

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS TOWARD RAPE VICTIMS IN “TIL IT HAPPENS TO YOU” MUSIC VIDEO BY LADY GAGA

Submitted by:

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SEMARANG
2016**

ABSTRACT

“Til It Happens To You” is a song by Lady Gaga. The lyrics and the music video tell about the story of women who have been raped in their college life. The purpose of this study is to analyze the elements of the poetry in the lyrics and to show the readers the psychological contents as portrayed in the music video. The study is limited on two aspects, which are textual and contextual aspects. Figurative devices and dictions are used to analyze the textual aspects; meanwhile the contextual aspects use psychoanalysis theory. Library research is done to compile the data. The finding of this study is psychological impacts toward the rape victims, which are reflected in the lyrics and in the music video of “Til It Happens To You”.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, disrupted behavior, Rape Trauma Syndrome, rape, lyric.

1. Introduction

Lady Gaga who was born on 28 March 1986, is an American female singer, songwriter, and actress. She is well known for her fashion, her self-empowering messages in her songs, and her live performances. Beside the music, she is also known as social activism in LGBT Rights and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Not only delivering her self-empowering message in her song, Lady Gaga also uses her work for expressing the emotion of the song. “Til It Happens To You” is one music video which expresses the emotion, in particular, the emotion of victims of rape. “Til It Happens To You” was released on September 18, 2015.

In Cavendish’s *Sex and Society Book-volume 1*, it is stated that rape is a crime which someone uses physical violence to force him or her to do unwanted sexual activity against her or his will with no approval (2010:161). According to Vicki S. Hegelson (2011:431) in *Psychology of Gender*, rape includes kissing, advances, oral sex, anal sex, and the behavior to sexual intercourse. As Koss *et al* (2003) explains, “The consequences of sexual assault are from minor bruises, fear, anxiety, and depression to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Rape Trauma Syndrome, even leading to death”.

Through the song, Lady Gaga persuades people to concern and to care about the issues of sexual assault against women and its impacts, especially toward female students in campuses in America. Sexual assaults against women have

become an urgent matter in America. As the *White House Council* reported, one of five women has been sexually assaulted while in college.

I chose “Til It Happens To You” because the lyric and music video represent the social issue which happens in American college life.

I decided to limit the discussion on the two aspects, which are textual and contextual aspect.

2. Method of Study

Method supports me to know how to collect the data from the topic which under study. There are two kinds of method, which I used namely method of research and method of approach.

2.1. Method of Research

In this study, I use library research to collect the data related to the topic. The information can be found in library from books, articles, or journals.

2.2. Method of Approach

These methods are close reading, close listening, close viewing, and psychological approach. In the textual aspects, close reading is used in order to get to understand the meaning of the song’s lyric, while close listening is required to find the musical data, and the close viewing is used to explore the visual aspects through the music video. Meanwhile, the psychological approach

is used to analyze the contextual aspects of the object. This approach relates the literary work and the condition of the rape victims.

2.2.1. Textual Aspect

Textual aspects are elements which build the literary works, such as theme, diction, and figurative devices. I also used the elements of cinematography to explore the scenes of the music video.

2.2.1.1. Diction

According to Holman in *A Handbook to Literature*, poetic diction is words chosen for a supposedly inherent poetic quality (1960:361). Diction can be divided into two types: denotation and connotation. Connotation is the cluster of implications that words or phrases may carry with them, as distinguished from their denotative meanings (1960:105).

2.2.1.2. Figurative Devices

According to Perrine in *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry* (1977:61), figurative device is a language using figure of speech, which cannot be taken literally (or should not be taken literally only).

In lyric of “Til It Happens To You”, there are some figurative devices which I figured out, they are:

1. Symbolism: It is the use of one object to represent or suggest another (Holman 1960:479).

2. Repetition: It is a rhetorical strategy for producing emphasis, amplification, or emotional effect in poetry.
3. Euphemism: It is used for mentioning a subject to which one party involved may be sensitive, such as politics or social issues more smoothly (Ham, 2005: 228).

2.2.1.3. Cinematographic Elements

In David Bordwell's *Film Art* (1986:119), *Mise- En- Scene* includes setting and the camera distances or the camera shots. The shots are divided by several kinds, such as: Long Shot, Medium Long, Medium Shot, Medium Close Up, Close Up, and Extreme Close Up.

Bordwell also states that for the setting, films could also use color to enhance the function of films (1986:124).

2.2.2. Contextual Aspect

The theory relates to the behavior of the rape victims after they experienced rape.

2.2.2.1. Psychoanalysis Theory

As cited in Bowins (2004:1), Freud says that

Psychoanalysis relates to human's unconscious mind process, which could influence on thought, emotion, and behavior. Loss is the general circumstance, which is causing emotion such as sadness, anxiety, and depression. Those are formed unconsciously in humans' mind.

Then Vaillant says, “Defense Mechanisms arise for handling and avoiding the painful emotions, ideas, and drives.” (1992:3).

In *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Bowins (2004:8) says that Psychological Defense Mechanisms are divided into mature defenses, intermediate or neuroses defenses, and immature defenses. The intermediate defenses are related to neuroses or sub unit of behavior of human. Citing Rose, Bowins in *Psychological Defense Mechanism* states that

...lists several forms of absorption and imaginative involvement including, missing part of a conversation, remembering past events so vividly one seems to be reliving it, not sure if a remembered event happened or was a dream, absorption in a television program or a movie, so involved in a fantasy that it seemed real, able to ignore pain, and staring into space (2004:3).

Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) or PTSD can arise as defense mechanisms, especially in the cases of sexual assault. According to American Psychiatric Association (1987:428), PTSD has symptoms as follows: worry, exhaustion, shame, anger, withdrawal, helplessness, guilt, suicidal traits, fatigue, insomnia, feeling of worthlessness, self-blame, depression, flashbacks and fear.

3. Discussion

All of the scenes of “Til It Happens To You” from the beginning until the end is in black and white colors, which show a gloomy situation of the past. The music video starts off with the appearance of a girl at the aisle in a building which has many doors. Behind the doors, there are many stories about rape.

This music video tells the story of four women who have been raped in their college life.



Picture 1. At 00.01.27



Picture 2. At 00.01.28

Picture 1 uses long shot in order to show the pain of being raped. Picture 1 and the line (line 1 in stanza 2) “how it feels” appear at the same time. Both picture 1 and the line show that the girl struggles. The ‘feel’ that has been mentioned before means that the feeling of being a victim of rape, so she struggles because of it.

Picture 1 shows a girl who struggles herself while her boyfriend on the picture 2 rapes her. In the picture 1, her boyfriend does not appear because here the girl is experiencing paradox in her mind. This paradox arises as defense mechanisms toward rape. She experiences intermediate defenses by having paradoxical feeling. She denies that she has been raped while she feels the pain because of the rape, so the picture 1 displays only her.



Picture 3. At 00.01.49

There is symbolism and also connotation in the lyric in line 1 stanza 3 “hold your head up and be strong”. “Head” in the lyric means a self-pride of someone. The words “Hold your head up” mean to stay strong. When “hold your head up” lyric is sung, picture 3 appears. Medium long shot is used to show the transgender man bends his body.

However, the scene is contradictory to the lyric because when the lyric says “head up”, the male transgender bends himself and buries his head instead of hold his head up. It concludes that “staying strong” is hard for him. He feels ashamed and embarrassed about his situation.

Following by the lyric; “How the hell could you talk, how could you talk?” line 3 in stanza 3, Lady Gaga uses repetition to emphasize and to explain that the talk about staying strong is like a difficulty for him because it is not easy to stay strong after losing his pride.



Picture 4. At 00.02.36



Picture 5. At 00.02.50

The picture 4 uses close up shot and it appears with the lyric in stanza 4 line 3; “Till it happens to you, you won’t know, it won’t be real”. The lyric explains that nobody will know about the feeling of being worthless, except until

someone has been raped. The picture shows her hand with a writing “I am worthless” on the top. The lyric and the scenes show that she believes that she is worthless because of the rape. She loses her virginity, even loses her pride. In other words, she loses everything.

Moreover, picture 5 that uses extreme close up to shows a back of a girl with a writing “Sometimes I hate myself” tells the same feeling for being a victim that leads her turning against and hating herself. It is counted as her defense mechanisms to handle the trauma.



Picture 6. At 00.02.39

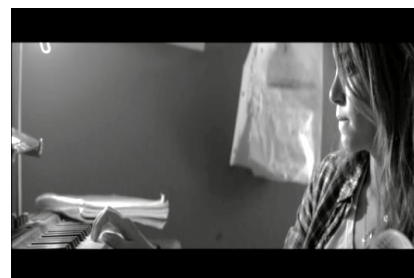


Picture 7. At 00.02.43

Picture 6 displays that a male transgender puts his toiletries such as towel, comb, toothpaste, and toothbrush in the basket, and then he throws it to the ashbin on the picture 7. The toiletries symbolize self-esteem of him. Throwing the toiletries means that he has lost his self-esteem because of being raped.



Picture 8. At 00.02.51



Picture 9. At 00.02.26

The line 1 in stanza 5 “Till your world burns and crashes” contains symbolism and euphemism. The word “world” symbolizes a life. The words “Till you world burn and crashes” is euphemism because it refers to the feeling of being raped. Then, the meaning of the lyric is the life of someone who completely fails because of the rape. Picture 8 uses medium shot to show the expression and the behavior of the girl after she is raped. She sits by hugging her feet and stares into space with her depressed face. She is depressed because her life is destroyed by the rape.

Then, picture 9 uses medium close up in order to show that the girl does not have any desire to work. She just stares at the keyboard and does nothing. It is because she lacks of concentration and keeps reminding the past event. Overall, her whole life is completely disrupted. Despite this, she cannot perform her daily activities as normal people do.

This song uses many repetitions in line; “Til it happens to you, you don't know how it feels, how it feels”. Lady Gaga uses repetitions to emphasize and to show the emotions of the victim. She says that nobody can feel it until someone becomes like them, as a victim of rape.



Picture 10. At 00.03.00



Picture 11. At 00.03.04

Then, the picture 10 shows that the male transgender experiences overreacting. He cleans the cupboard and cleans himself with tissues after he throws the toiletries because he feels disgusted about himself and he believes that he is dirty and filthy.

Next, picture 11 displays two girls, one of them is holding a box in order to show that she is moving from the place. In brief, she experiences Rape Trauma Syndrome. She tries to avoid anything which relates and reminds her to the rape. Under this circumstance, she moves from her place in order to forget the trauma.

4. Conclusion

“Til It Happens To You” is one of Lady Gaga’s songs which expresses the emotion, in particular, the emotion of victims of rape. From the analysis of the song and music video, I have figured out the contextual aspects which are related to the psychoanalysis aspects, such as the psychological impacts toward the rape victims. Both the song and the music video show that the victims experience intermediate defenses and Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) because of the rape. They cannot do their activity normally due to lack concentration and always remember the trauma. Above all, their life is disrupted because of the rape.

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