# การเสนอภาพความเป็นหญิงของศิลปินชายในเนื้อเพลงคัดสรรของวงมารูนไฟฟ์
# The Portrayal of Femininity in Male Artist in Maroon 5's Selected Songs

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## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะเฉพาะทางเพศสภาพที่ปรากฏอยู่ในเนื้อเพลงคัดสรรจากศิลปินวง Maroon 5 ซึ่งเป็นวงดนตรีศิลปินชายที่มีอิทธิพลในประวัติศาสตร์ดนตรีร่วมสมัย กรอบแนวคิดของความเป็นหญิงและความเป็นชายจากหลากหลายงานวิจัยเกี่ยวกับเพศสภาพ ถูกนำมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์เนื้อเพลงดังกล่าว โดยผลการวิจัยครั้งนี้แสดงให้เห็นว่าภาวะพึ่งพิงหรือการพึ่งพาคนอื่น อันเป็นลักษณะของความเป็นหญิง ปรากฏอยู่ในบทเพลงที่ถ่ายทอดโดยศิลปินชายอย่างเห็นได้ชัด ผลการวิจัยเรื่องนี้สนับสนุนการหักล้างทัศนคติแบบเหมารวมในเรื่องเพศผ่านเนื้อร้องในบทเพลง โดยผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าการจบความสัมพันธ์ของคู่รัก ซึ่งเป็นประเด็นหลักของเนื้อเพลงวงนี้ นำเสนอให้เห็นว่าฝ่ายชายไม่สามารถจัดการกับอารมณ์ความรู้สึกของตนเองได้และต้องการที่พึ่งพิงทางอารมณ์จากหญิงคนรัก ซึ่งแตกต่างจากภาพลักษณ์โดยทั่วไปของความเป็นชายที่มักจะต้องแสดงความเป็นผู้นำทางอารมณ์

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## Abstract

This research aims to study the gender-specific characteristics present in the lyrics of selected songs by Maroon 5, an influential boy band in contemporary music history. The concepts of femininity and masculinity traits from in the various studies of gender are employed to analyze the chosen song lyrics. The findings of this research suggest that the conventional characteristic associated with femininity, namely dependency, is present in the selected songs, which are prominently delivered by male speakers. This finding advocates the idea of breaking gender stereotypes through song lyrics. The results of the research showed that the band's lyrics, which primarily focus on the breakup of romantic relationships, highlighted the man's struggle to

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manage his own emotions and his reliance on emotional support from his beloved woman. This is different from the stereotypical image of masculinity that often requires displaying emotional leadership.

**Keywords:** Gender, Stereotype, Femininity, Dependency, Maroon 5

## Introduction

Song lyrics often convey a wide range of verbal messages, through which the ideas of individuals and social groups are disseminated within society. As a popular cultural expression, song lyrics reflect and sometimes highlight various social phenomena (Betti, 2023). Stereotypes based on gender are not a new phenomenon in the music industry. Research reveals that gender stereotypes are often reinforced by songs because they are a type of entertainment that is easily accessible (Faupel, A. & Schmutz, V., 2011; Lemos, 2011). Through radio, streaming services, and social media, songs can reach a broad audience and shape their perception and attitude.

When songs consistently portray men and women in traditional roles, they reinforce these gender stereotypes, making them seem natural and unquestionable. These repeated stereotypes in songs can influence listeners' views on the concept of gender roles, affecting how they perceive what is considered "normal" for male and female characteristics or behaviors. As a result, songs have a profound impact on cultural norms and can perpetuate outdated and limiting stereotypes if not critically examined and challenged.

According to Julia T. Wood (1994: 32), male often portrayed in various media as extremely masculine such as tough, independent, aggressive, dominant, unafraid, sexually aggressive, violent, and totally in control of all emotions. Csernik (2023: 3) stated that music videos and lyrics often showcase males in powerful positions, such as in rap music that presents men as tough, dominant, aggressive, and in control. Interestingly, male is not depicted as taking care around the house, doing household chores or nurturing children. On the contrary, the depiction of women is often portrayed as passive, soft, dependent, lacking confident, ornamental objects (Wood, 1994: 33). Gow (1996) indicated that despite a potential increase in MTV executives' awareness of gender issues at the start of the new decade, the popular music videos still exhibited a lack of representation of women and depicted them in a way that prioritized physical appearance over musical talent. All these perpetuate the negative stereotypes of both masculinity and femininity-subservience.

