

THE DERAILMENT OF FEMINISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GIRL EMPOWERMENT AND THE POPULAR MUSIC ARTIST

A Thesis by

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Master of Arts, Wichita State University, 2010

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2006

Submitted to the Department of Liberal Studies

and the faculty of the Graduate School of

Wichita State University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

July 2012

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, my mother, and my children

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Jodie Hertzog, for her patient and insightful advice and support. A mentor in every sense of the word, Jodie Hertzog embodies the very nature of adviser; her council was very much appreciated through the course of my study.

ABSTRACT

“Girl Power!” is a message that parents raising young women in today’s media-saturated society should be able to turn to with a modicum of relief from the relentlessly harmful messages normally found within popular music. But what happens when we turn a critical eye toward the messages cloaked within this supposedly feminist missive? A close examination of popular music associated with girl empowerment reveals that many of the messages found within these lyrics are frighteningly just as damaging as the misogynistic, violent, and explicitly sexual ones found in the usual fare of top 100 Hits. In fact, this cooption of feminist messages introduces a new danger in that it masks the commodification of feminism into a marketed brand of heightened sexual awareness (Gill 2008) while promoting traditional male behaviors as equalizing acts of power (Kilbourne 2009).

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INTRODUCTION

“Girl Power!” is ostensibly a message that feminists everywhere should be able to support. After all, feminists have been working on empowering women for generations now. This message should be one that parents raising young women in today’s media-saturated society should be able to turn to with a modicum of relief from the relentlessly harmful messages normally found within popular music. But what happens when we turn a critical eye toward the messages cloaked within this girl empowerment missive? A close examination of popular music associated with girl empowerment reveals that many of the messages found within these lyrics are frighteningly just as damaging as the misogynistic, violent, and explicitly sexual ones found in the usual fare of top 100 Hits. In fact, this cooption of feminist messages introduces a new danger in that it masks the commodification of feminism into a marketed brand of heightened sexual awareness (Gill 2008) while promoting traditional male behaviors as equalizing acts of power (Kilbourne 2009). The purpose of this qualitative study is twofold: I will theoretically construct the concept of GEMA (Girl Empowerment Message Artist) through literature and secondary sources of data such as interviews, marketing promotions, and fan site commentaries then systematically analyze their messages through a content analysis of lyrics of popular GEMAs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Recognizing the Effects of Music on Adolescence

Before constructing the criteria for the GEMAs it is important to ground my research in the literature related to music's effects on adolescence. The influence of a song's message is the subject of many theorists from a variety of disciplines. At the liminal state of adolescence, youths are particularly susceptible to the power of music and the messages found within their lyrics. These discordant messages are bombarding our adolescent girls at a time in their development when they are most vulnerable (Primack, et al 2008). The transition from child to adult can be difficult as the sense of self emerges (Arnett 1995). The social learning model emphasizes the importance of recognizing the changes the average adolescent is experiencing as they begin to be socialized in "identity-related activities, such as occupational preparation, gender role learning, and the development of a set of values and beliefs" (Arnett 1995). According to Arnett (1995), there are five uses of media specifically accessed by adolescents: "entertainment, identity formation, high sensation, coping, and youth culture identification" (519). For the purposes of this study, it is important to establish the aspect of identity formation with a brief exploration of youth culture identification in relation to media studies.

2.1.1 Gender Role Identity Formation

Adolescents make use of the media as a tool to guide their development and understand how they are supposed to look, feel, and act in the world around them. A large part of this comprehension relies on categorization. An important category that adolescents seek to comply with is that of gender. Gender role identity is created from not only the influences of family and peers, but also from media. Understanding what it means

to be a man or a woman can be influenced by the “physical and behavioral gender ideals” found in all forms of media (Arnett 1995). In addition to forming their own actions, the media can influence adolescent’s perceptions of how interactions with the opposite sex are supposed to occur. In an early study on the consumption of media, Steele and Brown (1995) articulate this particular phenomenon: “Girls who are just beginning to gain sexual and romantic experience are especially fascinated by media depictions of male-female relationships” (qtd in Arnett, 519). This, in turn, can impact their understanding of sexual and romantic scripts (Brown, et al., 1990). The formation of acceptable behaviors within adolescent peer is the foundation of their youth culture (Arnett 1995). A culture that Arnett (1995) contends is undeniably influenced by the media, particularly music as it helps with “defining and uniting the members of a youth subculture as well as expressing their shared view of the world” (519).

2.1.2 The Formation of Idols

The shared worldview of a peer network results in clear values, attitudes, and patterns of behaviors that allow adolescents a source of identity (Raviv 1996). Out of this culture, Raviv and his colleagues observe the emergence of idols. In an examination of imitative behaviors and idolization, theorists determined that the younger the adolescent the more influenced they were as they sought to become members of their peer group and formalize their identity as different from the adults (Raviv et al 1996). In their desire to fit in with their peer group—combined with the idolization and worship of popular music icons—young adolescents begin to engage in imitative behavior that directly impacts the way in which they view themselves. Music celebrities in particular hold high influence as Raviv and his colleagues (1996) posit that the:

Idolization of pop stars has unique characteristics for adolescents. First, the mere activity of listening to this music is age segregated and therefore sometimes outside the realm of parental control. In this way it provides a basis for self-expression, the construction of self-identity, the achievement of independence, and intimacy. (631)

Furthermore, these celebrities provide answers that adolescents feel that their parents, or other adults, are not equipped to answer or refuse to answer honestly in an effort to keep them innocent and childlike. Raviv et al (1996) explains,

Indeed, some of adolescents' most pressing questions find an answer through listening to pop music...the lyrics, rhythms, and harmonies provide stimuli that youth draw upon in learning sex roles, composing their sexual identities, shaping their values, and establishing their independence (Cooper, 1991; Denisoff and John, 1983; Frith, 1983; Sebald, 1984, 631).

The important function of music in consolidating the formation of the youth culture speaks to the powerful influence of media.

2.1.3 Rise of Media Influence

Yet, the power of the media to influence has been tempered in past research by the argument of consumption and the active audience (Levy and Windahl 1985). Despite these assurances that our youth are not simply empty vessels filled with mind-controlling lyrics, more contemporary media studies have proven that the hegemonic message of most media is extremely influential in the process of socialization (Biocca, Rubin, et al 1988, Pipher 1994, 1996, Kilbourne, 1996). Arnett (1995) points to “the rise of the media and the decline of the family as socialization agents” as a sign of an “increase in their [adolescent’s] independence in the socialization process”; resulting in a “certain incoherence in the socialization process” that provides conflicting messages from the media and other socialization agents like their families, schools, and communities (519). These conflicting messages arrive at a critical time in an adolescent’s liminal period of identity development; according, to Primack and other psychologists (2008):

During a period when adolescents are forming health attitudes and behaviors that last a lifetime, they are exposed to an enormous amount of electronic media, much of which contains messages relevant to health behaviors. (594)

Particularly troublesome is the realization that media—unlike the other accepted forms of socialization: i.e. family, peers, school, community, the legal system, and the cultural belief system—is operating from a market-based approach (Arnett 1995). From a media perspective, there exists no need to concern oneself with exactly what messages teenagers are identifying with, as long as it turns a profit.

2.1.4 The Inundation of Music

Given the potential developmental ramifications of marketed media, social scientists have a continued scholarly interest in both messages and consumption. As Primack and his colleagues (2008) state:

Music now accounts for more than a third of this exposure: on average, adolescents listen to 2.4 hours of music per day, or more than 16 hours per week. There are few limits to youths' access to music: 98% of children and adolescents live in homes with both radios and CD/MP3 players, and 86% of 8-to 18-year-olds have CD/MPD players in their bedrooms. These figures have increased substantially over the past decade. (594)

The amount of time adolescents devote to their music preferences creates an environment in which the messages found within these songs become of significant importance to their ideas of self. Inarguably, adolescents learn more about the world from the media than ever before (Kellner 2008) and then rely on these messages to help form their identities.

Popular music exposes adolescents to modeled and rewarded behavior that, according to the social learning model, can influence identity development (Miller 1948, Arnett 1995).

In a time, in which rap music contains an excessive amount of references to violent acts (Armstrong 2001), or in which popular music provides more descriptions of degrading

sexual acts than non-degrading ones (Primack 2008), shouldn't we be able to relax our guard when popular music stars sing of Girl Power? But what exactly is being marketed as Girl Power?

