

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Masculinity, also known as manhood, refers to a set of characteristics, actions, and roles that are associated with boys and men. In Western culture, masculine characteristics such as strength, boldness, independence, leadership, and aggressiveness are valued. Male roles, of which traditional or hegemonic masculinity is categorized in White culture, are strongly related to masculinity. African American masculinity is also implicated because elements of African American masculinity, including sexism and homophobia, are essential elements of hegemonic masculinity (Sasaki-Picou 2014).

Notable African Americans were subjected to slavery in America's white patriarchal society beginning in the 19th century. Men accepted their obligation to improve the existence of the slave society because they had more privileges than women as slaves. Black male slaves acted thus in order to "maintain their own personal dignity under the most degrading of circumstances" (Rose 1994:45). As a result, in a culture where white people predominate, specific hypermasculine myths of the ideal male were constructed. The story of African male patriarchy has changed with time and is still prevalent in modern music. Murray (1996) emphasizes the significance of maintaining one's masculine identity in order to uphold respect and one's status as a man; one of the easiest ways to do this is by

acting hypersexually toward women, and this is often portrayed in media images regarding Black male artists.

Media images or representations deliver different meanings and convey multiple messages to viewers; they are never unpremeditated or neutral, they disclose something (Hall 1997). The gender roles and stereotypes created by the media that are frequently advertised mirror the ways in which our culture actively promotes male superiority, privilege, and domination over women. It is not unexpected then that the male perspective predominates in representations created by the media if patriarchy does, in fact, shape our cultural institutions. Therefore, a lot of the roles that are created by the media are nothing more than stereotypes (Urbina 1999). One medium for presenting such images and representations is music video. To claim that music videos are influential and have a wide social impact may be both an exaggeration and a statement of the obvious as Walker and Bender (1994) suggest that music videos are more than just pure entertainment.

It is inferred by earlier discussions of how male-centered attitudes impact how women are portrayed in music videos. Given his history of abusing women, singer Chris Brown was one who exhibited this attitude. As he'd pleaded guilty for assaulting his ex-girlfriend, Rihanna, in the past, and has since been continuously alleged of being violent towards women. Being abusive towards his opposite sex was enough to claim that Brown wanted to assert his dominance and superiority as male. Peeters (2004) argues that music video is a tightly constructed work in which the star serves as the primary instigator in its production. Thus, in creating

his music, whether the lyrics or video clips, Brown would probably pour his ideas that would also reflect his view of women.

Chris Brown is one of the big names in the music industry. Contrary to his history of violence, his songs were still favored and played repeatedly by young people. For Brown, it is interesting to observe how he has changed as an artist with age as well as how his personal life has reflected the music he releases. Therefore, this study focuses on Chris Brown's recent release which garnered massive attention. Two music videos have been chosen to further examine how his male-centered attitude is reflected in his music. Those two music videos include: (1) *WE (Warm Embrace)*; and (2) *Under The Influence*. Each of these music videos has reached over 30 millions of views.

Released on April 11, 2022 by RCA Records, *Warm Embrace* featured female singer Normani. Commercially, this song has sold over 500.000 units in the US, earning the song its gold certificate. The music video was then released on 24 August 2022 on *YouTube* through his official channel. Directed by Arrad, the music clip captures sensual interactions between Brown and Normani. Normani is a well known singer, yet she is hired by Chris Brown only as a model for the video clip, to dance along him in a revealing dress. This practice is unusual where the singers are not in relationship and is different from his other music videos. The sensual interactions depicted in *Warm Embrace* between Brown and Normani is similar to what happens over female models in Brown's *Under The Influence* music video in which also include sensual images of women. The song was

originally released in 2019 but the music video came in October 2022 on *YouTube* as Brown saw the growing interest in this song.

As Murray (1996) emphasizes that one of the easiest ways for men to assert dominance is by acting hypersexually toward women, the writer discovered several music videos containing the same issue. One of them is *ZAZA* (2021) by rapper 6ix9ne in which presenting female models in bathing suits that barely have any role in the music video's plot, merely involved for decorative value. In *ZAZA*, the rapper told his audience about the feud he has with another rapper, Meek Mill. So, the scenes with half naked female models in it are without doubt inappropriate. In a similar way, Tyga's *Splash* (2021) and *Girls Have Fun* (2019), also depicts women merely as erotic displays. The same case could also be found in Bruno Mars' *24K Magic* (2016), POP SMOKE's *DIOR* (2019), Tyga's *Ibiza* (2020), Lil XXEL, and Tyga and Coi Leray's *What U Want* (2021).

Furthermore, rappers or other singers make their music videos just to visualize song lyrics. For example, Snoop Dogg, where in real life he is a family man, while his music videos and song lyrics do not reflect him as a family man. Likewise with Frank Ocean, where it is known that he is one of the queer rappers because it was revealed that his first love was a man, while his lyrics and music videos do not show this side of him and refer more to black masculinity. This can also be found in the music of other singers or rappers where in real life they are not as how they depicted themselves in their music, such as Eminem.

Compared to those artists, Chris Brown's music videos are seemingly mirror his personal life down to his behaviors. Therefore his most recent music

videos have been chosen. Aside from the recentness, another reason to choose the two music videos is because of how they portray Black females in the two music clips seemingly in line with Brown's tendency for asserting his manhood as a black man. Due to this fact, it intrigues the writer's desire to further track down how his music videos constructed Black masculinity as there are several forms of masculine expression in the two chosen music videos.

