

IMAGES IN POPULAR HILIGAYNON SONG LYRICS

***Claudette A. Baluran**

ABSTRACT

This study explored the content of five (5) popular Hiligaynon songs and their representation of feminine images of the Ilonggain the song lyrics. Analysis of the songs suggests that the most dominant code found is “Woman as Sex Object” and this code is directly linked to her physical appearance and attractiveness. Results of the study suggest that contents in the song lyrics reproduce prevailing sexual ideologies. Implications to media practice and cultural views on women are discussed.

Keywords: images of women, feminism, content analysis, songs, popular songs, Hiligaynon songs

* Associate Professor of English, West Visayas State University

INTRODUCTION

Of the many influences on how we view men and women, media are the most pervasive and one of the most powerful (Wood, 1991).

When pop culture presents feminism to the public via mainstream media, the results are mixed at best. For many women, this means that it's important to examine representations of women and agency in the expected places (network television, major labels), but it's even more important to start scouting the margins—the blogs, the underground publishing collectives, the tiny bedroom record labels—for alternatives and to begin creating them ourselves. Parsing feminism and pop culture is not as easy as looking vigilantly for what's "good" (that is, feminist) in pop culture and calling out what's "bad" (antifeminist and regressive). Pop culture has always been about commerce, and feminism and pop culture will always be uneasy bedfellows in a larger culture that remains conflicted (to say the very least) about how much power, agency, and autonomy women should have (Zeisler, 15).

According to Fairclough (1989), power in discourse has found a growth area in mass media—television, radio, film as well as newspapers. Mass media discourse is interesting because the nature of the power relations enacted in it is often not clear, and there are reasons for seeing it as involving *hidden* relations of power.

What makes the study of discourse in popular songs very interesting is that, as a part of popular culture, they are very efficient purveyors of ideas that could influence societal changes. As Frith and Home point out in *Art into Pop* (1987), 'Pop songs are the soundtrack of postmodern daily life, inescapable in lifts and airports, pubs and restaurants, streets and shopping centres and sports grounds'. Connor argues that pop music is perhaps 'the most representative of postmodern cultural forms' (Storey 2001).

Studying popular music is an interdisciplinary matter (Tagg, 1982). As such, music has been examined by numerous scholars in a variety of disciplines as a communication or sociological force that functions to persuade (Kosokoff & Carmichael in Cooper, 1984) and socialize (Roueck, Toohey in Cooper, 1984). The uniqueness of popular song lyrics and tonal music *and* the relationship between the two suggest that popular music has a more

powerful impact on its audience than other forms of verbal communication in which a view of reality is affirmed (Hayakawa in Cooper, 1984).

Cooper (1984) has implied in her study that the lyrics of popular music not only reflect the attitudes of periods of history but also function, as do other media form, to socialize attitudes. Further, she emphasized that her study has presented some evidence to indicate that the lyrics of popular music contain stereotyped images of women that have been distributed widely among young people. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that lyrics of popular music at least have the potential to influence attitudes among women.

A study by University at Buffalo sociologists has found that the portrayal of women in the popular media over the last several decades has become increasingly sexualized, even "pornified." The same is not true of the portrayal of men. These findings may be cause for concern, the researchers say, because previous research has found sexualized images of women to have far-reaching negative consequences for both men and women. They find the frequency of sexualized images of women in popular media, combined with the extreme intensity of their sexualization, to be cause for concern (Donovan, 2011).

The images of gender or sexuality according to McClary (1991)... are usually rhetorically generated; that is, they are produced by more or less deliberate choices by composers, along with other dramatic and affective strategies of particular pieces. This is not to say that every element of every construction of, say, "femininity" must be entirely intentional, for these codes often are taken to be "natural" —when composing music for a female character, a composer may automatically choose traits such as softness or passivity, without really examining the premises for such choices.

Although the Internet has gained widespread use in developed nations, Buckley (2000) argues that radio is still the most pervasive communication medium in the world. Because of its universal accessibility, radio has a unique and powerful role in fostering the communication of ideas. In today's societies according to von Bonninghausen (1991), no matter how far their industries are developed, radio and television are the most effective means of telling people what the world is like and how it functions. Public communication has become the most effective tool of power, and it is quite easy to understand why men do

not want to give away this power to “the other half” which by “nature” is bound to reproductive work, to “private” matters, is passive instead of active.