2.2 Girl Empowerment and Feminism

2.2.1 Defining Empowerment

First, we must conceptualize girl power if we are to be able to define GEMAs and examine the influence of such a message. According to Zaslow (2009) in her book *Feminism, Inc. Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, "the term 'girl power' entered our everyday lexicon when the short-lived, but overwhelmingly, successful British pop singing group, The Spice Girls, proclaimed that girl power was a way to identify with feminism without having to use what had become a 'dirty word'" (3). The "f" word no longer meant the age-old curse word used to describe uncouth sex but now represented what was considered that unsightly and unfeminine push by women to create equality between the sexes: Feminism. Avoiding the word and cloaking the act of seeking equality into something fun, feminine, and sexy, proponents of girl power polished empowerment to represent a shiny example of a social movement that required less unseemly struggle and more fashionable ways to be heard. This message of empowerment is problematic in that the popular media has situated it within a heightened sexuality and a promotion of consumption (Hains 2004). In an exploration of sexual empowerment, Peterson (2010) establishes the issues of defining the word empowerment (Riger 1993, Zimmerman 1990) and contends that, by following the line of empowerment messages one can discover at their heart the exploitation of our young women (Lamb 2010).

2.2.2 Girl Empowerment and 3rd Wave Feminism

Yet, girl empowerment is considered akin to the third-wave of feminism. As a direct response to the divisiveness of second wave feminism that insisted that femininity and feminism had to be separated, this new wave of resistance contends that feminism can be “fun and feminine” (Karlyn 2003, Baumgardner & Richards 2000). Third wave feminism insists on a focus of individualism that is easily manipulated into a capitalistic commodification of feminist messages (McRobbie 2009, Taft 2004). An individual is sold on the idea that she can be both feminine and a feminist. This adolescent girl is encouraged to become the girl represented in girl power media, and what Zaslow (2009) describes as one whom:

believes that she should be treated as an equal to her male peers, that she should be in control of her own body, that she is entitled to play tough and be smart, that she can, and will, support herself financially, and that her future should be self-determined...combats oppression and directs her own life...feels she has a right to enjoy her sexuality, to revel in the desire she elicits. (4)

Yet, even Zaslow realizes that this girl can only feel empowered when she is conforming.

And as Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2009) explains in her Marxist critique:

girl power will not—indeed cannot—fully challenge hegemonic paradigms of sexuality, beauty, and femininity because it is essentially a product located, produced, and distributed in a capitalist society. (5)

We must recognize the difficulty of forming any type of feminist message coming from the mainstream media due to the prevalent pressure of a patriarchal society that frames everything feminine with an appeal to the male gaze (Keller 2010). Zaslow (2009) explains that this new neoliberalism approach is manifested by:

playful border crossings between girlishness and female empowerment, the offer of demureness and the demand for independence, and the ambiguity surrounding feminist intention...are characteristic of girl power media, or media produced for girls and women after the late 1990s...girl power has represented an expansive

media culture that encourages girls and women to identify both as traditionally feminine objects and as powerful feminist agents. (2-3)

We must also be aware of the trivialization of empowerment as explored by Rosalind Gill (2008) as a “growing trend within contemporary advertising to promote products targeted at women using a discourse of empowerment” (p. 36). Girls are encouraged to approach feminism as if it is a task of consumerism: If they buy the right products they can find empowerment within those items. Anna Harris (2006) posits that:

Girls can consume a (feminist) identity---purchase powerful clothing, buy CDs that contain pro-women lyrics, or learn a rhetoric of empowerment for example—but girl power does not require an investment in social change. (p. 6)

This focus on consumerism is further enhanced by the inclusion of role models within the popular music industry.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION

3.1 Constructing the Girl Empowerment Message Artist

Female pop stars are often associated with girl empowerment. Whether self-identified or simply marketed and promoted by those in control, these artists become icons of female identification. Such identification is then asserted as feminist by both marketers and consumers. This phenomenon has been noted in many circles. Feministing, a contemporary feminist blog writer asks, “Where are Feminism’s Modern Musical Icons?” and posits that “there has never been a better time for women in music” pointing out that “there are more female major artists in the musical world than ever before” (Tee 2012). Despite this seemingly positive environment, the author asks this rather pointed question, “It would be safe to assume, then, that third-wave feminism has been particularly effective, would it not?” (Tee 2012). As she progresses through her essay she arrives at the unhappy conclusion that while we should be happy that more girls than ever are being fronted on the radio and encouraged to pick up a guitar, that when it comes right down to it, we are not necessarily seeing feministic success. Many of these artists seem equally confused as to what actually connotes empowerment.

3.1.1 Foundation of a GEMA

It is for this very reason that I felt it necessary to define the specific difference between a Feminist Music Artist and a Girl Empowerment Message Artist. My preliminary research presents the results of a content analysis of iconic female artists chosen for their popularity (based on number one hits, positions on Billboard charts, sales, and visibility in the media) that project messages cloaked as feminist, yet possibly fail upon delivery. I call

these icons of girl empowerment, Girl Empowerment Message Artists and posit that while they pose as feminist in nature they deliver false promises of empowerment when their messages revolve around gendered acceptance of the male gaze (Aapola, Gonick & Harris 2005). They promote an emphasized femininity by encouraging young women to conform to accepted beauty standards (Gill 2007). This script of traditional femininity reproduces dominant gender ideologies and patriarchal subordination of women (McRobbie 2009). Yet, at the same time they sing of flipping the traditional gendered script. Combine this with the glorification of masculine behaviors and we also discover messages of misandry and the encouragement of risky actions normally associated with hegemonic masculinity (Matson 2012, Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, Connell 1987).

3.1.2 Performative Feminism

One of the first issues to address with regard to the messages that Girl Empowerment Message Artists promote, is one of simple definition. What is feminism according to these icons? The feminism that Girl Empowerment Message Artists promote is one of performative feminism rather than active feminism (Zaslow 138-139). These music artists contend through their Girl Power anthems that by supporting these songs or purchasing specific items that feminism can be obtained. For example, Beyoncé sings in her hit song, Girls Run the World, (2011):

*I think I need a barber
None of these bitches can fade me
I'm so good with this,
I remind you im so hood with this
Boy im just playing, come here baby
Hope you still like me, If you hate me
My persuasion can build a nation
Endless power, our love we can devour
You'll do anything for me*

In her self-described girl anthem, Beyoncé focuses on vague assumptions of power already gained: a power that revolves around having the right haircut and standing on her own while threatening to use her persuasion to convince a boy that he'll do anything for her.

In these types of messages there exists no real impetus to actively engage with a political or social movement. Equality is to be had through individualistic expressions of consumerism and simple proclamations of power. This power is not clearly defined either. What type of power? Power for what purpose? The easiest answer is the power to purchase things. By wearing the right clothes, strutting about in the right shoes, donning the right accessories, applying the right make-up, getting the right hair-cut, and even smelling like your favorite star (most Girl Empowerment Message Artists have their own perfume lines), any girl can be successful! This visible consumerism benefits corporations who profit from a girl's culture but offers only a shallow sense of power for the girls themselves (Meenakshi 2009).

3.1.3 The Pursuit of Beauty: Emphasized Femininity and Consumerism

The power of consumerism is heightened by the ever present need to conform to specific beauty ideals (Tiggemann 2003, Kilbourne 1997). The pressure of idealized beauty demands that young women contort themselves to achieve the impossible figures of their role models: Role models that have become figures of idolization and worship as evidenced earlier in my examination of the influence of pop stars on identity. This construction of self-identity is indelibly tied to body image. Body image is defined as a concept of self that concerns an individual's perceptions and feelings about their body and physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Convinced by the ideal shown repeatedly throughout the media, young girls take on what can be construed as a cult of thinness

(Kilbourne 2010). This appeal to adolescent girls to conform to strict hegemonic norms of beauty is not simply embodied in the artist's appearance but is also sung about in their songs. Katy Perry provides an example of these types of messages in her song, California Girls (2010):

*The boys break their necks
Tryin' to creep a little sneak peek
California girls, we're unforgettable
Daisy Dukes, bikinis on top
Sun-kissed skin, so hot
We'll melt your popsicle*

References to getting their hair done, or wearing the right shoes, etc., are incredibly common and while this message could simply reveal the consumer push to encourage young women to purchase more goods, the detrimental effects of such messages are well-established in earlier research. So pervasive was the initial impact on young women, that the earlier examinations of this "girl-poisoning culture" conducted by Mary Pipher (1994) in her seminal work *Reviving Ophelia*, resulted in public policy aimed at correcting the negative and risky behaviors impacting girls upon the flood of images of idealized beauty in the media.

