

Express yourself by madonna essay sample



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The song “ Express Yourself” by Madonna has contradictory messages. It promotes respect for oneself among women, and female empowerment, but at the same time Madonna says women need a “ big strong hand to lift [them] to a higher ground. ” This negates any feminism that the rest of the song might suggest. There is a call for women to become independent, but this sentiment is challenged by the suggestion of women’s dependence on men. In the first few lines of the song Madonna clarifies who her intended audience is, “ girls. ” This can be seen as an intentional call for women to unite for a cause.

There are a variety of causes suggested in the song. Some that are apparent are Madonna’s decimation of patriarchal and capitalist constructions, (suggested in the lines “... Fancy cars that go very fast/ you know they never last... “, where Madonna is telling women not to let a man buy his way into their hearts), for sexual liberation (which is made apparent in the lines, “ Second best is never enough/ You’d do much better baby on your own. “). The theme of sexual liberation present in the lyrics is also suggested in the title, “ Express Yourself”.

I interpreted the line “ What you need is a big strong hand to lift you to your higher ground/ Make you feel like a queen on a throne/ Make him love you till you can’t come down,” as sexual innuendo. I did this taking the lyrics at face value and also since sex is a recurrent theme in Madonna’s songs. Another theme in the song is the idea that women should not settle for anything/ anyone less than “ best”. (“ Second best is never enough/ You’d do much better baby on your own. “) In these lines Madonna is trying to encourage women to have high self- esteem.

Through the line “ long stemmed roses are the way to your heart, but he needs to start with your head,” she is acknowledging the new intellectual woman. However, the suggestion that this woman needs a man to express herself is implicit. Madonna suggests a shift from the commonly held criteria of a man’s wealth to that of his treatment of women as the deciding factor in the success of a relationship. Ironically, the self-proclaimed “ Material girl” contradicts her earlier statements when she says that “ you don’t need diamond rings or eighteen karat gold.

Instead she recommends self- respect and true love as a better investment since the latter two are longer lasting. The song makes reference to independence in the line “ you’d do much better baby on your own. ” However, “ baby” would be best off with her Mr. Right. This contradicts the message of woman’s empowerment that is suggested in the rest of the song. The song offers a new point of view in the stanza, “ And when you’re gone he might regret it/ Think about the love he once had/ Try to carry on, but he just won’t get it/ He’ll be back on his knees... ” Here she suggests that the man is also dependent on the woman.

Additionally, these lines are sung to a slightly different tune, (it is the intermediate stanza) to further demarcate it from the rest of the song. The beats are typical to pop songs from the 80’s. They are retro- beats that are peppy, upbeat, brassy and standard to the dance music of that time. They make the listener tap his/her feet in time to the beat, yet the music is empty and not very meaningful. The music sounds computer generated and fake, with the exception of the intermittent sounds of a violin. The song sounds

highly ‘ produced’ and manufactured which makes the message seem less heart-felt.

The production quality is very good. This song has obvious mainstream and commercial appeal. The beats are rehashed and unoriginal as is the message contained in the lyrics. The vocals for the song are clear and powerful from start till finish. This further substantiates the idea that Madonna is trying to motivate the audience into action and generate support toward a cause. The idea that Madonna is trying to rouse women is apparent, however what is unclear is the exact cause she is trying to enlighten us about. Perhaps it is warning women against oppression perpetrated by a patriarchal society and promoting women’s sexual freedom.

But, as mentioned earlier she complicates this when she sings of women’s “ need” for a man. Madonna’s voice is clearly audible throughout the song. She is joined by all female back-up singers in the chorus and in the latter half of the song, but her voice is always the loudest. The chorus serves as the “ hook” for the song because it is repeated so often and also because it is easy to remember since it is catchy and consists of just two words “... express yourself... ” In fact the word “[express/ respect] your/himself” is repeated so often that it is almost like the audience is hypnotized into action! Self” is first sung on G, then on F sharp, moving to F natural, then on G, moving back to F sharp, and lastly (not counting repeated bars) self is sung on F sharp to F.

The word as well as the concept gets divided and put in motion, articulating agency through positions which remain partial and temporary. The melody thus prevents what we would call in narrative terms an ideological closure.

There is constant change and no recapitulation. The same theme can be found in the message of the song. She touches upon ideas and then goes on to a new idea which is different from, and often contradicts her last suggestion.

Overall, the song is not path breaking in the political message it carries. Very early on women were told, “ Why settle for Harvard when you can get Yale? ” referring to the male students at both colleges. Madonna’s song has the same message, i. e. don’t settle for second best. It makes reference to sexual liberation, and promotes an anti-materialistic society. However, in the end she is just revisiting the old ‘ boy-ravishes-girl’, and ‘ true-love’ story. What the audience expects from a performer like Madonna is to push the limits, and tread new ground. The song ‘ Express Yourself’ fails to do this.