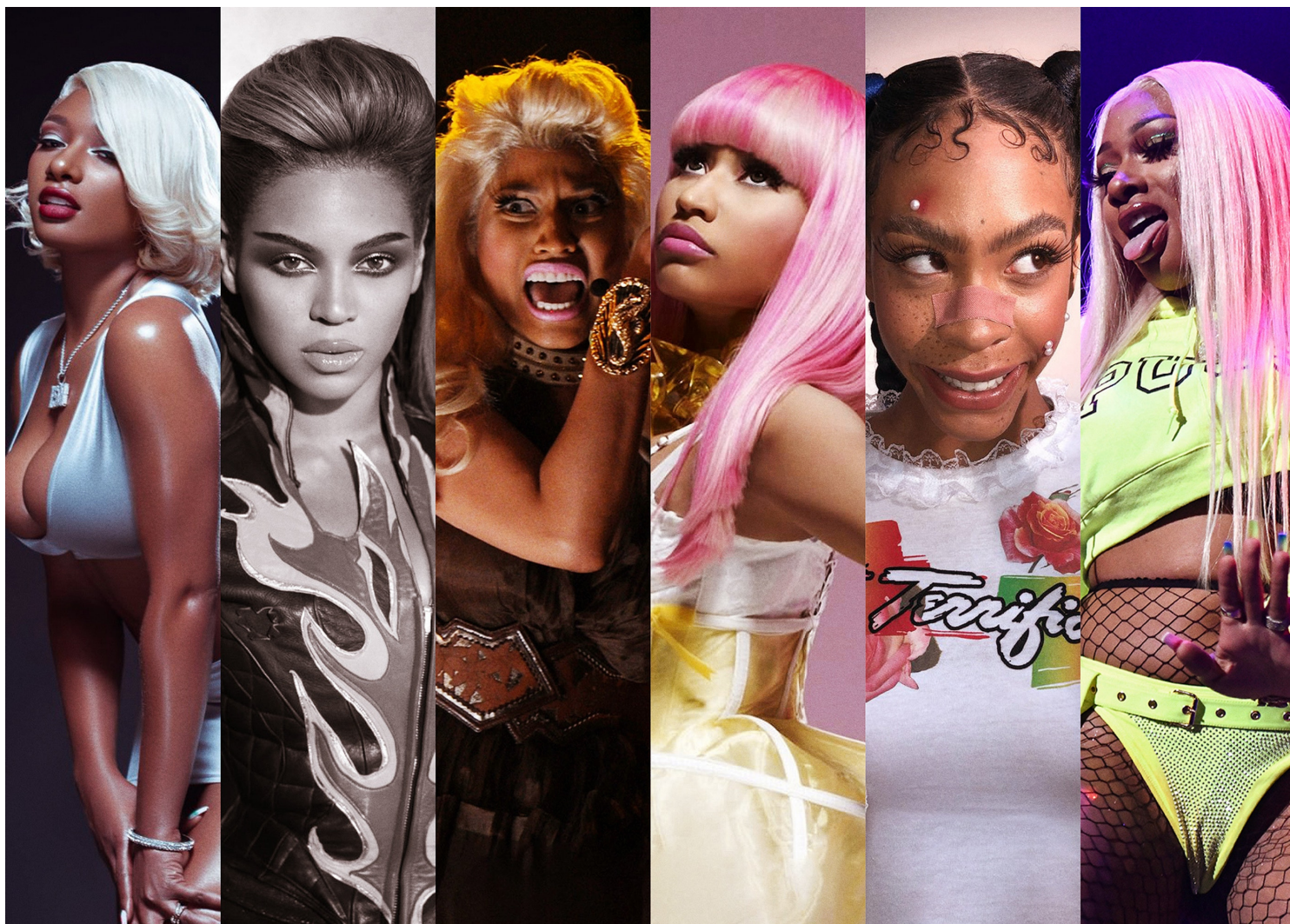


**THE FACE**

# The proud tradition of alter egos in female rap

## Music

Both Megan Thee Stallion and Nicki Minaj have announced new personas, continuing a culture of female rappers channelling unfiltered anger through fictional characters.

Words: [Taylor Crumpton](#)

26th February 2020

“I have someone else that takes over when it’s time for me to work and when I’m on stage, this alter ego that I’ve created, that kind of protects me and who I really am,” Beyoncé said in a press release for *I Am... Sasha Fierce*, her third studio album. “Sasha Fierce is the fun, more sensual, more aggressive, more outspoken side and more glamorous side that comes out when I’m working and when I’m on the stage.” Split into a double

album, Beyoncé and Sasha Fierce created the record's duality as tracks transitioned from upbeat, electro-inspired pop to emotionally powerful R&B ballads.

“Sasha Fierce was born when I did *Crazy in Love*,” Bey explained in a 2008 interview. “People, when they meet me, expect that all the time, but that person is strictly for the stage.” Sasha Fierce – who was killed off in 2010 – enabled Beyoncé to embrace her rage in a society where black women, especially mothers, are refused the privilege of anger. “Black women’s screams are often purposefully ignored, but channelling that anger in music forces people to pay attention,” Brooklyn White wrote for *Bitch Media*.