Though the subversion of gender stereotype has been a common theme of analysis in pop music, most researches focus on the works of female artists, such as the songs by Katy Perry and Janelle Monae. For instance, Lisara (2014: 67) analyzed the song lyrics from some of Katy Perry's songs utilizing gender studies and post feminism as

theoretical frameworks. The result showed that some song lyrics portray women differently from normative stereotypes. As women are traditionally depicted as being passive than men; contrastingly, in some of Katy Perry song lyrics, women are dedicated to empowering themselves by taking initiative and cultivating strong self-confidence. Moreover, Dworsky (2019: 29) studied how Janelle Monae engaged with the idea of femininity throughout her music videos and lyrics. In the analysis of lyrics, Dworsky found that some song lyrics indicate the unwillingness of being depicted as being subservient and weak, which belong to the traditional feminine traits. Dworsky further concluded that Janelle Monae has shown her commitment and investigation of gender, feminism, and female anger through her song lyrics and the music videos of Dirty Computer. Every music video embodies the concepts of gender equality, acceptance of sexual choices and fluidity, political statements, self-love and acceptance, and the struggle for racial equality (p.34).

Analyzing Maroon 5's songs from 2007s to 2020s has a significant impact on challenging gender stereotypes, particularly because the band has maintained substantial popularity since their debut album, *Song About Jane*, in 2002. As a widely recognized and influential group in the music industry, their portrayal of male speakers with traditionally feminine traits can subvert conventional gender norms. Therefore, this research will analyze the selected song lyrics of Maroon' 5 using the concepts of femininity and masculinity traits from in the various studies of gender. The purpose of this research is to analyze the portrayal of femininity in the selected lyrics of Maroon 5's songs. This analysis highlights how the band's music can play a crucial role in redefining masculinity and contributing to the deconstruction of gender stereotypes within society.

## Purpose of the Study

To study the portrayal of feminine trait presented in the five selected songs of Maroon 5.

## Theoretical Frameworks

### 1. Gender Stereotype

Gender differs from sex. While sex is a biological classification primarily determined by reproductive capacity, gender is the social construction (Eckert, Penelope and McConnell-Ginet, 2013, p.2). As Simond de Beauvoir claimed that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (1973, p.301), her statement made a distinct separation of the physical sex from gender. Gender is a specific trait that sets individuals apart based on their social interactions ฝwith others. Lorber (1994) explained that the process of gender formation starts with assigning a sex category based on the appearance of genitalia at birth. Then, the classification of sex is transformed into a social position of gender through the processes of naming, attire, and the utilization of gender indicators (p.55).

Brannon (1996) explained that a gender stereotype encompasses the views on the psychological attributes, qualities, and

suitable activities for men and women (p.160). According to gender stereotype theory, males are typically seen as more masculine than women, while women are typically seen as more feminine than men (Kachel.et.al, 2016). Brannon (1996) addressed that gender stereotypes exhibit significant influence, shaping perceptions of women and men and establishing societal classifications based on gender. These categories reflect individuals' perceptions, and even if these perceptions differ from reality, they can nevertheless exert significant influence on how people evaluate themselves and others (p.160).

The concept of gender roles arises from the interaction between individuals and their surroundings, providing individuals with manifestations of typical behavior based on their sex to be considered as masculine or feminine. (Brannon, 1996, p.160; Blackstone, 2003, p.335). Gender roles are the expected behaviors and responsibilities assigned to men and women based on their sex. Traditionally, many Western societies have held the belief that women are more nurturing than men. As a result, the conventional view of the feminine gender role dictates that women should act in nurturing ways. On the contrary, traditional views of gender roles assume that men are natural leaders. Therefore, the traditional masculine gender role implies that men should lead their households by being the primary financial providers and making key family decisions. (Blackstone, 2003, p. 337). Gender roles and gender stereotype concepts are connected. When individuals attribute a

consistent pattern of conduct to either females or males, they may fail to consider individual deviations and differences, leading them to conclude that the behavior is inherently linked to one gender but not the other. Hence, gender roles provide the basis for gender stereotypes (Brannon, 1996, p.160).

