

Misogyny, Misandry and Homophobia in Russian and American Rap Music

Yana Khachaturova, capstone project, 2020

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Objective



- Rap music has a reputation for being **misogynistic** and **homophobic** and although there are many articles written about the genre, only several of them analyze the impact of such songs on the listeners.
- The articles that attempt to shed light on the impact that such songs have contradict each other. Johnson, Jackson, et al after conducting a series of experiments have come to the conclusion that “exposure to violent rap videos has been related to higher acceptance of violence, including violence against women by African American adolescent males”, whereas a study conducted by Harvey (1999) suggested that “rap music did not have a major effect on attitudes towards women, male-female relationships, and manhood.”
- The main idea behind the comparison of Russian rap to American rap is that there are many ethnic stereotypes in American rap whereas these stereotypes are absent from Russian rap. However, both industries have homophobic songs and do not actively engage women in the production of rap music. These differences and similarities turn the process of analyzing the lyrics into a series of discoveries about how people from completely different cultures perceive and react to the messages that rap songs contain.

This project tries to understand whether or not songs that contain a) misogyny, b) misandry and c) homophobic lyrics can harm the listeners' mental and in some cases physical health. The project wants to suggest that in case these songs affect the listeners badly, the field has to be regulated.

How does rap music that contain misogyny, misandry and homophobic lines affect the listeners? What are the common patterns? What are the differences and similarities between Russian and American rap industries?

How are African-American women impacted by American misogynistic rap songs? Are Russian women impacted by Russian rap songs that contain misogyny? If yes, why?

How popular is misandry in Russian and American rap songs? If such songs exist, why are they created? Are women trying to battle one set of stereotypes by creating a different set of stereotypes? What is the rap community's attitude towards such songs?

America is not a homophobic country, but the rap canon is quite homophobic. Russia has always been a homophobic country. How are the rap singers expressing their disapproval of same-sex love? Why do they sing about it ?

The Research Questions



Methodology



Two methodological techniques were used in the creation of the project:

1) Analysis of the articles written about the concepts that the project is trying to address followed by the textual analysis of song lyrics.

2) Creation of two surveys, one for the English-speaking rap community and one for the Russian-speaking rap community based in Armenia and abroad.

Canonization of rap and Hypermasculinity

The word "canon" is derived from Greek and means "a standard". There are canons in literature, art and music and they are often created by institutions to show what should be perceived as the best, the traditional and the most significant. Rap canon includes black men and white men but the women are excluded from it. White rappers are not the main members of it because they are not part of the black culture and they have nothing to say about it. Black women are treated as second-class citizens because even if they become part of the canon, they are considered to be less likely to produce something "valuable". That is why there are so many female rappers who marginalize themselves and other women by featuring with male rappers and they usually sing only the hook of collaborative songs.

The entire field of gangsta rap is based on the notion of hypermasculinity, a practice according to which men occupy the dominant position in the society and are considered to be better than everyone else. Gangsta rappers are playing into the trope of a "badman", a man who is invincible and unstoppable and there is no one who can defeat him. That is why they oftentimes sing about violence, money, drugs and sex with women.

Canonization of rap and Hypermasculinity

Canonical gangsta rappers form a homosocial bond with their friends (**homosociality** refers to same-sex relationships that are not of a romantic nature, e.g. friendship) and respect family members, be it a man or a woman (mothers, sisters, daughters). They do not respect those who fall outside the aforementioned categories. These patterns can be observed in both Russian and American rap songs.

<https://vimeo.com/416790802> (Eminem, "Mockingbird", America) - In this verse Eminem makes it crystal clear that he is ready to go as far as possible to make his daughter Hailey happy. He is ready to satisfy all of her wishes to see her smile and if one of his purchases fails to make his daughter happy he will become aggressive and destroy the item or harm the seller for giving him a wrong present for his beloved baby. That way he puts his daughter on a pedestal; she is the only person whose desires he is ready to fulfill.

<https://vimeo.com/416791169> (Basta, "Mother", Russia)- Basta is a Russian rapper whose song shows us that he perceives his parent as a savior who supported him when everyone turned back on him. His mother is almost like a divine being because he hears her voice when he is hopeless and she pushes him to move on. According to the song, she has always believed in him and his abilities.

