

Postfeminism In 'Flowers' A Song From Miley Cyrus

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Abstract — This research examined the manifestation of postfeminism aspects in Miley Cyrus song 'Flowers'. Utilizing a qualitative method, this research analyzed song's lyrics as the primary source of the data. In addition, Roland Barthes' semiotics theory employed to provide a framework for interpreting the symbolic meanings embedded within the data. The result demonstrated the presence of 7 myths. From the 7 myths found, 2 aspects of postfeminism appeared namely individualism and femininity. Individualism aspect is the most ubiquitous one. The individualism depicted in Miley Cyrus' song entitled 'Flowers' emphasizes the importance of women recognizing and asserting their rightful place in society.

Keywords — Postfeminism; Song Lyrics; Qualitative.

I. INTRODUCTION

Popular songs or pop songs are well-known in youth generation as those relate to what the youth feelings, thoughts and states. Plasketes (in Adhitya, N.G. & Lasari, N., 2020) said that popular songs—the musical and lyrical elements, are a medium to express the experience of the youth. Moreover, pop songs in this era bring and form diverse paradigms to be agreed as public opinion (Widayanti, S.D., 2022). Thus, semiotics study is significant to research in songs. According to Barthes (in Muhlisin & Syamsurrijal & Arniati, F., 2024) that semiotics discovers how people assign meaning to objects especially sentence structures which constructed to deliver meaning in diverse situations. As we know, gender still remains huge problems faced by many young women today. They got many discriminations to express their individual identity these days. Thus, postfeminism is prevalent in many pop songs these days especially American pop songs. Postfeminist values inserted into American popular music to make youth acknowledge about it (Adhitya, N.G. & Lasari, N., 2020). Besides, song writers are capable to contemplate listener's postfeminism ideology and develop a new representation of woman characterized by strength, determination, autonomy in decision-making about their lives (Marlina, T., Nurjanah, S., Wikanengsih, 2020).

In America, Miley Cyrus is the most iconic and talented young singer who is also considerable as a song writer. Miley is widely recognized for addressing gender issues in some of her songs. In 2024, she won the most prestigious award in 66th Grammy Award for "Flowers" as Record of the Year and Best Pop Solo Performance. Many of music experts appreciated this song since it had powerful messages for women to be an independent and strong one. Those aspects—Independent and strong are related to postfeminism, initiated due to celebrate the diversity of women as the self. Postfeminism fight for reaching freedom which marked as independent woman who can decide her choices in life with no obstructed by men (Widiyanti, S. D., 2022). Miley's song "Flowers" valued postfeminism aspects which represent the postfeminism today. Miley Cyrus is not just a famous singer. She is a famous icon who had known as a successful American celebrity that represent American dream—Miley became a role model since she was a teen as she was popular for her role in *Hannah Montana* Movie and she changed her identity into an

extreme image due to maintain her popularity, which interconnected with the changing of American socio-cultural condition in that era (Riana, R., 2016).

Therefore, it is important to dig more about what kind of postfeminism in this era depicted in Miley's song entitled "*Flowers*". So, young women can comprehend the message of the song related to postfeminism.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative method to investigate the kinds of postfeminism in Miley Cyrus' song entitled "*Flowers*". Yin, K. R. (2011) stated that using qualitative method enables the researchers carrying out in-depth research related to every day's topic found in our surrounding—we study about people's life and their real-world conditions and how people embody their views and perspectives in their works. Moreover, Mills, J. & Birks, M (2014) said that qualitative research is to examine phenomena that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural and social context, studies firmly anchored in a methodological school of thought are finely textured and nuanced—producing a much higher quality outcome as it considered the dimensions of topic substance, voice and text.

