Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Ava Max’s Song “Not Your Barbie Girl”

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<td>This study analyzes Ava Max’s &quot;Not Your Barbie Girl&quot; using a feminist stylistic analysis approach with Sara Mills’ Theory, focusing on its message of women's liberation and rejection of gender stereotypes. The qualitative research focuses on song lyrics and language use, identifying how the song describes women and challenges existing gender constructions. The results suggest that the song adopts a strong feminist perspective, emphasizing self-empowerment, resilience, and rejecting societal constraints. The song disrupts dominant narratives surrounding femininity, positioning women as active agents in their lives. The combination of empowering lyrics and energetic music encourages listeners to embrace their strength and challenge oppressive systems. This study contributes to understanding feminism's expression through popular culture, particularly in music.</td>
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1. Introduction

Justice and gender equality are two topics that are addressed by feminism, a multidisciplinary approach. One way to characterize it is as a movement spearheaded by women who aim to question patriarchal norms and promote gender equality. Feminism basically says that there should be equal opportunities and rights for both genders. It aims to empower all women to fully exercise their rights while acknowledging the diversity of experiences, identities, skills, and strengths of women. In the context of stylistics, in particular, gender issues are especially fascinating to investigate within the field of linguistics, where they are often discussed in daily life.

The study of language styles as they are employed in literature is known as stylistics. The author's decisions impact the distinctive style of each literary work, and stylistics offers readers and scholars a framework for comprehending and evaluating the work. Stylistics is the study of the various ways language is used, frequently concentrating on the careful and complex ways language is used in writing (Turner, 1973:7). Feminist stylistics is a subfield of stylistics that examines the relationship between gender and language styles, specifically in relation to gender and social positions. The objective of this stylistic approach is to investigate how literature reflects or fails to reflect a distinct female consciousness. In this process, literary art is primarily seen as a means of highlighting female experiences and challenging male stereotypes of women. Feminist stylists aim to give women a voice and make their experiences relevant.

Sara Mills was the one who first used the term "feminist stylistics" in 1995. It is a theoretical framework that investigates how language and gender interact in texts that are literary as well as nonliterary. It offers methods for exposing gender prejudices and presents an overtly feminist analytical approach that uses linguistic techniques to find hidden agendas in different texts. Mills (1995) asserts that it is crucial to approach texts cautiously because language in written works is more than just a means of expressing ideas; it is a potent force that can shape ideas on its own. According to Mills (1995), texts should be examined at the discourse level, making the connection between specific words and phrases and larger ideologies (Mills, 1995: 123). According to her, gender has a significant impact on discourse and is embodied by gender ideologies in many literary characters. She argues that while writing characters, authors use language that is influenced by gender stereotypes.

In this study, the researchers use the song Ava Max's "Not Your Barbie Girl" as a data in analyzing feminist stylistics with the theory of Sara Mills. This song was released as a single on her album in 2018. Ava Max is an American Pop Singer and also songwriter. Ava Max's "Not
Your Barbie Girl" is a song about women's empowerment. The song acknowledges the difficulties that women endure in their lives and applauds those who battle alone. A lot of Ava Max's songs encourage women to be self-confident and genuine to themselves.

“A Feminist Stylistics Analysis in Rupi Kaur’s The Sun and Her Flowers” conducted by Saskia Febiola Siregar, Eddy Setia, Siamir Marulafau (2020). This study examines the portrayal of women and men in texts, utilizing feminist stylistics. It analyzes linguistic structures and their societal impact through stylistic analysis, as well as the roles of women and the representation of ideas and events in the text. The research employs a qualitative method and focuses on gender-specific aspects in the novel.

Rizwana Sarwar, Saadia Fatima (2022) conducted a research article titled "Madeline Miller's Circe: A Feminist Stylistic Approach" where they examined the portrayal of female characters in literature. They focused on Madeline Miller's reinterpretation of Greek mythology through the perspective of her female protagonists. Typically, the depiction of women in literature relies on predetermined language influenced by a sexist ideology dominated by male viewpoints. However, Miller challenges these traditional stereotypes by transforming the negative portrayal of Circe into a positive and empowered character in her retelling. The study analyzes Circe's character through discourse analysis with the aim of presenting her as a positive and empowered figure.

Another relevant work is "Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber: A Feminist Stylistic Approach," conducted by Seda ARIKAN in 2016. This research delves into the analysis of "genderlect" and "gendered" styles within Angela Carter's work, The Bloody Chamber. Carter uncovers hidden meanings within traditional fairy tales through her collection of rewritten stories. The article specifically examines three stories narrated by female protagonists, analyzing the lexico-semantic elements in their narration. It also scrutinizes Carter's writing style, which represents écriture féminine, through the lens of feminist stylistics.