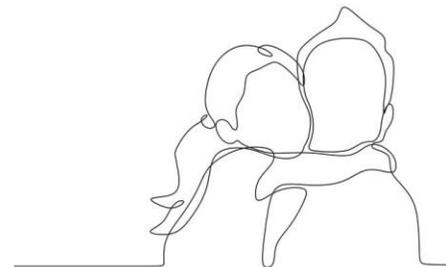
I know, you know, Mom,

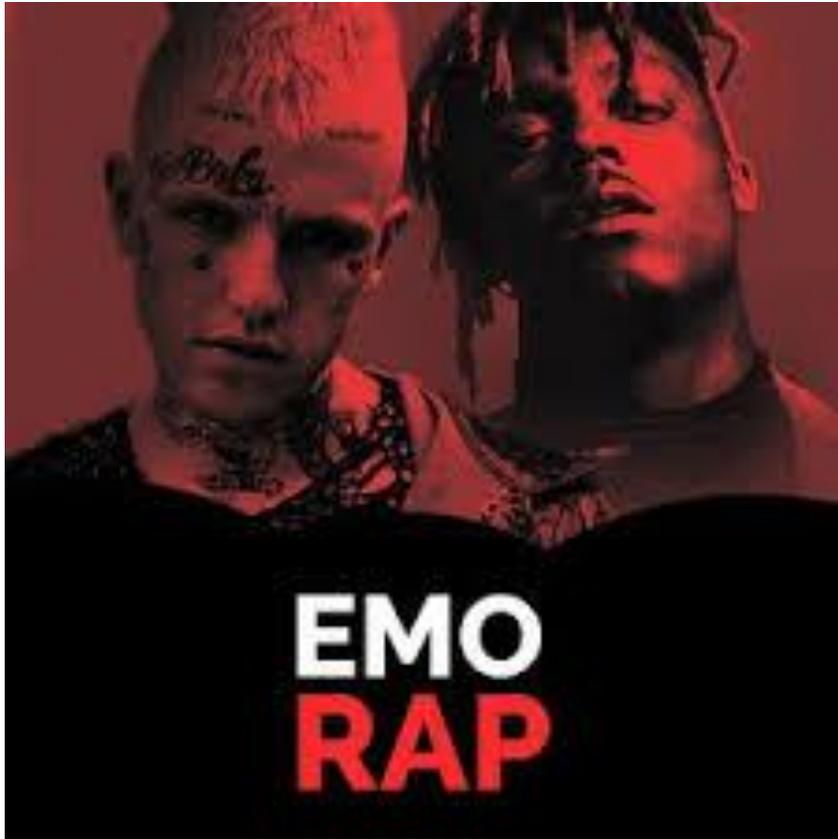
I know you believe, Mom

You believed and believe in me and that's a lot

And when fate knocked me down

Through pain and despair I heard a voice: "Get up, son!"





Canonization of rap and Hypermasculinity

There is a possibility that hypermasculinity will abandon the rap canon in the nearest future. There is a new branch of rap present both in Russian and American rap industries called emo rap and it is widely used by the modern rappers, especially the newcomers. These rappers don't take the concept of hegemonic masculinity into account, they do quite the opposite. They use the concept of subordinate masculinity (the opposite of hegemonic masculinity), meaning they rap about their weak and emotional sides.

<https://vimeo.com/416791338> (Post Malone, "Rich & Sad", America)-Gangsta rappers never rap about their readiness to give their belongings up to be with a woman. However, Post Malone changes the direction of the rap industry in a way that he shows that he is ready to get rid of everything he has to bring his woman back because she couldn't care less about his wealth. He is not afraid of showing his emotional side and he is not ashamed of putting his feelings on display.

<https://vimeo.com/416791549> (Lizer, "Between Us", Russia)- The character of the song feels that the woman is trying to push him away and the outcome is pretty clear for him. He predicts that she will most likely friendzone him and prefer to be friends but that's not what he wants although he knows that she does not want them to be together. He raps: "Tell me these three words that you have wanted to tell for so long: Let's stay friends " because he understands that the girl does not have serious intentions.