On *Hard Core*, Lil Kim’s 1996 debut studio album, the Brooklyn rapper channelled her frustrations of being disrespected by her male counterparts in hip-hop and betrayal by Notorious B.I.G., her mentor and lover, through her several alter egos over the album’s tracks. “*I am a diamond cluster hustler, queen bitch, supreme bitch /Kill a nigga for my nigga by any means bitch, murder scene bitch /Clean bitch, disease-free bitch, check it /I write a rhyme, melt in your mouth like M&M’s*,” she rapped on *Queen Bitch*, titled after her alter ego. *Crush on You* introduced The Queen Bee; her most famous persona, who laid the foundation for contemporary female rappers to implement personas in their discography.

## can create a fantas

Beyoncé paid tribute to the original Queen Bee in 2017 through five intricate recreations of Lil Kim’s outfits and stated, “HIP HOP WOULD NOT BE THE SAME WITHOUT OUR ORIGINAL QUEEN B.” From *The Rain*, Lil Kim’s 2001 *Manhattan File* magazine cover, *Black Woman Magazine*, 1999 *Source Awards*, and *Bad Boy* tour, Beyoncé released the photos under Halloween 2017: Lil’ Kim Appreciation on her official website, following photos leaked of her Jay Z’s couple outfit (Notorious B.I.G. and Lil Kim) from Kelly Rowland’s birthday party.

“Alter egos provide a theatre in which black women in particular can create a fantasy world where they’re not restricted to finite landscapes often attached to their identities,” writer DaLyah Jones tells me. “We, black women, are often puppets controlled by the strings of patriarchy, sexism, racism, capitalism and other manipulative tactics used to contort our most authentic selves ... This outward expression of otherness through performance can be explored endlessly.”

For decades, black women musicians have utilised alter egos as a source of freedom and liberation in their performances. Esther, a Chicago singer from the 1920s, had an alter ego named Baby Esther – who provided

the foundation for Betty Boop, though Helen Kane refused to acknowledge her as the source of inspiration. “Black women and girls had to develop personas that would be palatable for both black and white audiences,” Jones explains, “but it also alludes to the creativity that black women are able to exude when they themselves begin to negotiate barriers set around their identity.”

Loretta Mary Aiken was a standup comedian who rose to prominence during the '50s and '60s Chitlin Circuit – a travel circuit from the Eastern, Southern, and Upper Midwest for black talent to perform at venues who appreciated black entertainers throughout segregation. Through her performance as Moms Mabley, an alter ego was birthed from a series of traumatic experiences, such as the death of her father and sexual assault.

# palatable for both bl

In 2017, American psychologist Juli Fraga described the development of alter egos in adults as being “able to access other parts of the self that allow them to complete difficult tasks”. Fraga said, “One feels conflicted or insecure about their behaviour but if they believe ‘someone else’ is in charge, they feel less ashamed and perhaps more empowered to engage in the chosen act.”

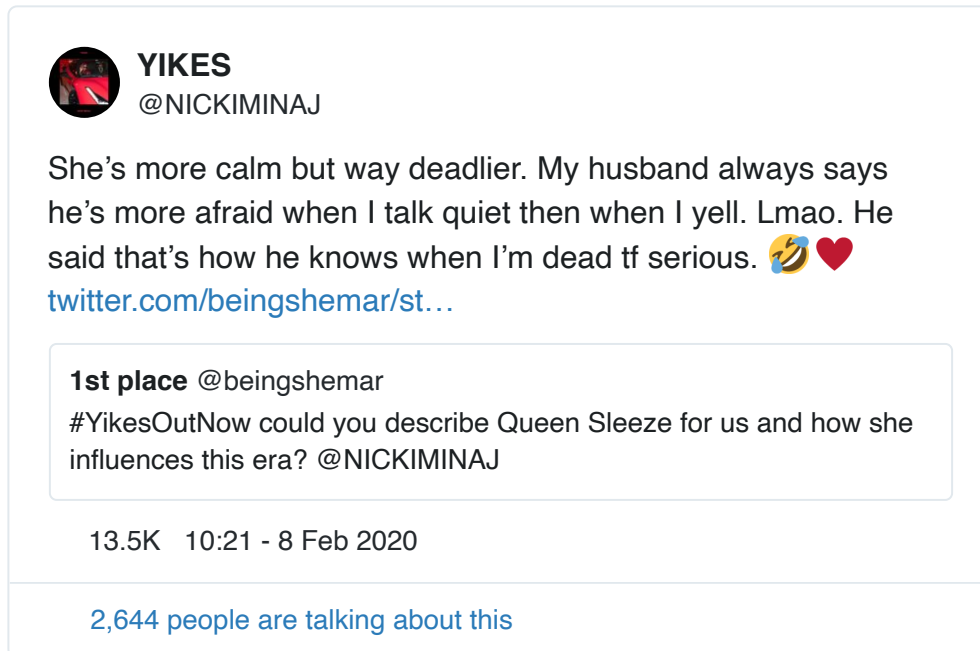
In contemporary women’s hip-hop, the development of alter egos is a prominent theme in artists like Rico Nasty – who’s personas Trap Lavigne and Tacobella have enabled her to transition between a feminine dainty archetype and aggressive strong punk persona. Destiny Frasqueri, a Bronx-based rapper who formerly had the moniker Wavy Spice but now performs as Princess Nokia described her persona to Noisey as, “a bruja and a tomboy, a classic New York Boricua shorty, a feminist, a queer woman who isn’t burdened, but empowered by her complexity.”