Songs often escape closer inspection as they are regarded as trivial parts of pop culture but upon closer inspection, they contain lyrics that subconsciously carry hidden meanings that are often guised in catchy rhythms and tones. This hidden power to manipulate perception is indeed alarming especially when it shapes a perspective detrimental to gender equity and to a value system we wish our young generation to learn.

In analyzing song lyrics, more than the appreciation of the music’s rhythm and tone, one should look at the message of the words since according to Machin (2010), lyrics are one way an artist tells us how to listen to them, how to put meanings into their music. Lyrics are not only about artists telling stories but also communicating discourses about their identity. However banal lyrics might seem, as in the case of love songs, they can reveal much about cultural discourses of a specific time alongside which an artist may want to align themselves. Songs from different times and by different artists may cover the same basic issues, such as falling in love, but the identities, actions and values vary. Of course many lyrics do not seem to make much sense at all and there seems to be no coherent message. But these too can communicate discourses, along with identities, values, and courses of action.

Mass media and popular culture has been considered as highly influential in shaping and (re)shaping cultural views. Because of the radio’s mass appeal and influence across social classes, it is imperative that studies subject popular music to analysis.

Method

The study is informed within the framework of quantitative content analysis to analyze stereotyped female images using Cooper’s operational definitions (1985). To establish baseline data and sampling of the songs, a random survey was conducted among seventy-five (75) people. They were asked to give the popular *Hiligaynon* song title that first came to their mind. The song should focus on women. Out of the songs given, only the top five (5) songs were selected for content analysis.

For the feminist analysis of the song lyrics, Cooper's (1985) operational definitions of feminine images were used:

Woman as Evil. Men portray women as evil when males become victims to their seduction. In her study, Cooper presents this image to refer to any explicit reference to a woman as bad or evil or exhibiting evil behavior. Lying, tempting or seducing a man, or being unfaithful belongs to this image (1985). When lyrics in the songs analyzed included description of women being seductive leading to a man's vulnerability, or being sexually promiscuous, woman as evil was coded by the researcher as present in the song/s.

Physical Characteristics. Any mention of any part of a woman's body like eyes, hair, mouth, skin (Cooper, 1985) constitutes an image where a woman's physicality is highlighted. When legs, face or such are mentioned in the song lyrics, they are coded under this image.

Need for Man. Fulfilling a fantasy of love or pining for a man's attention which is portrayed as the sole cause for a woman's existence falls under this category. Cooper defined this code as any reference to a woman's need for and reliance on a man. Depending on man, clinging to a man, finding fulfilment in a man, waiting for a man (Cooper, 1985).

Possession of Man. Any explicit reference to a woman as a possession of a man. "She belongs to me", "make her mine". The researcher includes in this category any description of the woman as the source of a man's happiness, thus prompting him to claim her as his or discreetly mentioning that she be relegated to the household to bring forth pleasure (Cooper, 1985).

Woman as Mother any explicit reference to a woman exhibiting nurturant, maternal behaviors. Taking care of a man, soothing a man's hurt feelings are considered by the researcher as nurturing actions manifested by the woman's "motherly instinct"(Cooper, 1985).

Woman as Sex Object. Any explicit reference to a woman as being sexually desirable or of a man desiring sex with a woman. "Desirable to kiss", "make love", or "getting it on". The researcher also includes in this category any mention of a woman being subjected to stares by men and other similar actions that objectify women (Cooper, 1985).

Woman as Delicate. Any explicit reference to a woman as soft, delicate or gentle. “Like a flower” and other similar ideas are considered to belong under this category (Cooper, 1985).

Woman as Childlike. Any reference to a woman as being a child or exhibiting immature behaviour. Examples include “girl”, “baby”, “immature”, “helpless”, “emotional”, “flightly” (Cooper, 1985).

Woman on a Pedestal. Any reference to a woman as being elevated to a position of worship or status higher than man. “Precious”, “apple of my eye”, “my dream come true” or any similar signal used in the song lyrics were considered to belong in this category (Cooper, 1985).

Woman as Attractive. Any description of a woman as physically attractive is included in this image. Words like “beautiful”, “pretty”, “lovely”, or “fair” were categorized here (Cooper, 1985).

Woman as Supernatural. This image includes any explicit reference to a woman as having supernatural powers. “Eyes that makes angels smile” or “I could move mountains for you”. Included by the researcher in this definition is the representation, description, or characterization of women having the ability to render men defenseless; open to threats; and physically, emotionally, and psychologically vulnerable (Cooper, 1985).

