FINAL SONG ANALYSIS PAPER  
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Dear Brian,  
 I hope you are doing great. I have been listening to a lot of music lately and I wanted to tell you about the song entitled “Durag Activity”, by Baby Keem featuring Travis Scott. I was assigned to write a research paper for the hip-hop class that I am taking, and I chose to write about this song. The professor gave us a list of 10 songs to choose from, but I decided to go with this song since I had been following Baby Keem and Travis Scott’s music for a while and listened to it a few times before on the radio. I loved the music and hence decided to do a lot of research on this song. The record is a part of Baby Keem’s debut studio album Melodic Blue. It has a catchy title as well as a tune. I love Baby Keem’s music and durag as an accessory and, hence I like the lyrics of the song. The distorted bass and synth tones give it an attractive sound and that is another reason I like this record. It has received a lot of praise worldwide and while a lot of that can be down to the artists’ popularity, I would like to elaborate on some of the reasons for it, applying the knowledge I gained from this course.

You would wonder how I view myself as a listener in all this. Although I do not wear a durag or wish to wear one, I feel motivated by the lyrics of this record. The album speaks about Baby Keem’s journey to becoming a global superstar and this record focuses on him dealing with fame. I do not relate to the record culturally but as a hip-hop enthusiast I feel driven to reach that level of success and assert dominance over my peers. The song establishes Baby Keem and Travis Scott as powerful figures and I view myself as one too, for the ventures I have undertaken that have had an impact on the people around me. Although I am neutral from a cultural and social perspective, I feel inspired by this music. In his interview with Apple Music, Keem said that he hoped to inspire the younger generations to openly talk about their own lived experiences. This song makes me think about my journey till now and how my culture has influenced my upbringing. Storytelling is an integral part of hip-hop and as a listener, I often think about ways in which I can tell my story to the world. Music is a strong medium to express emotions and personal feelings and this record gives a small glimpse of Baby Keem’s life, his desires, and struggles.

Before I describe the musical composition and production of this record, I would like to give you an insight into the artists’ background. Baby Keem is an American rapper and producer, who was born in Carson, California. He moved to Las Vegas, where he began producing music that combines trap and melody. His songs are about his family, his struggles, his success, his relationships, and his ambitions (AllMusic.com). Travis Scott was born in Houston and grew up in the suburbs of Missouri. He moved to Los Angeles where he started recording music such as traditional hip-hop, lo-fi, and ambient music. His songs also have infused elements from trap, cloud rap, and drill music. Travis’ songs are centered around the theme of drug use, violence, and hedonism (Allmusic.com). Both artists have a strong connection to Los Angeles and their music is a great reflection of that. They have referenced a few places from the city in some of their music. Using Mike Davis’ article, "The Hammer and the Rock" from 'City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles', we can get an insight into the city’s influence on their music. Mike speaks about how various social and political conflicts shaped the city and the role of minorities such as African-Americans and Latinos in its history. He explored the various struggles the city has been through and how they have led to different cultural movements. We can associate the rise of hip-hop artists like Baby Keem and Travis Scott with such movements.

The musical production of this record is outstanding. We had a chapter by Tricia Rose in our course and that gave me an idea of the history of hip-hop. Rose believes that hip-hop is rooted deeply in African-American culture. She discussed the role of technology in music production of rap music, detailing how turntables, samplers, and drums were used to create different beats. She also mentioned various techniques like sampling, sequencing, and digital production that helped boost rap music production. Applying Rose’s learnings to the song durag activity, we can find the connection to African-American culture. Both the artists Travis Scott and Baby Keem are Afro-Americans and have roots in African-American culture. Storytelling has been a massive part of African-American culture and that tradition is evident in the record as through his song he talks about monetary possessions, cars, influence, and romantic conquests in his life. The track's musical composition features a gloomy and unsettling rhythm with distorted bass and synth tones. The production aptly complements the tone and subject matter of the lyrics, which revolve around being dominant and fearless. A combination of instruments and sounds gives the song a distinct beat that stands out. The beat features piano sounds, a droning bassline, and drums in addition to the sound of a car engine. These sounds work in tandem to create a gloomy and dark vibe which is the overall theme of the song. A lot of sampling and autotuning are involved in the chorus. In an interview with Apple Music, Baby Keem highlighted the importance of the song's production and how he used distorted 808s and heavy bass to design the beat that was meant to be "in your face" and create a sense of energy and excitement. He also added that he had experimented heavily on this album and wanted to create a project that blended rap and melody while describing his personal experiences.  
  