When it comes to alter egos among female rappers, Nicki Minaj is arguably the master of the art. Her roster of personas includes Roman Zolanski – her violent, male, and paranoid alter ego heard on Roman’s Revenge, a shared track with Slim Shady – Eminem’s character known for his descriptive raps focused on drugs, murder and sexual assault. Martha Zolanski is Roman’s British mother, who apologises for Roman’s manic behaviour on Pink Friday. And then there’s Lorilee Zolanski, Roman’s sister. Lorilee is a Lolita-inspired character who whispers in a dainty voice on the background of Stupid Hoe and Beez In The Trap.

Harajuku Barbie is Nicki’s stereotypical pop persona with a hyper, high-pitched voice featured on Super Bass and BedRock. Trinidadian Dancehall Nicki, as her name suggests, is a reflection of Nicki’s Trinidadian heritage, who appears on dancehall-inspired tracks like Gun Shot. Gangsta Moll is the closest version to her

mixtape upbringings with the execution style of a sniper known to assassinate any of her counterparts in hip-hop. Moll has that raw, quintessentially New York hip-hop feel.

Nicki's latest single *Yikes* signals the arrival of Queen Sleeze, who Nicki described on Twitter as “more calm but way deadlier. My husband always says he’s more afraid when I talk quiet then when I yell. Lmao. He said that’s how he knows when I’m dead tf serious.” As Nicki Minaj prepares for her next album, the alter ego appears to be a signal towards her counterparts that she is still “The Queen of Rap”, despite her announcement to retire from hip-hop in 2019.



Nicki Minaj has had her fair share of messy beefs recently. From her vicious feud with veteran rapper Remy Ma (who delivered the brutal Nicki diss *shETHER*, an ode to Nas' infamous *Ether* diss to Jay Z, in 2017) to her public anger at Travis Scott, who beat her number one spot on the US Billboard Charts when his album *Astroworld* stayed there for a second week, to the ongoing tension with Cardi's B (galvanized by Cardi's historic win at the 61<sup>st</sup> Grammy Awards as the first woman to win Best Rap Album as a solo artist), Nicki has found herself in conflict with her counterparts instead of uplifting them.

Rather than backing away from the controversy, perhaps Queen Sleeze is a way for Nicki to double-down and package her argumentative, headline-generating antics as humorous entertainment. “It was interesting to hear the choice name with all of the recent negativity tied to her from beefs to charting competitions,” says writer Mikeisha Vaughn, a journalist who specialises in gender and hip-hop culture. “And with the explanation that this Nicki is more calm, but deadlier, only makes me think the bars to come will be lethal.”

While Nicki Minaj’s relationship with Cardi has been less than amicable, Nicki has been supportive of another rising Queen Bee – Megan Thee Stallion, who collaborated with Nicki for her 2019 single *Hot Girl Summer*. And parallel to the ascension of Queen Sledge is Suga – Megan’s new alter ego who debuted on *B.I.T.C.H.*, her latest single from the debut album named after her newest persona. Megan’s breakthrough EP was called *Tina Snow* – named after a persona based on her idol, the late Pimp C of Houston legends UGK’s alter ego, Tony Snow. Megan has said Suga is “besties with Tina Snow ... it’s a big problem.” In verse one of *B.I.T.C.H.*, as Suga, Megan Thee Stallion is ferocious: “*You really want me to whoop the ho that you fuckin’ with if I find her /Bitch, you ain’t that busy, I don’t give a fuck what you ain’t got time for,*” and continues to affirm her lady-pimp personality.

Heralded as the hottest new female artist in rap music, Megan Thee Stallion is the latest to utilise alter egos as a source of creative expression, to display the complexities of herself, free from the moral scrutiny which she’d be subject to if she claimed her material was completely autobiographical. Alter egos provide female rappers a sense of creative liberation, a way to document their sources of inspiration and an opportunity to change their public perception. Until female rappers are granted the same creative flexibility – the same artistic license to freely engage in aggressive lyricism – as their male counterparts, then alter egos will be used as a powerful tool of expression.

[Rap](#)[Hip-Hop](#)[Beyoncé](#)[Megan Thee Stallion](#)[Rico Nasty](#)