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Think Outside the Music Video: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Music Videos that Break the Genre Convention

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ABSTRACT

Typically, music videos fulfill an entertainment purpose, but this Master's thesis is dedicated to a rhetorical analysis of two music videos that fulfill a greater purpose. I studied two music videos that break the music video genre mold because each one is centered on two societal issues that would be distressing to discuss in other contexts. The first artifact I studied is Eminem's music video for "Stan," which highlights the issue of idolization and fandom. The research question that guided this analysis is: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom? The second artifact I studied is Lindsay Lohan's music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)," which highlights the issue of domestic abuse. The research question that guided my analysis is: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse? Both artists used their personal experiences with the accompanying issue to craft their unique music video.

I used the fantasy theme framework to conduct my analysis over each artifact. In each analysis, I identified the fantasy theme elements (character theme, action theme, setting theme, and rhetorical vision) present in the music video, and then provided specific examples of each element that help support the proposed research question. By utilizing their experiences as the driving force for their music videos, the two artists help make sense of their experiences. Thus, the music videos serve as a form of catharsis for each artist. Furthermore, by openly communicating about these issues, the artists inspire others who may find themselves in similar situations to not be fearful of associated

stigmas. The two music videos fulfill purposes greater than entertainment, thus making them worthy of further study.

Think Outside the Music Video: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Music Videos that Break
the Genre Convention

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

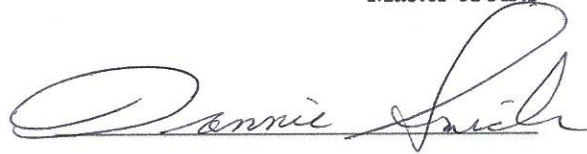
By

Kimberly Danielle Martinez

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

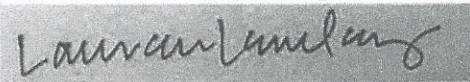


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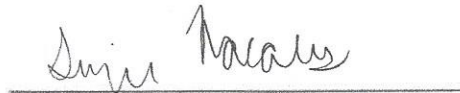
Thesis Committee



Dr. Lauren Lemley, Chair



Dr. Joe Cardot



Dr. Suzie Macaluso

To my family, friends, and mentors who supported, loved, and guided me throughout my academic career. To my professors at Abilene Christian University, thank you for your constant words of encouragement. There were times where I felt I had reached my limits, but you all constantly pushed me to meet, but also exceed expectations. You all made my journey possible and opened my eyes to new possibilities. For that, I am eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Music videos are essentially two to four minute short films that are created to visually accompany a song, and are one of the most popular forms of entertainment. The first music video debuted on MTV (Music Television) “at 12:01 am on August 1, 1981” for the song, “Video Killed the Rock Star” by The Buggles.¹ The debut of this music video paved the way for music videos to come and was the start of the MTV cultural phenomenon, which I will elaborate on later in my thesis. Music videos are primarily used today for brand awareness and artist exposure. In a Nielsen article, writer and SVP of Client Development for Nielsen Entertainment, David Bakula, highlights how brands are capitalizing on this notion by “incorporating products into big-name artists’ videos.”² Even though the purpose of present-day music videos is to push big-name brands and/or artists, they harness more noble potential, and their uniqueness should not go unnoticed. Music videos are a compelling form of rhetoric because they combine images, music, and the song’s lyrics in order to communicate messages. The music video is meant to accompany a song, and further support its message.

1. Jason Guerrasio, “A Very Ironic Video Was the First One Ever Played on MTV 34 Years Ago,” *Business Insider*, published August 1, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/video-killed-the-radio-star-34th-anniversary-of-music-video-on-mtv-2015-7>.

2. David Bakula, “Behind the Music (Video): How Important Are Videos to Both Artists and Brands?,” *Nielsen*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/behind-the-music-video-how-important-are-videos-to-both-artists-and-brands.html>.

However, there are many instances where the music video does not relate to the message of the song at all, and the only purpose it fulfills is to be entertaining. Music videos will typically fulfill those entertainment purposes—but what about when a music video breaks that genre convention? What about when a song and its accompanying music video are centered on sensitive matters? A great advantage of music videos is that they can also fulfill that purpose by being as raw and emotional as the artist wants them to be, an advantage that several artists have utilized. Music videos are powerful and differ from other forms of rhetoric, not just because they combine audio and visuals, but because they are influential tools that help artists communicate issues and messages that would otherwise be distressing to disclose. Some music videos break that mold by tackling intense and difficult issues, and the purpose of my thesis is to conduct a rhetorical analysis on two of those.

In my thesis, I will analyze two music videos: Eminem’s music video for “Stan” and Lindsay Lohan’s music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)” that break the music video mold. It is no secret that the two singers work in very different music genres and have vastly different singing styles, but their music videos connect them. Both artists utilized their music videos to communicate disturbing and sad societal issues that would be distressing and uncomfortable to discuss in many contexts. The music video for “Stan” brings to light the issue of obsessed fans and the consequences of star idolization, while the music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)” exposes domestic abuse between parents and the effect that it can have on their children. Furthermore, both Eminem and Lohan have connections to these issues, which makes their music videos even more powerful and telling. The stars

utilize the unique rhetorical medium, the music video, to expose a societal issue that he or she has dealt with, and that is why I have chosen them to analyze in my thesis.

My thesis consists of four chapters. In Chapter I, I will cover music video origins, symbolic convergence theory, and then my chosen theoretical framework. Chapter II is dedicated to Eminem's music video for "Stan," and will include the rhetorical situation and the analysis. Similarly, Chapter III includes the rhetorical situation and analysis of Lohan's music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father." Finally, in Chapter IV, I will review the content from each chapter, and conclude with final remarks and takeaways. First, I am going to discuss the history of music videos, a genre that goes even further back than the birth of MTV.

Music Video Origins

In the 1980s, record companies used music videos to promote their artists. Communication technology scholar Dale Andrews writes that, "throughout the 80s and 90s, music videos became a part of our culture. A singer or band could pretty much guarantee success if their video was played on MTV."³ In the 1980s and 1990s, the popularity of music videos was undeniable, but where did they get their start? First, I will discuss the very first music video ever created.

The First Music Video

The first music video was created in the 1890s. Andrews writes that, "George Thomas started the whole thing rolling with a song called 'The Little Lost Child.'"⁴ Former U.S. representative for the London-based Francis, Day and Hunter publishing

3. Dale Andrews, "Music Videos," in *Digital Overdrive: Communications & Multimedia Technology* (Burlington, ON: Digital Overdrive, 2008), 187.

4. Andrews, "Music Videos," 187.

organization Al Kohn, and founder of eMusic and law scholar Bob Kohn provide a synopsis of “The Little Lost Child” writing that, “in 1886, Joseph Stern, a necktie salesman, and Edward B. Marks, a button salesman, formed a partnership called the Joseph W. Stern Company.”⁵ The two had a strong desire to write songs, and their first was called “The Little Lost Child.” The song is about a lost young girl who meets a policeman. When the policeman returns the girl to her mother, he discovers that her mother is his long, lost wife. Thomas approached the pair with the idea to combine their song with images. To make this vision a reality, “Thomas photographed people acting out the song, transferred the images to glass and then hand painted each one. The resulting slides were projected in a movie theatre while musicians played and sang the song.”⁶ Andrews writes that the first showing did not go over well, but that the second showing was a success, and it was then that music videos were born. This new innovation gained enormous popularity as, “over 10,000 theatres played these illustrated songs at one time with people lining up just to see this new idea.”⁷

The success of “The Little Lost Child” sparked inspiration for others to follow Thomas’ lead, but it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that a new purpose for music videos was discovered. The film industry capitalized on the increasing popularity of rock and roll music by creating “movies [that] were made around these pop culture icons

5. Al Kohn and Bob Kohn, “The Art of Music Publishing,” in *Kohn on Music Licensing Third Edition* (New York, NY: Aspen Publishers, 2001), 77.

6. Andrews, “Music Videos,” 187.

7. Andrews, “Music Videos,” 187.

[Elvis Presley and The Beatles] and made the studios a very large amount of money.”⁸

However, some argue that these films were lengthy music videos that played in theatres.

In the 1960s and 70s, artists began appearing on television shows such as “Soul Train,” to promote their music. They created promo videos and sent them to shows for publicity. The infamous band Queen did this for one of their most famous hits, “Bohemian Rhapsody.” The song itself was a huge success, and “[the] video went on to become something of a viewing sensation, remaining in rotation throughout the single’s incredible million-selling run, which included nine weeks at the top of the U.K. pop charts.”⁹ Then in the 1970s, the reach and persuasiveness of music videos was discovered. Artists and bands discovered that via music videos, they could reach hard to reach places, thus boost their sales. One of the most famous outlets broadcasting music videos was arguably the most famous music television network: MTV.

