

Social Critique in the Lyrics Of P!nk's Music.

What do the songs "Stupid Girls", "Fucking Perfect", "Dear Mr. President", and "What About Us" say about human behavior and modern day struggles?

Category 2

An Extended Essay

English B HL

Group 3

Word Count: 3943

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Introduction

P!nk, the thirty eight year old American musical superstar, born as Alecia Beth Moore has built a strong career promoting songs with meaning. Internationally acclaimed, P!nk's songs reach her audience through humor and human-interest. P!nk's passionate interest in human rights. From P!nk's subtle critiques of social issues to challenging certain authorities, her songs include expression and meaning as products of popular culture in modern western societies. Songs are cultural artifacts that show a picture of popular culture through language symbolic of the times and expressed through this human experience. The symbolic languages of songs have the potential to create meaning for fans. The texts or the language of the lyrics can carry hope but can also linked to protest. Musical expression can entertain but can also invite people to consider many aspects of life. P!nk's is an artist who connects with people in songs that are important. In 1998, she made a global name for herself, in her distinctive persona and her ability to inspire her listeners. ("Wikipedia, the free") P!nk's songs are cultural artifacts showing a platform to challenge things that are happening in her immediate reality. For the purposes of this essay, four of P!nk's songs are examined and analyzed to show how the songs use symbolic language to reflect aspects of the living. In the four songs selected: "Stupid Girls" (2006), "Dear Mr. President" (2006), "Fucking Perfect" (2012), and "What About Us? (2017)" P!nk's voice is heard courageously speaking about some of the things that negatively affect some people. The four songs are texts set within a cultural context and engage in popular culture. The symbolic language of the songs promotes messages that are meant to inspire individuals. In effect, P!nk is an artist who uses her voice to express concerns about many things including gender, hope, struggle and inequality reflected in the songs "Stupid Girls" and "Fucking Perfect", and in "Dear Mr. President" and "What About Us" she voices criticism of authority.

The Language of Critique

In the lyrics of “Stupid Girls (2006)” and “Fucking Perfect (2011)” P!nk’s language highlights and questions the presentation of females and the danger for those celebrities appearing to be compromised as sexual objects. P!nk uses descriptive and repetitive language, creating a story showing women who compromise their integrity for their fame. “Stupid Girls” refers to two celebrities and suggests that they are part of the problem referring to them as: “*Porno paparazzi girls*” made in reference to Jessica Simpson and Lindsay Lohan (Vineyard). In twenty-one verses, “Stupid girls” is repeated twenty-two times implying that their actions are misdirected. In the article, The Telegraph, “*Stupid Girls is a song that railed against the cultural tyranny of making girls feel they have to be waif-thin sex bombs*” and in response to the problem, P!nk uses direct language in meaning:

“There’s a certain thing the world is being fed and my point is there should be a choice.” P!nk said, adding that the song was “brought by several conversation I’ve had with women and girls. Women have fought so long and hard for our rights and equality, and now all out attention is put on being a Size Zero.” (Chapter 5, Split Personality: P!nk).

Additionally, this idea is also found when P!nk uses informal diction and phrases such as “*Porno paparazzi girls*” and “*Will it fuck up my hair?*” to highlight the sexual tension in the industry marketplace that can lead to a path of destruction for young celebrities. P!nk criticizes the type of girl who loses her independence while only concentrating her attention that comes from celebrity status. In a bigger picture, P!nk is referring to a problem of the way that women are shown as objects with unrealistic and unattainable body types, and women as highly sexualized beings. (Kilbourne) In the music video (Wiseman), “Stupid Girls”, is a song the can be read as a critical response to the negative publicity created by some female Hollywood celebrities. P!nk makes this point very clear

to those that understand the celebrity cultural context in the video through strong mimicking of situations that mirror each of the celebrities. Not only does she mimic situations, she uses a form of ridicule and humor to reinforce this point expressing a point of view.

More social intentions are shown in the chosen words in the lyrics of “Stupid Girls”. The lyrics build a story of a situation. P!nk suggests concern for the way women are treated in modern society. This is evidenced in the lines (line 13, Stupid Girls): “*What happened to the dream of a girl president? She's dancing in the video next to 50 Cent*”. P!nk uses the language of mockery to criticize women made to look like sexual toys appearing in many music videos. The lyrics show the difference between the portrayal of women who have power and the portrayal of sexually objectified women. In many music videos, especially hip-hop women are frequently shown wearing very little clothing, often with partial nudity next to fully dressed males. These girls represent the wealth and power of men losing their individuality and their identity. P!nk expresses regret for these types of representations of women because they can greatly increase popularity because current popular culture trends seemingly attract audience through the use of sexual language both verbal and visual. (Exploitation of Women) P!nk stands out as an artist who attempts to convey that women who act this way as do so to strengthen appeal through their superficial appearances, show them as sex symbols, lacking control and lacking intelligence.

