

## Misogyny in the Lyrics of Billboard's Top Rap Airplay Artists

Justine Quek Kia Ling<sup>1</sup> Genevieve F. Dipolog-Ubanan<sup>2</sup>

*English Language and Communication Department  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts  
UCSI University Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

*English Language and Communication Department  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts  
UCSI University Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

**ABSTRACT:** The main purpose of this paper is to examine how women are described in rap/hip-hop songs. Five rap artists are chosen from the Billboard's Top Rap Airplay Artists in 2013 and 2014 and their songs' lyrics are analyzed to answer these questions: What misogynistic choices are found in these rap songs? What do these choices of words, phrases and clauses imply? The analysis of the rap song lyrics revealed that women are described as subordinate gender, and treated as mere sexual objects, and that hip-hop/rap music described women in a demeaning way and therefore has reinforced sexism and discrimination of women through its misogynistic lexical choices.

**KEYWORDS:** *Billboard's Top Rap Airplay Artists, gender stereotypes, misogynistic lyrics, rap/hip-hop songs*

---

### I. Introduction

In this era of globalization, popular music is gaining so much popularity that people are able to listen to it wherever they go. One of the genres in popular music that is listened to and patronized by both young and old alike is rap/hip-hop music. These two terms 'hip-hop' and 'rap' are used interchangeably in the music world. Hip-hop is a term that represents the genre and the culture that produces it; rap is the action word of hip-hop. Hip-hop originated in the 1970s in the Bronx, New York, and has since become the lifestyle of American culture. Cheeseman (1998, cited in Motley & Henderson, 2008) argued that hip-hop has become a tool through which the voice of the ethnic minority and youth, who protest for political issues as well as discrimination, can be aired and heard.

Moreover, Gamble & Gamble (2006) stated that hip-hop is "a social community that uses rap, a special language, to help express its culture" (p.114). Also, Rose (1994) expressed that rap music has "grown into a multi-million dollar record, magazine, and video industry with multi-platinum world renowned rappers, disc jockeys, and entertainers" (p.7) . While rap music has become popular for expressing hip-hop culture, there has been criticism and blaming of rap music as promoting misogyny as well as violence against women (Malek, 2008, p.107).

The issue of gender stereotype is likewise prevalent in popular music as women are presented as the marginalized others and inferior to men (Tuchman, 1978, cited in Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). The message is that men are dominant over women. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, cited in Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009), hegemonic masculinity is "the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimize the global subordination of women to men" (p.5) . Thus, men are more likely to initiate violence towards women and women take the position of being victimized (Seidman, 1992; Sherman & Dominick, 1986, cited in Conrad et al., 2009).

Rap music is "a type of audio pornography that endorses sexist and violent ideas and behavior" (Lynxwiler & Gay, 2000, p.3, cited in Monk-Turner and Sylvertooth, 2008). "Misogyny is not a word useful simply for describing particularly nasty bits of behavior, but rather directs us to set of relations, attitudes, and behaviors that are embedded within all other social relations" (Hamilton, 1987, p. 123, cited in Adams & Fuller, 2006).

According to Barongan & Nagayama (1995), exposure to misogynous rap music will result to sexually aggressive behaviors. When listeners are constantly exposed to misogynous lyrics, they will slowly be influenced by what they hear and their attitudes and behaviors will be shaped by the lyrics' insidious message of blaming, shaming and sexually objectifying women. Gerbner, et al (1973, cited in Cundiff, 2013) argued that when listeners are exposed to mainstream media content, they will gradually come to believe that what is expressed is the norm and is the reality. That is to say that the misogynistic message conveyed by the rap music lyrics through its linguistic choices and syntactic structures will affect the listeners' beliefs and attitudes. As time passes, as they are continuously exposed to this type of music and its message, they will start to believe that what are being conveyed in these widely popular rap songs are normal and acceptable. For example, if a rapper uses words such as 'bitch' and 'doll' to describe a woman, chances are high that listeners are going to use the same to refer to any woman. It is important to analyze how hip-hop/rap music portrays women in their lyrics and how this portrayal reflects the way rap/hip hop music industry view women in general.

