

“Bitch”, “Ho” and “Pussy”: Messages of Popular Rap Music

AHMAD DANIEL FAIZ RAMLEE & DEXTER SIGAN JOHN*

Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: sjdexter@unimas.my

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the messages of the popular rap songs. The specific objectives are: (1) to analyse the messages of rap songs in the Billboard Hot 100 Year-End Chart from 2017 to 2021, and (2) to analyse the level of misogyny in the rap songs listed in the Billboard Hot 100 Year-End Chart from 2017 to 2021. The descriptive study involved the analysis of messages in 25 popular rap songs. The content analysis of the songs showed that the most frequently used type of misogyny is sexual conquest messages found in 23 songs, followed by derogatory manner and physical aggression but rape and sexual assault messages were less frequently used. Most of the songs fall under the high level of misogyny. The most popular words used in these five songs are “bitch”, “hoes”, “ho”, “pussy glitter”, and “whores”. As the rap music is dominated by male singers, the misogyny messages promote a culture of toxic masculinity and reinforce the belief that men should be dominant in all aspects. The rap music normalises the idea of sexual violence, by making it acceptable or even desirable. The findings indicate that there is a need to promote positive messages in the music especially on woman empowerment.

Keywords: Derogatory manner, misogyny, rap songs, sexual conquest

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-SA (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial_ShareAlike 4.0 International License) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, for non-commercial purposes, provided the original work of the author(s) is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

Music is a universal language. It has the power to transcend cultural, social, and linguistic barriers. It is also an art form that has been a part of human civilisation for thousands of years and continues to evolve in the world we live in. From the earliest forms of tribal music to the complex compositions of classical music and the modern sounds of pop, rock, and hip-hop, music has the ability to evoke emotions, express ideas, and connect people on a deeply personal level (Clark & Giacomantonio, 2013). Today, various musical genres have emerged due to geographical location, evolution, demand and necessity (Poulin, 2018). One of the most popular musical genres is rap.

Rap music started in the 1970s. It emerged from the African-American community in the United States (Irfan, 2022). What makes this music unique is it is characterised by its spoken lyrics, often set to a rhythmic beat or instrumental track. In its early years, rap music was often associated with the hip-hop culture. The marginalised communities, who had been excluded from the mainstream society, used rap music a form of expression. Today, rap music has become a global phenomenon. However, there is controversy over the messages sent by rap songs. Rap music has been associated with drugs, crime, and socio-political issues (Irfan, 2022). Its messages often portray abuse and violence, and encourage women to embrace sexual objectification and degradation (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). The development of these messages indirectly supports misogynistic views in the rap music industry. Misogyny is “an ideology that reduced women to objects for men’s ownership, use, or abuse” (Adam & Fuller, 2006, p. 939). If the misogynistic lyrics are widely embraced, it will contribute to a culture that normalises sexism and woman objectification.

Over the years, several studies have been conducted to analyse the misogyny in rap music. Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) assess the portrayal of women in 403 rap songs in the albums that attained the platinum status from 1992 to 2000. The results showed a majority of songs do not degrade women, and some rappers even challenged rap’s misogynistic messages and advocated for a more inclusive version of masculinity. However, Cundiff (2013) discovered themes of power over, objectification of and violence against women in the popular rap and hip-hop songs on Billboard’s “Hot 100” chart between 2000 and 2010. Similarly, Quek and Dipolong-Ubanan (2017) found that in the rap and hip-hop songs listed in the Billboard’s Top Rap Airplay Artists in 2013 and 2014, women are depicted as subordinate gender, treated as sexual objects, and described in a demeaning way. Male rappers are