Music Television (MTV)

The birth of Music Television (MTV) goes back to 1978 when “Mike Nesmith [member of The Monkees] produced the first music video show for the US market called ‘Popclips.’”¹⁰ Nesmith took “Popclips” to the Warner AMEX Satellite Entertainment Company (WASEC) and received approval to produce the show for a test run in Columbus, Ohio, where it was very successful. New episodes were shot, and debuted on Nickelodeon in March 1980. The show was so successful that WASEC spent \$20 million to devote an entire channel to music programming. WASEC decided to name this

8. Andrews, “Music Videos,” 187.

9. Jeff Giles, “The Story of Queen’s Iconic ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ Video,” *Ultimate Classic Rock*, November 10, 2015, <http://ultimateclassicrock.com/queen-bohemian-rhapsody-video/>.

10. Andrews, “Music Videos,” 187.

network MTV, and it was launched on August 1, 1981, but only appeared in certain areas. Music journalists Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum write that, “MTV first appeared in suburban and rural areas, where the cost per mile of digging and installing cable was far cheaper than in cities.”¹¹ The very first music video to air on the network was “Video Killed the Radio Star” by The Buggles, and it was not long before British music would make its presence known on MTV. Andrews further elaborates on this and writes,

British music started to dominate MTV with videos from Duran Duran, the Human League, the Thompson Twins, and Culture Club. This was known as the second British invasion, the first happening in the 1960’s with the Beatles and Rolling Stones.¹²

The success of music videos was so evident that American artists followed suit by producing music videos for their songs and sending them to MTV. One year later, “I Want My MTV!” became the new slogan for America and their music videos. The music video focus remained with MTV for several more years, but eventually shifted around the year 2000. The network strayed from its original foundation and began to air more diverse pop culture content. MTV began airing reality television shows, such as: *The Osbournes* and *Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica*, as well as animated shows, such as: *Daria*, *Beavis and Butt-Head*, and others. Fast forward to now, and the network rarely airs music videos. Despite this enormous shift, MTV is still considered the original and most popular music television network. It paved the way for other television networks, one of the most prominent being *Friday Night Videos*.

11. Rob Tannenbaum and Craig Marks, *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2011), 1993.

12. Andrews, “Music Videos,” 188.

Friday Night Videos (FNV)

To compete with MTV's popularity, NBC created their own music television show in 1983. The show was called *Friday Night Videos (FNV)*, and initially ran for 90 minutes, only to be cut down to 60 minutes in 1987, as a result of the increasing popularity of *Late Night with David Letterman*. *FNV* broadcasted the latest rock videos, but the show also included its own unique segments. American television and radio historian Tim Brooks, and marketing scholar and former vice president of research for Showtime/The Movie Channel Earle F. Marsh overview these segments, writing that

mixed in were "Hall of Fame Videos" by stars of the 1960s and 1970s (the Beatles, Hollies, Doors, etc.); "Private Reel," a profile of a major star; and "Video Vote," in which viewers got to vote for one of two selected videos, using nationwide 900-numbers.¹³

One of the show's biggest segments was called the "World Premiere Video," where it would premier a major artist's clip. The videos were announced by off-camera announcers at first, but the show began to include celebrity guests to host the episodes, including famous figures such as Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder, and Tony Danza. However, focus shifted for the program when it began to air less music videos, and more comedy segments. The show ended on December 29, 2000. Along with *Friday Night Videos*, one additional network was a significant player in the music video industry: VH1.

13. Tim Brooks and Earle F. Marsh, "Nighttime Network TV Series: A to Z" in *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946- Present* (Ninth Edition) (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2007), 505.

VH1

VH1 (originally titled VH-1, which stood for Video Hits 1) was another big name in the music video industry. The network premiered on January 1, 1985, and “became an outlet for music geared towards the adult market, specifically the over 25 crowd.”¹⁴ The network was owned by MTV, and was often considered its sister channel. Writer for *The Business of Television*, Anne Becker explained how VH1 differed from MTV, writing that “for its first 10 years, the channel existed as an older-skewing, less-hip alternative to MTV, heavy on light rock, jazz, and R&B, and host to name VJs including Don Imus and Rosie O’Donnell.”¹⁵ However, VH1’s ratings began to decrease in the mid-1990s, and the network changed its name to VH1: Music First. The network “expanded its repertoire of music acts to include rockers like Red Hot Chili Peppers and rappers like Eminem, and moved to include music-related series, such as *Pop-Up Video*, and *Behind the Music* and its companion series *Legends*.”¹⁶ Then in 2002, “ratings were down some 35% and VH1 needed new life.”¹⁷ As a result, VH1 would also make the shift to “celebreality” content and shows, such as *The Surreal Life*, *Strange Love*, and *Flavor of Love*. *The Surreal Life* was a show where D-list celebrities would live together in a mansion and complete outrageous activities assigned to them, all while their escapades and relationships were under constant camera surveillance. The shows *Strange Love* and *Flavor of Love* included D-list celebrities as well, but were considered dating game shows. VH1’s shift

14. Andrews, “Music Videos,” 189.

15. Anne Becker, “Cover Story: VH1 Hits a New High Note,” *The Business of Television*, published May 5, 2008, <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/programming/cover-story-vh1-hits-new-high-note/28812>.

16. Becker, “Cover Story: VH1 Hits a New High Note”

17. Becker, “Cover Story: VH1 Hits a New High Note”

was successful, but it too has since strayed from its music television roots. The growing popularity in reality television, and other forms of pop culture are reasons for the networks' content shifts, but another component is seen for the decrease in music television: the increasing popularity of YouTube.

YouTube

YouTube is a website where users can upload, view, and share video content. The site was founded in 2005 by friends/colleagues Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, and its success is undeniable. In a *Telegraph* article, writer Richard Alleyne explains the site's success, writing "the figures are astonishing. More than 200 million videos are watched every day on the site and 10 hours of new content posted on it every minute."¹⁸ The website was so successful that it attracted the attention of Google. Within a year, Google bought the site for \$1.65 billion. Although YouTube was initially created for video-sharing purposes, it now includes "clips of [users'] favourite TV shows, films, sporting events and music videos."¹⁹ As far as music videos were concerned, technological advances (such as smart phones and the accessibility of information online) made it much easier to view music videos online, but it was not long before YouTube realized it needed to censor music video content that was not shared by its original creators. Not only that, but YouTube also realized that it needed to also deliver revenue to the appropriate parties for those music videos.

18. Richard Alleyne, "YouTube: Overnight Success Has Sparked a Backlash," *The Telegraph*, July 31, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2480280/YouTube-Overnight-success-has-sparked-a-backlash.html>.

19. Alleyne, "YouTube: Overnight Success Has Sparked a Backlash."

As a result, YouTube partnered with Vevo, the world's leading music video platform. This partnership enables music videos to be viewed on the YouTube website, as well as on the mobile app, and remedies the previous revenue problem. Thousands of artists and bands on YouTube now have a Vevo account that includes all their music videos, but that is not to say that all artists and bands do. Some artists' and bands' music videos are instead available under their own YouTube accounts, or under their record label's accounts. Still, their videos are now available on YouTube, thus making it very simple to view a music video whenever one wishes. Christian Cawley, a writer for MakeUseOf and someone with experience in IT desktop and software support, explains how easy it is now to view music videos via the YouTube app, he writes that, "it is a far cry from the experimental times of the 1960s, where adding some film to your latest hit record was considered *avant garde* [innovative]." ²⁰ Technological advancements and the increased retrieval of internet content has made YouTube the new and popular medium for viewing music videos.

As of October 2017, one music video has been viewed on YouTube more than 400 million times. It is considered one of the most iconic music videos of all time, and broke the music video glass ceiling with its special effects and elaborate dance numbers: The King of Pop, Michael Jackson's music video for the song "Thriller."

Michael Jackson's "Thriller" Music Video

The music video for Michael Jackson's hit song "Thriller" debuted on MTV on December 2, 1983. Jackson contacted John Landis, director of the horror/comedy film *An*

20. Christian Cawley, "From MTV to YouTube: A Brief History of Music Videos," *MakeUseOf*, May 17, 2015, <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/mtv-youtube-brief-history-music-videos/>.

American Werewolf in London, to see if he would be interested in creating a music video for “Thriller.” Landis was an established director with films such as *The Blues Brothers* and *Animal House* under his belt, but Jackson, according to Phil Hebblethwaite, a journalist for *The Guardian*, “wanted Landis because of *An American Werewolf in London*.”²¹ Landis agreed, but only if he could make it a short film, to which Jackson agreed. The music video starts out with Jackson walking through the woods with his new girlfriend. He gives her a ring as a token of his affection, but then warns her that he is “not like other guys.” She states that that is why she likes him so much, but Jackson tells her that is not what he meant. A full moon appears, and Jackson transforms into a werecat. His girlfriend runs away, but Jackson chases after her and attacks her off-screen. Then, the video shifts to Jackson in a movie theater watching a horror movie with a new girlfriend. She becomes frightened and leaves the theater, and Jackson follows her. The two go for a walk and pass by a graveyard, where members of the undead begin to rise out of the ground. The zombies start to corner the two, and the girl turns towards Jackson, only to realize he has become a zombie. Jackson and the other zombies break into an elaborate dance as Jackson starts singing along with “Thriller.” His girlfriend becomes frightened and runs into an abandoned house, with Jackson and the undead following her. He corners his girlfriend and reaches for her throat, only to awake and realize he was dreaming. Jackson offers to take his girlfriend home, and as the two are walking away, he turns back to towards the camera and smiles, revealing his yellow werecat eyes.