Since the boom of rap and hip-hop music in the 1970s, it has become one of the channels to portray women as the marginalized other. Vulgarity in rap music is very common. The use of vulgar language is a natural feature of the hip-hop and rap culture. According to Halliday (1976), vulgarity or swearing is referred to as "anti-language", and it is a marker of one's membership to a particular group. Since hip-hop and rap culture originated from the Bronx, where many African American community are in, it is important for them to be identified clearly as a distinct group. One can argue that the existence and use of vulgarity in their music is a signal of a divide between "in-groupers" and "out-groupers". Hutchinson (1999, cited in Thompson, 2004) claimed that the male artists want to crystallize their masculinity by producing such vulgar-filled songs.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze how women are portrayed in rap and hip-hop music. In order to achieve this purpose, the lyrics of the songs from 5 rappers who were Billboard's Top 5 Rap Airplay Artists in 2013 and 2014 were chosen. The 2013 top rap artists are Drake, Lil Wayne & 2 Chainz; and the 2014 top rap artists are Kid Ink & YG. The lyrics of their songs were analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. What misogynistic words/phrases and clauses are found in the song lyrics of Lil Wayne, Drake, 2 Chainz, Kid Ink and YG?
2. What do these choices of words, phrases and clauses imply?

### 1.2 Materials and Methods

Five top rappers of 2013 and of 2014 and two of their Top 5 songs were purposely selected for this study. These songs were drawn from the lyrics website: [www.azlyrics.com](http://www.azlyrics.com), considered as one of the largest lyrics databases on the web. These songs were chosen as they were sung by Top 5 male rappers of 2013 and 2014 and were related to women.

Data for this qualitative study were the rap/hip-hop lyrics and textual analysis was used to identify the misogynistic words/phrases and clauses used by these top rap artists.

The research focused on two hit songs from each of the chosen rap artists and these were analyzed to find out how women are portrayed in their song lyrics. The artists and their songs are:

1. Lil Wayne: *IANAHB (I Am Not A Human Being)* and *Bitches Love Me*
2. Drake: *The Language* and *Girls Like Beyoncé*
3. 2 Chainz: *Used 2* and *Beautiful Pain*
4. Kid Ink: *Body Language* and *Main Chick*
5. YG: *Do It To Ya* and *Left Right*.

## II. Analysis and Discussion

To recall, the 10 songs were purposefully chosen from the Top 5 Rap Airplay Artist of 2013 and 2014, namely Lil Wayne, Drake, 2 Chainz, Kid Ink and YG. The songs are:

- (1) Lil Wayne - *I Am Not A Human Being*
- (2) Lil Wayne - *Bitches Love Me*
- (3) Drake - *The Language*
- (4) Drake - *Girls Love Beyoncé*
- (5) 2 Chainz - *Used 2*
- (6) 2 Chainz - *Beautiful Pain*
- (7) Kid Ink - *Body Language*
- (8) Kid Ink - *Main Chick*
- (9) YG - *Do It To Ya!*
- (10) YG - *Left Right*

### 2.1 Misogyny in Rap Music

Misogyny is defined as “hatred or disdain of women” (Adams and Fuller, 2006, p. 940). It can also be defined as sexualizing women and the dominance of men over women (Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993, as cited in Conrad, Dixon and Zhang, 2010). It is an ideology where women are depicted as objects and that men take ownership of them for use or abuse. Misogyny occurs often in rap music lyrics and it involves the “promotion, glamorization, support, humorization, justification, or normalization of oppressive ideas about women. In misogynistic rap music, there are often degrading statements about women in relation to sex, violent actions, reference of women as to a class lower than men or just as objects for men to use” (Adams and Fuller, 2006, p. 940).