3.1.4 Theories of Socialization: Explaining the Effects of Idealized Beauty

Social comparison theory has been heavily used to examine idealized beauty image effects on women (Botta, 1999; Irving, 1990; Law & Labre, 2002; Levine & Smolak, 1998; Martin & Kennedy, 1993; Richins, 1991). In fact, it becomes rather evident that young women engage in an unhealthy comparison with media stars (Polce-Lynch, M., Myers, B. J., Kliever, W., & Kilmartin, C., 2001, Milkie 1999). Expanding on Milkie's original study, Serdar (2010) observes that "the pervasiveness of the media makes it very challenging for most women to avoid evaluating themselves against the sociocultural standard of beauty"

(3). Studies on music videos effect on adolescent's perceptions of their body-image continue to demonstrate a deleterious impact (Tiggemann 2003, Kilbourne 2010, Zaslow 2009). When combined with the Cultivation theory of exposure the level of influence is only heightened (Serdar 2010):

Unrealistic media images of women are so prevalent that it seems that females who fulfill such a standard are more the norm than the exception. Cultivation theory argues that images that portray women who match the sociocultural ideal of beauty are extremely prevalent in popular media, and that repetitive exposure to such images influences women's abilities to understand that such standards are unrealistic. As females constantly view images of tall, thin women that are shown in different forms of mass media, there is a cumulative effect over time in that many women adopt this unrealistic standard of beauty as "reality." (2)

Even women who recognize that these are harmful messages and are made aware of the application of photoshop, plastic surgery, and other artificial acts used to create this ideal remain concerned with the power of idealized beauty. Choi, Leshner, and Choi (2008) examine the third person effect (TPE) in their recent study on body image:

The TPE refers to two propositions (Davison, 1983): First, people tend to believe that mass communication has a greater impact on others than on themselves (thirdperson perception, TPP). Second, this perception may lead to behavioral consequences (TPE). The TPP applied to idealized body image advertising suggests that women believe others are influenced by idealized body images more than they themselves are. Second, this perceptual gap may result in behavioral consequences such as negative evaluation of their bodies, and extreme diet. (149)

Yet, there exists another area of danger for young women who are bombarded by these ideals. Typically, the messages of beauty standards are underscored by the need to broadcast one's sexuality as well.

3.1.5 Commodification and Teenage Sexuality

A secondary issue to explore in the problematic issues of Girl Empowerment Message Artists is their assertion that sexiness is everything. It would be almost impossible not to recognize the powerful effect of sex in advertising and product sales: Sex Sells. But

what type of sex? Is there any real empowerment to be found in embracing the messages found in the music of Girl Empowerment Message Artists? Overwhelmingly girls receive messages that proclaim sexiness as the standard and tout the success of equality between the sexes. Yet, both of these projections ring falsely upon closer examination. Sexiness without sexual agency is encouraged. Girls have the right to remain sexy, or as Kilbourne accurately pinpoints in her seminal videos *Killing Us Softly*, “to be sex objects” (2011).

One of the most disturbing fallacies to this notion of successful equality between the sexes is in its misrepresentation of equal treatment regarding sexual activity and behaviors. According to these Girl Empowerment Message Artists, sex is easy and fun and promiscuity is a girl’s right. In Nelly Furtado’s song, *Promiscuous* (2006), she offers up these lyrics for empowerment of a girl’s right to be sexually active:

*Promiscuous girl, wherever you are
I’m all alone and it’s you that I want
Promiscuous boy, you already know
That I’m all yours, what are you waiting for?*

However, this promotion of sexuality speaks very poorly toward responsibility. In a time in our society in which Abstinence Only programs are still the only ones consistently funded by our government girls are still being told that sex is dirty and that virginity is pure. As Jessica Valenti uncovers in her exploration of this topic in her book and subsequent video, *The Purity Myth*, “American taxpayers shell out about \$50 million a year on abstinence-only education in our schools – almost half a billion dollars since 1996” (2009). This mindset is fueled, in part, by a push to return to more traditional ideas of gender and the sexes: “the leaders who are really pushing this return to purity believe that sex is the greatest source of danger to young women... And they’ve been prescribing a return to traditional gender roles as the cure” (2009). Ironically, this message of purity surrounds our young female

pop stars—Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift—at the same time they are sexualized into objects of fantasy and erotic desire. This idea of sexy without sexuality is a restrictive position to put our young women in. While posing as blank canvases for society’s sexual fantasies, these young women are not supposed to actually be sexually active. This magnification of our society’s discomfort with teenage girl sexuality tends to have explosive results. What typically happens is that these stars maintain an image of sweet, innocent, purity, until they seem to burst apart with sexual pressure. Their metamorphosis from “Oops I did it Again” to “I’m a Slave 4 U” (Spears), or from a genie in a bottle to XXXtina (Aguilera), or from purity rings with daddy to stripper poles at the VMAs (Cyrus) seems to be a direct backlash against this constrained sense of a woman’s sexuality. Taylor Swift remains the only icon here who has avoided this fate.

So convoluted is our society’s acceptance of young, teenage girl sexuality, that when Zaslow (2009) conducted focus groups to explore these very concepts she discovered that this discordance was clearly evident in the adolescent girl’s personal experiences. As Zaslow (2009) explains: “female sexuality is something to be guarded; girls are taught not to come home pregnant and to protect themselves from sexual predators” but at the same time young girls receive a contradictory message that “female sexuality is something to be used...it is a powerful commodity available as exchange for economic, cultural, social, and emotional capital” (57-58). The girls in her study were aware that their sexuality was a political issue and that they had already been exposed to the conflation of girls and women with their bodies by “institutions, corporations, advertisers, and producers” resulting in objectification that at times required girl’s complicity (58). As she examined her participant’s responses in conjunction with pop music performers, Zaslow (2009) posed

this telling question, “How do girl audiences make sense of a woman who presents herself as in control of sexual encounters yet maintains a sexual image that is rooted in a stereotypically male-coded fantasy?” (58).

3.1.6 Mainstreamed Objectification

Stepping briefly away from Girl Empowerment Message Artists, it is important to acknowledge what they are measured against. By comparison to a flood of sexually objectified women in popular music who enact scenes of passive acceptance of male aggression, these women are attempting to at least proclaim a smidgeon of power—a power recognized by the girls in Zaslow’s (2009) study as they attempted to explain how a sex sells philosophy encourages women to embrace this limited form of sexuality (58). Contemporary studies of popular music have revealed a veritable minefield of misogyny (Generation M, Killing Us Softly 4, Dreamworlds 3). Sut Jhally, the founder and Executive Director of Media Education Foundation, demonstrated the horrific similarities between the gang assault of women in Central Park in 1989 and popular music videos of the day in his video *Dreamworlds 3* (2007). By splicing together scenes from a litany of artists with actual footage of the attacks on women, he chillingly revealed the inarguable resemblance between reality and fantasy. In the music videos barely dressed females (casually termed “video hos” by the industry) gyrated for the obvious titillation of the male singers who verbally lacerated them and women in general. One archetypal action appeared repeatedly in the montage, men surrounding these women and pouring their drinks all over them in a simulation of sexual gratification. It is against this backdrop that Girl Empowerment Message Artists struggle with presenting a feminist representation of equalization of the sexes.

Instead of encouraging girls to accept their objectification as sexy, one way in which Girl Empowerment Message Artists create friction against this is by espousing a sexual agency that is not contingent upon being passive. One could argue that these music artists who adopt a more typically masculine approach to sexuality are acting from a position of empowerment. This could be viewed as a feminist success. For those feminist theorists, like Driscoll (2002), who argue that girl empowerment messages have engendered some social change and that these GEMAs—grandmothered by The Spice Girls—demonstrate change by challenging sexual passivity, I contend that the inherent harm found in this message of sexual equality is potentially dangerous and outweighs the positive message of autonomy. We still live in a sexist society and as a result girls who embrace this expectation of equality will be punished accordingly. Slut-shaming still exists and where a man might be lauded his sexual conquests, women are still expected to hide their exploits (Tanenbaum 1994). So implicit is this separation that one needs only look to clothing to recognize the difference between the sexes: A woman can *dress like a slut* (an act that bears no universal code and can be misinterpreted and applied to all manner of clothing options) and portray herself as sexually available; whereas, a man has no clothing choice in his wardrobe that will announce his desire to be sexually objectified. Additionally, one cannot look too far past the idea of the performance factor of this type of sexuality hyped by Girl Empowerment Message Artists. Katy Perry and her cohorts may maintain that promiscuity has no dire results, but no matter how playfully one chimes along to waking up in a bed with a stranger unable to determine whether they have a hickey or a bruise upon their neck (Last Friday Night 2010), the outcomes of such an evening are hard-pressed to masquerade as real empowerment.