Additionally, the song’s intention becomes increasingly clear: “*With their itsy-bitsy doggies and their teeny-weeny tees*” again “Stupid Girls” attempts to ridicule how some celebrities position themselves in order to gain fame. P!nk seems to be saying that women in America need to learn how it feels to be respected by others through their talent and

they should not be singularly focused on their physical appearance. However, in the lines *“The disease is growing; it’s epidemic. I’m scared that there ain’t cure. The world believes it, and I’m going crazy. I cannot take any more”* indicates that P!nk feels the frustrations and the difficulty in trying to actively change an age old tradition of sexual inequality as highlighted in the research of Jean Kilbourne in the documentary, *“Killing Us Softly”*. (Kilbourne). Furthermore, in “Stupid Girls” the lyrics: *“Maybe if I act like that. That guy will call me back. Porno paparazzi girls. I don’t wanna be a stupid girls”* implies that P!nk recognizes the perceived power that females seek. P!nk also implies that she does not behave in this way and that she has found a way to use her passion and ambition to make a name for herself by holding control over how she presents herself rather than losing her integrity. Using direct language and shocking criticism the power and the effect of the symbolic language encourages a closer look at the complex nature of the sexual inequality present in society. P!nk conveys to women that there are other choices.

In the song, “Fucking Perfect”, the focus is not specifically directed towards females, but targets a wider audience. The song, “Fucking Perfect” contains lyrics that are both motivational and inspirational. P!nk uses intimate references to her own relationships and the anxieties that relationships can bring, in order to connect with similar issues and expresses the painful realities of relationships that cannot easily be expressed in daily life. The lyrics: *“Pretty, pretty, please, don’t you ever, ever feel/ Like you’re less than fucking perfect/ Pretty, pretty please, don’t you ever ever feel like you’re nothing, you’re fucking perfect to me”* giving her fans encouragement in lines that repeat and are intended to create a greater sense of self confidence for women damaged by unhealthy comparisons to the high beauty ideals and standards set through celebrity culture. P!nk asks people to truly view themselves through a positive lens. P!nk directs the song to those who have

experienced distress, in the line: *“Filled with so much hatred, such a tired game”* in the perceived imperfections in the way they are, often leading to depressive thoughts and general dissatisfaction with themselves as humans.(P!nk: Fucking) Through her strong verbal expression, P!nk successfully brings a message to her fans guiding them to seek perfection in their own beauty and to love themselves.

The intention of the song “Fucking Perfect” is developed as P!nk uses informal and colloquial language that carries like a conversation indicating that she is aware of the effects of this type of thinking and is willing to act as a vehicle to inspire others. P!nk implies that people should stop critically assessing themselves, and like the nature of the song “Stupid Girls”, the song “Fucking Perfect” maintains the theme of self-esteem, feminism, and looking after one’s mental health. P!nk presents the expression of advice and her personal anecdotes also appear in the song: *“Look, I’m still around”* As shown in the Youtube comments from a fan: *“ Every time I listen to this song, my mind starts saying I’m not good enough and need to be perfect”*. The song “Fucking Perfect” shows P!nk’s eagerness to relieve the audience’s anxiety by naming the issue and telling them “they are perfect” any way. This is seen in the lines: *“Made a wrong turn, once or twice/ Dug my way out, blood and fire/ Bad decisions, that’s alright”* P!nk suggests that it is important to move on after making a mistake challenging a modern notion that suggests any failure is a sign of weakness. In, *“Welcome to my silly life”*, she presents mistakes that she has made providing a personal part of her showing the value in truthful conversations.

More personal testimony comes in the second verse: *“Mistreated, misplaced, misunderstood /Miss, no way it’s all good, it didn’t slow me down/ Mistaken, always second guessing /Underestimated, look, I’m still around”*, implies that P!nk herself has

also been mistreated, misplaced, and misunderstood by many people, yet she is still strong. In the lyrics: *“You’re so mean when you talk/ About yourself, you are wrong/ Change the voice in your head/ Make them like you instead”* P!nk speaks to her audience asking them to treat themselves gently, but also to allow the inner judgment to be influenced by P!nk who sets herself as a model of someone who has experienced hardship and has found a way to have control over her life.