21. Phil Hebblethwaite, “How Michael Jackson’s Thriller Changed Music Videos For Ever” *The Guardian*, November 21, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/nov/21/michael-jackson-thriller-changed-music-videos>.

The video cost \$900,000 to make due to the elaborate filming and effects, as well as for the ten days of dance rehearsals. The 13-minute-long video was one of the first of its kind not only because of its length, but because of the success it brought to MTV, and the doors it opened for music video creators to come. The video was a huge success, and to this day, is considered one of the most revolutionary music videos of all time. It was so successful that it became the first music video to be inducted into the Library of Congress' National Film Registry. Ironically, upon its release, this music video was one that did not exactly fit into the music video genre. Hebblethwaite quotes Vaugan Arnell, a music video promoter, who explained that

when you're making music videos, it's like you're a tailor; you cut the suit to fit your model and the artist you're working with. Thriller was the biggest recording artist in the world at the time working with probably the biggest director and it was an amalgamation of the two talents. They made something that was so perfect for the early 80s. It took videos to another level, but in my world and in the world of artists I was dealing with, it's almost like it didn't relate.²²

By breaking the music video glass ceiling, the "Thriller" music video inspired others to begin creating music films themselves. Trudy Bellinger, who was studying art at the time of its release said that

it was really groundbreaking to have such a long video, and it helped to shape the future of music videos, which previously had been more performance-based . . . It really opened our [college students] eyes to music videos as a creative form of film-making, and a potential career.²³

The music video ignited creative juices for music video creators because they realized that music videos can be as creative, lengthy, and elaborate as one wishes. There are no limits, which brings me to my two chosen artifacts to analyze for my thesis.

22. Hebblethwaite, "How Michael Jackson's Thriller Changed Music Videos For Ever."

23. Hebblethwaite, "How Michael Jackson's Thriller Changed Music Videos For Ever."

Rhetorical Artifacts and Theoretical Framework

In my thesis, I will analyze two music videos. Neither of them are the typical “sing to the camera” music video. Rather, both bring distressing, controversial, and disturbing real-life issues to light, which is why I have chosen to analyze them in this thesis. Although Eminem and Lindsay Lohan are polar opposites as far as their singing styles, their music videos connect them. The music videos for “Stan” and “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)” are about controversial and disturbing issues, and the artists utilized their music videos to communicate the severity of each accompanying issue. Furthermore, both Eminem and Lohan have personal experience with the issue their music video is centered on, which I will discuss further in Chapters II and III. The music videos not only help the artists communicate about idolization and fandom, and domestic abuse, but they also serve as a form of catharsis for both stars. The music videos help Eminem and Lohan make sense of their experiences, and can also be considered warnings and/or cautionary tales, which makes them even more unique. In Chapter II, I will overview the content of and rhetorical situation surrounding “Stan,” and in Chapter III, I will do the same for “Confessions.”

In my analysis, I will analyze how the rhetors who created these two music videos utilize this unique medium to craft fantasy themes that portray distressing and controversial topics that are otherwise difficult to discuss. Although the two issues may be difficult to understand, Eminem and Lohan utilize their music videos to openly communicate about them, therefore opening the door for further discussion on the topics. As a rhetorical method, fantasy themes come from symbolic convergence theory; therefore, in the following sections I will overview symbolic convergence, fantasy

themes, and rhetorical visions to gain a better understanding of the ways that fantasy themes will be critical to my analysis.

Symbolic Convergence Theory

The sociocultural tradition of communication focuses not on the individual aspect of communication, but rather on communication in/of groups. Communication scholars Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss write that “this tradition focuses on patterns of interaction between people rather than on individual characteristics or mental models. Interaction is the process and site in which meanings, roles, and cultural values are worked out.”²⁴ Littlejohn and Foss claim that interaction among individuals is at the heart of this tradition, and that meanings, roles, and cultural values stem from these interactions. Furthermore, communication scholars Craig and Muller write that, “for theories in the sociocultural tradition, communication is a process essentially involved with concepts such as social structures, identities, norms, rituals, and collective belief systems.”²⁵ These concepts are not only present within a group, but they are also characteristics that strengthen a group by providing a solid foundation composed of shared and collective concepts.

Symbolic convergence theory centers on the connections made among rhetorical themes, beliefs, messages, and people. Through symbolic convergence, people can develop their own beliefs about what is real and what is just. Furthermore, through these connections, people are more able to develop a shared worldview with others who think

24. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss, *Theories of Human Communication: Tenth Edition* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.), 55.

25. Robert T. Craig and Heidi L. Muller, “The Sociocultural Tradition,” in *Theorizing Communication: Readings Across Traditions*, ed. Robert T. Craig and Heidi L. Muller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 365.

the same way. Communication scholar and creator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest G. Bormann writes that, “the symbolic convergence theory of communication is a general theory that accounts for the appearance of a group consciousness, with is implied shared emotions, motives, and meanings.”²⁶ In this quotation, Bormann claims that shared emotions, motives, and meanings are responsible for creating a shared consensus. This shared consensus can ultimately lead to a shared worldview. Communication scholars Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss build on this notion writing that symbolic convergence, “explains how worldviews are created symbolically that catch up and involve often large groups of people.”²⁷ When one person develops his or her beliefs, it is likely he or she will pass those beliefs to another. This cycle can continue, and go on to craft a shared view among a large group of people. When one seed is planted, there is no telling how much something will flourish. As a result of this flourishing, a culture can evolve and prosper. Bormann writes that “the culture consists of shared norms, reminiscences, stories, rites, and rituals which provide the members with a unique symbolic common ground.”²⁸ Bormann claims that at the root of a culture is a common ground, where the shared ideas, beliefs, and values dwell. Everything comes full circle.

Symbolic convergence emphasizes the overlapping and convergence of ideas and beliefs, and the rhetorical themes communicated by individuals in a community is an

26. Ernest G. Bormann, “Symbolic Convergence Theory and Communication in Group Decision Making,” in *Communication and Group Decision Making*, ed. Randy Y. Hirokawa and Marshall Scott Poole (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 81.

27. Stephen W. Littlejohn, “Symbolic Convergence Theory,” in *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory, Volume 1*, ed. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 943.

28. Ernest G. Bormann, “The Symbolic Convergence Theory of Communication: Applications and Implications for Teachers and Consultants,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 10, no. 1 (1982): 50. doi:10.1080.00909888209365212.

important aspect of this overlapping and converging. Rhetorical themes have the power to alter the ways in which people formulate their own realities, and music videos are not an exception. In the case of this thesis, I argue that rhetors create and share these realities with other people through fantasy themes woven into music videos.

Fantasy Themes

Fantasy themes are stories or “realities” that craft symbolic convergence and can create a shared knowledge amongst groups of people. Communication scholars Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss elaborate more on this notion in writing that

these stories, or fantasy themes, are created in symbolic interaction within small groups, and they chain out from person to person and group to group to create a shared worldview. In essence, then, conversations create and sustain shared narrative for a group that constitute their reality.²⁹

In this quote, Littlejohn and Foss explain that fantasy themes are essentially stories created by individuals that become widespread amongst groups of people as they interact with one another. As a result, several widely accepted fantasy themes can work together to become a shared worldview for a group of people. Fantasy themes are artistic, and have the power to help a group make sense of experiences. Communication scholar Sonja K. Foss writes that, “in addition to their dramatic nature, fantasies are characterized by their artistic and organized quality. While experience itself is often chaotic and confusing, fantasy themes are organized and artistic.”³⁰ Because fantasy themes are so artistic and organized, it makes making sense of experience much easier for participants. Foss further elaborates on fantasy theme and explains that “all fantasy themes involve the creative

29. Littlejohn and Foss, *Theories of Human Communication*, 206.

30. Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, Fifth Edition* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2018), 107.

interpretation of events, but the artistry with which the fantasies are presented varies.”³¹ This idea is worth noting because fantasy themes are not only organized, but they can be presented in various ways. Through this dramatized vision, participants are then able to come to a better understanding of their experiences. Fantasy themes help in organizing complicated, messy, and disordered events. Through this process, group mind is created and shared.

Communication scholars Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss write that, “fantasy themes are the building blocks of the drama (view of reality) a group creates.”³² There are several components that make up a fantasy theme, including character themes, action themes, and the setting themes.