These studies demonstrate how feminist stylistic analysis has been utilized to explore various elements within texts, with a specific focus on feminist perspectives and concerns. In this current work, the researcher aims to conduct a feminist stylistic analysis of Ava Max's song "Not Your Barbie Girl" using Sara Mills' model (1995). Unlike previous studies, which primarily analyzed traditional literary works, this study focuses about feminist representation on a modern song.

2. Method

The research approach used in this research is qualitative. Creswell defines the approach qualitative as a process inquiry to understand social problems or problem humans based on creation of a holistic image
formed with words, reporting the informant's views in detail, and arranged in a scientific setting. (Samsu, 2017, page 86). This research was conducted using qualitative descriptive methods because the data results are analyzed in the form of phenomena descriptive such as words, sentences, and Language. Descriptive analysis is analysis carried out on phenomena that occurred at that time now (Samsu, 2017, page 111).

The research object used is the title of the song "Not Your Barbie Girl" by Ava Max's. Before analyzing Ava Max's songs, first collect data. This data can be found on Spotify, YouTube, Google, and many others.

3. Results And Discussion

Sara Mills' feminist theory in stylistics focuses on examining literary and linguistic styles through a feminist perspective. She highlights how language, style, and discourse contribute to the reinforcement or subversion of gender norms and power dynamics. Sara Mills applies feminist principles to the study of stylistics, a field that explores how linguistic and literary choices convey meaning and aesthetics. In feminist stylistics, she investigates how linguistic features like vocabulary, syntax, and discourse structures are employed to represent and construct gendered identities and experiences in literary texts. Mills examines how literary styles may uphold or challenge gender stereotypes and societal expectations. She pays attention to how authors use language to depict characters, relationships, and power dynamics, ultimately revealing the underlying gendered ideologies present in texts. By analyzing the linguistic and stylistic elements of literary works, Mills contributes to a deeper understanding of how language can either reinforce or challenge gender hierarchies and promote a more equitable representation of gender in literature. In our analysis, we will follow Mills' suggested three levels: word-level analysis, phrase/sentence-level analysis, and discourse-level analysis, all in relation to gender issues.

a. Context, Gender and Writing

Ava Max, born Amanda Ava Koci, is an American pop singer and songwriter who was heavily influenced by her parents' musical backgrounds. She relocated to Virginia at the age of eight and began participating in and winning Radio Disney singing competitions at the age of 10. She released songs under her birth name, Amanda Kay, but later adopted the name Ava as her first name due to personal preference. At the age of 22, she chose the stage name Ava Max, with the surname Max representing a blend of masculine and feminine attributes. During this period, she had a distinctive hairstyle that became part of her logo. Ava Max is known for her powerful voice, unique high-fashion perspective, and ability to create cinematic, dramatic pop music with a focus on female empowerment.

The song "Not Your Barbie Girl" was released by Ava Max on August 15, 2018, as a promotional
single through Atlantic Records. Initially, on December 15, 2017, Ava Max shared the song exclusively on SoundCloud as a special gift for her fans. The track includes a sample from the popular song "Barbie Girl" by Aqua. In Aqua’s "Barbie Girl," the lyrics depict a willingness to be controlled by a boy, allowing him to touch and handle her as he pleases, which is why she is referred to as a Barbie. However, in "Not Your Barbie Girl," Ava Max takes a different approach. She asserts that she is not the boy’s Barbie girl and emphasizes that he cannot touch her without her consent or permission.

"Not Your Barbie Girl" by Ava Max is a song that can be analyzed from the perspective of Feminist Stylistics, a framework developed by Sara Mills that examines how language and discourse reflect gender ideologies and power relations. This analysis will explore the lyrics and themes of the song, focusing on how it challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

The song begins with the line "I'm not your Barbie girl," immediately setting the tone for a rejection of the passive, objectified image associated with the Barbie doll. Barbie has long been criticized for promoting unrealistic beauty standards and reinforcing gender stereotypes. By proclaiming that she is not a Barbie girl, Ava Max signifies her refusal to conform to these limiting expectations. Throughout the song, Ava Max asserts her agency and independence, emphasizing that she cannot be controlled or manipulated by others. She sings, "I'm livin' in my own world, I'm livin' in my own world, I'm livin' in my own world, yeah." This repetition highlights her determination to define her own identity and exist outside of societal expectations.

Furthermore, the song rejects the notion of women as passive objects of desire. Ava Max sings, "You can touch, you can play, if you say, I'm always yours," but immediately follows it up with the empowering line, "But I'm sorry, not sorry 'bout what I said." This juxtaposition suggests that while she acknowledges the existence of desire, she retains control over her own choices and refuses to be reduced to a mere object of someone else's desires.

