

Realm of Masculinity: Encoding Manhood in the Rap Music Genre

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Abstract

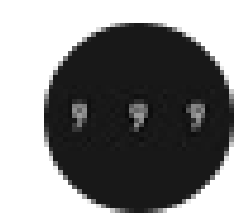
In today's technological culture, songs and their accompanying music videos are accessible through online websites, streaming platforms, social media outlets and network channels. Their lyrical messages have become a constant presence in everyday life. Texts revealed that music videos create a guideline of how to acceptably act as men and women in today's culture. Among the most popular music genres is rap, which widely features misogynistic content. Rap artists' lyrics and videos feature women who are regularly diminished to sexually promiscuous objects, lacking any individual thoughts and/or feelings. The speed and regularity in which consumers can now access this content desensitizes listeners to sexual harassment, exploitation and violence towards women. Many "old school" rappers such as Dr. Dre, Ice Cube and Tupac set a standard for utilizing misogyny in musical projects which has paved the path for current artists such as Future. With over 45 million monthly listeners on Spotify, Future is ranked among the platform's top 50 artists. Although his songs and albums vary in terms of featured artists, topics and cover art, his degradation of women is constant. As one of the leading artists in this popular genre with a primarily male audience, Future's construction of violent acts and phrases towards and against women encodes dominance and violence against women as a normal facet to manhood.

Introduction

Misogyny is defined as "hatred, aversion to, or prejudice against women" (Merriam-Webster, 2022, p.1). While the concept can infiltrate any discussion, media or cultural experience, its repetitive appearance in the rap industry has become an expected aspect of culture. Sut Jahally explains throughout *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video*, that from its origins, music videos have relied on narratives of female sexuality for the profit of the artist(s) and record company (Jhally, 2007). He explains that the stories of the videos provide an understanding of how to act as men and women in a culture (Jhally, 2007). Because music and their accompanying videos are accessible online, streaming platforms, social media and through multiple network channels, these lyrical messages have become a constant presence in everyday life and culture.

Among the newer artists dominating the rap scene is Nayvadius DeMun Wilburn, also known as "Future," who first rose to popularity in 2012, with his second album release entitled *Pluto*. Despite being a novice in the industry, Future won a Platinum Award for the album from the Recording Industry Association of America. As of 2021, Future has been ranked in Spotify's "Top 50 Artists" — with over 47 million monthly listeners — and holds recognition as a "Verified Artist" on Spotify, providing an added level of notoriety on the platform. Like many of the prominent old school artists, Future's songs and albums differ in terms of featured artists and topics. But one aspect always remains: the degradation of women.

Content warning: sexual content, hip-hop, violence against women, explicit words/phrases, sex trafficking and misogyny



lxrdr 4 weeks ago

Future never disappoints when making music

309 likes 1 reply



Melvin7 3 weeks ago

Future's giving the people what they want 🔥

1 like 0 replies



Ma'gash - SA 5 months ago

This music video is honestly a masterpiece. The visual concepts, compositions, lighting, editing, camera movements and effects, costume, all of it. Truly incredible stuff.

553 likes 0 replies

Research

Research from Adams and Fuller argues that misogynistic rap contains one or more of the following six ideas, "(a) derogatory statements about women in relation to sex; (b) statements involving violent actions toward women, particularly in relation to sex; (c) references of women causing "trouble" for men; (d) characterization of women as "users" of men; (e) references of women being beneath men; and (f) references of women as usable and discardable beings" (Adams & Fuller, 2006, p. 940). Furthermore, existing literature illustrates the correlation between women's degradation in hip-hop music and men's behavior towards women in the real world. However, many of these studies were conducted years ago when music streaming platforms didn't yet exist. A gap remains in studying how the development of technology in the music industry has further impacted behaviors that are perceived as "normal" for men.

As Sillars demonstrates in his text *Narrative Analysis: Reading Culture Through Stories*, individuals of prominence distinguish what narratives are important and note-worthy in society and are understood based on who does the story-telling (Sillars, 1991, p. 153). Future's story-telling exemplifies the little respect in which he talks about and treats women. Starnage, a social media marketing business, reports that 82.5% of Future's audience are male individuals between the ages of 18 and 49 (Starnage, 2022). As a man of status and wealth, Future's primarily male audience is likely to interpret the lyrics in his songs or aspects of his music videos as his stance on *how* to treat and talk about women. Therefore, the demeaning style he employs when addressing or rapping about women in his music serves as his perspective on how they deserve to be treated in the real world. With a majorly male audience, Future's semiotic construction of violent acts and phrases towards and against women encodes dominance and violence against women as a normal facet to manhood.

Analysis

Applying Adams and Fuller's concepts regarding misogynistic rap, Future meets all six ideas. Among various phrases and terms used lyrically, he uses derogatory statements about women, particularly in relation to sex. Expressions throughout the song "MESSAGING ME" such as "Hit her like a porn star..." (Future, 2022) or "Put it down in her tonsils" (Future, 2022) align with their second requirement — the inclusion of violent actions towards women, particularly in a sexual manner. Additionally, "As long as she listenin', ain't doin' nothin' suspicious..." (Future, 2022) furthers the idea that the woman he references is causing trouble and Future is tasked with putting her in her place, meeting Adams and Fuller's third idea. Describing women as only interested in sex or fame from the artist characterizes women according to the fourth concept — women are users of men. Lastly, the fifth and sixth notions are accomplished in the music video — women are depicted and referenced as beneath men and as discardable objects.

Throughout *The Semiotics of Television*, John Fiske emphasizes how semiotics focus on the idea that "meanings are generated and circulated in a culture and with the relationship of these meanings to the structure and power within society" (Fiske, 1985, p. 176). He argues that meaning makes sense of social experience and rather than conveying meaning, the signs produce meaning themselves (Fiske, 1985). The way the women are filmed in "MESSAGING ME" — close-up shots of their intimate body parts, sexually touching one another and Future — generates a clear meaning: women exist as objects for men's entertainment, instruction and judgment. The skimpy outfits the women sport places an emphasis and importance on their physical bodies. Because Future openly touches the women, it suggests that this is a normal aspect of society and that women exist as displayed bodies for men's perusal. When women are portrayed as puppets, playthings and inanimate objects for men's desires in music, it seeps into and is repeated in the culture it reflects. Rather than showcasing women as individuals with their own personalities, interests and values, they're lumped into one group — hoes, sluts and bitches.

Conclusion

Misogyny is not a rarity for male rappers and singers. While style, lyrics, technology and favored artists have evolved over the years, women remain the target of many artists' deleterious actions and statements. The sustained access to sexist music on numerous platforms, many accessible through one's smartphone, desensitizes listeners to sexual harassment, exploitation and violence towards women. It permits the objectification of women — their bodies are seen as a currency, and one of little value. The speed and reach of this content will only continue to increase with advances in technology and innovation. Until then, with Future's increasing notoriety and sexist themes, the abuse and misogyny that women experience in the real world will likely expand.