#### 2.1.1 Misogynistic words

Table 1: Misogynistic words found in the 10 rap songs

Rap Songs	Bitch/Bitches	Hoes	Pussy	Chick	Girl/Girls
1. Lil Wayne - <i>I Am Not A Human Being</i>	5/2	1	2	-	2
2. Lil Wayne - <i>Bitches Love Me</i>	3/10	4	3	-	-
3. Drake - <i>The Language</i>	1	-	1	-	2/2
4. Drake - <i>Girls Love Beyoncé</i>	-	1	-	-	3
5. 2 Chainz - <i>Used 2</i>	3	-	1	-	-
6. 2 Chainz - <i>Beautiful Pain</i>	-	-	1	-	-
7. Kid Ink - <i>Body Language</i>	-	-	-	-	5
8. Kid Ink - <i>Main Chick</i>	1	-	-	3	3
9. YG - <i>Do It To Ya!</i>	-	-	2	-	4
10. YG - <i>Left Right</i>	5	1	1	-	-
Total	30	7	11	3	21

TABLE 1 shows misogynistic words in the 10 songs and the number of times these words occurred. The demeaning words like *Bitch/Bitches*, *Hoes*, *Pussy*, *Chick* and *Girl* used to refer women are found in the lyrics of these top rap songs. The most common misogynistic words that can be found in the lyrics are *bitch* and *bitches*, which occurred a total of 30 times throughout the 10 songs. Women are called *bitch* and *bitches*. The word 'bitch' is literally defined as a female dog, so to use it to refer to a woman is quite unpleasant and derogatory. Some examples from the songs are:

"Tell the bitch to get off me!" in *I Am Not A Human Being*

"I got some down bitches I can call" in *Bitches Love Me*.

Another misogynistic word used to describe women is *Hoes*. *Hoes* is defined as 'slut' or 'a prostitute'. Examples of it being used in the songs are:

"These hoes got pussies like craters" in *Bitches Love Me*

"Get money and fuck these hoes" in *Girls Love Beyoncé*

"Broke hoes" in *Left Right*.

The word *pussy* can also be found in these song lyrics. The word *pussy* refers to a woman's genitals and the use of it to describe women is very degrading. For example,

"Pussy so good" in *The Language*

"Her pussy fat but ain't good so that's a misprint" in *Beautiful Pain*

"I can see your pussy through your white dress" in *Left Right*.

One word that appeared only once but also refers to female genitals is *Punani* from the song *Left Right* by YG.

"Fuck with me for better sex I know all the right spots to keep that punani wet".

*Chick* did not appear very frequently as it only occurred in one out of the ten songs, in *Kid Ink - Main Chick*. Although the word is not a very offensive word compared to those mentioned above, it can also mean 'a very easy woman'. For example, in the line, "Girl, I know you wanna be my main chick, my main chick". It implies that the man has many other women he called chick by his side, and the woman in the song is just one of them.

Another word that appears in the lyrics of the ten songs is the seemingly neutral and positive word *Girl* or *Girls*. Though the word alone does not come out as misogynistic, but its use in the songs is of shame and full of sexual innuendos. For example,

"Bring in some girls from Miami" in *The Language*

"Girls love to fuck with you conscience" in *Girls Love Beyoncé*

"Girl, nobody beats up the pussy like me" in *Do It To Ya!*

"My dick work, girl" in *Left Right*.

Vulgarity in rap music may seem offensive to people who do not understand the hip-hop culture, but for the hip-hop community, it is part of their life, and to them, it is a natural feature (Gupta, 2012, as cited in Grönevik, 2013, p. 18). Lynch and Krzycki (1998, as cited in Monk-Turner and Sylvertooth, 2008) stated that rap music is the story and voice of the streets. Rap music tells the life story of the low income minority group on the urban streets of the Bronx.

In the use of misogynistic words, women are depicted as a class lower than and under the control of men. Women are viewed as mere objects who are expected to follow the commands and actions of men. Valsinger (2008, as cited in Grönevik, 2013, p. 13) has stated that "male hip-hop and rap artists portray themselves as strong and powerful through subordination of women in their lyrics". In their songs, the male rap artists use words that subordinate women and that aim to maintain a tough and strong image.

### 2.1.2 Misogynistic phrases and clauses

In the world of rap and hip-hop music, women in general, are degraded through various ways of naming, shaming and hating and sexual objectification (Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009). To name and shame is to ridicule or belittle another person. Sexual objectification is to treat a person as an instrument or tool of sexual pleasure. Phrases and clauses that clearly name, shame and sexually objectify women are shown in the table below.