There are several related studies focusing on the construction of Black masculinity in music as its basic issues. *"Drip Too Hard? Commercial Rap Music and Perceived Masculinity Ideals and Actual Self-Evaluations among Black U.S and Dutch Adolescent Men"* focuses to look into how American and Dutch adolescent men perceive ideals of masculine behavior, physical appearance, and mate desirability in commercial rap (Dankoor et al., 2022). The research discovered three masculinity ideals to be present in rap and congruent with the majority of the respondents' own ideals. Through their respondents, they reveal that it is appropriate to view women as either sexually freaky girls or wifey material. Second, attractive men look wealthy, and third, desirable men financially provide for their partners.

Demetrius Green held a research entitled *"Documenting Drill Music: Understanding Black Masculine Performances in Hip-Hop"* (Green 2018). The study argues that drill music is an appropriation of the dominant black male representation of hip-hop but used in their own context of defining their own masculinity. Maria Lykotrafiti carried out an analysis entitled *"This is a man's world: The Construction of Masculinity in Rap Songs' Lyrics from 1990-1995 and*

Rap Songs from 2005-2010” (Lykotrafiti 2020). The study set to examine the construction of black masculinity in rap songs over multiple years. The study focused on the alteration of the lyrics over time and the promoted role models through rap.

Samuel Lindsay and Antonia C. Lyons examines how masculinity, femininity, and alcohol consumption are constructed within four mainstream popular music videos through a study entitled “*“Pour It Up, Drink It Up, Live It Up, Give It Up”: Masculinity and Alcohol in Pop Music Videos*” (Lindsay et al., 2017). The study discovered that the masculinities within the videos being examined are resulted from intersections of race, gender, and market forces. While the videos analyzed do not belong to the gangsta rap or even hip-hop genres, they all borrow rap elements from these. “*The POLITICS of COOL: Black Masculine Subjectivities in the Art of Donald Glover and Mohau Modisakeng*” conducted by Stella Viljoen (2022) looked at how expressions of anger are tied to a kind of black masculine subjectivity. It reveals that through iterations of ‘cool’, Black masculine subjectivities are identified as in tension with the dream of decolonization and the transnational reality of capitalization.

All of the mentioned studies above, despite having the same issue in common, the focuses and methods used are different. The first mentioned study is qualitative using depth interview as its approach that focuses on how Black male adolescents who frequently consume rap and have personal connections to this genre and the characters negotiate the masculinity ideals in rap and how they relate to their self-evaluations. The second study is a textual analysis focused on

the linkage between space and black masculine performances in hip-hop drill music videos and using a documentary theory framework with a touch of panopticon concept proposed by Michel Foucault. The third study focused on analyzing the alteration of rap lyrics in constructing masculinity in rap music over the years through qualitative content analysis. The fourth study focused on how masculinity, femininity, and alcohol consumption are constructed in music videos and it employed critical multimodal discourse analysis. The last study was conducted in a textual analysis model, comparing music video to artworks with the focus on Black masculine subjectivity.

Aside from those studies above, this study attempts to examine the construction of Black masculinity in Chris Brown's two music videos through all the signs signaling how Brown reflected and re-signified Black masculinity through his music through the application of John Fiske's semiotics concept. Furthermore, the objects used for this study are fit for investigating the issue of black masculinity. As Peeters (2004) argues that there is a correlation of the singer as the mastermind and the concept of music video, the ugly history of the singer supports the decision of the writer to select the objects. The writer's intention to raise the issue of Black masculinity was powered by the fact that the dominant notion of hypermasculinity continues to exist as the most pervasive in the black music industry. Even after being challenged by the queerness brought by LIL NAS X and the new concept of black masculinity offered by Kendrick Lamar's lyrics, the traditional notion of Black masculinity is still well established as amongst black male artists, a reproduction of hegemonic masculinity continues to

exist as the most accepted and publicly received gender performance. In this case, the writer considers that such an issue is essential to be examined to add to general awareness and understanding of black masculinity in the music industry.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

According to the research background described above, the writer found a statement of the problem:

- How is Chris Brown's masculinity as a black male constructed in *Warm Embrace* (2022) and *Under The Influence* (2022) music videos?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Referring to the statement of the problem above, the writer would like to determine this study's objective as follow:

- To reveal on how Chris Brown's masculinity as a black male constructed in *Warm Embrace* (2022) and *Under The Influence* (2022) music videos

1.4 Significance of the Study

In line with the objective of the study above, there are several significant points of this study. The first one, is to provide more information to the readers about Black masculinity in media especially in music media. The second one, the researcher expects the readers to gain more insight regarding the hidden meaning in *Warm Embrace* and *Under The Influence* music videos. The findings of this

study would reveal the construction of Chris Brown's black masculinity represented in the two chosen music videos. The third one, the result of this study is useful to gain additional information for future research about the construction of black masculinity.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

Black Masculinity: masculine attributes ascribed to African American men
(Milton 2012)

Submissive: willing to submit to the authority or will of others; obedient or
passive

Gender roles: the stereotype that tells men and women what is typical for their sex
in a particular context and situation (Eisenclas 2013)

Patriarchy: a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social,
political and economic institutions (Asiyanbola 2005)