



ECHOES OF EMPOWERMENT: FEMINISM IN MUSIC OF 2023



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BACKGROUND

Those that have researched feminism in music have largely focused on the presence of sexualization and feminist themes (or lack thereof) in rap and R&B music, finding that it is in these genres where these themes are most present, both in the lyricism and the music videos. Common themes of misogyny, substance misuse, and drugs have been found amongst the lyrics of many rap artists and their music videos. Music videos in the rap genre have also been found to objectify and sexualize women, especially those by male artists.

However, there is very minimal research on the presence of feminism in pop music, especially by female artists, as well as on the impact of these topics on women in the industry. Rap and R&B are two go-to genres in this field when analyzing the presence of sexualization and feminism, but it's important to recognize that it is equally if not more present in other genres, such as pop. Research on this topic tends to focus on male perspectives on these topics, but female artists tend to incorporate them into their lyricism and music videos as well.

For this study, a qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze song lyrics by the Billboard Top 10 Female Artists of 2023 to find lyrics containing themes of feminism, sexualization, and womanhood in order to better understand their successes/failures, fame, and historical significance to women in the music industry.

METHODOLOGY

Simply defined, feminism is the push to establish social, cultural, and political equality amongst the sexes. It does not simply involve women nor does it aim to diminish the power and accomplishments of men. Though it may seem straightforward, oftentimes, this idea is misunderstood and demonized by those who choose to not understand. Through feminist theory, different forms of thinking can be used to contribute to positive social change.

Nudd and Whalen open their article with a quote by Susan Fauldi that states "All women are born feminists, but most get it knocked out of them." It is more common to find that women identify with the idea of equality amongst the sexes but do not identify with the term "feminist." Too often, the idea of feminism has been displayed in a negative light, diminishing its effectiveness towards helping women progress forward. Society is run on a male-focused mentality and undermines anything that is considered inherently feminine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

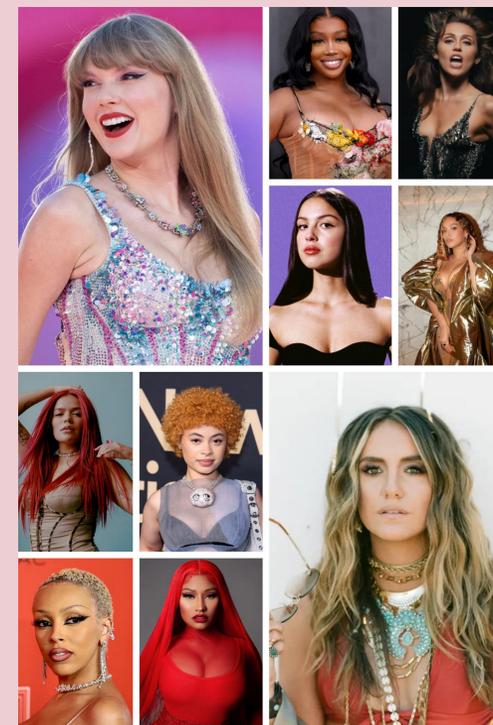
While over the course of time, variations on how feminist discourse have been discussed have changed, one outlet that has remained consistent is the use of music. One study looked at how messages of femininity and masculinity have played a role in music specifically created by Black artists and how they affected Black youth. The results found that the verbiage used within the music did affect how these young Black men and women not only viewed themselves but the opposite sex as well. While men were depicted using words like strong, aggressive, and sex-focused, women were depicted very differently with words such as emotional, sex object, and in need of love from a man. These kinds of lyrics encouraged hateful thinking of women, pushing ideas that they are to be viewed as objects or lesser than (Lanice, 2016). In contrast, in another study conducted on how feminism is portrayed through music, this time, female rock music was analyzed. When breaking down songs from artists such as Gwen Stefani, Madonna, and Alanis Morissette, the lyrics were found to appropriate what is considered to be characteristics of typical girlhood. Oftentimes, these female artists will play into the idea that women need approval from society, or specifically men, in order to partake in their "girlish" activities. A common tactic used within the music industry is where women pretend to be innocent and helpless but secretly, they are sexy and powerful in order to captivate men. This all plays into a concept known as "Transgressive Feminism" which are behaviors that go against what are considered to be typical gender norms (Wald, 1998). Both studies shed light on how even in music that is directed toward women, there is still a dominant male influence that overshadows any feminist themes.

INITIAL QUESTIONS

- How do female artists spotlight themes of **feminism**?
- How do female artists **portray fellow women** in their music?
- How do female artists discuss **gender disparity**?
- How do female artists portray **sex** and **sexual desire** through their music?

METHODS

This qualitative study will use a thematic analysis to understand how female artists discuss feminism and women in their songs. Artists were selected based on the Billboards Top 10 Female Artists of 2023. The researchers will analyze the songs on the most recent album of each artist. Thus, 139 songs (*# needs update*) have been selected for analysis. Coders will participate in emergent coding, which means that themes will be derived from the lyrics. Researchers will review each verse to code, however, not every verse may have a code. Feminist theory will be used to inform coding.



Billboard Top 10 Female Artists of 2023

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The first half of the research project consisted of a literature review, where multiple common themes were found that related to the research. It was mainly found that within the research that has been conducted in the past on how women are portrayed in music, there are many themes of misogyny, sexualization, degradation, and objectification. These past studies have been linked to how women and men, both in the music industry and in the general public, view not only themselves but each other. The presence of these themes has been proven time and time again to leave a lasting impact on the listeners, further pushing these themes into the minds of the people in our society.

NEXT STEPS

The project is still ongoing, but as the study continues, the next steps for this project include completing coding, coding analysis, conference submission, and publication submission. After coding is complete, the researchers will meet to discuss code themes found within the songs analyzed. Once the paper is completed, it will then be submitted for presentation at a conference and— after receiving feedback during presentation and applying the feedback— submitted to a journal for publication.

REFERENCES

