

### **The Submissive Female in “Rude,” the Hit Single**

MAGIC! is a Canadian reggae band most known for its debut single “Rude.” The song was released on October 12, 2013 in Canada and is very successful. It is also an international hit, climbing the charts in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Netherlands, and Sweden. In the United States, it is currently still played on pop stations at least once every other hour or so. The song is told from the perspective of the male singer who is asking for a father’s permission to marry his daughter. It chronicles his journey from his bed to the father’s house, and it tells of him asking and being turned down three times by the father for his daughter’s hand. Despite its popularity and carefree sound, the song lyrics have antifeminist undertones. Feminism being “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitations, and oppression” (hooks).

Although the song is titled “Rude,” it could just as easily be titled “Marry That Girl” because of the amount of time it also repeats the latter phrase. However, the girl in question is not given voice in the song. She is referred to often in the phrase “marry that girl” and “marry her anyway,” but there is an absence of female choice in the singer’s assertions. Her thoughts or opinions are never included except when the singer asserts “you know she’s in love with me,” which is his interpretation of her affections. He makes many claims, saying “she will go anywhere I go,” “we will run away,” “we’ll be a family,” and “I’m going to marry her anyway” without any recognition that the girl may not want to pursue any of these developments. There is no mention of including the girl in the decisions above or the ones to follow. Forceful statements like the ones including “will” (“we’ll be a family” and “or we will runaway”) sound domineering. These kinds of phrases position the man as the authority figure and head and leave the woman to fill the submissive “other” role.

Additional word choices are also questionable. With “Can I have your daughter,” the use of the word “have” is interesting since it implies possession and ownership. The definition of “have” from the Oxford English Dictionary is “to hold in hand, in keeping, or possession; to hold or possess as property, or as something at one’s disposal.” “To hold in hand” is similar to the phrase “to hold in the palm of one’s hand” and “hold in check” (if you take the phrase to mean that the hold is restrictive). However, “have” is also used in marriage vows with “to have and to hold.” In this case, “have” can mean “to keep” or “to endure.” Thus, the meaning is ambiguous and can be taken negatively.

One could argue since the conversation is between the two men that it’s logical to simply reference the girl instead of having her fully represented. Furthermore, it could be inferred that the girl will have a choice in each matter. The couple may have even talked about these issues before the boyfriend asked for the father’s permission. Thus, he would know where the girl stands and could be making these claims with her approval. However, these kinds of omissions are dangerous because the lyrics could impress upon a listener that girls/ women are meant to succumb to the desires and authority of a boy/ man and do not need to be included in decisions. Male perspective is given precedence in this song because of the exclusion of female voice. The phrasing also objectifies the female as an item of male desire. This can be seen through the use of “have” in the phrase “have your daughter,” which signifies that the female is a thing to be had or possessed as mentioned earlier. The singer’s question “Don’t you know I’m human too?” directed toward the father is ironic because of this objectification. There is no mention of the woman being human. Not characterizing the female as human (grouping her with the male singer and father) further oppresses her and positions her as an object and “other.” As Cheryl Buckley says in “Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,” “Woman is

either the subject of patriarchal assumptions about women's role and needs... or the object in sexist advertising." The song does nothing to counter the idea that women are "objects to be viewed," "sexualized things," (Buckley) or "passive bodies" (Root).

On this idea of "passive bodies," the notion that the girl will "go anywhere [he goes]" is demeaning as well. As is the assumption that all girls want to get married and start a family. Because of the use of the term "girl" instead of a name, the lyrics speak to girls/ women in general due to the anonymity of the character. When the singer says "marry that girl," he is in a sense talking about all females. After hearing the song, one of my male friends said it gained popularity because of the appeal marriage and talking about marriage has for women. This view is very limiting for developing women and women who do not wish to get married or desire to pursue other things. The lyrics in the song (like the ones mentioned above) further the belief in our patriarchal society that a woman should follow a man's lead.

The song doesn't just limit the role of the female; it limits the role of the male as well. It positions the male in both authoritative positions in patriarchy (as future husband and as father). It doesn't allow for deviation from either of these roles. bell hooks points out that "most men find it difficult to be patriarchs." Men are expected to hold to the masculinities practiced in their society regardless of their own wants or needs.

The proposal ritual of asking for the father's permission has existed for centuries. It often went/ goes hand in hand with marriage arrangements in which the woman is handled as a form of property. In this way, the ritual is seen as a misogynist practice. However, it can also be viewed as an honorable tradition; one that gives respect to the parent(s). The tradition has always been to ask for the father's permission—which is no different in the case of this song. But one has to ask, "where is the mother?" By excluding the mother in the ritual, it reinforces the idea that the father

or man should be the head of the household. Thus on the surface, the lyrics in the song fail to challenge the patriarchy or “institutionalized sexism” as bell hooks terms it. Unless the mom is included, it is simply two men making a decision on a woman’s behalf. In recent years, I believe both parents or single mothers have been better incorporated into this ritual practice, but the majority of these interactions still occur solely between a father and a potential son-in-law.

The lyrics below show the singer catering to the father’s ideals by asking permission to marry his daughter:

Knocked on your door with heart in my hand

To ask you a question

‘Cause I know that you’re an old-fashioned man, yeah (Magic!).

The singer saying the father is “old-fashioned” implies that the ritual is antiquated. This supports the dispelling of the formality since it is viewed as a thing of the past. This viewpoint liberates male suitors from following the tradition of asking for the father’s permission and also from being held accountable by the father during marriage. He is asserting his independence and rebelling against parental authority. This does not change the woman’s standpoint: she is still governed by a man. Ultimately, however, the song does pay tribute to the proposal ritual to a certain degree by singing about it and by having the male singer act on it. Although the male character voices his dislike for the ritual, he still follows it. The male suitor is not liberated either since he is still answerable to the father figure. Thus the adherence to “old” patriarchal traditions has not been overtly challenged in this case.

The implications for technical and professional writers is you can never be too careful with your word choice and how you represent groups of people. Also, it is more prudent to make clear your belief or support for a cause instead covering your backside with an offhand remark.

For example, I believe the statement “you’re an old-fashioned man” was included to prevent any backlash from singing about what some would say is an antifeminist practice. If MAGIC! had taken a stronger stand on the tradition or included the mother in the practice, the impact of the song could have been very different. Because of the popularity of the song, many people may consider returning to this practice. Whether it will continue to marginalize the mothers is yet to be seen.

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### Works Cited

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