Table 2: Misogynistic phrases and clauses found in the 10 rap songs

Rap Songs	Naming, Shaming and Hating	Sexual Objectification
1. Lil Wayne - <i>I Am Not A Human Being</i>	Lettin' all these hoes ride my dick, car pools, my bars passed the bar exam, no law school.	Then I make her take this dick like advice. She see-saw it, she suck it and enjoy it
2. Lil Wayne - <i>Bitches Love Me</i>	These hoes got pussies like craters. Can't treat these hoes like ladies, man!	She wake up, eat this dick. Call that breakfast in bed. 69, 96.
3. Drake - <i>The Language</i>	Pussy so good that you gotta come see me on tour and you gotta fly in first class.	She just wanna smoke and fuck, I said, "Girl, that's all that we do."
4. Drake - <i>Girls Love Beyoncé</i>	Girls love to fuck with your conscience. Girls hate when niggas go missing and shawty	All my young boys 'round me saying, "Get money and fuck these hoes"
5. 2 Chainz - <i>Used 2</i>	You can't do it with a dick in you? You can't do it like that with a dick in you? Bitch!	Bad bitch with me yeah, she sadity yeah. Got her hair fixed yeah, kinda thick yeah. Shawty known to strip yeah, for the rent yeah
6. 2 Chainz - <i>Beautiful Pain</i>	Her lips and her hips thick. My boxers are covered in her lipstick. Her pussy fat but ain't good so that's a misprint	I aim at 'cha, I bang at 'cha, hope a plane hit 'cha. Fuck you and whoever came witcha'
7. Kid Ink - <i>Body Language</i>	I can read your body, nuff said. Quit all that yappin'. Need less talk and a little more action. Now girl keep it G, know you speak a little freak	If you tryna ride, just stay in my lane. It's no other way to explain it. In layman, fuck who you came with.
8. Kid Ink - <i>Main Chick</i>	Girl, I ain't tryna dog ya (nope). Bad bitch only thing I'll call you	Girl I know you wanna be my main chick, my main chick. I said fuck whoever you came with, who you came with. I told her "Fuck that nigga"
9. YG - <i>Do It To Ya!</i>	I know the homies might think a nigga's crazy. But you could fuck around and have my first baby. What?	I said face down ass up. That's the way we likes to fuck. Do my dirt on the low. That's the way shit's 'sposed to go
10. YG - <i>Left Right</i>	I hate make-up, I hate broke hoes, I can't talk to you bitch I ain't social. Where the bad bitches at? Let me know doe, I can send this dick your way baby postal!	I need action while relaxin, and a bitch that knows gymnastics so she can divide her legs on this dick like a fraction.

As seen in TABLE 2, misogynistic phrases and clauses are found in each of the 10 songs. In the category of Naming, Shaming and Hating, women are blamed using derogatory words for doing something wrong or for something men are not satisfied about or want to complain about, be it the woman's body or attitude. For example,

“These hoes got pussies like craters. Can't treat these hoes like ladies, man!”  
(*Bitches Love Me* by Lil Wayne)

“Her lips and her hips thick. My boxers are covered in her lipstick. Her pussy fat but ain't good so that's a misprint.”  
(*The Language* by Drake)

“I hate make-up, I hate broke hoes, I can't talk to you bitch I ain't social. Where the bad bitches at? Let

me know doe, I can send this dick your way baby postal!"  
(*Left Right* by YG)

In an interview with Brother Marquis from two Live Crew, he says, "I'm degrading [women] to try to get me some money. ... And besides, you let me do that. You got pimps out here who are making you sell your body. Just let me talk about you for a little while ...and make me a little money" (Collins, 2000, p.143-144, as cited in Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009, p.13). The implication is that because it has already become a norm, there is no problem in bad-mouthing or shaming women in their songs.