Misogyny in Russian and American Rap

Generally speaking, misogyny can be described as hatred of or prejudice against women. These are the main patterns of misogyny: **a) violence against women b) disrespect of women and their feelings c) denigration of women who have sex for money d) depiction of women as unquenchable sex machines.**

Russian rap is not based on ethnic stereotypes and has to do with the collective image of a woman. American rap has mainly to do with marginalizing women of color, however in Russia people are predominantly white. Russian women can be marginalized based on their personality but not because of their skin color.

There are three gender stereotypes that exist in African- American reality and two of them often appear in rap songs.

1) **Mammy** is an obese enslaved woman who tries to satisfy her masters. These type can rarely be encountered in rap songs. According to C.M. West (1995), women who get exposed to the Mammy stereotype are likely to develop eating and mental disorders because they don't want to turn into obese women who live their lives for the sake of making others happy.

2) **Jezebel** is portrayed as a "bad girl" with an overly sexual body who is so seductive that men cannot resist having sex with her. The Jezebel stereotype reduces women to sex dolls so much that some of them might start developing sexual dysfunctions.

3) **Sapphire** is described as an angry woman who does not have any feelings for men and her life is centered around money and only monetary rewards make her less ignorant or angry. The Sapphire stereotype forces women to hide their negative emotions because they do not want to be viewed as hostile or pushy.



Misogyny, violence against women

The most problematic rap songs are the songs that describe the murder or rape of women, contain violent lyrics or dehumanize women by treating them as disposable objects.

<https://vimeo.com/416770185> (Eminem, "So Much Better", America)-The rapper is basically rapping about his girlfriend who cheated on him with other rappers and was trying to deceive him by saying that she had not. And there he is, lying in his bed and thinking about her death and the benefits of it.

<https://vimeo.com/416772516> (LSP, "Madness", Russia)-According to the song, the rapper and the girl are extremely drunk and they are under the influence of drugs. They have mixed everything they could, Bombay which is a gin, Tussin which is a cough syrup used by drug addicts and Bacardi, a rum. They are also drinking Sprite and both of them don't remember what is in it. However, when he approaches the girl she asks him to stop but he does not listen to her and undresses her against her will.



STOP VIOLENCE



Misogyny, disrespect of women and their feelings

The second category has to do with men who disrespect women by dating them and not having feelings for them. They do not think that women should be loved and treat everyone like bitches and hoes.

<https://vimeo.com/416776560> (Jay-Z, "Big Pimpin", America)-Jay-Z's approach to dating women is quite simple, he sleeps with them and then leaves them because he can exist without these women, it is not a big deal for him. He gets acquainted with these women in neighborhoods and shows them what a good life is by taking care of their appearance because they are supposed to have sex with him. However, he does not take care of their basic needs and he is not willing to pay for their meals. He positions himself as a free man who does not need women and who is ready to spend money only in case it makes them prettier.

<https://vimeo.com/416777935> (Pharaoh & Boulevard Depo, "5 minutes ago", Russia)-The same pattern can be observed in Russian rap. Despite the fact that the rapper sings about having an intercourse with a woman in a car, he thinks that she is disgusting and he is not impressed with her skills. He calls her a "bitch" as many rappers do and it automatically shows us the attitude of male rappers towards certain women. He also raps "your bitch is disgusting" which means that she is the property of his opponent, she belongs to that guy.

Misogyny, denigration of women who have sex for money



The third category of songs describes women who are ready to have sex for presents or money and oftentimes rappers are not against doing that (Sapphire).

<https://vimeo.com/416780228> (Ty Dolla \$ign, "Hottest In The City" America)- The rapper is ready to give the woman he has sex with expensive presents if she is ready to have oral sex with him. She does not do it for pleasure purposes only, she needs a Rolex watch and a Tesla and although he calls her a "bitch", he is ready to give it to her. The verse is an attempt to show off that he has so much money that trading luxury cars for sex is nothing to him.

<https://vimeo.com/416781949> (Thrill Pill, Egor Kreed, Morgenshntern, "A Sad Song", Russia)- The rapper perfectly understands that the woman he is with wants his money and does not love him but loves his fame. He raps that in order to earn some money she should work hard in bed and satisfy the rapper. He also remembers the conversation with his father who once told him not to trust bitches because they only care about money and they are venomous snakes.