## 2. Feminine and Masculine Traits

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stated that "masculinity" is not a static concept inherent in the physical or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities refer to patterns of behavior that are carried out through social interactions and might vary depending on the gender dynamics within a certain social context (p.836).

Following by Hearn et al. (2023), masculinities are the established and organized patterns of gender behavior that are relational, physical, ever-changing, disputed, and include interaction between individuals. They are also performed and have a significant impact on society. Also, masculinities are shaped in response to cultural norms and expectations of men and males within the framework of gender hierarchies. (p.194) Importantly, Hearn et al. (2023) also supported the idea of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) that masculinity is not fixed but men, women, and individuals of other genders can actively demonstrate and maintain different forms of masculinity. These forms of masculinity encompass various indications, discussions, actions, and presentations that may conceal conflicting ideas (p.194).

Masculinity is characterized by a wide range of characteristics. The masculine

traits include characteristics such as being forceful, independent, self-reliant, and having a tendency to take risks. Studies have shown a direct relationship between the characteristic of masculinity and mental well-being (Bassoff & Glass, 1982) and self-esteem (Whitley, 1983). Further, according to Bem (1974), there are some traits shown in the measurement scales for masculinity-femininity (M-F), specific items were categorized as 'masculine' (e.g., 'aggressive', 'ambitious', 'analytical', 'assertive', and 'athletic') in contrast to other items categorized as 'feminine' (e.g., 'affectionate', 'cheerful', 'childlike', 'compassionate', and 'flatterable') (p.156). As well, traditional masculinity is commonly associated with negative and socially undesirable traits and behaviors that align with idealized masculine norms in society. It is characterized by instrumental personality traits like aggression, self-assertion, social dominance, and a lack of empathy towards others (Courtenay, 2000; Kupers, 2005; Maccoby, 1998; Parent, 2019, as cited in Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021).

Apart from masculinity, the concept of femininity encompasses a wide range of traits and behaviors that are often associated with women. Femininity often includes nurturing, empathy, sensitivity, and non-aggressive communication (Windsor, 2015; Lemon, 2016). When critically analyzing femininity, it is frequently connected to the realm of personal life and tied to roles that involve nurturing and care. The maintenance of the home, the upbringing of children, and various other forms of emotional labor are frequently at the core

of these expectations (Lemon, 2016).

Since the primary emphasis of this research will be on dependency, qualities and behaviors of dependency will be further upon by various scholars in the following manner.

Dependence is associated with female and considered a major part of femininity (Lerner, 1984, p. 125). Dependence is considered as the claim that women require male protection and assistance may appear innocent. In fact, certain women may appreciate the practical assistance and courtesy that these attitudes foster and maintain. In past centuries, the social structure deprived women of power. Although they were able to work, society rarely provided them with positions that would allow them to earn as much as a male. Consequently, women were dependent on the income of their husbands to ensure their survival. In the present day, any individual who is dependent or reliant on others may be portrayed as feminine. They are perceived as vulnerable and require a strong individual to assist them in their survival. This causes them to be the submissive individual in a dominant-submissive relationship (Drew, 2023).

Apart from Drew's perspective towards dependency of women, there are more aspects about the dependency of women as one of the gendered stereotypes as well. Female dependency on interpersonal interactions is a gender stereotype that has been reinforced and fulfilled. From a young age, girls are taught to be submissive, obedient, and deeply committed to building and maintaining social connections (Kirsh & Kuiper,

2002, as cited in Hurt, 2008, p.3). Additionally, Nugent & Jones (2005, as cited in Hurt, 2008, p.3) claimed that women have been culturally influenced to establish connections with others, yet the culture undervalues women's preferences towards relational connectivity and instead prioritizes conventional male charac- teristics such as independence and autonomy.

