

“WAP” Rhetorical Significance

The artifact I chose to analyze is a song titled, “WAP (Wet-Ass-Pussy)” by Cardi B featuring Megan Thee Stallion. I chose this song in order to further unpack the concept of double standards within societal gender norms. “WAP” addresses the issue of double standards or the unfair expectations amongst men and/or masculine people and women and/or feminine people because it sheds a brighter light on how once a person is born, they are immediately expected to live up to specific standards written by society, which is currently dominated by values of men.

To begin, the rhetorical artifact is significant because it creates a bold statement that directly goes against the social expectations made for women created by men. The title itself is an acronym for the phrase, “Wet-Ass-Pussy”. The title immediately makes a statement about the contents of the song. The major goal of “WAP” is to evoke feelings of surprise and shock. The purpose of the artifact is to make an eye-catching/ear-catching statement that addresses the unjust expectations for women. The target audience of WAP is adults who are fans of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion and fans of hip-hop/rap, and the empirical audience consists of teens and adults who are not particularly fans of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, but may listen or pay attention to mainstream radio and trending topics.

The rhetorical situation that “WAP” is responding to is the double standards and constant objectification of women’s bodies in modern society. Since the current society is a patriarchy, women often feel as though they have no say in their choices that have to do with their body because of the constant stress and pressure that they are put under. In this song, the rhetors are Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, as they both contributed to the writing and performance of the song. As rhetors, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion have the opportunity to use explicit language to strongly convey that women should be free to express themselves in any way. Almanzar, Pete,

Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1) open the song up with repeated lyrics, “Whores in this house, There’s some whores in this house, There’s some whores in this house...” setting the song up with its own standards that defies current social standards by calling themselves “whores”, in an attempt to reclaim the word for all women. In this artifact, they talk about women as a group, but a constraint they fail to address are specific groups of women. “Put this pussy right in your face...” [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)]. This song does not bring up subgroups of women, such as women of color, or people who identify as women but do not have female genitalia.

The lines in the song can be interpreted in many ways, depending on which audience listens to the song. Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1) include, “Gobble me, swallow me, drip down the side of me (Yeah), Quick, jump out 'fore you let it get inside of me (Yeah), I tell him where to put it, never tell him where I'm 'bout to be (Huh)...”. The major beliefs or concerns that the target audience holds is that women have the right to take ownership of their bodies and live up to their own standards, women should not restrict themselves only to be accepted by men, and that if men were to write a similar song from a man’s perspective, then the song would not be perceived in the same light.

On the other hand, when the empirical audience were to hear/read the lyrics, “Your honor, I'm a freak bitch, handcuffs, leashes, Switch my wig, make him feel like he cheatin', Put him on his knees, give him somethin' to believe in, Never lost a fight, but I'm lookin' for a beatin' (Ah)” [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)], the major beliefs/concerns of the empirical audience is that this song is purposely explicit to get attention and to create a certain shock value to get more publicity. In addition, another concern is that since this song

promotes sexual implications of women, maybe even considering the song to be a gateway to allow women to be objectified because of the explicit nature of “WAP”.

In “WAP”, the language devices that “WAP” uses include epistrophe, metaphors, and double entendres. After the introduction and before the end of the song, the chorus states, “Yeah, you fuckin' with some wet-ass pussy, Bring a bucket and a mop for this wet-ass pussy, Give me everything you got for this wet-ass pussy...” [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)]. At the end of every line in the chorus, “Wet-ass-pussy” is emphasized to remind the audience of the central point of the song. This demonstrates the literary device, epistrophe. In the third verse, Cardi B raps, “Need a Henny drinker, need a weed smoker, Not a garter snake, I need a king cobra,” [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)]. These few lines demonstrate a metaphor. When Cardi B says that she wants a “king cobra”, it is a metaphor for a woman desiring the “ideal man.” This metaphor opposes the idea that men are always perceived to want a small, dainty woman who is submissive, cycling back to the idea of double standards created by the patriarchy. Nearing the end of verse three, Cardi B says a double entendre, “I spit on his mic and now he tryna sign me, woo,” [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)]. This line shows a double meaning of the word “mic” meaning a man’s penis and a microphone to rap in.

In this song, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion’s tone is assertive. Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1) include the line, “I want you to park that big Mack truck right in this little garage,” to further convey their straightforwardness while participating in intercourse with a man. This line breaks the norm that men are domineering, while women are supposed to submit themselves to them. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion exemplify the idea that women have the ability to speak out for themselves and tell men what

they want. Another line in this song that showcases the assertive nature of it is, “In the food chain, I’m the one that eat ya,” [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)]. This line of the song reveals that Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion are at the top of the food chain, meaning that they are the alpha predators when it comes to their place in society. They are describing their rank in society and how women can conquer the patriarchy.

In conclusion, my analysis taught us that “WAP” means much more than what meets the eye. It may seem as though the song is vulgar, explicit, and “distasteful”, but there is a deeper meaning that talks about how double standards in society are continuously taking a toll on women, keeping women in these boxes that have been curated by men. The artifact teaches people that women should take ownership of their bodies and lives and stop living for the standards of men. The particular feature that I think is the most important is the metaphors in verse three where Cardi B stated how she needed the “ideal man”. I think that it was powerful in a sense that she was taking the domineering role and reversing the societal roles of men and women. She was being upfront about what women should act like when living in a world that is run by men. The critical puzzle that I think the artifact will help us understand is how to overcome the obstacle of double standards ingrained in our society. What other steps can we as a whole take to create more equal expectations and roles for women and men? Or perhaps, where did these societal standards come from, what factors have been actively contributing to this perspective, and why are we still holding these expectations in our minds?