The character theme describes the personalities of the characters within the fantasy theme. Communication scholar Sonja K. Foss writes that, “*character themes* describe the agents or actors in the drama and ascribe characteristics and motives to them.”³³ The character theme pertains to the individuals in the drama, and some characters are more important than others. The introduction of characters also typically involves the selection of protagonist and antagonist. Communication scholar and originator of symbolic convergence, Ernest G. Bormann writes that “when people dramatize an event, they must select certain characters to be the focus of the story and present them in a favorable light while selecting others to be portrayed in a more negative

31. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 107.

32. Littlejohn and Foss, *Theories of Human Communication*, 206.

33. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 108.

fashion.”³⁴ The selection and recognition of a character’s development is important to note in any fantasy theme as it can help better understand the characters in the drama, and even their actions.

The action theme consists of the plotlines of the drama. Communication scholars Littlejohn and Foss describe it as “the action or development of the story.”³⁵ When looking at the action themes, one is essentially analyzing what occurs in the drama. The action themes connect to the overall plot line of the drama, and ultimately help describe what occurs. Communication scholars Donald Shields and Thomas C. Preston write that the “action simply means who is doing what, to whom, and how?”³⁶ Although all the fantasy theme elements work together, the action themes connect with the character themes because one is looking at what the characters do throughout the drama. This fantasy theme element is important to consider when conducting a fantasy theme analysis because anyone can watch what happens in a drama, but the next step is assigning themes that help describe those actions and thus, help one gain a better understanding of the overall story.

Finally, the setting theme is where the action is taking place and describes the characteristics of the scene. Bormann explains that once a critic identifies the places where the drama is taking place, questions that may follow are, “Where are the dramas set? In the wilderness? In the countryside? In the urban ghetto? Is the setting given

34. Ernest G. Bormann, “The Critical Analysis of Seminal American Fantasies,” in *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 9.

35. Littlejohn and Foss, *Theories of Human Communication*, 206.

36. Donald Shields and Thomas Preston, “Fantasy Theme Analysis in Competitive Rhetorical Criticism,” *National Forensic Journal* 3, no. 2 (1985): 107.

supernatural sanction?”³⁷ Not every critic has to ask these exact questions, but these are examples of ones that a critic may want to consider when analyzing the settings.

Communication scholar Virginia Kidd writes that “often the setting is symbolic.”³⁸ At face value, the places where the events take place may seem simple. More often than not, the settings have deeper meaning attached to them and thus, play an important role in the narrative. The setting themes are important to the analysis because they describe the places where the events take place, and connect to the other fantasy theme elements.

These elements help better organize the fantasy theme so that individuals can make better sense of their reality and experiences. Bormann writes that “a fantasy theme is a way for people to present or show to the group mind, to make visible (understandable) a common experience and shape it into social knowledge.”³⁹ By including all these elements into a fantasy theme, rhetors are better able to make, shape, mold, and share their messages with an audience. Each element serves its own unique purpose, and is important to note while analyzing a fantasy theme. If a fantasy theme is successful, it becomes a rhetorical vision.

Rhetorical Vision

If a fantasy theme contains all the required characteristics (setting, character, and action themes), then it has the potential to gain traction within a community and become a rhetorical vision. Sonja K. Foss defines a rhetorical vision as “a swirling together of fantasy themes to provide a particular interpretation of reality. It contains fantasy themes

37. Ernest G. Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58, no. 4 (1972): 401. doi:10.1080/00335637209383138

38. Virginia Kidd, “Fantasy Theme Analysis,” April 3, 1998, California State University, http://www.csus.edu/indiv/k/kiddv/fta_reading.html

39. Bormann, “The Symbolic Convergence Theory of Communication,” 52.

relating to settings, characters, and actions that together form a symbolic drama or coherent interpretation of reality.”⁴⁰ In this quote, Foss explains that the combination of the three themes make it a rhetorical vision. If one or more of the themes is absent, then it cannot be a successful rhetorical vision—all three elements are needed because they are all important and serve a purpose. It is also important to note that rhetorical visions must include strong links to reality. In the same source referenced earlier, Shields and Preston write that

reality links are the *here-and-now phenomena* that add credibility to the dramatistic interpretation presented within the rhetoric of a vision. As such, the reality links serve to make the vision more believable and thus make symbolic participation within the vision more acceptable.⁴¹

In this quote, Shields claims that if a rhetorical vision includes true and real elements, it is easier to comprehend, and accept. The implementation of real-life components can make a rhetorical vision stronger. The more believable a rhetorical vision, the stronger it is because more people are able to relate to it. In the following section, I will preview the two music videos that I have chosen to analyze in my thesis, and that communicate their own rhetorical vision.

Analysis Preview

As I stated earlier, the two music videos I will analyze in my thesis break music video genre conventions. Eminem and Lindsay Lohan accomplish this by using their music videos to address societal issues they have a connection with. Although “Stan” is fiction, Eminem has stated that he receives letters like Stan’s all the time, and that the video serves as a cautionary tale to not take what he says too seriously. On the other

40. Foss, “Fantasy-Theme Criticism,” 108.

41. Shields and Preston, “Fantasy Theme Analysis in Competitive Rhetorical Criticism,” 108.

hand, Lohan's music video is a reflection of the domestic abuse she witnessed between her mother and father. The music video served as a form of therapy for her, but also as a comfort to those who may find themselves in a similar situation. The two music videos are unique and powerful because they utilize this rhetorical medium to communicate disturbing social issues that are otherwise distressing and uncomfortable to discuss. By doing so, the singers are opening the doors for discussion. Due to their authenticity, the music videos may (and probably do) make viewers uncomfortable, but that discomfort can spark awareness and future conversation about these real-life problems.

In my thesis, I will utilize the fantasy theme framework to study how Eminem and Lohan created their music video in order to discuss the accompanying societal issue. Both singers crafted their music videos to make sense of their experiences, and they accomplished this by including the necessary fantasy theme components: setting themes, character themes, and action themes. Thus, the fantasy theme framework will provide the lens I need to effectively examine my artifacts. Chapters II and III of my thesis will be organized by artifact.

Chapter II will be dedicated to Eminem's music video for "Stan." Throughout the chapter, I will examine how the artist utilized fantasy themes to address the potentially problematic "relationship" between a celebrity and a fan. I will study how Eminem discusses star idolization, fandom, and obsession in his music video. Eminem accomplishes this task at face-value, but in my analysis, I will delve deeper into how he crafted his music video to include the fantasy theme elements to further communicate his message. The research question that I will answer in this chapter is: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom?

Chapter III of my thesis will be dedicated to Lohan's music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)." Throughout the chapter, I will analyze how Lohan used fantasy theme elements to address the issue of domestic abuse between parents and the pain it can cause for their children. In my analysis, I will examine how Lohan used fantasy themes to communicate her message. In this chapter, I will answer the question: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse?

Finally, Chapter IV will be the conclusion chapter of my thesis. In this chapter, I will discuss the influence that these two unique music videos have on society. Both Lohan and Eminem's music videos break the music video glass ceiling, but they fulfill a purpose larger than the average music video. This is the reason why I have chosen these two artifacts for my thesis, and is a concept I will return to at the conclusion of my thesis.

CHAPTER II

EMINEM'S MUSIC VIDEO FOR "STAN"

The song "Stan" by American rapper Eminem (also known as "Slim Shady," or by his birth name, Marshall Mathers) is one of the most infamous by the artist. The song features a sample of the love song "Thank You" by English artist Dido. "Thank You" was featured in the film *Sliding Doors*, and was discovered by Mark James, "The 45 King," while he was watching television one night. In an episode of VH1's *Ultimate Albums* dedicated to *The Marshall Mathers LP*, The 45 King discusses the first time he heard the song and says, "I was actually doing bills, or doing something, sitting on the bed watching it [*Sliding Doors*] and then, 'my tea's gone cold/I'm wondering why,' I said, 'wow, that's kind of hot.'"¹ He then goes into detail about how he edited the song before passing it onto Eminem saying, "I taped it, I took it down to the basement; I looped it up, added a baseline and thumb tracks."² Eminem listened to the new sample of Dido's song and instantly thought of an obsessed fan, which inspired him to write "Stan." Eminem raps the first three verses of the song from the point of view of an obsessed fan named Stan. The music video directly follows the song (which is fiction, a question often raised by listeners), and is considered one of the most controversial and disturbing music

1. "Rare Musical Stuff," "VH1's Ultimate Albums – Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (2002)," April 30, 2016, from VH1's Ultimate Albums, YouTube Video, 43:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IDRuJsxs7s&feature=youtu.be&t=12m57shttps%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2F0IDRuJsxs7s%3Ft%3D12m57s>

2. "Rare Musical Stuff," "VH1's Ultimate Albums – Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (2002)."

videos ever made. The music video features Stan, a fan of Eminem's who becomes increasingly obsessed with the artist. The music video opens with Stan dying his hair the same blonde color as Eminem's and getting angry when his pregnant girlfriend calls him Stanley. Stan then turns his basement into a shrine to Eminem, which includes posters covering the walls, a mannequin dressed like Eminem, and a video tape of the artist playing on loop, which he waves to every now and again. Throughout the song, Stan writes fan mail to Eminem, but unforeseen circumstances, such as his mail getting lost at the post office, prevent Eminem from responding to Stan in a timely manner.