To reduce bias, two intercoders and the researcher coded the images according to the operational definitions of images adapted from Cooper (1985). During the coding procedures, the coders were given a copy of the operational definitions of images by Cooper (1985). They identified the codes based on the lyrics of each song. After the coding was done, the data were tallied, placed in the appropriate columns, encoded, and converted to raw data. The raw data was then analyzed using Friedman 2-Way ANOVA by Ranks and Cohen’s Kappa to establish reliability of intercoder perceptions. Average was also used to determine the number of codes found in each song and as a whole.

Results

The five songs identified by the respondents are presented by order of most-recalled; namely, (1) *IlonggaGwapa*, (2) *Inday Song*, (3) *IndayTuwad*, (4) *Kung Bal-an Mo Lang Tani*, and (5) *Buho*.

Results of the study reveal that the most dominant codes in the song lyrics analyzed were found under (1) Women as Sex Object. The remaining categories are arranged according to dominance of codes: (2) Woman as Physically Attractive, (3) Woman as Evil, (4) Woman as Supernatural, (5) Need for Man, (6) Physical Characteristics, (7) Woman on a Pedestal, (8.5) Woman as Delicate, (8.5) Woman as Mother, (10) Possession of Man; however, none was found for the category Woman as Childlike.

Data is presented in Table 1

Intercoder Average Codes Found Per Song and as a Whole

Song	Average Codes Found										
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11
<i>IlonggaGwapa</i> (Beautiful Ilongga)	1.7	4.3	0	.3	1.3	3	3	0	5	10	5
<i>Inday</i> (Miss)	0.3	2.3	0	2.7	1.7	1.3	0	0	1	1.3	2
<i>IndayTuwad</i> (Bend Over, Miss)	5	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	1	0
<i>Kung Bal-an Mo Lang Tani</i> (If You Only Knew)	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Buho</i> (Hole)	4	1	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	1
Total	11	7.33	8.33	3	3.67	26.33	3.67	0	6	12	8.67

*Ilongga is a female native of Iloilo City, Philippines

*Inday is a native term for a young lass among *Visayan* speaking peoples of the Philippines

Code Legend:

C1 Woman is evil

- C2 Physical characteristics
- C3 Need for man
- C4 Woman as possession of man
- C5 Woman as mother
- C6 Woman as sex object
- C7 Woman as delicate
- C8 Woman as child
- C9 Woman on a pedestal
- C10 Woman as physically attractive
- C11 Woman as supernatural

The texts that were analysed reflect ten (10) out of eleven (11) of Cooper's (1984) identified feminine images in song lyrics. The image of "Woman as childlike" was not identified in the texts; however, "Woman as Evil", "Physical Characteristics", "Possession of Man", "Woman as Mother", "Woman as Sex Object", "Woman as Delicate", "Woman on a Pedestal", "Woman as Attractive", and "Woman as Supernatural" were found in the songs *IlonggaGwapa*, *Inday*, *IndayTuwad*, and *Buho*. The image "Need for Man" was central to the song *Kung Bal-an Mo Lang Tani*.

The songs *IlonggaGwapa*, *Inday*, *IndayTuwad*, and *Buho* are punctuated by numerous references to the Ilongga's sexual objectification which are directly connected to her physical appearance and attractiveness. Sexual objectification was found to be the most dominant code in these song lyrics. Furthermore, the lyrics show that sexual objectification is closely related to a woman's physical characteristics and physical attractiveness. This leads to the idea that women found "sexy" are directly linked to descriptions like beautiful, charming, having flawless skin; the description of "sizzling hot" schematically opens to having a slender body. Another type of sexual objectification found is presenting a disparaging image of a woman by using rhetorical repetitions to highlight her nakedness and the female genitalia.

Dominant codes aside from sexual objectification include "Woman as Physically Attractive", "Woman as Evil" and "Woman as Supernatural". Some less dominant codes were "Woman's

Need for Man”, “Physical Characteristics”, “Woman on a Pedestal”, “Woman as Delicate”, “Woman as Mother”, and as a “Possession of Man”.

The Ilongga described as having “Physically Attractiveness” is described as cute, having flawless skin, *morena* (olive toned skin), *mestiza*(fair-skinned), and highlighted. The descriptions substantiate the idea that regardless of skin tone, a relatively healthy skin is found to be attractive.

The image “Woman as Evil” includes a description of her having seductive eyes that could hypnotize men. She is characterized as a tease, a possible source of disease, one who initiates sex, sleeps with multiple partners, is engaged in sexual promiscuity, all of which point to her indiscretion and blaming her for her misery seem justified.