Furthermore in the lines: *“So complicated, look how big you’ll make it/ Filled with so much hatred, such a tired game”* P!nk conveys an idea that life as a celebrity is not as romantic as it looks. Finally, P!nk’s internal dialogue is seen in the lyrics: *“Done looking for the critics ‘cause they’re everywhere/ They don’t like my jeans, they don’t get my hair/ Change ourselves and we do it all the time/ Why do we do that?/ Why do I do that?/ Why do I do that?”* where P!nk suddenly changes from a singing voice to a rapping tone, possibly showing an end of the voices of the critics. In other words, P!nk is not going to change herself to fit, but like the song title suggests she will keep with her notion of what she believe is “Fucking Perfect”.

The Language of Politics and Expressions of Hope

In the two songs, “Dear Mr. President (2006)” and “What About Us (2017)” P!nk presents another subject worthy of a lot of attention revealing a story of political criticism. Both songs criticize the actions of former president George W. Bush and current President, Donald Trump. As an American citizen, P!nk can utilize her celebrity platform to repetitively express her reactions through songs and pointing blame at world leaders, past and present. The song, “Dear Mr. President” shows a stronger political side of P!nk’s personality. The song is not like “Stupid Girls” and “Fucking Perfect”, but it maintains P!nk’s power of presenting her ideas in an open letter to the former president embedded in the song. The release of such a single song embraces a high level of freedom of expression, but also frustration towards power and authority. P!nk presents a strong connection to the symbolic meaning. “Dear Mr. President” is a social critique when P!nk rallies her fans to pay attention. The song begins with her soft voice and an invitation: “*Come take a walk with me*” before an abrupt break in the tempo allowing for a dramatic start to her tirade: “*You’re not better than me. Speak honestly*”. P!nk emphasizes in the lyrics her need to speak as an equal and deserving person and citizen in relation to the damaging political agenda the former president promoted. She attempts to dramatize an honest conversation with Bush. It is similar in the conversational tone of the two above-mentioned songs, but the intention is very different.

A sudden shift changes intention in the second verse, P!nk shows an accusatory tone in: “*What do you feel when you see all the homeless on the street? Who do you pray for at night? Before you go to sleep? What do you feel when you look in the mirror?*” P!nk asks tough questions with a steady pace and focus, asking the president how he feels as a human being. Furthermore, the use of guitar chords shift giving the song increased power

in meaning. When P!nk questions, “*Are you proud?*” she uses a form of sarcastic ridicule revealing an angry tone and suggesting blame.

As the song’s tempo increases, and the chorus begins, P!nk’s voice and the guitar get louder as her lyrical content becomes more detailed. With a tone of rage, the song asks: “*How do you sleep while the rest of us cry? / How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye?*” whereby P!nk makes a historical reference to the soldiers who made sacrifices for their country in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. (WordPress/“Musical Analysis”) P!nk attempts to speak on behalf of the soldiers and their loved ones. Using a rhetorical question: “*How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye?*” P!nk addresses President Bush and his responsibility to protect and help the bereaved families. This release in 2006 was timely in the controversy surrounding Bush’s willingness to send American soldiers to foreign lands to fight senseless wars. Therefore, P!nk asks “*Can you even look me in the eye? And tell me why?*” forcing the attention on President Bush and also blaming him for his neglect.

Finally, the word “hard work” is repeatedly sung at the end of the song:

*Let me tell you about hard work
Minimum wage with a baby on the way
Let me tell you about hard work
Rebuilding your house after the bombs took
them away
Let me tell you about hard work
Building a bed out of a cardboard box
Let me tell you about hard work
Hard work, hard work, you don't know
nothing about Hard work
Hard work, hard work*

The repetition of the lines and the chorus highlights the very difficult situations that some people face while living in the United States and how challenging it is to overcome these hardships. Moreover, P!nk makes a specific reference and criticizes Bush’s idea of an

American dream claiming a contradiction in his actions because he delivered an American nightmare (Engelhardt).