As time goes on, Stan's actions become more obsessive. He gets a tattoo of "Slim Shady" on his chest over his heart, dresses like Eminem, professes his romantic love for the artist, and replaces pictures of his girlfriend with pictures of Eminem. Stan becomes increasingly angered that Eminem has not written back or called him, and his rage reaches an all-time high when he discovers his girlfriend in the basement. Stan then proceeds to tie her up and stuff her in the trunk of their car. He recklessly drives the two through the pouring rain, while shouting his last message to Eminem into a tape recorder, and drives his car off a bridge. The video then shifts to Eminem on his tour bus writing a letter back to Stan. Eminem tells Stan that he is worried about him, and encourages him to get counseling before he does something to hurt himself or his girlfriend. The music video ends with Eminem recalling a recent incident where a guy drove his car off a bridge, killing himself and his pregnant girlfriend, and saying that he does not want Stan to end up like him—only to realize that it was Stan, to which he says, "Damn." To gain a better understanding of this music video, I will overview the rhetorical situation of the music video by discussing the rhetors, audience, reception, and finally the context.

Rhetorical Situation

“Stan” is one of the most infamous songs by the controversial and outspoken rap star Eminem. Not only is the song one of the most infamous songs by the artist, but the accompanying music video is one of the most influential music videos ever created. In order to better understand the concept of the video and its influence, I will cover the rhetorical situation of the artifact in the following sections: the rhetor, audience, reception, and context.

Rhetor

Eminem was born on October 17, 1972 in St. Joseph, Missouri to Debbie Nelson and Marshall Mathers, Jr. Debbie and Marshall separated while Eminem was still young, and Marshall moved to California. Eminem would write letters to his father, but they would all come back marked “Return to Sender.”³ Debbie and Eminem moved quite frequently, usually shifting between Michigan and Missouri. He had an interest in storytelling and was introduced to his first rap song, “Reckless” around the age of 9.⁴ Eminem and his mother’s relationship was very tumultuous; the two fought often, and Debbie would often throw him out of the house after (according to Eminem) she would take the paychecks he earned from his part-time jobs. Still, Eminem continued to write songs and blast his stereo when his mom was not home.

At the age of 14, Eminem and a friend would sneak into a neighboring high school to attend and join rap battles and open mic contests on the weekends. Eminem often talks about how he would get booed as soon as he grabbed the mic because he was

3. Anthony Bozza, “Eminem Blows Up,” *Rolling Stone*, April 29, 1999, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/eminem-blows-up-20091105>.

4. Bozza, “Eminem Blows Up.”

white, but then the audience “would shut up once they heard me rhyme.”⁵ Eminem “dropped out of high school after failing the ninth grade for the third time” at the age of 17.⁶ His rap reputation grew, and he spent some time in several rap groups, none of which lasted very long. In 1996, he was signed to Jeff and Mark Bass’s FBT Productions, and released his first album, *Infinite*. The album was a bust, and the feedback fueled him to write darker and angrier songs. Rolling Stone writer Anthony Bozza interviewed Eminem, who said that,

after that record, every rhyme I wrote got angrier and angrier. A lot of it was because of the feedback I got. Motherfuckers was like, “You’re a white boy, what the fuck are you rapping for? Why don’t you go into rock & roll?” All that type of shit started pissing me off.⁷

During this period, Eminem also created the violent alter-ego, “Slim Shady.” Under this alter-ego, the artist’s song lyrics centered on disturbing matters such as drugs, violence, and murder. Eminem soon caught the attention of record producer Dr. Dre, and the two collaborated on his upcoming album.

Eminem released *The Slim Shady LP* in February 1999, and the album was so successful that it went certified triple platinum by the end of the year. The album’s songs were more disturbing than his previous album, with one of the songs even describing a fictional trip with his young daughter to dispose of his wife’s body. Although the album was met with criticism, it made Eminem, a white male in a genre dominated by African American males, a household name and a prominent figure in the hip-hop world. The artist’s 2000 album *The Marshall Mathers LP* was a huge success, selling “an astounding

5. Bozza, “Eminem Blows Up.”

6. Bozza, “Eminem Blows Up.”

7. Bozza, “Eminem Blows Up.”

1,760,049 copies” in its first week.⁸ *Rolling Stone* writer Richard Skanse writes that, “*The Marshall Mathers LP* sold more than twice as many copies in its first week than the previous rap record holder, Snoop Dogg’s 1993 *Doggystyle*.”⁹ The rapper’s controversial lyrics were present on this album, as well. The album also includes a song titled “Kim,” which is about Eminem killing his estranged wife Kim. The song is very graphic, and includes sound effects of Kim trying to run away from him in the woods, and gagging from her throat being slit. Due to his unique style, Eminem had a big fan-base, but he also had his enemies. *The New York Times* Opinion writer Bob Herbert wrote that

Eminem is making millions exercising his unassailable right to artistic freedom. But there is a legitimate question here about sanity. “I’m a kill you!” he says of one woman. “Like a murder weapon, I’m a conceal you in a closet with mildew, sheets, pillows and film you.” What is the artistic value here? Trust me, it’s not the music. And the lyrics, as you can see, are both inane and obscene.¹⁰

Eminem’s signature style was making him a success, but it also made some question whether he was an artist, or just a deranged, violent, and malicious individual because many of his songs were about domestic violence, murder, drugs, and were full of curse words.

Despite the criticism, his signature rapping style and fearlessness to speak his mind did not waver in future albums. Eminem continued to rap about disturbing issues, and even bashed public figures by name, such as Christina Aguilera, Michael Jackson, and even former U.S. President George W. Bush, in subsequent albums. Some of the

8. Richard Skanse, “Eminem Bounces Britney From Top Spot,” *Rolling Stone*, May 31, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20080401120550/http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/5923810/eminem_bounces_britney_from_top_spot.

9. Skanse, “Eminem Bounces Britney From Top Spot.”

10. Bob Herbert, “In America; A Musical Betrayal,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/29/opinion/in-america-a-musical-betrayal.html>.

artist's songs were even humorous, with an accompanying music video falling into the parody genre, such as "Just Lose It." The star's fans praised his bluntness and unique rapping style and considered his lyrics poetic. In their eyes, a rapper had never been so gutsy and bold prior to Eminem—even if that meant rapping about serious and disturbing matters. Although a good number of the star's songs are incredibly graphic, Eminem also writes songs about his personal life, such as: being a father, trying to get clean, and even anthems that inspire listeners to stand up for themselves and what they believe in. The star continued to be a huge success throughout his career, and in 2017, he made his way back into the limelight when he bashed President Donald Trump in a freestyle rap during the BET Awards. The star prompted his fans to either choose him or Trump, rapping,

and any fan of mine who's a supporter of his, I'm drawing in the sand a line,
you're either for or against, and if you can't decide who you like more and
you're split on who you should stand beside, I'll do it for you with this.
Fuck you.¹¹

Eminem ended the freestyle by giving the middle finger to the camera. His declaration occurred after controversial events such as the white supremacist rally controversy, the battle between the White House and the NFL, and as a tribute to Colin Kaepernick. Even after all these years, the star is still speaking his mind and causing a stir.

Although he is most well-known and was responsible for the music video's content and direction, Eminem was not only the mastermind behind the song "Stan." In the same *Ultimate Albums* episode referenced earlier, Eminem explains the inspiration that Dido's "Thank You" played in the creation of "Stan." He says that, "seeing the

11. Deena Zaru, "Eminem Unleashes on Trump: The 11 Fiercest Lines," *CNN Politics*, October 12, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/11/politics/eminem-donald-trump-bet-hip-hop-awards/index.html>.

vision, like, in what Dido was saying like, her words, like, instantly put me there. Like, ‘your picture on my wall,’ like this is about an obsessed fan, that’s all I kept thinking.”¹²

“Thank You” is a soulful love-song—a far cry from the hip-hop genre, but the snippet from the song fits eerily well into Eminem’s hit. In an interview on *TRL* from 2000, Eminem discusses how “Stan” was also written, in part, as a reaction to his newfound fame, which seemed to happen overnight, he says that,

I get crazy letters like this. I don’t—like all of this [the fame] is crazy to me. I never knew that I was gonna have any of this. It’s all a bit much to me. To even imagine this, and now it’s happening. For people to look up to me, like it’s really crazy to me.¹³

With this newfound fame came the realization that his fans sometimes take what he says seriously and/or mimic what he does, but Eminem says that “Stan” is a warning to not do so. In the same interview he says that, “it’s a message to the fans, you know what I’m saying like, everything that I say is not meant to be taken literally, just multiple things.”¹⁴

Eminem is very organic and honest in his songs, but he does not want all of his work to be taken literally and seriously; song writing is his form of expression, not a set of directions for his fans. The star also warns against the dangers of idolizing entertainers too much. In the same VH1 *Ultimate Albums* special, he says that, “anybody who lives and breathes for someone who entertains, is taking it too far and probably has something mentally wrong with them, and they can do something fucked up.”¹⁵ It is not bad to

12. “Rare Musical Stuff,” “VH1’s Ultimate Albums – Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (2002).”