The lyrics of the song are impressive and are centered around the theme of power, money, status, influence, and sexual desire. Keem described the song as a fun and energetic track and explained that the record was inspired by his experience of wearing a durag that empowered him and made him feel confident. We had studied Imani Perry’s chapter on verbal archetypes and hip-hop and that aided my analysis of the lyrical composition of this record. Perry argues that hip-hop is made up of archetypes and themes that address topics such as race, class, and power. From the lyrics, it is evident that the artists are working with the warrior archetype. They portray themselves as influential, powerful, and dominant public figures and use explicit and abusive language to look down upon their rivals. They boast about their wealth, and it is clear from lyrics like “But this Bugatti cost me three, I ten-to-two it” and “Huh, I'm big rich” (Spotify). While most of the song focuses on Keem’s fame and wealth, some parts also reveal the mental problems that the artist is going through as he deals with fame. “I can't fall in love, it's fuckin' up my mental (fuckin' up my mental)” is a clear indication of that (Spotify). Feelings of struggle and mental stress add another perspective to the song about the challenges that one must deal with as a result of global success and stardom. The lyrics are in sync with the beats to create a gloomy and dark setting.

Using Greg Tate’s "Hip-Hop Turns 30" in 'Flyboy 2: The Greg Tate Reader', we can discuss the broader impact of this song around the world. Tate states that hip-hop is a strong cultural force that inspires social changes and movements across the world. I believe that this record captivates the younger generation. Youth today want to assert dominance over their rivals and become powerful figures in society. Baby Keem and Travis Scott brag about their riches and influence on society and a lot of the youth population will be motivated by these lyrics to succeed in their fields. The album which the record is a part of, the Melodic Blue, is about Baby Keem’s meteoric rise to stardom and will influence a lot of youngsters aspiring to become future stars.  
  
Overall, I believe that the lyrics and sound complement each other well to make this a great piece of music. Although the song does not directly draw from dozens or toasts, it contains explicit and offensive lyrics. There is no clear evidence of the record relating to police brutality against the minorities as it is Keem’s personal experience while growing up. I don’t see any element of politics involved in this song and believe it is more of a party and carefree record as described by Baby Keem in his interview. The song goes back to Keem’s life before he became famous and there is no political angle involved here by any means. We had come across ASAP Rocky’s Peso in the lecture, and I believe that the two songs are very similar in meaning. In Peso, ASAP reflects on his experiences with drugs and culture and depicts a hedonistic lifestyle. Durag activity depicts a strong connection to southern culture. Baby Keem was born in Vegas and describes his experiences while growing up in the city (Allmusic.com). 808 drums are a staple part of Southern rap music and have been involved in producing this record (platinumloops.com). Travis Scott, who hails from Houston, another city in the south, also brings out southern elements such as autotuning in the record (Allmusic.com). However, the record might be objectively flawed, as there is a great deal of sexually explicit content in the song which to some extent is problematic in terms of attitudes towards women. With the lyrics coming across as women being objectified and looking at the broader meaning of the song, which is hedonism and materialism, one may interpret women being used as sex toys to derive pleasure. I firmly believe that music like any other art form is open to interpretation and perspective, and these were just my views on the same. One could question whether the global success of this record shows society’s attitude, but everyone will have their interpretations, which is the beauty of music. You could have a different interpretation of the song and I’d recommend this song to you.

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