Misogyny, depiction of women as unquenchable sex machines

The last category of misogyny has to do with women who are overly sexualized and reduced to body parts. It is reminiscent of the Jezebel stereotype where the image of a black woman with voluptuous forms plays the central role.

<https://vimeo.com/416785510> (Trey Songz, "Animal", America)-The rapper is not talking about the girl's smartness or personality. Instead he sees only the sexual aspect of her and he wants to have an intercourse with her. He compares his penis to an anaconda and the bedroom to a jungle and by doing so he talks about his animalistic desires. He is the hunter and she is his helpless prey so his dominant position will let him get what he dreams of anyways.

<https://vimeo.com/416787927> (Morgenshetrn, "Pennywise", Russia)-So the rapper compares the girl to a character named Pennywise from the movie called "IT" based on Stephen King's horror novel. She has a huge mouth and that is why she resembles Pennywise and she is ready to swallow everything after having an oral sex with him. However, even though she wants him so much he is not going to have sex with her due to the fact that he is not interested in doing so. Morgenshtern compares women to monsters and by doing so questions their humanity.



Misandry in Russian and American Rap

Misandry can be described as hatred of or prejudice against men. There are not many female rappers whose songs promote misandry, but they do exist.

The first song that aimed to destroy the rap canon- "Roxanne's Revenge" by Roxanne Shante. The song was a response to "Roxanne, Roxanne" by a band called UTFO. The singers of the band rapped about how they were trying to flirt with a girl named Roxanne by bragging about their money or skills. Even though Roxanne Shante had nothing to do with the girl discussed in the song, she decided to respond to every single member of the band in her song. For example, in this verse she responds to the member of the band named Doctor Ice by saying that he is not as great as he thinks he is:

Well, let me tell you somethin' else about the Doctor, too:

He ain't really cute, and he ain't great

He don't even know how to operate

He came up to me with some bullshit rap

But let me tell you somethin'; don't you know it was wack



Misandry in Russian and American Rap

<https://vimeo.com/418204294> (Nicki Minaj, "Lookin Ass", America)-In this particular verse Minaj combines all the actions and habits that are considered to be cool and manly by men and tries to show them that they look lame and stupid and there is nothing impressive about their behavior. She uses the term "nigga" to describe a canonical man who brags all the time but is miserable and funny. The phrase "nigga-nigga" comes up every time after she mocks a man and it almost sounds like an insult.

Aziza, "Supreme", Russia. Aziza wrote this song about her ex-husband Guf, who is a famous rapper in Russia. Guf had a conflict with her new husband and she decided to make it public. In the song she insults the rapper and the song aims to open his fans' eyes to who he really is.

You messed with my people, and crossed the line

This dirty song won't get away with you

My husband will come to you in your countryside

And lay your impudent face on the tiles





Misandry in Russian and American Rap

The reason why misandry cannot often be encountered in rap music is that women have to collaborate with men rappers in order to be able to survive in the canon. That is why female rappers often sing collaborative songs and they are usually responsible for the melodic part of the song. 1. J.R., Cardi B, "Gimme Head Too" 2. T.I., Iggy Azalea, "No Mediocre".

The background of the entire slide features a horizontal rainbow gradient. In the foreground, there are dark silhouettes of two people, possibly a man and a woman, facing each other. The man's silhouette is on the left, and the woman's is on the right. They appear to be in a close embrace or conversation.

Homophobic Slurs in Rap Songs

Gay people challenge the notion of who a real man is and thus there is a constant need for gangsta rappers to keep them under control and suppress the newly developing branches of gay rap.

<https://vimeo.com/418214170> (Eminem, "Criminal", America)-He openly states that he hates gay people and whoever tries to accuse him of insulting the LGBTQA+ community is wrong because he is not homophobic but the accusing people are heterophobic because they try to go against natural laws. Then the rapper describes an imaginary homosexual looking at his pelvic area and the rapper assumes that his sexual organ is so desirable that gay men want to look at it with passion in their eyes. Although this song insulted many LGBTQA+ activists, Eminem says that he himself is not homophobic and his alter ego Slim Shady is the one who raps.