13. “Yash Bhatia,” “Eminem Explains His Song ‘Stan,’” April 7, 2013, from *TRL*, YouTube Video, 2:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2R6yvdkPqA>.

14. “Bhatia,” “Eminem Explains His Song ‘Stan.’”

15. “Rare Musical Stuff,” “VH1’s Ultimate Albums – Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (2002).”

admire a celebrity, but when someone becomes obsessed and takes everything the star says literally, that is crossing a line and when it becomes problematic, and that is what Eminem wanted to highlight in “Stan.”

The music video for the song directly follows the narrative of the song; therefore, his vision for the song is the same vision for the music video. The music video was directed by Phil Atwell and co-directed by Dr. Dre, and the two followed Eminem’s vision. In a TV special dedicated to the making of the music video, Dr. Dre discusses how although Eminem himself is not present throughout the entire video, they still wanted him to be seen in the video saying that, “we found creative ways to make sure his face is seen in posters and pictures [in Stan’s basement] and what have you.”¹⁶ Phil was also quoted saying, “we didn’t want to make this so much of characters and then performance later by Eminem and Dido.”¹⁷ They wanted the focus of the video to be on the story of Stan, not on Eminem, which is something that Eminem clearly wanted to establish when he wrote the song. Atwell and Dr. Dre certainly played a part in the making of the video, but Eminem’s vision was the driving force in creating it. With this better understanding of Eminem’s vision for the music video, I will now focus on the audience for “Stan.”

Audience

As I mentioned earlier, Eminem has a strong fan-base, but where are the majority of his fans located? With the help of YouTube’s geocoded streaming data, the *New York Times* set out to discover where Billboard Top 100 artists’ music is most popular. From

16. “Eminemunlimited11,” “The Making of ‘Stan,’” January 14, 2011, YouTube Video, 8:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoCeArB2ctM>.

17. “Eminemunlimited11,” “The Making of ‘Stan.’”

this investigation, the *New York Times* found that Eminem's "fan base is strongest in whiter and more rural places: West Virginia; southern Ohio; eastern Kentucky; deep north Maine; the Ozarks in Missouri; across the Great Plains. And of course, Eminem is popular in his hometown, Detroit."¹⁸ Due to the vulgarity of some of his content, Eminem's material is directed at the 18 and older age group. Oppressors have criticized the artist for influencing youths with his material, but the star has made it clear that it, while it is not intended for them, he is not responsible if they do happen to listen to his songs. Eminem discusses this in an article by *Rolling Stone*, saying that

my album isn't for younger kids to hear. It has an advisory sticker, and you must be eighteen to get it. That doesn't mean younger kids won't get it, but I'm not responsible for every kid out there. I'm not a role model, and I don't claim to be.¹⁹

In this quote, Eminem explains that his albums come with all the necessary precautions for their content, and he cannot be held responsible if young kids manage to listen to his songs. He writes his songs to express himself, not to be a role model or martyr. His fans also typically share the same angst present in many of his songs, making his content more relatable. MTV News writer Jeremy Kaplan relates to this and writes that,

despite the fact that it [*The Marshall Mathers LP*] was so explicit that even the uncensored version had some words deleted, I saw in between the cursing and the violence because the music applied to me directly. While I deeply felt these lyrics at the time, the fact is that I went through this rebellious, angry phase literally half my life ago.²⁰

18. Josh Katz, "What Music Do Americans Love the Most? 50 Detailed Fan Maps," *The New York Times*, August 7, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/07/upshot/music-fandom-maps.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&mtrref=m.facebook.com&_r=0.

19. Bozza, "Eminem Blows Up."

20. Jeremy Kaplan, "Eminem: Why One Fan is Still a Fan," *MTV News*, June 30, 2010, <http://www.mtv.com/news/2578969/eminem-fans/>.

Eminem's material (that was not centered on murder or rape, and other disturbing matters) really spoke to the younger generation, as they were the ones who typically go through angst-filled, rebellious phases. His fans not only admire Eminem for speaking his mind, but for how he effortlessly raps about things that they can identify and connect with. Eminem's voice is one that can speak to an entire generation of fans. As his music career flourished and matured, his songs went from being extremely vulgar all the time to deeply personal and complex, something his fans also appreciate. Kaplan capitalizes on Eminem's loyal fans and writes that, "people who have seen beyond Eminem's vulgarity and enjoyed his music for its complexity are the ones that will be with him until the end."²¹ With that in mind, I will move on to discuss how "Stan" was received by fans and the general public.

Reception

The song "Stan" was received well and praised for its haunting storytelling style. It even claimed the 296th spot on *Rolling Stone's* 2011 "500 Greatest Songs of All Time" list.²² The music video, however, was met with mixed reviews. Because the music video directly illustrates the song, it brings to life this disturbing, creepy, and sad story of fandom gone wrong. *Time Magazine* writer Nick Carbone describes how only edited versions of the video were shown, writing that,

MTV, for one, cut out all traces of Stan's wife bound in the trunk of the car and removed one scene showing him guzzling vodka while driving before

21. Kaplan, "Eminem: Why One Fan is Still a Fan."

22. "500 Greatest Songs of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, April 7, 2011, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/the-500-greatest-songs-of-all-time-20110407/eminem-feat-dido-stan-20110526>.

airing the video. But even without the most graphic scenes, that dark video manages to paint a gruesome picture of fandom gone wrong.²³

The domestic violence parts of the song are present in the music video, but were dramatically toned down so that the music video could be shown on television—uncut versions of the video are even rare to find on the internet. Still, the creepy and disturbing elements of the video have enabled it to claim its spot as one of the most notorious music videos of all time. Eminem was the first artist who gave us a look into the dynamic between fan and celebrity. Chairman of Interscope Records, Jimmy Lovine, says that,

[Eminem] stepped outside and took a look in, and he gave us all a look into what it looks like to be the fan, what it feels like to be the person who's being admired, and he did it simultaneously.²⁴

A combination such as this had not been created by an artist before, and Eminem's creation allows listeners and viewers a look into the potentially problematic "relationship" between celebrities and fans. The music video's message serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of idolizing celebrities too much, and its message has stuck with fans throughout all these years. Next, I will discuss "Stan's" legacy and why it is worthy of study.

Context

The music video for "Stan" was released in 2000, and although it is almost 20 years old, its legacy still lives on. The music video brought the accompanying dark song to life, and it illustrates the problems and consequences that can result from idolizing stars. In an article for *Noisey*, writer Emma Garland explains how "Stan" exposed the

23. Nick Carbone, "Top 10 Controversial Music Videos," *Time*, June 6, 2011, <http://entertainment.time.com/2011/06/07/top-10-controversial-music-videos/slide/eminem-stan/>.

24. "Rare Musical Stuff," "VH1's *Ultimate Albums* – Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (2002)."

consequences of fandom by “plung[ing] its hands into the messy dynamic between artists and their fans.”²⁵ This problematic relationship had not been addressed through song or music video prior to “Stan,” so Eminem’s creation was the first of its kind. Rap artists began to use the term “Stan” in their songs for years to come, typically to describe obsessions and/or obsessive fans. The term “Stan” became so common that in 2017, the word became a recognized word in the Oxford English Dictionary. In a *Time* article, Cady Lang provides the definition, writing that “the dictionary officially defines a ‘stan’ as an ‘overzealous or obsessive fan of a particular celebrity’ and cites the origin as ‘early 21st century’ and ‘probably an allusion’ to the rapper’s seminal 2000 single ‘Stan.’”²⁶ The term made such an impression that seventeen years after its release, it became a recognized word—making its notoriety undeniable. As noted earlier, it is considered one of the most disturbing music videos of all time, but it is also one of the most memorable. It is notorious for addressing the mental issues associated with idolizing stars and fandom, thus bringing to light an issue that may be uncomfortable to otherwise address. It is not bad to view a celebrity as a role model, but “Stan” exposes the potential dark side of this admiration.

With the rhetorical situation in mind, I will now shift to the analysis portion of my thesis. In the following section, I will utilize my chosen theoretical framework to analyze the music video for “Stan,” and therefore answer my proposed research question.

25. Emma Garland, “Eminem’s ‘Stan’ Gave a Face and Name to Fandom,” *Noisey*, September 29, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/a3kj5j/eminem-stan-fandom-obsession-deep-dive.

26. Cady Lang, “‘Stan’ is Now an Officially Recognized Word in the Oxford English Dictionary So It’s a Big Day for Eminem,” *Time*, June 1, 2017, <http://time.com/4801810/eminem-stan-oxford-english-dictionary/>.