Importantly, there are some existing studies regarding the dependency trait of women presented in the various studies of song lyrics by two notable female artists; Britney Spears and Katy Perry. First, Niiranen (2008) presented the woman's dependence from Britney Spears's song lyrics. In "Baby One More Time", as the lyrics says, "Oh baby baby, the reason I breathe is you", this line illustrates Spears' acceptance that her partner is the sole basis for her continued existence. This statement may be interpreted as a figurative expression of affection, but it also implies that women are portrayed as the inferior gender, dependent on the existence of men (p.56). Importantly, this demonstration of women's dependency on men is supported by the idea of Bretthauer et al. (2007), who suggested that many women tend to sing about not being able to live without men (p.40). Moreover, Lisara (2014) also uncovered gendered messages in Katy Perry's chosen song lyrics. The results indicated that 80% of the song lyrics by Katy Perry from *One of the Boys* album that were examined include negative gendered themes, which reinforce women's reliance on and need for men. Likewise, most song lyrics of Katy Perry convey gendered themes that express

a sense of diminished self-worth and acknowledge a certain reliance on men (p.66 – 67). To conclude, the lyrics of the songs from various female artists continue to contain references to the existence of women's dependence.

## Methodology

This research begins with a compre- hensive review of essential concepts and relevant theories on gender stereotypes, specifically those relating to feminine and masculine traits associated with men and women. Later, the researcher selects five Maroon 5 songs that ranked on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart spanning 2007 to 2020, presenting traits of male dependency. Then the researcher employs a detailed textual analysis of selected Maroon 5 songs to address the central research questions. Finally, following the analysis of all findings, the researcher presents the outcomes and draws conclusions that contribute to the broader understanding of gender portrayal in Maroon 5's songs.

## Result and Findings

### 1. Male Dependency

Traditionally, emphasizing self- reliance and independence is a commonly upheld masculine trait (Connell & Messer- schmidt, 2005). Autonomy has widely been examined in men and masculinities scholarship as an idealized trait of masculinity and a pursuit of men, bound up with the idea of hegemonic masculinity that generates, justifies,

and maintains gender disparities (Connell, 1987). However, from the analysis, it is obtained that there are some songs that contain the concept of being dependent, which is one of the female traits of femininity as will be illustrated in the following section.

The first song to be introduced in this category is "Won't Go Home Without You". This is the third single from Maroon 5's second studio album *It Won't Be Soon Before Long*. In 2022, Billboard ranked this as the tenth best Maroon 5 songs of all time. Moreover, this song continues to be one of the group's most powerful and enduring ballads, evoking deep emotions (O'Brien, 2022). This song primarily focuses on the turning point of ending a romantic relationship. The girl terminated the relationship with the boy, while the boy is attempting to refute the fact that their connection has ceased to exist. He is contemplating the actions he could have taken to save this failed relationship. In addition to its fame, this song contains phrases and important lines that exemplify the characteristics associated with feminine stereotypes, as seen below.

The trait of dependency is prominently woven throughout the lyrics, as the male speaker expresses a deep emotional reliance on the presence and approval of their ex-girlfriend. In the first line of the lyric, the man sings, "I asked her to say, but she wouldn't listen". This line indicates that the male speaker is in a vulnerable state where he cannot be alone that is why he "asked" her to stay even though their relationship has already ended. Since this song is about the aftermath of the broken

relationship, it subverts the normal expectation that males are usually the one who can move forward and become independent. However, this line shows the speaker's desire for the other person to remain with him, indicating a dependency on her company and support.

Furthermore, in the chorus, the line that says "I may not make it through the night, I won't go home without you" says that the male speaker's existence is dependent on his girlfriend, as he asserts that he may not endure this evening in the absence of her presence. Therefore, this exaggeration indicates that the presence of her is essential to his well-being. These lines also reflect the fear of loneliness and the need to avoid being alone. Additionally, the repeated plea in the chorus, where he asks his ex-girlfriend to be with him, further emphasizes the degree of dependency, as these lines indicate the speaker's refusal to accept being alone.