"Not Your Barbie Girl" by Ava Max can be analyzed from a Feminist Stylistics perspective as a song that challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Through its lyrics, the song asserts female agency, rejects the male gaze, and empowers women to define their own identities and resist societal expectations. It serves as both a critique of patriarchal norms and an anthem of self-empowerment for women.

b. Analysis at the Level of the Word
1) "Not your Barbie girl, I'm livin' in my own world"

Ava Max insists that she is not a Barbie doll that can be controlled by others. She lives in her own world, which means she has the autonomy and freedom to make her own decisions. This
reflects the principles of liberal feminism regarding the importance of women's autonomy. This lyric is a sign of rejecting the stereotypical image of a passive, objectified "Barbie" and asserting individuality. The lyrics challenge the concept "Barbie girl" and reject the idea being objectified.

2) "I ain't plastic, call me classic"

Word level on these lyrics is a sign of rejecting the artificial and emphasizing authenticity. The phrase "I ain't plastic" from the lyric as a symbol of rejection being artificially. Ava Max rejects the role of an object or plastic that can be played with and shown off. She emphasized that she was an individual with her own rights and freedoms, not just an object for others to enjoy. This is in line with the view of liberal feminism that women are not objects, but subjects with the same rights and freedoms as men.

Furthermore, by saying "call me classic," Ava Max shows that she appreciates traditional values and deeper qualities in herself. She rejects views that only focus on external appearance and reminds others to see the beauty and uniqueness within him.

3) "You can't touch me there, you can't touch my body"

At the phrase/sentence level, the lyrics assert the speaker's agency and autonomy over her body. By stating, "You can't touch me there, you can't touch my body" the lyrics emphasize the importance of consent and boundaries.

4) "Unless I say so, ain't your Barbie, no"

These lyrics emphasize that women have the right to determine their own identity and values. They do not want to be objects controlled or owned by others. By saying "ain't your Barbie, no," Ava Max makes it clear that she doesn't want to be thought of as someone else's property or be governed by the expectations set by society.

5) "Pull up to that dream house, god gate heels down how much do you like this?"

At the word level, the lyrics make use of images that are linked to domesticity and femininity, like the "dream house" and references to the hallway and bedroom. But the lyrics also question gender norms by implying that the speaker has the authority to give or withhold permission. The lyrics experiment with agency and power relations at the phrase and sentence levels. The phrase "god gate" conveys a sense of power and command over who is allowed entry into the speaker's private area.

6) "How much do you like this?"

It is interpreted as a rhetorical question that challenges other people's views about the extent to which they value and support women in achieving independence and freedom. These lyrics show that women do not need to seek validation or approval from others to justify their life choices. They have the right to pursue their dreams and goals without caring...
about the extent to which others like them.

These lyrics also highlight the importance of appreciating women who have the courage to step outside social norms and pursue their own dreams, as well as changing the view that women should live according to what other people want or like.

7) "Welcome to my bedroom, hallway go down"

It is interpreted as a statement of women's freedom and independence in controlling their own personal space, and rejecting invasion or surveillance from others. These lyrics show that women have the right to determine who is allowed into their personal space, in this case, the bedroom. By saying "hallway go down," Ava Max makes it clear that she is setting boundaries and limiting other people's access to her personal space. These lyrics also highlight the importance of valuing women's autonomy and power to set boundaries in their relationships and interactions with others.

8) “Say he's got permission”

Interpreted as a rejection of the view that women need permission or approval from men or anyone else to live or act according to their own wishes. These lyrics show that women have the right to make their own decisions without having to ask permission or approval from others, especially when it comes to their personal lives and relationships. By saying "Say he's got permission," Ava Max may be criticizing the view that assumes that women must ask permission or get approval from men before they can do something.

These lyrics also highlight the importance of respecting women who can make their own decisions and do not need to depend their lives on approval or permission from others.

9) "I can take myself on a dinner date"

These lyrics emphasize the importance of women's autonomy and independence. This challenges the view that women must always have a partner or depend on someone else to feel complete or happy. These lyrics invite women to enjoy their alone time, appreciate themselves, and show that they have the power to create happiness in their own lives.