Analysis

This portion of my thesis is dedicated to the fantasy theme analysis of “Stan.” Throughout this section, I will delve deeper into the four fantasy theme elements in the following order: character themes, action themes, setting themes, and the rhetorical vision. Within each section, I will identify the themes present in “Stan” and then provide specific examples from the music video that help support each one, and answer my research question: how can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom? First, I will begin with character themes.

Character Themes

There are four main characters in the music video “Stan” -- Stan, his girlfriend, Stan’s six-year-old brother Matthew, and Eminem. My analysis identified two character themes these characters fulfill: Stan’s girlfriend, Matthew, and Eminem illustrate the helpless/powerless theme, while Stan illustrates the dangerous/deadly character theme throughout the video. I will begin by discussing the helpless/powerless theme.

Helpless/Powerless

Stan’s girlfriend, who is pregnant with his child, objects to his obsessive behaviors several times throughout the video. When she is not objecting his behaviors, his girlfriend is alone with a look of defeat and sadness. An example of this occurs when Stan’s girlfriend is cooking dinner while trying to get Stan’s attention. She is in the kitchen calling out to him, but he is watching television and ignores her. However, when he finally does acknowledge her, he is angry, annoyed, and waves his arms in frustration. He walks towards her, and the two exchange words, until Stan waves his hand in her face and walks away, leaving her in the kitchen by herself with a sad look on her face and

rubbing her stomach. Only the two of them live in the home, so she cannot enlist in the help of someone else to get through to Stan—this usually results in her alone, even when Stan is also in the house. Another example of this happens when Stan is writing one of his many letters to Eminem. He is downstairs in the basement, and the camera pans over many Eminem posters and memorabilia, but then switches to Stan’s girlfriend, who is upstairs in their bedroom. The line from the song, “my girlfriend’s jealous because I talk about you 24/7” plays right after the camera pans over her face, which displays sadness, confusion, but also acceptance.²⁷ From this point on, all references to the music video come from this source. It is clear that she is not jealous; rather she is lonely and very aware of the severity of Stan’s fandom. Stan’s girlfriend is the only character who has firsthand accounts of his downward spiral. Therefore, she is aware of Stan’s obsession with Eminem and how out of control it has become, but she is also aware that the problem is bigger than she can handle. His obsession has become so out of control that there is nothing she can do or say that will change him. Stan is more than just an Eminem fanatic; he has become a fan who has taken his idolization with the star too far and become a case of fandom gone wrong because his idolization is affecting a person who needs him now more than ever. As a result of Stan’s extreme case of idolization and fandom, his pregnant girlfriend is left alone, helpless, and powerless.

The first time that Stan’s younger brother Matthew appears in the music video is when he attends an Eminem concert with Stan. The camera shows Stan first, enjoying the concert, but then the camera pans down to Matthew, and it is clear that he does not care

27. “EminemVEVO,” “Eminem – Stan (Long Version) ft. Dido,” December 24, 2009, YouTube Video, 8:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOMhN-hfMtY>.

to be there. Stan's arms and hands are wrapped around Matthew, essentially keeping him right in front of him the entire time. Afterwards, the line, "he [Matthew] wants to be just like you man / he likes you more than I do" plays, but the visuals clearly contradict Stan's statement. One can even assume that the statement rings true in regard to Stan, and not Matthew; Stan not only idolizes Eminem, but also wants to be him. Matthew appears very bored at the concert, so viewers can assume that Stan brought him to the concert, disregarding whether or not he would actually enjoy himself. Another example of this theme occurs when Stan attends an Eminem meet-and-greet in Denver. Once again, Stan brings Matthew to an Eminem event, but the video only shows that Stan met Eminem; Matthew is simply standing next to Stan. Viewers can assume that Matthew did not even meet Eminem, yet Stan brought him to the meet-and-greet. Stan is taking advantage of Matthew and using him as a means to get to Eminem, rendering him helpless. Furthermore, Stan diminishes his own unhealthy obsession with Eminem by claiming that Matthew is a big Eminem fan—an assertion that the rhetor shows to be false. Stan's idolization and fandom have pushed him to not only lie about his brother, but the two have also pushed him to neglect his brother's disinterest. As Stan's little brother, one can assume that Matthew just wants to be around Stan, yet even he is powerless to do anything about Stan's extreme case of fandom.

Eminem is the third character who illustrates the helpless/powerless theme. Stan writes his first letter to Eminem at the beginning of the video (he states that he previously sent two letters to the rapper, but that is not shown in the video). After he licks the envelope and mails the letter to the star, the video switches to the post office. As a post office worker is wheeling a mail bin from the mail room, Stan's letter falls to the ground.

Because of this, and unbeknownst to Stan, the star either did not receive Stan's letter in a timely manner or did not receive the letter at all—the video does not specify. Either way, it was an accident. As the video progresses, Stan's fandom causes him to become increasingly frustrated that Eminem is not replying, yet the audience realizes Eminem cannot be blamed for anything if he never received the letter to begin with. In this case, Eminem is powerless because the loss of the letter at the post office was out of his control. He is not only at the center of Stan's idolization, but he is also at the center of Stan's frustration. Eminem cannot be blamed for either of these things, which brings me to my next example. Another way that Eminem is powerless is when one considers that, although Eminem is at the center of Stan's obsession, it is not his fault that Stan is so infatuated with him. Eminem is a huge rap artist, but it is unfair to blame him when a fan overly idolizes him and/or his songs. He does not control how much or how little his fans admire him, nor does he control their actions once they listen to his material. At the end of the day, Eminem is just a person; therefore, he too is powerless when it comes to Stan's severe case of fandom. On the other hand, Stan demonstrates a very different character theme.

Dangerous/Deadly

Stan, on the other hand, illustrates the dangerous/deadly character theme. It is clear that throughout the video, Stan becomes more and more angry because Eminem is not replying to his letters. At the beginning of the video, Stan calmly writes a letter to Eminem and even appears understanding of the fact that Eminem has not replied. However, by the time he is writing the second letter, he is frustrated that he still has not received a response from the star. He aggressively writes the letter, and is breathing

heavily. Viewers can see that Stan moves further and further to his breaking point, and that it was only a matter of time before his idolization with Eminem caused him to snap. Stan reaches his breaking point when he discovers his girlfriend in the basement.

While he was sleeping, she snuck out of bed and went to the basement and discovered that Stan replaced her spot in a picture of the two of them with a picture of Eminem. She is horrified, and turns around to discover Stan standing behind her. The next shot is of a drunken Stan recklessly driving on the freeway through the pouring rain as he screams his last testimony to Eminem into a tape recorder, even referencing Eminem's song "My Name Is," saying, "I drank a fifth of vodka / dare me to drive?"²⁸ In his last message to the star, Stan also references Eminem's song "Kim" when he informs Eminem that he has tied up his girlfriend and stuffed her in the trunk of the car by stating, "but I didn't slit her throat, I just tied her up / See I ain't like you / 'cause if she suffocates, she'll suffer more, and then she'll die too." Soon after, Stan even shouts, "Shut up bitch, I'm trying to talk!" when his girlfriend is heard screaming from the trunk. Stan then informs Eminem that he ripped all his posters off the wall, and the camera flashes back to him in the basement, presumably after putting his girlfriend in the trunk. Not only did Stan tear down the posters, but he also repeatedly hit the television with a baseball bat, and even turned over the table where he wrote his letters. The camera then returns to the car, and upon realizing that Eminem will not even receive the tape recorder, Stan drives the car off a bridge, killing himself and his girlfriend.

28. Genius, "My Name Is Lyrics," *Genius*, accessed February 22, 2018, <https://genius.com/Eminem-my-name-is-lyrics>.

It is clear that Eminem is not going to receive the tape, yet Stan makes it a point to record a final message for him. This shift in his personality is a direct consequence of his idolization and infatuation with Eminem and is a severe case of fandom gone wrong. Up until the very end, Stan is doing everything in his power to ensure that Eminem never forgets him. Furthermore, this series of events, the music video illustrates how dangerous and deadly Stan became. It is fair to say that no one could have predicted Stan would do something as disturbing and awful as kill himself and his girlfriend the way that he did, but viewers do witness Stan's drastic metamorphosis throughout the video. He started out as an Eminem fanatic, but morphed into an obsessed fan with dangerous tendencies, which resulted in not only his death, but also that of his girlfriend and their unborn child.

Action Themes

Similar to the character themes portion above, the action themes section is divided into two themes I identified in the music video: fear/concern and obsession. In this section, I will provide specific examples of what the actions in the music video that support these themes, which will ultimately help answer my research question of how a rhetor can utilize a music video to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom. First, I will discuss the fear/concern theme, and then I will discuss the obsession theme.