Likewise, "Payphone" is another song that shows the dependency traits in its lyrics. "Payphone" tells the story of a man reflecting on a past relationship that ended in heartbreak. The male speaker is depicted on a payphone, trying to call his ex-girlfriend. The lyrics reflect his frustration and regret over the lost love, as well as his struggle to move on. In addition, this song made its debut on the Billboard Hot 100 at the third position, eventually reaching its highest position at number two. "Payphone" does not provide a gratifying listening experience. However, the song set a new record for the highest number of digital downloads in its first week and appears to be

an unavoidable hit for the summer (Powers, 2012).

The first line of the lyrics says "I'm at a payphone, trying to call home, All of my change I spent on you". The imagery of the payphone symbolizes his attempt to reach out and reconnect with his ex-girlfriend, indicating his inability to move on. The attempt to call "home" with all the money that he spent to make the call highlights his relentless effort to salvage what remains of their connection. This act of trying to contact his ex-girlfriend, despite knowing the outcome, underscores the emotional dependency of the male speaker.

The metaphor "You turned out the lights" suggests the abrupt end of the relationship which brings the speaker into darkness and uncertainty. This imagery evokes a sense of loss, as if his world has been dimmed by the breakup. The next line "Now, I'm paralyzed "metaphorically expresses the speaker's emotional stagnation. The word "paralyzed" means that he is unable to move forward as he is trapped by his past feelings. "Still stuck in that time, When we called it love" furthers this notion, indicating that he is emotionally frozen in the past, unable to let go of the moments when the relationship was thriving. This symbolizes his deep emotional attachment and inability to accept the present reality.

"Sugar" is the next song to be analyzed, showcasing the trait of dependency. "Sugar" is one of Maroon 5's most popular compositions, having been released as the third single from the album *V* in 2014. This single reached the second position on the US

Billboard Hot 100. Its release date was August 29, 2014. It achieved sales of 164,000 units within the initial week (Miller, 2015). "Sugar" is a story about a man who is profoundly yearning for the physical presence of his partner. The lyric compares the woman's love to sugar and the man expresses a deep craving for her love and attention. Currently, he is separated from her, and he is so yearning for the intimacy that he is imploring her to return to him.

In "Sugar" the dependance trait is evident through the lyrics that express a desperate need for the woman's love and presence. In the first few lines of the song, the man says, "I'm hurting, baby, I'm broken down, I need your loving, loving, I need it now." The repetition of "I need" emphasizes the speaker's dependency on his partner's love and affection. This neediness and urgency from the word "now" can be viewed as a dependent trait, as the speaker is expressing a strong reliance on someone else for emotional support. Then, the man says, "When I'm without you, I'm something weak., You got me begging, begging, I'm on my knees." In these lines, the male speaker admits his own weakness due to the loss of his partner. This admission of weakness contrasts with traditional notions of male strength and independence, highlighting a more dependent side of the male speaker.

These highlighted lyrics simply address that the presence of this woman is important and necessary in his life, and that he is willing to do whatever it takes to get her back, for example begging on his knee. This

suggests that the man depends on the woman for strength and comfort. Furthermore, the action of begging can infer the man's sense of inferiority and the act of accepting the superior status of the woman. To illustrate, from the very beginning of this song, these first four lines present the way men are dependent, which is traditionally not the male stereotype, without women as they are metaphorically broken down into pieces. Also, they admit that they are something weak when they are not with women whom they love. They would do everything, even begging their knees just to be with women.

Along with a few lines from the second verse, there are dependence's traits found in this song as well. Those lines are; "When I'm without you, I'm so insecure" and "You are the one thing, one thing I'm living for". In "When I'm without you, I'm so insecure", it can be inferred that men, who are too dependent, feel unsafe and insecure when they are alone without women. Furthermore, this can be giving the sense of accepting their weakness as they mention their insecurity as being with women might potentially be one of the aspects that makes them feel comfortable and secure. Meanwhile, "You are the one thing, one thing I'm living for" symbolizes the fact that men are overly reliant on women since they assert that women are the most important thing in their lives and that this is the only thing they are motivated to do in their lives.