Her image as “Woman as Supernatural” causes men’s vulnerability, his inability to lose control evidenced by drooling, a fast heartbeat, and acknowledging her as having the power to metaphorically sustain life.

“Woman’s Need for Man” is an image that characterizes the *Ilongga* as a weak character whose sole existence can only be justified by a man’s love, and the only fulfilment is finding her love reciprocated.

Another image portrayed is her “Physical Characteristics” like the eyes, nose, skin, smile, hips, all of which are closely related to physical attractiveness.

The image “Woman on a Pedestal” is described as someone men offer their love to, being promised a good life, to be taken care of, and proudly announced by men as “number one” to mean she has everything they find perfection in.

“Woman as Delicate” describes the Ilongga as sweet and not haughty relegating her as someone submissive and not given to aggressive behaviour. She is likened to a famous protagonist, the delicate Maria Clara from Dr. Jose Rizal’s novel *Noli Me Tangere*.

“Woman as Mother” is represented as someone who gives love, provides nurturing care like staying in the house and doing stereotypical household chores. Other descriptions include being hardworking, dependable, and having the ability to bear children.

The image “Possession of Man” is attested to by line “we got the most sexy” and by descriptions of them making men happy, getting ordered around, and men directed to take responsibility of their woman, equating her to an immature and irresponsible individual devoid of thinking.

Discussion

Results of the study offer several conclusions. First, the study shows that the *Ilonggais* represented in a myriad ways. Some are done in positive perspectives while some lean towards the negative, even denigrating. That these images are found in Hiligaynon song lyrics is hardly surprising. It would seem that these images infiltrate song lyrics across cultures. As discussed in the literature, a UNESCO report describes the litany of common images of women in the media: “the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, the hardfaced corporate and political climber.” (Portrayal of Women in Popular Media, 2009).

This is likewise supported by Wood (1994) who asserts that media have created two images of women: good women and bad ones. These polar opposites are often juxtaposed against each other to dramatize differences in the consequences that befall good and bad women. Good women are pretty, deferential, and focused on home, family and caring for others. Subordinate to men, they are usually cast as victims, angels, martyrs, and loyal wives and helpmates. Occasionally, women who depart from traditional roles are portrayed positively, but this is done either by making their career lives invisible. On the contrary according to Wood (1994), the other image of women the media offer us is the evil sister of the good homebody. Versions of this image are the witch, bitch, whore, or nonwoman, who is represented as hard, cold, aggressive—all of the things a good woman is not supposed to be. She further observes that prime-time television favorably portrays pretty, nurturing, other-focused women.

Second, the study shows that majority of the images portrayed about the *Ilonggais* that of a sex object and that these are directly connected to her physical appearance and attractiveness. Which means that women they find “sexy” are directly linked to descriptions like beautiful, charming, having flawless skin; the description of “sizzling hot” schematically opens to having a slender body. Another type of sexual objectification found is presenting a disparaging image of a woman by using rhetorical repetitions to highlight her nakedness and genitalia, possibly for a strong visual impact on the listeners.

This result upholds a study done by researchers from the Brigham Young University which according to Sohn (2012), took note of lyrics suggesting that "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal" or that "a person is held to a standard of beauty equating physical attractiveness with being sexy," among other messages. Then perhaps, if man's biological makeup were to be considered, the study of Gervais et al. (2012) could shed light on this phenomenon. Their experiment showed that women's bodies were reduced to their sexual body parts in perceivers' minds not only by males but by females as well.

This study cannot address the effects of popular music or that of popular Hiligaynon music in particular; however, noted psychologist Dr. Steven Martino (Rap Music Blamed for Teen Pregnancy, 2011.) said about rap music's portrayal of women as sex object as degrading women in ways that are clear but they do the same to men by depicting them as sex-driven studs. Musicians who use this type of sexual imagery are communicating something very specific about what sexual roles are appropriate, and teenage listeners may act on these messages. Studies in line with this observation may be pursued further.

For deeper analysis and investigation, this study may be replicated using other feminine approaches to demonstrate the viability of analyzing texts of song lyrics to highlight multiple voices in other *Hiligaynon* songs in particular, and popular songs in general.

This study centered on popular *Hiligaynon* music only; similar researches in other Philippine sub-culture's music are encouraged since they may yield interesting results. The importance in understanding images of women across cultures is underscored in studies by Pemberton (2008) and Hatton (in Donovan, 2011).

The influence of songwriters is recognized; thus, it is strongly recommended that they create more healthy perspectives on images not only of women but of men as well in their compositions.

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