3.1.7 Glorification of Masculinity and the Promotion of Risk-Taking Behaviors

This level of danger is a third compelling argument at the problems hidden within Girl Empowerment messages. Risk-taking behavior, normally associated with typical teenagers, has long been socially acceptable in young men in our society. “Sowing your wild oats” or “becoming a man” are some clichés that still exist today as evidence that adolescent boys are expected to behave in a certain fashion during their growth into manhood. Many theorists (Connell 1987, Kimmel 2008, Jhally & Katz, 1999) have contributed to the understanding of the existence of hegemonic masculinity, which has influenced our understanding of what it means to be a man in our society. In our search for gender equality, girls are encouraged to adopt traditionally masculine behaviors as a sign of their empowerment. Many masculine traits are glorified in our society and seen as more successful than traditional feminine traits. Due to this, Girl Empowerment Message Artists may promote a cartoonish version of masculinized behaviors under the guise of empowerment. Many of these ideas find their root in the hypermasculinity promoted by the media, this “macho personality” operates around three main variables: a) "callous sexual attitudes toward women", b) "the belief that violence is manly", and c) "the experience of danger as exciting" (Mosher, Serkin 1984). I suggest that the callous sexual attitudes promoted by Girl Empowered Message Artists stem from this glorification of masculinity and promotion of a reversed social script. They sing of promiscuity, as evidenced in my earlier contention of the emphasis on sexiness and sexual activity; but, more importantly for this assertion, they sing of engaging in risky and potentially dangerous activities. Drinking, partying, doing drugs and breaking the law are all themes found within Girl Empowerment Message Artist’s lyrics. For example, in *Last Friday Night*

by Katy Perry (2010) she encourages a multitude of risk-taking, law-breaking, and possibly damaging actions:

*There's a stranger in my bed,
There's a pounding my head
... I smell like a minibar
... I'm screwed
Oh well
It's a black top blur
But I'm pretty sure it ruled
Last Friday night
Yeah we danced on tabletops
And we took too many shots
Think we kissed but I forgot
Last Friday night
Yeah we maxed our credit cards
And got kicked out of the bar
... Last Friday night
We went streaking in the park
Skinny dipping in the dark
Then had a menage a trois
Last Friday night
Yeah I think we broke the law...
... Don't know what to tell my boss
Think the city towed my car
Chandelier is on the floor
With my favorite party dress
Warrants out for my arrest*

Perhaps more worrisome than the gratuitous references to drinking until blacking out, or the illicit sexual acts, or even the breaking of the law, is the refrain's contention:

*This Friday night
Do it all again
Do it all again
This Friday night
Do it all again
Do it all again
This Friday night*

The ramifications of this being promoted as empowering girls are frightening to consider.

3.1.8 Hyper-masculinity Demands Power Imbalance: Misandry as Misguided Feminism

The cooption of masculine traits includes the mistreatment of women, but I hypothesize that an analysis of these lyrics will reveal misandry in place of misogyny. After all, to be truly equal by this idea of empowerment, one must desire power over another. I contend that Girl Empowerment Message Artists further pervert the feminist ideal of equality to mean the empowerment of women over men. Found within their music, will be harmful messages aimed at retribution towards men for their patriarchal position in our society. This torqueing of feminism will be cloaked within the idea of “*doing to men what has always been done to women*” as an equalizing act of power. Katy Perry (2010) offers yet another example of such misandric notions in her song *Peacock*:

*Are you brave enough to let me see your peacock?
Don't be a chicken boy, stop acting like a beeotch*

The entire song mimics a cheerleader's chant and perhaps capitalizes on the mean girl stereotype associated with such an archetype. Demanding that this “boy” show her his penis and denigrating him should he refuse, is inarguably unhealthy. This is not equality but simple sameness pretending to mean something else.

Zaslow (2009) touches on this briefly in her study by including interviews with Christina Aguilera in which the singer proclaims that “nobody's squirting champagne on me” (64); yet, in return she creates a video for “*Can't Hold Us Down*” that enacts a scene in which she holds a hose between her legs and sprays all over disrespectful boys. According to the interview quoted in Zaslow's book (2009): “It was her intention, she says, to convey an ‘expression of women having power over the boys’” (qtd in Zaslow 75).

These characteristics of empowerment provide false idols of feminism. Girl Empowerment Message Artists offer limited change to the unbalanced playing field between boys and girls in our society. Their brand of empowerment does little to equalize the imbalance of power between the genders. At the conclusion of her study, Zaslow (2009) determined that:

Ultimately, rooted in individual power, power over men, and a politics of choice, girl power pop music does not encourage the girls in this study to consider the need to change norms of beauty and sexuality or to complexly question the position of women in the culture industry (82).

In fact, I believe that there exists a distinctly harmful distortion of the concept of power found within popular music lyrics. According to most girl empowerment messages, a young woman should imbibe alcohol (and other drugs), engage in sexual acts with a lack of concern normally promoted toward young men (although egalitarian sexual practices are not mainstreamed and these girls run the risk of being shamed for their behaviors with detrimental outcomes on their self-esteem and personal psyches) while embracing their own sexual objectification as empowering, and to conform to a very limited and prescriptive image that in turn supports consumerism. This commodification of feminist messages is dangerous. Therefore, it is imperative to gain a better understanding of what messages Girl Empowerment Message Artists are actually promoting to our youth.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to provide a deconstructive interpretation of girl empowerment lyrics as promoted by Feminist Message Artists with the aim of investigating the commodification of feminism as “feminine empowerment”. Additionally, I sought to discover if this commodification resulted in a promotion of traditionally feminine values or if—in the disguise of empowerment—a glorification of traditionally masculine behaviors. I hypothesized that there would be no lack of messages that encouraged young women to seek their worth by conforming to cultural beauty standards and objectifying themselves. I further contended that in the place of healthy equality between the genders, the examination of these messages would reveal misandric notions of girl superiority.

4.1 Song Selection

Using *Billboard* magazine to determine the most popular artists currently, I chose to focus my studies around the artists that were most influential according to their algorithms.

Using *Billboard's* newest chart, *the Social Media 50*, I was able to narrow down the artists based primarily upon their popularity. Defined as a ranking of the most active artists on the world's leading social networking sites, this chart tracks artists who are chosen by a unique formula that compiles a blending of their weekly additions of friends/fans/followers along with artist page views and weekly song plays, as measured by the Next Big Sound described as: “the listening, discovery, and purchasing decisions of millions of consumers... moved online...Next Big Sound provides a centralized place to monitor all the behavior and activity happening for artists both online and off. Next Big Sound tracks more data for more bands online than anyone else in the world” (White, n.d.). I then narrowed the list down to

female message artists with particular interest accorded to those who have been promoted or self-promoted as “strong,” “empowered,” or “feminist” on fan pages and in interviews. Based on this process the following ten possible GEMAs were identified for investigation: Rihanna, Lady Gaga, Adele, Katy Perry, Nicki Minaj, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, and Selena Gomez.

Taking these top ten artists I further focused my attention by selecting each of their top ten songs on the Peak Charts, once again using *Billboard*. When taken together, these songs represent songs from the Hot 100, Hot Country Tracks, Hot Rhythm & Blues (R&B)/Hip-Hop Songs, Hot Rap Tracks, and Pop 100. Because one artist analyzed did not have ten songs on these lists (Adele), my sample ended up including 96 unique songs [see Appendix for full list of songs by artist and Billboard ranking].

4.1.1 Coding Measures

From the literature review I was able to arrive at a concrete idea of what a GEMA would look and sound like. When it came time to test this theory, I needed specific categories to represent the areas of gendered behavior that masqueraded as feminist. Having grounded my research in studies of empowerment, feminism, and music influence, it became clear that applying these ideas in addition to those of gender schema and social script theory, would allow a clearer examination of these artists and their messages. Recognizing that gendered behavior is scripted and performed (Butler 1990), I utilized Sandra Bem’s Sex Role Inventory (1971, 1993) to lay the initial framework.

Feminine Reinforcement. This categorical code was separated into three distinct areas (1) Traditional Empowerment, (2) Consumerist Empowerment; and (3) Sexualized Empowerment.