Feminist Criticism and “WAP”

To begin, feminism within a Feminist Critic is the concept that every person, no matter their sexuality, gender-identity, race, ethnicity, social class, etc., deserves to have a fair chance in life. It also is the idea that each person should have the same amount of equity. Although many individuals may focus their ideals around feminism toward solely women, it is about liberation for all, whether that individual be a woman, man, nonbinary person and so forth. Feminists want to address the oppression of everyone and find ways to challenge the ideology of domination, moving people to look at new, alternative and non-dominating ways of life (Foss, 2009, p.142-143).

There are different subsections of feminism that fall under a feminist critic. First, there is “ecofeminism”, which dives into how the way humans treat the environment is directly linked to how the patriarchy is implemented in everyday life. Second, there is “seperatist feminism”, which links heterosexuality to male supremacy. Third, there is “cultural feminism” which is the most known type of feminism amongst the current culture, explaining that the roles that we follow and play in life is a direct result of social and cultural constructions. It explains the norms that most of society follows, and defies them by opposing such expectations. Fourth, there is “power feminism”, which explains that non-males must claim their power through becoming part of the system and dismantling it from within. Next, there is “lipstick feminism”, which reclaims the traditionally feminine activities for themselves. This type of feminism reclaims words, phrases, and material things. Last, “transnational feminism” is concerned with global capitalism and inequality (Foss, 2009, p.141).

Many types of artifacts can be categorized and used under a feminist criticism. To name some types, novels, journal articles, speeches, movies, TV shows, podcasts, and songs can all be

explained through the lens of a feminist criticism. People who have utilized Feminist Criticism in their bodies of work include independent scholars such as Dana Cloud, intersectional feminist, professor, and author, Bell Hooks, and philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler.

Continuing on, the major formal characteristic of a Feminist Critic is that it is supposed to disrupt hegemonies. There are six strategies of disruption for an artifact. To start, generating multiple perspectives on an issue can be a strategic way of disrupting the status quo. Finding many perspectives on an issue can be analyzed through this strategy through purposefully looking at perspectives that are different from their own, or summarizing differing perspectives on an issue (Foss, 2009, p.1487-148). Second, cultivating ambiguity can be a useful tactic for some rhetors. Rhetors can create messages that are unclear to open space for more than one interpretation of the artifact (Foss, 2009, p.148-149). Third, the process of reframing an issue to shifting perspectives to view a situation can provide challenge and shed light to new meanings to established frameworks (Foss, 2009, p.150). Fourth, the concept of resourcement makes the decision to take energy from a different source, meaning that rhetors have the option to not interact within the frame in which an interaction is unfolding and use another source from the original frame to create their response (Foss, 2009, p.150-151). Fifth, enactment is a form of disruption that is personal, as this calls for individuals to act out or embody an interpretation of a situation that is opposite of the one that is normally accepted. They are embracing the perspective that they are making about the reality they wish to have (Foss, 2009, p.153). Lastly, juxtaposing incongruities allows rhetors to contrast assumptions and beliefs about the world, which introduces new ideas to them (Foss, 2009, p.154).

The major functional characteristics of a Feminist Criticism includes identifying and explicating the strategies used in the artifact to disrupt hegemonies, and exploring the impacts of the strategies of disruption on hegemonic ideologies and structures (Foss, 2009, p.147-148).

As stated earlier, the key concept behind a feminist critic is to disrupt hegemonic structures and provide new alternative ways of thinking, perceiving, acting, and being (Foss, 2009, p.154). Feminist critics should acknowledge that equity should be the same for all, every person's life and experience in life is valuable and matters, and every individual should have self-determination where they have agency over the decisions and choices that they make. It also should focus on liberation over oppression. This means that rhetors wishing to disrupt the status quo should focus on societal alternatives that focus on ways to get out of the status quo or else they will be feeding the initial problem. This then leads to discussion of disruption/finding new alternatives.

In conclusion, my analysis teaches us that there are multiple ways to disrupt and question the normativies created and continued by society. We learn that there are different strategies to disrupting status quos and that the ways in which rhetors write is purposeful and made for deeper examination. A particular feature in this theory that is useful to further explain my artifact, "WAP" (2020) is the subsection of lipstick feminism, since "WAP" reclaims words and phrases such as "pussy", and "whore" in a lyrical way. The song also juxtaposes the concept of sexual intercourse and how it is a taboo topic for non-males to openly talk about [Almanzar, Pete, Owens, Foye III, and Rodriguez (2020, track 1)]. Some potential contributions that this theory makes toward the study of rhetoric is that it provides further insight into the foundational depictions of women through the entertainment industry, specifically in the music industry. Furthermore, it creates conversation to examine use of lyricism by musical artists, which gets

listeners to delve deeper in the concept of non-male empowerment. Finally, it also begs the questions, “Why are these specific lyrics chosen within songs?” and “What is the underlying message behind musicians’ words?”

References

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