The data used in this research was the lyrics of Miley Cyrus' song entitled "*Flowers*". The song was listed in Endless Summer Vacation Album (2023) which released on January 12, 2023 by Columbia Record. Semiotic approach from Roland Barthes was also used to identify, classify and interpret the data related to postfeminism.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the results showed that there were 2 aspects of postfeminism found in lyrics of Miley Cyrus' song entitled "*Flowers*" namely, Individualism and Femininity. In "*Flowers*", Miley conveyed and encourage women—and people in general—that women have freedom to choose what contributes to their sense of agency and fulfillment, since they possess the same power as men to pursue their goals. Miley also showed women how to be strong individuals while embracing their femininity. She depicted and encourage the idea that femininity never imprisons women or limits their freedom to achieve their intentions.

Table 1. Result table related to Semiotics of Roland Barthes and Postfeminism

Lyrics	Denotation	Connotation	Myth	Aspects of Postfeminism
We were good, we were gold	Women are as good as gold	People should respect women because women is as precious as gold or dream that people always fight for it	Women have equal opportunities in society as women can do anything that men do.	Individualism
Kinda dream that can't be sold	Women are as valuable as someone's dream but can't be sold			
We were right 'til we weren't	Women can act right and wrong			
Built a home and watched it burn	Women can build a home and burn it			
I didn't wanna leave you	She wanted to stay and express her feeling	Women should consider their	Women have the ability to find	Individualism
I didn't wanna lie				

Started to cry but then remembered I	honestly even she began to cry. Then she realized something	own strength	happiness for themselves, independent of societal expectations.	
I can buy myself flowers	She can buy flowers, write her own name in the sand, talk to herself, dance by herself, hold her own hand and love herself better than her partner	Women can fulfil their own happiness	women's happiness does not depend on men	Individualism
Write my name in the sand				
Talk to myself for hours				
Say things you don't understand				
I can take myself dancing				
And I can hold my own hand				
Yeah, I can love me better than you can				
I can love me better	She can love herself better	Women can take care of herself better than being with men	Women are able to take care and fulfil their own happiness better than when they are being with men	Individualism
I can love me better, baby				
Can love me better				
I can love me better, baby				
Paint my nails cherry red	She can paint the colour of her nail matches to the roses her partner left	women can do whatever they want to do to take a revenge	women have the autonomy to select an appropriate form of revenge that aligns with their individual preferences and may deviate from conventional societal perceptions about revenge	Femininity & Individualism
Match the roses that you left				
No remorse, no regret	She has no regret and forgives what her partner did to her	women can do whatever they want to do	women have freedom to choose everything in their lives	
I forgive every word you said				

3.1 Denotation

Barthes (in Muhlisin & Syamsurrijal & Arniati, F., 2024) explained that there is a dual-tiered system of signification namely denotation and connotation—the denotation functions as an early signalling system which consist of signifiers and signs that describe the relation about the object of signifier and the abstract concept it relates. Through the denotation meaning we could see how Miley depicted her self as a woman who knows her self-worth and autonomous which related to the objects that she explained in the song lyrics. We can see the examples in these lyrics

We were good, we were gold

Kinda dream that can't be sold

We were right 'til we weren't

Built a home and watched it burn

In the lyrics above, the word “we” referred to women described with the adjective “good” which is equal with another object “gold” and “dream” that represent the value of women is as good as gold and dream. Gold has known for its high value in all society in human history since the qualities that gold had (Schoenberger, E., 2011). Moreover, dreams especially American dreams—where Miley came from, the American dream is a great national suggestion to hard work and achieve a successful and prosperity life (Schudson, M., 2004). Through those explanation we can see that Miley knows the value of women and spreads that message through the song lyrics to the listeners. Moreover, in the next lyric the word “we” also referred to women. The adjective “right” contrasted with the word “weren’t”, while the phrase “built a home” contrasted with the phrase “watch it burn”. These contrasts showed that the women are able to choose their own actions—whether labelled as right or wrong by society—as they have right to live aligned with their own beliefs, not society’s expectations. Mostly, the misleading values in socio-cultural consensus tied women into a second-class citizen and it makes women encountered in subordination, marginalization and criminalization in society (Khairullah, 2022). Thus, women don’t have freedom to choose anything in their life. Through those words in her song lyrics, Miley appeared to acknowledge that women have the autonomy in choosing certain actions regarding their life choices. Therefore, the examples above demonstrated the denotation meaning that Miley’s realized women’s values and autonomy.