10) "Buy myself diamonds and a champagne"

In these lyrics, Ava Max emphasizes that women don't need to wait for someone to give them gifts or luxuries. They have the ability to buy their own diamonds and drink champagne, demonstrating that they have the economic power and autonomy to fulfill their own desires. These lyrics also highlight the importance of valuing women who achieve their own financial success and luxury, as well as changing the view that women can only achieve these things through dependence on others.
11) "Order five courses, then chocolate cake, uh-huh"

Describes women’s freedom to enjoy food and fulfill their own desires without needing to care about the expectations or judgments of other people. These lyrics show that women have the right to enjoy the portions of food they want, including ordering a five-course meal and enjoying chocolate cake. It emphasizes that women have the right to express themselves through food choices and enjoy the dishes they like without fear of judgement. These lyrics show that women do not need to limit or control their diet to meet society’s expectations. They have the freedom to enjoy food and fulfill their own desires without fear of being judged or restricted by social norms. These lyrics also highlight the importance of valuing women who have a healthy relationship with food and their own bodies, as well as changing the view that women must limit or control their eating patterns to meet society’s expectations.

m. “Actin’ like I care, but I don’t, and? (But I don’t care)”

This lyric further emphasizes the previous lyric which said that women are good at pretending (acting). These lyrics show that women don’t need to pretend or pay attention to things they don’t consider important. By saying "Actin’ like I care, but I do not," Ava Max may be expressing indifference or disinterest toward social expectations or norms that require women to pay attention to or prioritize certain things. It is important to appreciate that women have the right to determine what is important for themselves and do not need to pay attention to or live up to expectations that are irrelevant or inconsistent with their values. These lyrics emphasize the importance of women having freedom to determine their own life priorities.

It is important to appreciate that women have the right to live according to their own desires, without having to prioritize seeking a romantic relationship or meeting certain social expectations. These lyrics emphasize the importance of women having autonomy and freedom in determining their own path in life. These lyrics also highlight the importance of appreciating women who have the courage to step outside of social norms that require them to seek romantic relationships to feel complete or happy. Reject passive roles and gender stereotypes associated with women.

l. "Actin’ like I care when I want a man"

Described as a rejection of the expectation that women must constantly seek or depend on men to feel worthy or happy. These lyrics suggest that women don’t need to pretend to care about finding a man or meeting social expectations that require them to seek romantic relationships. By saying "Actin’ like I care," Ava Max may be expressing a disregard for such expectations, emphasizing that women have the freedom to determine their own life priorities.
autonomy and freedom to determine their own interests and priorities in life.

n. "I do my own thing, yeah, watch me dance, uh-huh"

(I do my own thing) in this lyric Ava writes that women can do whatever they want, such as dancing (dancing symbolizes freedom to do anything). In the lyrics, there is the line "I do my own thing, yeah, watch me dance, uh-huh" which means "I do my own thing, yeah, watch me dance, uh-huh". This line depicts an independent and confident attitude, where the singer shows that she is not bound by the expectations or stereotypes that society imposes on women.

c. Analysis at the level of the phrase

Analyzing the lyrics of the song at the level of the phrase/sentence, we can identify metaphors and metonyms that appear in relation to gender issues from a feminist stylistics perspective, using Sara Mills' theory.

a. "Not your Barbie girl, I'm livin' in my own world"

Metaphor: The phrase "Barbie girl" is used metaphorically to represent the stereotypical, objectified image of women. By stating "Not your Barbie girl," the lyrics reject the idea of conforming to societal expectations and assert the speaker's autonomy and individuality.

b. "I ain't plastic, call me classic"

Metaphor: The metaphorical comparison between "plastic" and "classic" challenges the notion of artificiality often associated with femininity. By stating "I ain't plastic," the lyrics reject the idea of being a manufactured, inauthentic representation of femininity and instead assert the speaker's authenticity and timeless value.

c. "Welcome to my bedroom, hallway go down"

Metonymy: The mention of the "bedroom" and the suggestion that the "hallway go down" implies a sense of power and control over one's personal space. By using these metonyms, the lyrics convey the speaker's agency and autonomy within intimate settings.

d. "I can take myself on a dinner date Buy myself diamonds and a champagne Order five courses, then chocolate cake"

Metonymy: The use of the phrase "take myself on a dinner date" and the mention of buying "diamonds and champagne" and ordering "five courses, then chocolate cake" represents self-sufficiency and the ability to provide for oneself. These metonyms challenge the expectation that women need men to fulfill their desires and assert the speaker's independence.
The representation of characters and gender roles is crucial at the discourse level. Sara Mills highlights the artificial nature of characters and gender roles in texts by claiming that they are constructed entities deeply entwined with ideological considerations.