Feminine Reinforcement – Traditional (FR/T): Traditional Empowerment. This category relies upon the ideas presented by emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). This style of femininity relies upon the pleasing of men. As a direct complement to hegemonic masculinity, this style of thinking demands that women conform to a man's desires and accommodate his needs (Connell 1987, 183, 187). Coding included all references of placing a man's needs above her own, or an overemphasis on the importance of having a man in her life.

Feminine Reinforcement – Consumerism FR/C): Consumerism as Empowering. Using Anita Harris' (2005) study of empowerment conflated with consumerism I coded examples of women's empowerment deriving from the purchase of the right products. Additionally, I thought to include in this subsection any focus on body image and beauty standards. This thought process was supported by the increasing commodification of societally accepted beauty ideals linked to an ever sky-rocketing industry of beauty products, fad diets, and/or plastic surgery.

Feminine Reinforcement – Sexualized (FR/S): Sexuality as Empowering. Using Rosalind Gill's (2004) study of empowerment conflated with sexism, I coded examples of women's empowerment deriving from their sexuality. This included frequent examples of a woman's worth solely located in her ability to be sexualized. As discussed previously, this sexualization lacks agency (Kilbourne 2009) and as Zaslow (2009) noted, is rooted within male-coded fantasy.

Cooption of Masculine Behaviors. Having established the feminine ideals I sought to explore in the music of these artists, I looked for the co-option of masculine traits as part of the messages of false empowerment promoting the glorification and acceptance of hyper-masculinized behaviors (Mosher, Serkin 1984). Many masculine traits are glorified in our society and are likely to be seen as markers of success over traditional feminine traits. By adopting the traits characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) and presenting them as achievable and desirable, GEMAs lyrics would show one—or more—of the following three categories.

Co-opted Masculine – Traditional (CM/T): Relying on Bem’s traits I limited this category to any references of stereotypically masculine behavior assumed by the female message artists. In an interview with PBS, Michael Kimmel (considered to be an expert in the field of men’s studies) described traditional masculinity as: “never do[ing] anything that remotely hints of femininity...be[ing] a big wheel... measur[ing] the size of your paycheck, wealth, power, status... [and] never showing your emotions” while always exuding an “aura of daring and aggression” (Kimmel 2008). This definition helped refine what traits deserved coding. However, the traits daring and aggression demanded a category of its own.

Co-opted Masculine – Risky Behaviors (CM/RB) Understanding that masculine behavior involves the promotion of risk-taking activities as evidenced in Matson’s (2012) collection of studies on hegemonic masculinity, I coded for legal, sexual, mental/psychological examples of self-harm.

Misandry. (M): Given part of the charm of masculinity is the avowal of its superiority, it stands to reason that in a true co-option of this socialized role of

behaviors, girls would be encouraged to consider themselves above men. As Connell (1987) pointed out in his initial studies on emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity, there is no such thing as hegemonic feminism. Understanding that one of the more common misrepresentations of feminist pedagogy is the idea that women must desire a position of power over men, I coded examples of this phenomenon: Empowerment of the female at the cost of denigrating males.

RESULTS

Of the 96 unique songs identified in the initial sample, gendered behavior was referenced in nearly all of them (see Figure 1). The most commonly recognized phenomenon across GEMAs was reinforcement of traditional feminine ideals. Sixty-two (65%) songs contained references to traditional behaviors, promoting the subjugation of a girl’s interests and life in pursuit of pleasing and/or acquiring a man. A smaller percentage (26%) contained lyrics that promoted consumerism as empowering. While sexualization most definitely occurs, only 20% of the sampled songs contained lyrics that were explicitly sexual and fit the parameters of sexuality without sexual agency.

When examining the co-option of masculinized behaviors twenty-four (25%) of the songs included references of traditionally masculinized behavior. Nearly identical in appearances was the glorification of risky behavior as seen in twenty-three songs (24%). The existence of misandry was minimal with only eleven of the ninety-six songs (12%) including misandric content.

Table 1 (Percentage of GEMA traits by Artist)

ARTIST	# of Songs	FR/ Traditional	FR/ Consumer	FR/ Sexuality	CM/ Traditional	CM/Risky Behavior	Misandry
<i>Rihanna</i>	10	7(70%)	0	4(40%)	3(30%)	1(10%)	2(20%)
<i>Lady Gaga</i>	10	8(80%)	4(40%)	3(30%)	1(10%)	3(30%)	1(10%)
<i>Adele</i>	6	4(66%)	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Katy Perry</i>	10	8(80%)	3(30%)	5(50%)	3(30%)	8(80%)	2(20%)
<i>Nicki Minaj</i>	10	3(30%)	2(20%)	2(20%)	10(100%)	5(50%)	1(10%)

Table 1 (Continued)

ARTIST	# of Songs	FR/ Traditional	FR/ Consumer	FR/ Sexuality	CM/ Traditional	CM/Risky Behavior	Misandry
<i>Jennifer Lopez</i>	10	5(50%)	1(10%)	0	1(10%)	2(20%)	0
<i>Shakira</i>	10	7(70%)	5(50%)	3(30%)	0	1(10%)	1(10%)
<i>Taylor Swift</i>	10	9(90%)	4(40%)	0	1(10%)	1(10%)	0
<i>Beyoncé</i>	10	6(60%)	4(40%)	2(20%)	4(40%)	1(10%)	3(30%)
<i>Selena Gomez</i>	10	5(50%)	2(20%)	0	1(10%)	1(10%)	1(10%)
TOTAL	96	62(65%)	25(26%)	19(20%)	24(25%)	23(24%)	11(12%)

5.1 Feminine Reinforcement

This study demonstrated that nearly two-thirds of the sampled popular songs portray a traditional feminine landscape. This specific category was the only one that all artists sampled complied with, from country to rap to any genre in between. Disappointingly, self-avowed feminists such as Lady Gaga and Beyoncé had large proportions of their songs devoted to these messages; while, perhaps less surprisingly, Katy Perry and Taylor Swift led the demographic in this particular arena. References to traditional behaviors related to domestic spheres such as the kitchen, bedroom, or boudoir, were coded in this category. Stereotypical behavior and references to “good girl behaviors” (Perry, Swift, and Shakira) were also included. The largest proportion of these songs focused on the lack of agency found in love or lust. Placing a man as both love interest and controlling force was of central importance in many of these songs. Typically the lyrics illuminated a love or

attraction that was both initiated by a man and controlled by one as well. Examples of this phenomenon are found in the Figure 2.

Table 2 (Feminine Reinforcement-Traditional)

Artist	Reference	Song Title
Rihanna	<i>"I'm obsessive when just one thought of you comes up You got me stressing, incessantly pressing the issue It's not healthy for me to feel this But I can't control myself Cause you on my mind has got me losing it I'm lost, you got me looking for the rest of me"</i>	<i>Only Girl in the World</i>
Lady Gaga	<i>"I'll give anything to be your baby doll/ He said sit back down here where you belong"</i>	<i>You and I</i>
Adele	<i>"Until you kissed my lips and you saved me But my knees were far too weak to stand in your arms Without falling to your feet"</i>	<i>Set Fire to the Rain</i>
Katy Perry	<i>"You're so hypnotizing, your touch magnetizing They say be afraid/They don't understand you/ Infect me with your loving/Fill me with your poison Take me, Take me, Wanna be your Victim, Ready for Abduction, for you I'll risk it all"</i>	<i>E.T.</i> <i>E.T.</i>
Nicki Minaj	<i>"You're like a candy store and I'm a toddler"</i>	<i>Your Love</i>
Jennifer Lopez	<i>"You've touched my heart and it altered Every plan I've made"</i>	<i>Ain't it Funny</i>
Shakira	<i>"For you I'd give up all I own And I'd file my nails so they don't hurt you And lose those pounds and learn more about football"</i>	<i>Don't Bother</i>
Taylor Swift	<i>"Today was a fairytale/You were the prince, I used to Be the damsel in distress/You took me by the hand And picked me up by six"</i>	<i>Today was a Fairytale</i>
Beyoncé	<i>"Show you how much I appreciate you I'm dedicated to you/I will forever be true I hate being apart/ Show ya, show ya, show ya Til you're through with me"</i>	<i>Dance For You</i>
Selena Gomez	<i>"A day without you is like a year without rain I need you by my side/Don't know how I'll survive"</i>	<i>A Year Without Rain</i>

The fairytale prince rescuing the damsel in distress is expected to be found in Taylor Swift's teenaged dreamscapes; yet, as evidenced in Figure 1, not one single artist managed to avoid

this treacherous field of submission. Katy Perry provides the strongest example of this lack of control in her song *ET* (2010). Whether it's magic, cosmic fate, supersonic powers, supernatural gifts, or even foreign extraterrestrial powers, Perry covers all the bases when taking her willpower out of the equation: going so far as to liken herself to a victim that has been infected, poisoned, and abducted. There exists no sexual agency in the picture painted to the girls she sings too, the power rests in the male's desire. As Connell (1987) pointed out in his early studies on emphasized femininity, traditional roles for women require a lack of power in their relationships with men further reinforcing the complementary roles of hegemonic masculinity.

