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Media Industry Essay

Sheila Whiteley's (2000) study Women and Popular music



## SEX AS A WEAPON

This is a man's world, as the American James Brown says in his song of 2012. Men and women see the world differently, behave differently and are treated differently. The music industry is a good reflection of all those differences. In the following essay I am going to talk about all type of discrimination that happen in this industry, not only gender discrimination but also racism, homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation . In the end I am going to give a brief conclusion to summarize all the points.

Regarding gender discrimination, it is crucial to mention that music videos are valuable mediums which tell viewers stories about what is "normal" in our society. Since ever men are portrayed as aggressive and powerful characters, while women are rarely represented as independent individuals and more as passive objects perpetuating and emphasizing unhealthy and damaging stereotypes, usually difficult to change. The female body is rarely presented as non provocative. However, that is not the main issue, the problem is the message that is behind that image, women seen as sexualized characters, with little to offer besides their bodies. Here is where the theory of objectification comes, it was written by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997. It explains that objectification occurs when "women are treated as products with the only aim of pleasuring the men". This kind of objectification is considered problematic, due to the fact that it is in some way dehumanizing the person. It is curious to mention that historically music has not always been explicitly sexual, in fact, Western music in the Middle Ages was practiced by monks. However, as part of being human, we can associate everything with sex and sexuality, nevertheless, it is not the sexual nature of music the responsible for damaging society, but the way this is often manipulated and made to reinforce the role gender stereotypes.

According to Omnicore, most of the YouTube viewers are male, the 62% to be precise, while the 48% of the viewers are female. Both genders are exposed to all type of videos, some of them ethically appropriate and some of them not as much as they should. Female viewers watching those unseemly conducts on the screen so many times it can lead to a self-objectification where individuals start thinking that they are going to be valued only for their physical appearance and ability to entertain the opposite gender. Indeed, not only do they feel like their physical appearance is worthier than everything else, but also which body shape should they have to be more attractive and desirable for society. The consequences are alarming, specially in young girls, they start punishing their bodies to reach the universal beauty standard, sometimes hurting their body and mental health. Bulimia and Anorexia are 2 mental disorders especially detected on women and are the reflection of a chauvinist society. The insecurity and the fear they suffer are feelings that make an individual weak and easier to be manipulated by others in any situation.

With the appearance of the internet and the develop of technology, the percentage of people with an electronic device has considerably increased in the last decade . We live in a technological era, this means that the accessibility to the internet is unlimited. We can be surfing on internet at any time, in any place. The consequence of this availability to platforms, such as YouTube, is that the average of hours on the smartphones is increasing significantly, especially in the youngest ones. Children spend an average of 23 hours a week as reported by the telegraph newspaper in 2019. Such growth can become a media communication with the aim of influencing people and a way of sending messages full of values. For instance, the exhibition of sexual content where women is objectified teach boys they are totally free to enjoy their sexuality, instead, girls are taught to be sexy but submissive at the same time .

With regard to the lyrics of the songs, language can therefore be seen as not only an important tool to convey information but also as a reflection on the societies that use it. The words we chose to transmit our message demonstrate the way a society perceives its environment and relays information about it. For instance, if a country uses a sexist language in its everyday life, it means that the chauvinism is so interiorized by the speakers that they do not realise how they are already discriminating women by the use of some expressions. Many of the lyrics of the songs contain those expressions because singers are not just producing content to entertain, they produce content with symbolic value and even though they seem harmless, they can have an enormous impact on the human's behaviour. It is crucial to point out that not everybody who listen to denigrating songs become chauvinist, due to the fact that adults must be able to separate lyrics from what it is real. The problem comes when we talk about the young generation, as long as they are part of the listeners of those lyrics too, they are somehow building their language basing on their favourite singers or songs and being unaware of what those expressions really means and involves.

In relation to music genres and its content, it is fairly clear that Rap, as well as, hip hop have the highest amount of sexual content in their videos. The sexual objectification of women is very common, sometimes even appears violence against women in a very explicit way. It is not rare to mention that several hip hop and rap singers have been accused of gender violence to their girlfriend or wife and even after that, people still idolize them no matter what they have done and how badly they behaved.

The instance of violence that was unique to hip-hop appeared as force in *Blurred Lines*, a song written by Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams in 2013 . During the song, one of the singers says the following sentence: “So hit me up when you passing through, I will give you something big enough to tear your ass in two”. By singing those words the man is engaging the girl in forceful sexual acts that would be enough to “tear her ass in two”. Some people describe the lyrics as "rapey" due to the fact that it was referring to a non-consensual sex. In spite of the big controversy, *Blurred Lines* spent five weeks at number one in the UK charts according to the BBC News. When Robin Thicke was interviewed by GQ magazine, he declared that if the men respect their women, it is alright for them to degrade their women. The artist made it clear when he explained: “People say, ‘Hey, do you think this is degrading to women?’ I’m like, ‘Of course it is. What a pleasure it is to degrade a woman. I’ve never gotten to do that before. I’ve always respected women”. With this statement not only is he saying it is totally fine to degrade women, it’s actually fun. By contrast, Pharrell Williams at first did not understand why people was so annoyed by the song, but later in an interview of GQ magazine he clarified he was embarrassed by some of that stuff, it just took him some time to realize about his mistake.