Chorus:
"Not your Barbie girl, I'm livin' in my own world"
"I ain't plastic, call me classic"
"You can't touch me there, you can't touch my body"
"Unless I say so, ain't your Barbie, no"

The chorus serves as the central message of the song, emphasizing the speaker's rejection of the Barbie girl stereotype and asserting their autonomy. It challenges the objectification and control associated with the Barbie image. The use of the phrase "I ain't plastic, call me classic" challenges the notion of artificiality and presents the speaker as authentic and timeless. The lines "You can't touch me there, you can't touch my body" and "Unless I say so, ain't your Barbie, no" assert the speaker's ownership of their body and demand consent and respect. This claim is consistent with feminist principles that aim to confront and destroy gender stereotypes that restrict women's autonomy (hooks, 2000).

Pre-chorus:
"Pull up to that dream house, god gate heels down"
"How much do you like this?"
"Welcome to my bedroom, hallway go down"
"Say he's got permission"

The pre-chorus sets the scene and presents the speaker as the one in control. It conveys a sense of power and confidence, as the speaker enters a dream house and commands attention. This metaphor challenges conventional ideas of passive femininity by conveying a sense of action and power. The line "Say he's got permission" suggests that the speaker has the authority to grant or deny access to their personal space.

Verse:
"I can take myself on a dinner date"
"Buy myself diamonds and a champagne"
"Order five courses, then chocolate cake, uh-huh"
"Actin' like I care when I want a man"
"Actin' like I care, but I don't, and?"
"I do my own thing, yeah, watch me dance, uh-huh"

The verses highlight the speaker's independence and self-sufficiency. They express the ability to treat oneself to experiences traditionally associated with being pursued or provided by a romantic partner. The lyrics challenge the societal expectation that women should prioritize finding a man and assert the speaker's indifference to conforming to those expectations. This supports the notion that valuing and honoring women's agency promotes gender equality as well as a more dynamic and powerful society (hooks, 2000). The lines "I do my own thing, yeah, watch me dance, uh-huh" further emphasize the speaker's autonomy and freedom to express themselves.

Bridge:
"Did you forget I'm real?"
"Oh, I'm breathing, touch me, feel"
"Oh, say I'm your toy to play with, wanna put me in a box"
"You ain't gonna talk to me like that, you better stop"

The bridge confronts the objectification and dehumanization of women. It asserts the speaker's realness and presence, demanding to be recognized as a living, breathing individual. The lyrics challenge the idea of being treated as a toy or object for someone else's amusement. It parallels feminism's emphasis on women's empowerment and the value of taking control of one's own destiny. The final line "You ain't gonna talk to me like that, you better stop" asserts the speaker's boundaries and demands respect.

Examining Ava Max's song "Not Your Barbie Girl" through a feminist stylistics lens using Sara Mills' theory holds the potential to offer valuable insights into the depiction of gender and power dynamics within both the song's lyrics and the broader cultural context. Through the application of feminist stylistics analysis, this study aims to uncover and dissect the
gender stereotypes embedded in the song's lyrics. Such an examination can illuminate how the song portrays concepts like femininity, objectification, and the societal expectations imposed on women, ultimately contributing to the scrutiny and dismantling of detrimental gender norms.

Sara Mills' theoretical framework places a particular emphasis on scrutinizing power relations as reflected in language. Consequently, analyzing the lyrics through this theoretical lens can reveal instances of power imbalances between genders, bringing attention to manifestations of male dominance or female subordination. This nuanced exploration contributes to ongoing conversations about power dynamics in popular culture and their implications for achieving gender equality.

The title of the song, "Not Your Barbie Girl," implies a rejection of objectification and challenges the notion of women as commodities. Through feminist stylistics analysis, this study intends to investigate how the lyrics either contest or reinforce the commodification of women's bodies and identities. This critical examination contributes to broader discussions about the representation of women in popular music.

By centering on feminist stylistics analysis, the study seeks to amplify the voices and perspectives of women, including the artist Ava Max. It aims to highlight how the song serves as a platform for expressing feminist ideas, challenging societal norms, and advocating for empowerment and agency for women. Such an analysis plays a role in increasing the visibility and recognition of female artists' contributions to feminist discourse, furthering our understanding of how popular music both reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards gender.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the song "Not Your Barbie Girl" by Ava Max employs feminist stylistic analysis to challenge traditional gender roles and promote female agency. Through her choice of language, Ava Max rejects societal expectations and asserts her independence. The lyrics emphasize self-empowerment, resilience, and the rejection of societal constraints. The song disrupts dominant narratives surrounding femininity, positioning women as active agents in their own lives. The combination of empowering lyrics and energetic music creates an uplifting experience that encourages listeners to embrace their strength and challenge oppressive systems. Overall, "Not Your Baby Girl" serves as a powerful anthem for female empowerment and a call to dismantle gender inequality.

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