3.2 Connotation

Connotation is a secondary level of meaning, the signifier and signified brought into the broader signifier (in Muhlisin & Syamsurrijal & Arniati, F., 2024). Barthes (1977) said that a connoted message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it...Connotation is not necessarily immediately graspable at the level of the message itself (it is, one could say, at once invisible and active, clear and implicit) but it can already be inferred from certain phenomena which occur at the levels of the production and reception of the message. Moreover, Barthes (1957) described that it was metalanguage in which one speaks about the first system (denotation)—to know the meaning of connotation the comprehension of the terms and global signs is important to be understood only in the degree that the terms grant the meaning to myth.

Through the denotative meaning discussed above, it can be seen that Miley not only conveyed her understanding of women’s values and autonomy, but also expressed a connotative meaning. Miley wanted to acknowledge and encourage both women and people to recognize and respect women’s value and autonomy. In other words, Miley encouraged both women and people to respect women for being themselves. In line with the value of gender equality, both women and people should not underestimate women. Additionally, in the term of autonomy women should have freedom to decide what they think, what they do and what they wear. People and women itself should recognize women as individuals with equal right, not as a subordinate group forced to follow harmful and biased societal rules as women have the same right as men in society. So that, due to defend women issued from a subordinate class in society, all society levels should have gender awareness and sensitivity, and society consensus—values, norms and laws must not be gender biased (Khairullah, 2022).

3.3 Myth

Barthes (1957) said that myth is not same like any language which used due to a special condition. Myth is a communication system that created to deliver a message. So, myth is a signification mode. Barthes (1957) said that myth is related to readers who consume the text—how people understand things based on their cultures. Myth has double function namely to point out and notify and it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us. Moreover, a myth is revealing the dominant value in a given period which reflects cultural phenomena happened in that time (Barthes, 1957).

From the connotation meaning above which Miley wanted people to respect women for being themselves and women have freedom to determine all aspects of their lives, led us to the signification of the myth namely women have equal opportunities in society and women have freedom to express themselves. Those myths reflected the phenomenon happened to women in society today. Gender inequality is still faced by women which exist in all levels of society and country...Sweden has been recognized for its commitment to gender equality, still has a pervasive discrimination against women through the senior assignment in business field... so to break the barriers the recognition for women's potential in leadership positions are needed to provide the developmental system for women (Masood, R., 2023). Besides, the presence of socio-cultural norms and practices centered on male power grants men privileges, thereby creating an environment conducive to the exploitation of women; this perpetuates the domination of women, resulting in an ongoing state of inequality between men and women, which manifests in instances of violence against women... in order to establish safe systems and practices that provide women with an equal position and reduce the risk of violence, changes are necessary at both the individual and societal levels (Dahal, Pranab & Joshi, Sunil Kumar & Swahnberg, Katarina, 2022). Therefore, the myths of the lyrics above offered a reflection on the challenges currently experienced by women today.

3.4 Postfeminism

3.4.1 Individualism

Individualism was found to be the most prevalent postfeminism aspect in the myths of Miley's song entitled '*Flowers*'. The 7 myths found namely women have equal opportunities in society as women can do anything that men do, women have freedom to express themselves, women have the ability to find happiness for themselves—independent of societal expectations, women's happiness does not depend on men, women are able to take care and fulfil their own happiness better than when they are being with men, women have the autonomy to select an appropriate form of revenge that aligns with their individual preferences and may deviate from conventional societal perceptions about revenge, and women have freedom to choose everything in their lives. Through those myths, it offered a compelling insight into Miley's viewpoint on women's issues. Miley's song '*Flowers*' demonstrated that women were able to make independent life decisions without societal approval or the influence of male approval. Miley emphasized self-empowerment and respect for women, asserting that women possessed the same dignity and respect as men. Consequently, women should feel empowered to make decision about their lives without fear of societal constrains. Those reflected postfeminism aspect, individualism which women are responsible to and for themselves; women are encouraged to pursue their individual freedoms at expense of a collective female identity; The problems that young women encountered in achieving their goals were constructed as individual challenges, rather that political problems that are best faced collectively; When they experienced racism, homophobia, or domestic violence, they framed those experiences in exclusively personal terms in a way that turns the idea of the personal-as-political on its head; Third wavers tended to take a first-person, confessional approach to solving problems they encountered, with various individuals pipping up to reveal their frustration with a specific situation and how they resolved it (Foss, A. K., Foss, K. S., Ruggerio, A. A., 2022).