Leading into the next two categories, many of these traditional notions of womanhood rely on pleasing your man. A girl is encouraged to do so through both her consumer purchases of beauty products and her sexuality. Surprisingly, only slightly more than a quarter of the songs sampled provided examples of consumerism as empowerment. One could argue that the albums themselves are products of consumer empowerment, as many young women rushed out to buy Beyoncé's anthem *Girls Run the World* (2011), due to its marketed position as a political statement; however, this study is strictly rooted in analyzing lyrics. Based on that examination, Jennifer Lopez provides a strong example of what references encouraged commodification and adherence to strict beauty standards, in her song *I'm Real* (2001): "You like the way I dress and the way I wear my hair/Show me off to all of your friends." While Jennifer Lopez, only measured ten percent of her songs in this category, I believe her lyrics to be one of the better examples of this phenomenon. The emphasis is clearly placed upon how she looks and how this attractiveness is used to

present herself as a trophy for her boyfriend. This objectification is also highlighted in the third category of sexualization.

Recognizing the difference between healthy sexuality and sexual exploitation can be tricky in our current era. In the primer *Gendered Worlds* Aulette, Wittner, & Blakely (2009), supply this definition of healthy sexuality:

An important component of both physical and mental health, [healthy sexuality] fosters intimacy, bonding and shared pleasure, and involves mutual respect between consenting partners...In contrast, sexualization occurs when a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal...a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness with being sexy...a person is sexually objectified (347).

Too often the sexuality that these artists promote is more in alignment with that of sexualization. The love that these artists sing about requires a loss of self, to such a degree that nearly every singer included in this study begged or pleaded for rescue (see Figure 3).

Table 3 (References of Loss of Self, Need of Rescue)

Artist	Reference	Song Title
Rihanna	<i>"This time please someone come and rescue me"</i>	<i>Only Girl in the World</i>
Lady Gaga	<i>"I'd rather die without you and I"</i>	<i>You and I</i>
Adele	<i>"Until you kissed my lips and you saved me"</i>	<i>Set Fire to the Rain</i>
Katy Perry	<i>"My heart stops/You complete me"</i>	<i>Teenage Dream</i>
Jennifer Lopez	<i>"Now I give you me"</i>	<i>If You Had My Love</i>
Shakira	<i>"I don't really know what I'm doing But you seem to have a plan"</i>	<i>Hips Don't Lie</i>
Taylor Swift	<i>"It turns out freedom ain't nothing but missing you"</i>	<i>Back to December</i>
Beyoncé	<i>"Got me hoping you'll save me right now"</i>	<i>Crazy in Love</i>
Selena Gomez	<i>"Rescued, saved, hypnotized" "Catch me I'm falling/Won't you save me"</i>	<i>Love You Like a Love Song A Year Without Rain</i>

Only 20% of the songs sampled included references to exploitative sexuality; yet much like girl empowerment being a matter of performance, there exists a strong emphasis on being sexual for another. From Rihanna's *Rude Boy* (2009) "tonight I'm gonna let you be the captain/let you do your thing" to Shakira's "what you give is exactly what you receive so put me in a cage and lock me away and I'll play the games you want me to play" (*Give it Up to Me*, 2009), the message is apparently one of submission.

Due to the unhealthy nature of many of these behaviors I considered revisiting my coding and providing another category of Feminine Reinforcement-Risky Behaviors. Even without this category it is easy to decipher that much of the messages found in these artist's works promotes a very poor excuse for feminism. This should come as no surprise as many of the traditional values found in the ideals of emphasized femininity run in direct opposition to any real message of empowerment.

5.2 Cooption of Masculinity

From here, my examination of lyrics moves into the co-option of masculine traits. The first area studied was simply traditionally masculine traits of dominance and control. Of the masculine categories this was the largest percentage of coded lyrics, with 25% of the sampled songs providing examples of these characteristics. Nicki Minaj was the biggest contributor to this category with 100% of her songs complying within these parameters. As the only rap artist that I coded, I am curious as to whether or not this correlates with the more masculine field of that specific genre, something for further study in the future. Unique to songs by Nicki Minaj was the allusions to her "ride". From "hoopty hoops" to "Continental" to "Audis" to "let me get my truck" (*Starships*, 2012, *Did it On Em*, 2011, *Right by My Side*, 2012), Nicki Minaj assimilated the significance placed upon

transportation found in masculinized associations with their vehicles. Interestingly enough large proportions of her personal analogies were male figures and stereotypically empowered male roles:

*Don't worry about me and who I fire
I get what I desire, it's my empire
And yes I call the shots, I am the umpire
In this very moment I am King/
I slay Goliath with a sling,
Clap for the Heavyweight champ, me! (Moment for Life, 2011)*

Her self-references remained very masculine, "I'm a Diehard like Bruce Willis/There's an S on my chest cause I'm ready to save him/when he calls me mama, lill mama, I call him baby" (Your Love, 2010). In *Did it On Em* (2011) she refers to herself as Terminator, and in *Roman's Revenge* (2010), she sings "I'm not Jasmine, I'm Aladdin" and a little later in the song "These bitches calling me Manning, Eli".

Another characteristic of this co-option of masculinity as a form of empowerment was the existence of violence. This, too, remained a category solely linked to Nicki Minaj and exemplifies many earlier studies on the links between violence and rap music. In *Super Bass* (2011) she sings of physical altercations over suspected cheating, going so far as to sing, "And yes you'll get slapped if you're lookin ho".

While those three areas were largely Nicki Minaj's own, she shared the emergence of the female gaze with a few of the other artists. Typically the largest emphasis is placed upon how a female looks, even when pursuing a male, the artists focused on their own appearances to the extent that the object of their desires tended to be invisible. While coding for this category I found a small sample of references to the male's style and/or looks (Figure 4).

Table 4 (Co-opted Masculinity-Traditional/Female Gaze)

Artist	Reference	Song Title
Nicki Minaj	<i>"I mean you're so shy and I'm lovin your tie"</i>	<i>Super Bass</i>
	<i>"I can tell you're in touch with your feminine side"</i>	<i>Super Bass</i>
	<i>"And I think I like him with the fitted cap on"</i>	<i>Super Bass</i>
	<i>"He the type to pop tags and be cockin' the brim"</i>	<i>Your Love</i>
Jennifer Lopez	<i>"With a new white T you fresh"</i>	<i>Jenny From the Block</i>
Beyoncé	<i>"Man on my hips"</i>	<i>Single Ladies</i>

In a fascinating correlation that deserves more attention than this initial study could provide, there appears to be a direct link between the ideas of masculine dominance and economic privilege. Beyoncé appropriates the idea of purchaser equals provider as the strength in a relationship. This is traditionally seen as the masculine role and she appears to only sing about this role when denigrating the man in question, which provides a direct link to Misandry, our third category. For example, she sings, "If he deserves it, buy his shit too" (6). Additionally, she sings of a "man on her hips" (2) as if this were a sign of success much like a woman on the arm of a man has been seen in more stereotypical fashion as a trophy. Adopting a calloused view of the replace-ability of a significant other, she devotes an entire song to the idea that there is always another man waiting in the wings (Irreplaceable, 2006): "Another you...a matter of fact he'll be here in a minute". This sentiment is echoed by Selena Gomez surprisingly (of Disney fame), as she sings of moving onto the next one as a form of punishment for a boyfriend who didn't pay her enough attention (Bang, Bang, Bang, 2011). In another track (If I Were a Boy, 2008), Beyoncé explores the idea of gender swapping and demonstrates many acceptable associations with masculinity as a form of power: being able to wear what one wants, drink with friends,

chase after girls, sleep with whomever one wants with no consequences, and put one's self first with no repercussions.