The song, “What About Us (2017)” shows a similar approach to a subject that is connected to a political context with a strong human rights’ focus. P!nk makes reference to individuals who are refused their rights on the grounds of their ethnicity, their nationality and their sexuality. Similar to the song, “Dear Mr. President”, P!nk shows a strong political bias adding critiques in the form of a message to the President of the United States, Donald Trump. The song, “What About Us” is a very timely song in an increasingly conflicted world. It begins with the pronoun “we” introducing the idea of we the people as together and places P!nk in the position to speak for citizens. This is evidenced in the lines: *“We are searchlights, we can see in the dark/ We are rockets, pointed up at the stars/ We are billions of beautiful hearts”* P!nk continues to refer to President Trump in the lines: *“And you sold us down the river too far”*, indicating that President Trump’s early record suggests his actions are flawed when measured against a record of human rights and his childlike and simplistic language. P!nk conveys the underlying assumption of neglect in presenting a series of general questions: *“What about us?/What about all the times you said you had the answers?/ What about us?/ What about all the broken happy ever afters?/ What about us?/ What about all the plans that ended in disaster?/ What about love?/ What about trust?/ What about us?”* P!nk appears to be presenting the idea that President Trump is not fulfilling his promises made to the citizens of the US before his election. P!nk moves from the pronoun of “we” shifting to “us” indicating that she is a citizen and, she is also with a need to express her frustration. Using the word “we” shows that P!nk is referring to the minorities, whose rights are being threatened by President Trump administration’s policies. The release date and a voiceover segment in the beginning reinforce the idea that the song is about President

Trump. In the second verse: *"We are problems that want to be solved/ We are children that need to be loved/ We were willin', we came when you called/ But man, you fooled us, enough is enough, oh"* P!nk is suggesting that there is hypocrisy in a country that promotes freedom for all citizens and yet there are many contradictions. P!nk challenges the political actions revealing a rebellious spirit through the lyrics: *"It's the start of us, waking up come on/ Are you ready? I'll be ready/ I don't want control, I want to let go/ Are you ready? I'll be ready/ 'Cause now it's time to let them know/ We are ready, what about us?"* Through these lyrics, P!nk promotes a line of civil disobedience towards President Trump, possibly encouraging citizens to unite and challenge government policy.

Cultural Artifacts with Universal Appeal

P!nk songs presents meaning in symbolic language and appeal to humans. The songs “Stupid Girls”, “Fucking Perfect”, “Dear Mr. President”, and “What about Us” show that words and language create texts that can construct specific meaning and there is power that comes with the authority of a celebrity voice. P!nk has a distinctive voice not only in the tonal talent but also in her courage to highlight subjects and critique issues for a wide fan base. In her use of directed comments, her casual language and the way the words are crafted, P!nk provides songs tell cultural stories symbolizing popular culture linking meaning to current day and in a world of political upheaval, the words and actions of celebrities can act as voices of hope for the average person who can access music. The songs, “Stupid Girls”, “Fucking Perfect”, “Dear Mr. President”, and “What about Us” highlight problems that occur all over the world. It is not only women who live on American soil who are exposed to unrealistic beauty standards. There are countless examples of women in current situations all over the world where their worth and identity are defined by traditional standards influenced by how they appear. Even the brilliant world leader, Chancellor Angela Merkel appearance is scrutinized which gives reason to looking at gender (Foreman). From a political perspective, there is also an indication that many citizens of the world suffer from poor leadership of their countries. Issues of discrimination based on ethnicity, language, country of birth, and sexuality are evidenced and documented in daily news broadcasts. This is also evidenced in general, in the human rights reports from individual countries. The stories of the people on this planet are told through formal and documented news releases, but the power of an internationally known superstar to carry a message of both hope and concern through her lyrics and the presentation of her music is also a powerful tool of popular culture that works to encourage action.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, “Stupid Girls” and “Fucking Perfect” are important in showing the relationship of girls and women objectified and controlled by sex crazed music industry. P!nk challenges this positioning and seeks greater empowerment for women. This is not merely an American problem, for example, in Korea; there are many K-pop singers with an average body weight below 45 kilograms desperately attempting to fit into a box showing a skinny body and a pretty face. (allkpop/“Female Body”) As beauty standards in Korea promote thin bodies, there are also many social issues of eating disorders and mental health concerns related to unrealistic expectations. The idea that an American music icon like P!nk can reach a global audience is understandable in the way that P!nk presents issues relevant to Americans, but also has far-reaching power to reach women of other cultures in similar situations.

Similarly the songs “Dear Mr. President” and “What About us” recognize the position of the average citizens of any country against the power of authority (in this case in the leadership of a country). The song is critical in a general sense of politicians all over the world, especially in places where freedom of expression is not as commonly practiced and accepted. It is possible to see P!nk’s songs as powerful cultural artifacts with global appeal suggesting that all humans have the right to question power and authorities as it affects their lives. P!nk uses language to create a vehicle to provide commentary and in doing so, she gives her audience her perspective through social critique. She remains a powerful and positive influence creating meaning in this world.

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