As for reggaeton, the fame of this genre reached the top during the decade of the 2000s and its repercussion is increasing all over the world, becoming indeed very popular in countries where Spanish is not spoken by the citizens. It is more than clear that their lyrics are not the most appropriate ones. Reggaeton singers usually talk about love, break ups and their lovers. However, the women in their songs is seen as the responsible for destroying the relationship due to their jealousy and possessiveness. A great amount of people is against this genre

and they do not consider it music at all, it is more a way of undervaluing the music industry. Others on the contrary, they would say that they listen to it because it is catchy and good for moving their hips, they do not pay much attention to the lyrics. Both points of view are respectable, everyone is free to listen according their taste.

While white women are oppressed by their status as women, black women are undoubtedly oppressed not only by their gender, but also by their race. Despite the fact that the presence of black women is huge in Rap, Soul and Hip-hop music, in other type of music it is more likely to see women with Eurocentric features , such us, white skin, blonde hair, and low body weight. Women, both Black and White, are not only receiving messages about what means beautiful in our society, but also about how they should express their sexuality. Black women are still presented as hypersexual bodies, while white women are more restrained and controlled in their sexuality, this happen due to historical events.

As our society is developing so does the music industry and we can say it is changing in a positive way. Feminists realised that if they want their message to be listened and spread it to a more wide range of people, they must open to new channels, that is the reason why considerable amount of mainstream women singers have started to show their involvement in feminism. Little by little more songs are written by feminists artists and less lyrics are written with the aim of enforcing gender roles. Without going any further, Beyoncé, Selena Gomez, Billie Eilish, Cardi B and so on are some of the singers, currently role models for a great amount of young children, whose songs are made to empower the figure of the women. The song "Who run the world (Girls)" by Beyoncé is an obvious example of it.

Fortunately, nowadays we can find more and more songs that speak about women sexuality freely. It seemed that women in the past could not enjoy their sexuality without being judged by the society. The topic about masturbation also it's been a taboo and censured since ever. The women who admitted that she could feel pleasure without the need of a men was directly called "slut", whilst the man who masturbate himself was a normal human being experimenting with his body. Biologically both genders are able to feel pleasure by themselves, nevertheless, society chose to impose women that they are in this world uniquely to please men. Joseph Gobbels, a German Nazi politician and Reich Minister of Propaganda of Nazi Germany, said, "a lie repeated a hundred times becomes truth". Despite the fact that women are not merely objects, it is true that if society is repeating women those values since they are born, it is completely understandable to interiorize so much those words, they end up not only believing them, but also assuming their role as submissive individual.

There is a big debate related to introducing feminism in the music industry. On the one hand, there is a group of people who strongly believe that singers have started to positionate as feminist in their songs as a marketing strategy. In fact, many brands have used the fame of this movement to increase their sales since feminism is in the public eye. T shirts with phrases such as, "I am feminist" or "Girl empowerment" are clear examples of how brands have taken advantage of this social movement for their own benefits. On the other hand, the use of feminism in the songs is perfectly understandable for others, due to the fact that singers are also people who make use of music to express themselves and give their personal opinion about any topic. Although singers increase their popularity and they gain more money by doing this, it is way more better to enrich someone who transmit that women are independent and strong, rather than enriching people who call them manipulative and controlling people. Despite the fact that people disagree the use of music as protest regarding women rights,

since the beginning of the music history, huge amount of artists have tried to claim their values and criticize the society itself through their lyrics, It is not a new trend that is flourishing now. For instance, they often speak about corruption in politics, the poverty in the world...things that they see they are unfair and must be changed.

As for men singers, some of them have decided to show another image of a heteronormative cis male in their videos. What is more, they raise awareness regarding LGBT movement and support the feminist movement. Freddie mercury, David Bowie and Sam smith are some of the singers who express their sexuality freely helping so any kids to know that the human being can be attracted to the same gender and that it is perfectly correct.

To sum up, getting rid of music which denigrates and discriminates some group of people doesn't mean that chauvinism is going to disappear. However, changing the nature of language is a reflection of the changing circumstances in which a society finds itself. The music has a considerable impact on the human being and it reflects in some way the culture, the manners, and the values of a society. Instead of forbidding those kind of misogynist music, I strongly believe there is a bigger need of focusing on the education that is given to the youngest one. Children should be thought since they are little that everything that appears on the screen is not real. The educators should be parents and obviously the school, not the content that they see in their devices, those content should play more as a complement to their knowledge.



Chauvinism, sexism, racism are some of the discriminations that existed before music appeared, so blaming the music for being living in a society full of injustices it does not make sense. The use of “perfect” female bodies in videos is mainly used in advertising, still can be seen in other areas, such as, in television when it comes to presenting the news, the magicians by having beautiful assistants and obviously in the music industry. Having said that, I see challenging to quit not only misogyny music but all type of content that discriminates. The commercial society prefers to underline those stereotypes clearly in the media due to the fact that huge amount of companies can make use of our desire and effort to be more accepted in society when it comes to selling their products.

Finally, since we are living in an era of changes and improvements, socially speaking, the music industry has a big responsibility when talking about transmitting messages to the public. The regulation in this industry must be more strict and restrictable due to its accessibility to people from all ages.

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