Not all associations with masculinity are negative, however. The role of protector seemed to lack the depreciating air that provider seemed to allude to, with other artists sharing this category. Rihanna's *Umbrella* (2007) imparts this sentiment, "You can run into my arms/It's okay don't be alarmed/I'll be all you need and more". While, Taylor Swift offers, "The time is going to come when you're so mad you could cry but I'll hold you through the night until you smile" (Jump then Fall, 2009). The idea that a woman would place herself in the role of comforter isn't hard to imagine as that is traditionally feminine behavior, but these lyrics seem to be capturing the role of protection, not simply nurturance. This co-option of traditional masculinity could truly move a relationship to one of a more equal status, which would perhaps lend itself to a true feminist interpretation.

In sharp contrast to this seemingly successful blurring of gendered scripts, the category of Co-opted Masculinity-Risk-taking Behavior highlights a dangerous evolution that serves neither sex. Only slightly less prominent, 24% of the songs tested provided an opportunity to preview the absorption of negative masculine tendencies by these artists. This category included references to drinking, drug use, sexual promiscuity, and engaging in behaviors that are deemed unhealthy in terms of mental, physical, social, and even legal spheres. As Beyoncé practically purrs, "Every rule I had you breakin, it's the risk that I'm takin' (Halo, 2010). While a couple of the artists had only a few occurrences (Rihanna, Shakira, Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, and Selena Gomez all shared only ten percent of their songs with this phenomenon), Katy Perry managed to cinch the honor of being the most

subversive. With 80% of her songs fitting within these parameters, Perry coats many of her lyrics in a bubble-gum cutesy fashion that minimizes the very real dangers associated with many of the activities she playfully sings about. Lyrics that encourage “getting drunk on the beach” are contrasted sharply in the same song with “building forts out of sheets,” presenting a girlish youthfulness around serious misbehaviors (*Teenage Dream*, 2010). Using alcohol as a catalyst she provides an extensive list of reckless behavior in *Last Friday Night* (2011) and *Waking Up in Vegas* (2009), but it is her assertion that she “got so brave, drink in hand, no I don’t even know your name...it doesn’t matter” in *I Kissed a Girl* (2008) that really underscores her assertions that being inebriated makes such actions acceptable. Additionally, she resorts to promoting the behavior in all three of the aforementioned songs by insisting, “let’s do it all again, it ruled” (*Last Friday Night*, 2011) and exhibiting no consequences for her actions.

One consequence of this co-option of masculinized behaviors in the pursuit of empowerment is the emergence of misandric notions of denigration aimed at men in general. This is one of the more problematic components of Girl Empowerment messages but was not as evident across these particular GEMAs as expected. In fact, the code emerged in only 12% of the songs, representing the smallest category investigated. However there appears to be a correlation between the cooption of masculinity and the presence of misandry. Perhaps because hegemonic masculinity maintains that one gender must be superior when Girl Empowerment Message Artists take on this dominant themed gendered behavior someone must therefore become inferior. In this study, Beyoncé dominated her role of most misandric in quantity if not in quality. While Beyoncé tends to infantilize men in her self-identified anthems of empowerment, she does so in a nearly

economic fashion, making sure that the purchasing power in the relationship is in the hands of the women she sings about, she goes so far as to pen an anthem to girl empowerment in which girls rule the world. Equality would argue that the ruling parties should share the throne, so to speak; but, it is not equality that she is seeking. Fortunately, the examples of this phenomenon are not as plentiful in this initial study, as this derailment of feminism is contentious and only replaces one subjugated populace for another. Katy Perry's tone is perhaps sharper when she claims "Yeah you PMS, like a bitch" in *Hot n Cold* (2008) and shames the target of her derision by showing his inability to conform to masculine codes of strength with this gem: "don't be a baby/don't call your mother/cause now we're partners in crime" (*Waking up in Vegas*, 2008). This tone of scorn is continued in Rihanna's *Take a Bow* (2008) when she also mocks the tears of a male, "you trying to apologize/you're so ugly when you cry"; yet, it is in her song *Rude Boy* (2010) that the contempt seems most evident: "Can you get it up? Is you big enough?" This type of denigration should never be considered empowering.

DISCUSSION

This study began as a search for feminist representations in music. The initial purpose was to discover if the feminist perspective existed in popular music genres. True to the spirit of the grounded theory method, the examination of popular music culture birthed the construction of a new concept, Girl Empowerment Message Artists (GEMA), and a subsequent analysis of how “empowering” GEMA music lyrics actually are. Recognizing that these artists are not necessarily actively presenting themselves as feminists, it is important to acknowledge the way in which they are being consumed. Girl empowerment has become the byword of the new generation of young girls, it is undeniably a moneymaking industry that wraps itself in the ideas of third-wave feminism and targets adolescent girls and their parents. As these popular music icons are introduced into the marketplace they are packaged in such a way as to appeal to this particular demographic. Whether or not they are purposefully embodying feministic traits or are simply engaging with some of their ideals is not the focus of this particular study, but rather this study examined the existence of the GEMA criteria within their lyrics.

As previously established, the influence of music on adolescent’s perceptions of self and their susceptibility to the messages found in music cannot be denied (Arnett 1995, Primack 2008, Raviv 1995). With the advent of MP3 players, iPods, and other music devices, today’s kids spend copious amounts of time listening to music that is not expected to be heard by everyone. Parents, guardians, and other adults have become immune to the sight of a child with a set of headphones plugged into their ears. For this reason, it is increasingly important for adults to stay aware of the messages their youth may be

receiving as they immerse in the music culture during such a critical time in their development.

Existing research has established that young women are inundated with harmful media messages (Primack 2008, Zaslou 2009, Kilbourne 1999). While notably some music is more problematic than others, this study finds that the messages hidden within Girl Empowerment songs can be particularly damaging when veiled as feminist and empowering to young women. The cooption of feminist messages masks unhealthy associations with traditional emphasized femininity, commodification of heightened sexual awareness, and the promotion of traditional masculine behaviors linked to reckless behavior and misandry.

Along these lines, several noteworthy findings emerged in the present study. For young women looking for positive, strengthening messages of empowerment, the GEMAs analyzed in this study will offer mixed messages to follow. As Raviv (1995) noted in his study on identity formation in adolescence, the influence of popular music celebrities is undeniable. If music can provide the “basis for self-expression” and the “achievement of independence, and intimacy” (613) GEMAs provide a discouraging amount of traditional feminine ideals of dependency. Many of their songs encourage girls to place boys at the center of their lives and to give up agency in their relationships. Subjugating their own desires and needs for the pleasing of another person cannot—**should not**—pretend to be an act of empowerment. In a culture in which rape and sexual assault is an epidemic, and the grey areas of consent are confusing for most adults, we must be conscious and guarded against messages that bombard our adolescent girls with the idea that subordinating their desires to a male’s interest is normative (Zaslou 2009). Other findings supported the

concerns of feminist scholars (Harris 2006, Gill 2008) that third wave feminism has been commodified. This commodification deserves more attention as the harmful link between empowering purchases and increasingly less realistic beauty ideals has resulted in a multi-billion dollar industry that preys on women's self-esteem (Kilbourne 1999, 2004, 2011). If girls do not feel good about themselves (or perhaps their disempowered position in society) they can always shop for the right products (Keith, Hurt, Katz, Salter, Gruver, Jolls, 2008). Further study also supported the initial hypothesis that there exists a glorification of masculine traits in the music produced by GEMAs. While there appeared to be some healthy aspects to this collusion, a direct link to violence (Connell 1987, Matson 2012) was uncovered and the reckless behavior was promoted as exciting and fun (Kimmel 2008). Finally, while misandry was not as prevalent as the other categories, there did appear to be a correlation between empowerment misconstrued as superiority.

Like all research, however, the current study has a few limitations that should be discussed. One of these limitations could be the narrow pool of artists and the use of only a small sample of songs from each artist. Much more variation in projected messages may be uncovered if an artist's full catalog was analyzed. The decision to limit my focus on the *Billboard's Social Media 50* chart to identify artists and Billboard song rankings to narrow down songs, however, was purposeful to guarantee mainstream popularity and thus the greatest potential impact to youth. Nonetheless, throughout the analysis I found that I very much wanted to include several other potential GEMA's: Pink, Christina Aguilera, and Britney Spears, to name a few. Expanding the artists included, comparing across music genres, investigating shifts in GEMA across eras (for example a comparison of Madonna

and Lady Gaga seems particularly apt), and a more in depth investigation of an artist's catalogs are all areas for future research.