Women are portrayed as mere sexual objects, good only for men's sexual gratification. Men telling what women should do during sex is also an act of sexual objectification, as well as mentioning of female body parts and reducing women into sexual body parts. Some lines from the songs include:

"Then I make her take this dick like advice. She see-saw it, she suck it and enjoy it."  
(*I Am Not A Human Being* by Lil Wayne)

"I said face down ass up. That's the way we likes to fuck. Do my dirt on the low. That's the way shit's 'sposed to go."  
(*Do It To Ya!* By YG)

"I need action while relaxin, and a bitch that knows gymnastics so she can divide her legs on this dick like a fraction."  
(*Left Right* by YG)

"All my young boys 'round me saying, "Get money and fuck these hoes".  
(*Girls Love Beyoncé* by Drake)

Brown (2003) states, "Songs are filled with violent, raunchy language, misogynistic allusions, sexual innuendo – sometimes blatant references to lewd sexual acts – and suggestive dancing" (as cited in Yocum, 2010, p. 2). Men will be praised for having the luxury, the money and the ability to get any women they desire. The women in these songs are being portrayed as clingy and subservient, who obediently follow men's instructions so that they would be accepted by the men. According to Yocum (2010), "the fact that a song can control a person's actions and behaviors shows us how the music industry plays a big part in gender construction" (p. 5). This is echoed by Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) who says, "even though not all songs contain full-flash misogynistic lyrics, but these songs still place women in a very negative light .... even with the absence of misogyny, it does not mean that women are represented positively" (p. 25).

Hip-hop and rap music has reinforced sexism and discrimination of women. The songs often portray women as subordinates and weak, while men are the boss and the powerful ones. With these rap songs becoming so mainstream and popular, there is the growing fear that society will be influenced and will begin to think that treating women as weak, subordinate and inferior, as conveyed in their favourite rap/hip-hop songs, is normal and acceptable. Sadly, the 10 rap songs that were chosen in this study portrayed women in a degrading manner and used misogynistic words, phrases and clauses -- which would directly or indirectly influence and brainwash the listeners into thinking and doing the same.

### **III. Conclusion**

Misogynistic words, phrases and clauses are found in the lyrics of the 10 rap song. Women are portrayed as subordinate beings and only worthy as sex objects.

Due to time constraint, this paper was able to study only 10 songs from five top rap artists. For future research, not only songs from male artists but also from female top rap artists should be included. This would help to extend the research and examine how female rap artists portray women in their songs, whether female rappers also use misogynistic lexical choices in their songs.

## References

### Books:

- [1] Gamble, T. K., and Gamble, M. *Communication works*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006).
- [2] Rose, T., *Black noise: Rap music and black culture in contemporary America*. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994).

### Journal Papers:

- [3] Motley, Carol M., and Geraldine Rosa Henderson. "The Global Hip-Hop Diaspora: Understanding The Culture". *Journal of Business Research* 61(3), 2008, 243-253.
- [4] Weitzer, R., and Kubrin, C. E., Misogyny in rap music: A content analysis of prevalence and meanings. *Men and Masculinities*, 12(1), 2009.
- [5] Halliday, M.A.K. Anti-Languages. *American Anthropologist*, 78(3), 1976, 570-584.
- [6] Conrad, K., Dixon, T. L., and Zhang , Y. Controversial rap themes, gender portrayals and skin tone distortion: A content analysis of rap music videos. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(1), 2009, 134-156.
- [7] Monk-Turner, E., and Sylvertooth, D., Rap music: Gender difference in derogatory word use. *American Communication Journal*, 10(4), 2008.
- [8] Adams, T. M., and Fuller, D. B., The words have changed but the ideology remains the same: Misogynistic lyrics in rap music. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36(6), 2006, 938-957.
- [9] Barongan, C., & Nagayama, G. C. The influence of misogynous rap music on sexual aggression against women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 19(2), 1995.
- [10] Cundiff, G. The influence of rap/hip-hop music: A mixed-method analysis on audience perceptions of misogynistic lyrics and the issue of domestic violence. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 4(1), 2013.

### Chapters in Books:

- [11] Malek, A., Violence in Language: Is Rap Music Causing Violence in America?, in *Violence, Realities and Concerns*. (Beirut: Notre Dame University Press, 2008) 107-115.

### Theses:

- [12] Thompson, A. S., *Gender in hip hop: A research study*. Humboldt State University, California, 2004.
- [13] Grönevik, K., *The depiction of women in rap and pop lyrics*, doctoral diss., Linnéuniversitetet, Kalmar Växjö, Sweden, 2013.
- [14] Yocum, S. C., *Rhetorical Construction of Gender: How Women are Portrayed in Popular Music Today.*, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 2010.