3.4.2 Femininity

The next postfeminism aspect found in the myth of Miley's song entitled '*Flowers*' is femininity. The myth that showed femininity is women have the autonomy to select an appropriate form of revenge that aligns with their individual preferences and may deviate from conventional societal perceptions about revenge. Through the investigation of the song lyrics that related to the myth namely "*Paint my nails cherry red, Match the roses that you left, No remorse, no regret, I forgive every word you said*", we

will understand how Miley overcame the challenges she faced in her personal life. Instead of succumbing to despondency, exasperation or the pursuit of retribution, Miley elected to undergo a process of self-reconstruction, striving to embody a more authentic and refined version of herself. This endeavor was characterized by an embrace of feminine identity as showed by the lyrics *“paint my nails cherry red”* and *“I forgive every word you said”*. These expressions can be interpreted as a manifestation of conventional feminine values in women. Women are depicted to have more forgiveness than men, as women showed having personalities such as agreeableness and empathy and their valuing relationships (Miller in Kaleta, K., Mroz, J., 2021). Besides, painting nails exemplified the culturally situated symbols of femininity that embedded within sociocultural context... that illustrated the society impressed importance of their being well-maintained and convicted as a true feminine (O’Toole, O., 2019). Therefore, the myth above counted into postfeminism aspect—femininity as embraced feminine identity to make women feel great about themselves. In postfeminism, femininity embraced as a response to the negative stereotypes of feminists as shrill, hairy and unfeminine and that no man would ever want them...postfeminism engaged with traditional femininity in various ways—having sexy body; expressing sexual desire and embracing the beauty products, paraphernalia, and rituals of femininity. Those means an ideology of agency, confidence and resistance...those actions were perceived as expressing individuality rather capitulating to beauty imperatives—something done to please women themselves and to make them feel good rather than to attract or please a man. There are shifted the way power operates from external, male gaze to an inner gaze that they themselves controlled (Foss, A. K., Foss, K. S., Ruggerio, A. A., 2022).

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

The objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of postfeminism aspects in Miley Cyrus’ song entitled *‘Flowers’* with using Roland Barthes semiotics theory. After a careful analysis of the song lyrics, 7 myths found namely women have equal opportunities in society as women can do anything that men do, women have freedom to express themselves, women have the ability to find happiness for themselves—-independent of societal expectations, women's happiness does not depend on men, women are able to take care and fulfil their own happiness better than when they are being with men, women have the autonomy to select an appropriate form of revenge that aligns with their individual preferences and may deviate from conventional societal perceptions about revenge, and women have freedom to choose everything in their lives. From those myths, 2 aspects of postfeminism found namely individual and femininity aspects. The individualism aspect is the most prevalent one. Individualism in the song lyrics showed that Miley encouraged women to embrace their identity and affirm their place in society. Women possess the autonomy to make decisions, regarding their preferences, think independently, and remain true to individual principles since women and men hold equal value.

4.2 Suggestion

The results of this research are anticipated to enhance comprehension of postfeminism in a popular song, the future researchers may also got benefits to have deep insight how postfeminism appeared in song lyrics. Besides, this research could be a reference to future researchers who interested to research postfeminism in another data sources such as movie, novel, and social media.

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