In Russia homophobia goes hand in hand with nationalism because Russians consider homosexuality to be typical of America due to the fact that it is liberal and tolerant. A rapper named Noganno has a song named "Superhero" where he talks about getting rid of gay people: |

At the monument in the square fags were hanging out

We are orderlies: brass knuckles, bats

Survey Results: Survey in English

The survey in English was created for English-speaking people living in America and posted on Rap Genius forum (<https://genius.com/rap-genius>) and Rap-Royalty forum (<http://www.rap-royalty.com/forum/forum.php?s=1293ef2edfad03eabf3063497bb1631c>), disseminated through Facebook groups that discussed rap music and also posted under misogyny/misandry/rap subreddits. I have managed to get 120 responses. The survey included questions about the gender, age and music preferences of the participants. The most relevant questions were the following:

Do the rap songs you listen to offend men or women? If possible, describe gender stereotyping in music that you have encountered so far.

What is your attitude towards such songs? Do they make you feel unfairly stereotyped?

If you listen to rap songs that verbally abuse men or women, what is the main reason behind it?

Should the field be regulated in order not to hurt anyone's feelings?

70% of the participants were male, an indicator that women who listen to American rap are voiceless. The participants almost unequivocally (90%) indicated that rap music affects mostly women. Half of the participants indicated that they do not pay attention to derogatory language used in rap songs, while 29% stated that they do not feel objectified and only 21% felt objectified and affected by the lyrics. Many of people who realize that rap music objectifies women said that they continue listening to rap songs because they are cool and rappers should feel free to express their opinion (freedom of speech). The last question was about the regulation of the field and 46% thought that the field should not be regulated at all and the rest were unsure. Since the survey was mostly filled in by men, such responses were expected because songs that insult women are not supposed to hurt their feelings.



Survey Results: Survey in Russian

The survey in Russian was posted on a website called Pikabu (pikabu.ru) where users can discuss various topics, sent to the students of the Slavonic university of Armenia because they speak Russian and some of them listen to Russian rap and posted on two rap forums (hip-hop.ru and rapforce.net). When answering the question about gender distribution, the participants indicated that 53% was male and 47% female. Approximately 80% of the participants indicated that Russian rap music insults both men and women and 67% were not offended by rap music. The question about regulations revealed that 69% of people thought that regulations were not necessary and the rest thought that only rap songs about violence and racism should be banned.

Survey results reveal that the majority of women are absent from the American rap canon whereas according to the Russian survey the distribution is equal. African-American women living in America feel marginalized and stereotyped and that is why their voice is absent from many discussions. Women living in Russia are not stereotyped based on their appearance and that is why they do not hesitate to express their opinion regarding misogyny and misandry. When a Russian woman watches a rap video produced in Russia she sees twerking or half-naked girls but she does not associate her own life with the life of these girls. However, when an Afro-American woman watches a rap video she is likely to associate herself with women shown in rap videos because of the three stereotypes present in African-American reality.



Limitations



- Due to time constraints I was able to question approximately 100 people for each of my surveys which is not enough taking into account the fact that both of the countries are big.
- When creating the survey in English I did not include a question about the ethnicity of the participant so I am not sure who exactly took the survey.
- It was also impossible for me to find a single scientific article analyzing Russian rap so I had to carry out research myself.

Future Research Possibilities

- There is a strong need to look deeper at how Russian rap echoes stereotypes and prejudices existing in the country. Even though I tried to look for scientific articles on Google Scholar, JSTOR or Ebsco I could not find a single article analyzing Russian rap. It can also be useful to create a more detailed survey for American participants and ask them questions about their ethnicity. Obviously, the precision of the project depends on the number of questioned participants and questioning as many people as possible might give life to more detailed papers in the future.
- It might also be useful to question people of the LGBTQA+ community to get a better understanding of their attitude towards homophobic slurs.
- One thing to look at is how emo rap is changing the rap canon and making it more romantic and softer because nowadays singers like Post Malone are becoming more and more famous. Due to time constraints this paper tried to cover as many fields as possible but these suggestions should be paid attention to in order to shed light on the fact that rap music is not just a combination of beats and rhyming words.



ПОЯСНИ

Thank you for your attention!

