

Eminem is a controversial rap singer who has written multiple popular songs considered misogynist. In “Like Toy Soldiers”, Eminem proposes a diverse gender perspective. Identify the gender stereotypes in this famous song and discuss different ways to interpret the role assigned to men from a gender theory approach.

In Toy Soldiers, Eminem talks about glory and pride, setting an example, violence and battle, idolism and pressure on those who are seen to be the leaders, and other issues and pressures, many which are linked and perhaps even generated from what is expected and required, for one to be seen as masculine. The concept behind this song stems from feuds in the Rap/Hip Hop community, where it is common practice to insult each other. Eminem is comparing the rappers to toy soldiers. “A toy soldier may be a friend, an acquaintance, or a follower to a cause. They may be emotionally connected to you, but they are “expendable” to a greater cause(usually pertaining to the protection of a friend) because they are “expendable” they are referred to as toy”. urbandictionary.com(2009). These toy soldiers are being controlled by someone else, they do not feel they have a choice. In the case of Eminem, he is working for a record company and the major important element to them, is that he sells albums, which in turn results in income and profits, for the record companies. Money equals Power, Power equals Money, masculinity is seen as giving one power. The song warns against the hip-hop wars, which are seen to be escalating into real life violence.

From the very beginning of the song the Soldier/Fighter element is highly illustrated and obvious, this is emphasised in the way that the lyrics are set to a rousing military tuned tempo, which in turn is set along to the beat of a marching drum. This brings thoughts of military marching and battlefields, rousing the troops to succeed and to be triumphant. Masculinity is judged on performance and ones achievements. The sayings of “kill or be killed” and “dog eat dog”, spring to mind. Why is it seen as “masculine” to be a fighter along with

the need to succeed and win. Power and strength should not only be physical.

We see at the start of the songs accompanying video , two young boys are sitting on the floor playing with their toys, one then says he is bored, to which the other boy replies, that they could look at a book that he has. He emphasises and states that this book was given to him by his dad. This is signifying the cyclical nature information is passed down from father to son, father teaching son and a means of passing on the knowledge and wisdom, which he has learned from his life and his forefathers before him. We could see this as confirmation of Judith Butlers theory that gender is culturally formed. Butler states that Gender “ is real only to the extent that it is performative”. (Butler,1999,p.23).

“There’s a certain line you just don’t cross and he crossed it”. (Eminem,2010). We see that the expectation of masculinity encourages pride, which in turn one hopes will lead to glory, but is Eminem really trying to portray his frustration over constant disputes and the need to reply or protect oneself with forms of violence and the need of forever going into battle. As Butler states, it is “ Important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms”. (Butler,2012)

“Even though I hold the weight of the world on my shoulders I ain’t never supposed to show it, my crew ain’t supposed to know it”. (Eminem,2010). The pressure of masculinity to be a leader and not to show any weaknesses. “ Big boys don’t cry”, but why shouldn’t they.

“Step by step, heart to heart, left right left”. (Eminem,2010).

“Boys and men labour (if perhaps not quite so consciously)to develop an adult masculinity by repetitive action to enhance muscularity and macho appeal” (Bradley,2014,p.24). Performativity is the power of language to effect a change of some kind in the world.

Judith Butler believes that gender is not tied to material bodily facts , but it is something that completely and solely of social construction. Masculinity is about performance, strength and power. “ Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extend that it is performed”. (Butler,1990,p.278)

To conclude, Eminem's Toy Soldiers presents an idea of masculinity as strength, power and for one not to show emotions or weaknesses and that one is having to continually fight. We of course need to be aware of the variations of gender. Gender processes are greatly affected by class, age and ethnicity and this is particularly important when looking at Rap music, with lyrics directed towards a real or imaginary rival. The music will often have a boastful rhyming pattern.

Bradley states that "We can certainly say that we are living in a gender-aware society" (Bradley, 2014, p. 8)

, is this really the case though or maybe this is only true when we look on a very surface level and not take a much more intense and deeper view. When we look for a route to gender liberation one solution could be through "challenging the rules of performance create 'transgressive' gender activities and identities". (Butler, 1990, p. 33).

"Step by step, heart to heart, left right left
We all fall down like toy soldiers
Bit by bit, torn apart, we never win
But the battle wages on for toy soldiers" (Eminem, 2010)

The battle wages on !, but does it need to?.

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