Finally, the coding categories could be refined in a variety of ways to include more or less nuance. As discussed briefly in the results section, areas such as a Feminine Reinforcement –Risky Behaviors could be developed that expand on previous works by feminist researchers examining the effects of gendered reinforced behavior on adolescent development (Kilbourne 2010, Pipher 1984, Valenti 2004). Likewise, within the Co-opted Masculinity codes more attention could be paid to the links between masculine dominance and economic privilege (Bem 1993, Connell 1987, Kimmel 2008). For these reasons, future coding efforts would benefit from utilizing a secondary coder to establish inter-rater reliability.

CONCLUSION

7.1 Implications & Future Directions

Media analysis studies, such as the one done in this thesis, not only have implications for research but also for application. A growing area of applied scholarship across the fields of Sociology, Communications, Public Health and Education is media literacy. Not only do parents need to know what their youth are consuming media wise, but youth need to be taught how to think critically about the media depictions that they are consuming.

One limitation of the current methodology is we are unable to assess how young women actually consume GEMA messages. Further investigation into young women's consumption of GEMA is both an area for future research but also a technique that can be incorporated into consumer activism through media literacy campaigns and programs. Existing *Girl Power* programs such as Spark and Rites of Passage have discovered that the media serves as a useful way to interact and educate participants while recognizing some of the inherent dangers found within, such as messages of Girl Empowerment masquerading as feminism.

Similar to Zaslow's (2009) research findings, the current examination of GEMA indicates a complex interplay between projections of empowerment and reinforcement of traditional gender ideals. While generally the exception, some GEMA's, like Adele, managed to avoid being coded under several of the categories of interest in this study. In addition, some of the worst offenders were also found to provide at least some lyrics of empowerment that could be said to coincide with feminist ideals. For example, Lady Gaga and Selena Gomez find success with *Born this Way* (2011) and *Who Says* (2011),

respectively, two songs about self-acceptance. Katy Perry offers *Part of Me* (2010) as a testament to recovering after a bad relationship. But the most successful candidate would be Jennifer Lopez who contributed *All I Have* (2003)—a song about being independent and standing up to a bad relationship—*Love Don't Cost a Thing* (2001)—where money doesn't matter and she makes her own way—and finally, *I'm Gonna be Alright* (2002), about escaping yet another unhealthy relationship. While it could be said that both Perry and Lopez chose to invoke images of empowerment within the traditionally feminine realm of relationships, the protagonists of both artists ultimately acknowledge their relationships as unhealthy and manage to move on thereby demonstrating resiliency.

Another area to explore, or at least add to the discussion, is the weight of imbalanced messages. As the unit of analysis used in this study was the songs themselves, it can be viewed as an indictment of the entire song when in retrospect some songs analyzed offered mixed messages of true empowering ideals counterbalanced by negative associations with violence and/or reckless behavior. This study is only the first step in examining the music targeted at young women. Nonetheless, it is through the act of assisting youth in uncovering and critically assessing the meaning of girl power that true empowerment can take place.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Figure 5 (Artists in order of Popularity-by artist and subsequently by song)

Artist/Position	Billboard Legacy	Song Title	Peak	Year
Rihanna 1	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>Umbrella</i>	1	2007
		<i>We Found Love</i>	1	2011
		<i>Only Girl (In the World)</i>	1	2010
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006	<i>What's My Name?</i>	1	2010
		<i>Rude Boy</i>	1	2010
		<i>SOS</i>	1	2006
		<i>Disturbia</i>	1	2008
	Made the Billboard Hot 100 Songs of the Year Chart in: 2005	<i>S&M</i>	1	2011
		<i>Take a Bow</i>	1	2008
<i>Pon de Replay</i>	2	2005		
Lady Gaga 2	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>Poker Face</i>	1	2009
		<i>Born this Way</i>	1	2011
		<i>Bad Romance</i>	2	2009
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>The Edge of Glory</i>	3	2011
		<i>Telephone</i>	3	2010
		<i>Alejandro</i>	5	2010
		<i>Love Game</i>	5	2009
		<i>You and I</i>	6	2011
		<i>Paparazzi</i>	6	2009
<i>Judas</i>	10	2011		
Adele 3	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011	<i>Set Fire to the Rain</i>	1	2012
		<i>Rolling in the Deep</i>	1	2011
		<i>Someone Like You</i>	1	2011
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2009, 2008	<i>Rumour Has It</i>	16	2010
		<i>Chasing Pavements</i>	21	2009
		<i>Turning Tables</i>	63	2011
Katy Perry 5	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>Firework</i>	1	2010
		<i>Teenage Dream</i>	1	2010
		<i>Part of Me</i>	1	2010
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>I Kissed a Girl</i>	1	2008
		<i>California Girls</i>	1	2010
		<i>Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F)</i>	1	2011
		<i>E.T.</i>	1	2011
		<i>The One that Got Away</i>	3	2012
		<i>Hot N Cold</i>	3	2008
<i>Waking up in Vegas</i>	9	2009		
Nicki Minaj 7	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010	<i>Super Bass</i>	3	2011
		<i>Starships</i>	2	2012
		<i>Moment 4 Life</i>	13	2011
		<i>Your Love</i>	14	2010
		<i>Fly</i>	19	2011
		<i>Right Thru Me</i>	26	2010

Artist/Position	Billboard Legacy	Song Title	Peak	Year
Nick Minaj (continued)	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011	<i>Beez in the Trap</i>	48	2012
		<i>Did it on Em</i>	49	2011
		<i>Right by my Side</i>	51	2012
		<i>Romans Revenge</i>	56	2010
Jennifer Lopez 10	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011	<i>I'm Real</i>	1	2001
		<i>Ain't it Funny</i>	1	2002
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999	<i>If You Had My Love</i>	1	1999
		<i>All I Have</i>	1	2003
		<i>Jenny From the Block</i>	3	2003
		<i>Love Don't Cost a Thing</i>	3	2001
	Made the Billboard Hot 100 Songs of the Year Chart in: 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999	<i>On the Floor</i>	3	2011
		<i>Waiting for Tonight</i>	8	1999
		<i>I'm Gonna be Alright</i>	10	2002
		<i>Get Right</i>	12	2005
Shakira 11	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010	<i>Hips Don't Lie</i>	1	2006
		<i>Whenever, Wherever</i>	6	2001
		<i>Underneath Your Clothes</i>	9	2002
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2010, 2006, 2005, 2002	<i>She Wolf</i>	11	2009
		<i>La Tortura</i>	23	2005
		<i>Give it Up to Me</i>	29	2009
		<i>Loca</i>	32	2010
	Made the Billboard Hot 100 Songs of the Year Chart in: 2005, 2002	<i>Waka Waka(This Time for Africa)</i>	38	2010
		<i>Don't `Bother</i>	42	2005
		<i>Objection(Tango)</i>	55	2002
Taylor Swift 15	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>You Belong with Me</i>	2	2009
		<i>Today was a Fairytale</i>	2	2010
		<i>Mine</i>	3	2010
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007	<i>Love Story</i>	4	2009
		<i>Back to December</i>	6	2010
		<i>Speak Now</i>	8	2010
		<i>Fearless</i>	9	2008
		<i>Jump then Fall</i>	10	2009
		<i>Change</i>	10	2008
		<i>If this was a Movie</i>	10	2011
Beyoncé 21	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2009	<i>Halo</i>	1	2010
		<i>Crazy in Love</i>	1	2003
		<i>If I were a Boy</i>	1	2008
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003	<i>Irreplaceable</i>	1	2006
		<i>Best Thing I Never Had</i>	2	2011
		<i>Love on Top</i>	13	2011
		<i>DIVA</i>	19	2008
	Made the Billboard Hot 100 Songs of the Year Chart in: 2004, 2003	<i>Girls Who Run the World</i>	29	2011
		<i>Countdown</i>	35	2011
		<i>Dance for You</i>	39	2011

Artist/Position	Billboard Legacy	Song Title	Peak	Year
Selena Gomez 29	Made the Top Artists of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010	<i>Who Says</i>	21	2011
		<i>Love you Like a Love Song</i>	22	2012
	Made the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart in: 2011, 2010, 2009	<i>Round & Round</i>	24	2010
		<i>Naturally</i>	29	2010
		<i>A Year Without Rain</i>	35	2010
		<i>Tell Me Something I Don't Know</i>	58	2009
		<i>Magic</i>	61	2009
		<i>Falling Down</i>	82	2009
		<i>One and the Same</i>	82	2009
<i>Bang Bang Bang</i>	94	2011		