The fourth song, "Nobody's Love" was released on July 24, 2020, in the album *Jordi.* Also, it peaked at number 41 on the Billboard Hot 100. "Nobody's Love" conveys a longing for peace, companionship, and stability during difficult times; suggesting that this love can provide strength and comfort, especially in challenging circumstances.

Apart from its lyrics' underlying messages, this song strongly conveys a sense of dependency by male speaker. The line, "You're the only hand in my back pocket, If you ever left, I'd go psychotic," illustrates the significant role of a woman in the man's life, as he perceives her as his sole support. Here, "back pocket" serves as an idiomatic expression suggesting something readily available for support in times of need. More critically, the phrase "If you ever left, I'd go psychotic" underscores the intensity of his reliance, with "psychotic" indicating a potential for emotional instability. This line, therefore, emphasizes the man's profound emotional and psychological dependence on the woman, implying that her departure would lead him to a state of desperation and instability.

Additionally, the line "Baby, you're the key to my heart locket. If you ever left, never unlock it" illustrates how the man views his beloved as essential to his emotional well-being. He considers her the key to unlocking his heart, symbolized by the "locket," which traditionally holds treasured items. Metaphorically, without the woman as the key, he feels he could never love someone again. Finally, the plea to "never unlock" the locket reflects his excessive attachment, suggesting he would close himself off from love. The selected lines

from this song imply that the speaker's happiness and emotional security are dependent on their partner's continued affection and presence, thereby intensifying the trait of dependency.

Finally, "One More Night" is the last song to be analyzed. This hit was released in 2012 from the fourth album *Overexposed* reached the nine consecutive weeks in Billboard Hot 100 Chart. The lyrics primarily explore the internal conflict of desiring to leave a challenging relationship while feeling too emotionally attached to walk away. The song's narrator depicts a relationship characterized by tension and dissatisfaction, where both partners appear to amplify each other's negative traits. Addressing the trait of dependence, the line "Trying to tell you 'no,' but my body keeps on telling you 'yes'" illustrates the man's dependence on the woman despite the unhealthy nature of their relationship. While he tries to reject his need for her, he ultimately cannot resist, revealing his underlying reliance on her presence.

Furthermore, the lines "So I cross my heart and I hope to die that I'll only stay with you one more night" and "And I know, I said it a million times" highlight the man's dependence on the woman. Despite the toxicity of their relationship, they continue to reunite. Notably, the phrase "a million times" suggests that his return to her is not an isolated incident but a recurring pattern, reinforcing his awareness of their repeated cycle. These lines underscore his emotional reliance on her, even amid challenges.

## Conclusion

Maroon 5's portrayal of emotional dependence through male speakers in the selected songs aligns with traits conventionally seen as feminine, offering a distinct perspective on gender roles. Even though these songs do not showcase the physical dependence which is one of the major stereotypes associated with men, the male speaker in these songs portray emotional vulnerability, as they revolve around stories of broken relationships. Traditionally, media often portrays men as resilient or indifferent after a breakup, while women are shown as heartbroken and in need of emotional support. However, in Maroon 5's five selected songs, male characters display deep emotional struggle, yearning for what they've lost. This depiction contrasts with typical masculine portrayals, challenging gender stereotypes by suggesting that emotional vulnerability and dependence are not exclusive to one gender.

Through these portrayals, Maroon 5 songs could subtly deconstruct gender norms and encourage listeners to reconsider rigid cultural assumptions about emotional resilience. The band's influence, particularly as these songs have topped charts, may encourage societal shifts in viewing emotional dependency as a shared human experience. This analysis supports the view that gender traits are fluid, not fixed, allowing for a reinterpretation of traditionally gendered traits across contexts. Maroon 5's reinterpretation of these stereotypes through male perspectives offers a broader reflection on evolving societal views surrounding gender roles.

## Recommendation

As this research focused mainly on the feminine traits found in the song lyrics of Maroon 5, it is believed that there are further feminine characteristics present in the song lyrics of this band that have yet to be examined. Moreover, given the limited number of songs analyzed in this research, future research should consider expanding the scope by incorporating a larger sample of songs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, the researchers may research the song lyrics from other notable male artists whether there are any women presentations potentially shown in those song lyrics or not

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