Fear/Concern

The music video opens with Stan dying his hair the same blonde color as Eminem's. Upon discovering him in the bathroom, his girlfriend asks, "Stanley, what are you doing to yourself? Don't you think you're taking this too far?" Stan took drastic measures to be like Eminem, and this frightens his girlfriend. It is not uncommon for a fan to wear his or her favorite artist's merchandise or to dress like him or her for

Halloween; those are normal examples of fandom, but Stan crossed the line into an extreme case of fandom when he dyed his hair the same color as Eminem's. By doing this, Stan is that much closer to looking like Eminem, but at the core of his actions, he is only fueling his unhealthy idolization with the star. The tone of his girlfriend's voice, as well as her facial expressions, communicate her feelings of concern, worry, and fear. Moreover, it is worth noting the obvious: she is pregnant with his child. Stan has this unhealthy fixation on Eminem, and therefore is not devoting any time to her, which is more than enough to worry and scare anyone in her situation. It is fair to say that Stan does love his girlfriend, but he also loves Eminem and is obsessed with him; his love shifted from his girlfriend to the star. At one point in the video, she is sitting in the hallway of their home in the dark, with only the light from the bathroom lighting the hallway. She is alone because Stan is in the basement writing a letter to Eminem, and she is looking up at the ceiling, displaying a "what am I going to do?" look on her face. As I stated earlier, only the two of them live in their home, so she is constantly alone while Stan is preoccupied by anything and everything Eminem. Eminem is his idol and consumes his thoughts and controls his actions, but where does that leave his pregnant girlfriend? She is constantly alone, and this worries her to her core because she needs him now more than ever.

Eminem also illustrates the fear/concern theme. Once Eminem finally gets around to replying to Stan's letter at the end of the music video, he thanks Stan for his letters and shows genuine interest in Stan and his life by asking him, "you said your girlfriend's pregnant now / how far along is she?" He then apologizes for missing him after the concert that Stan attended with Matthew and states that he did intentionally dismiss him.

After addressing these things, Eminem shifts from curious to concerned and tells Stan, “you got some issues Stan / I think you need some counseling.” Eminem references the fact that Stan wrote he likes to cut his wrists, just like Eminem mentions in a couple of his songs, but Eminem tells him that he is just joking and to not take it seriously. Eminem also writes, “I hope you get to read this letter / I just hope it reaches you in time before you hurt yourself.”

At this point, Eminem realizes that Stan is more than just a fan; Stan’s obsession with him has become so severe that Eminem fears he could harm himself, or someone else. Eminem even tells Stan, “I just don’t want you to do some crazy shit” and brings up a story he recently saw on the news about how a guy drove his car off a bridge with his pregnant girlfriend in the trunk. Upon realizing that this was Stan, Eminem says, “damn.” Throughout this portion of the music video, Eminem writes the letter slowly, as if he is trying to address all the things that Stan mentioned in his letters. It makes sense that Eminem is so careful in choosing his words because although he does receive fan mail all the time, it is likely rare that he receives fan mail like Stan’s. He wants to address all the things that Stan wrote about, but he does not want to encourage his dangerous behavior or say something that may rub him the wrong way. Eminem sighs, purses his lips, pauses in the middle of writing the letter and appears hesitant as if he is being careful with how he crafts the letter. His nonverbals, as well as his words show that Eminem is concerned about Stan and is fearful of what he may do, but also that he may be too late. If Eminem was not concerned about Stan or fearful of what he may do, he would not be taking the time to carefully write the letter and offer him advice.

Obsession

On the other hand, Stan illustrates the theme of obsession. A specific example of the theme occurs when Stan is dying his hair in the bathroom. As his hair becomes blonde, he stares at himself in the mirror and smiles as he watches it change. He is proud of what he has done; however, at this time, his girlfriend is banging on the door because she needs to use the bathroom. Stan becomes annoyed and ignores her at first, but she is persistent. She keeps banging on the door and screams, "let me in!" After some time, he finally lets her use the bathroom. She tries to talk with him about what has just done, but he gets angry when she calls him Stanley. After lifting the toilet seat for her, he leaves the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. Due to Stan's obsession with (and his desire to become) Eminem, he neglects his girlfriend. He constantly dismisses her and her needs throughout the video, but this is one of the most prominent examples that explains how obsession drives this dismissal.

Later in the music video, Stan gets "Slim Shady" tattooed on his left chest, over his heart. Stan already crossed the line by dying his hair the same color as Eminem's, but getting the tattoo takes things to a whole other level. He has permanently marked his body with the star's name, thus taking his fandom to an extreme. The placement of the tattoo also speaks volumes. By placing it on his heart, Stan visually communicates that Eminem is metaphorically close to his heart because his name is physically tattooed on this part of his body. The tattoo displays his devotion and love for the artist and is a reflection of his true feelings. Stan admits that he has romantic feelings for Eminem in the second letter, writing, "we should be together too" as he places a magazine cutout picture of Eminem over his girlfriend, revealing a new image of Stan with his arm around

the star. This action illustrates how Stan not only idolizes Eminem, but how his infatuation has morphed into him having romantic feelings for the star.

Setting Themes

The setting themes are important to consider in my analysis because themes describe the places where events take place in the music video. Although the number of places is limited in the music video, the setting themes communicated through these places are critical to understanding the video's messages. In this section, I will delve deeper into the two setting themes I identified: hidden and public. Then I will provide specific examples of each theme and explain how they contribute to my research question: how can a rhetor utilize a music video to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom?

Hidden

Stan's basement is his sanctuary and is an example of the hidden setting theme. Throughout the video, Stan constantly returns to the basement because it is not only where he writes his letters to Eminem, but it is where (in his mind) he can be with Eminem. The walls of the basement are completely covered with Eminem posters, a television plays a video on loop of him that Stan waves to, the desk where he writes the letters is covered with stickers and magazines featuring the star, and there is even a mannequin dressed like Eminem near the stairs. The basement is dimly lit with a single lightbulb hanging from the ceiling, and it is constantly raining, thundering, and lightning each time the audience watches a scene that takes place in the basement, which contributes to the creepiness aura. In some way, shape, or form, Eminem is in the basement. The room is dedicated to the star, and it clearly stems from Stan's obsession.

In the music video, viewers can see that that is where Stan goes to be alone, but to also be completely surrounded by everything Eminem. He is alone but is not lonely; in his mind, his idol is there with him. It is where he is most content and where he shamelessly writes to Eminem. At one point in the video, he looks over his shoulder to ensure that his girlfriend is not coming down the stairs, so viewers can infer that she has been ordered to not enter the basement. Later in the music video, Stan's breakdown is sparked because he discovers his girlfriend in his sanctuary. He was already on edge because Eminem was not replying, but when she entered his hidden domain, he was pushed over the edge. The basement is literally hidden, and it is where Stan secludes himself from the outside world so that he can be alone with the object of his obsession.

Public

The other setting theme I identified in the music video is public. Stan is most unhappy in these types of settings. This makes sense with the understanding that Stan is most happy in the hidden places, and most unhappy in the public settings because he is not alone with his idol, Eminem. This is most evident in the music video when Stan and Matthew are waiting for Eminem after his concert. The two are surrounded by fellow Eminem fans, and Eminem actually starts walking towards Stan, who has extended his hand to the star. Then, a female fan pushes Stan's hand out of the way, and Eminem's security pulls him away from the crowd. Matthew is simply standing there, but Stan gets angry that someone else got between him and Eminem meeting again. In this setting, Stan is in public amongst a group of people, and he is essentially competing with other people to get to Eminem, which he does not like. In his mind, he is Eminem's biggest fan, so it should just be him and Eminem. He does not want to be in public places

because that means the two are not alone. This type of setting makes Stan feel the opposite of what the hidden settings make him feel: angry, frustrated, and lacking control.

Rhetorical Vision

With all the themes and examples provided in the sections above in mind, I have come to the conclusion that through the music video for “Stan,” Eminem is communicating that idolization and fandom are detrimental, not just for the fan, but also for those around him or her. All of the fantasy theme elements come together to support this overall rhetorical argument. For example, the character themes assign personality traits for each of the characters in the video; Stan’s girlfriend, Matthew, and Eminem display the helpless/powerless theme, while Stan illustrates dangerous/deadly. The character themes contribute to the overall message of the music video in that they all connect with the dangers of idolization and fandom.

The action themes explain what occurs consistently throughout the music video. Stan’s girlfriend and Eminem illustrate the action theme fear/concern, while Stan illustrates the action theme obsession. The actions in the music video contribute to the overall vision and message because they are the consequences of Stan’s extreme obsession with Eminem. This severe case of idolization and fandom gone wrong directly contribute to Stan’s girlfriend’s, Eminem’s, and Stan’s actions.

The setting themes describe the themes that are represented by multiple settings. Although there are not many different physical settings in the music video, there are two themes that represent the settings: hidden and public. The two setting themes are important to the narrative because they help describe and create contrast among the places where the actions take place. The two themes are opposites, but they help illustrate

and explain Stan's emotions. When he is in hidden places, he is happy, but when he is in public spaces, he is easily angered and discontent.

The three fantasy theme elements come together in this text to communicate that idolization and fandom can be detrimental to not just the fan, but to those around him or her. As a result of this extreme case of idolization and fandom, Stan, his girlfriend, his younger brother Matthew, and Eminem were each placed in undesirable, and often dangerous, situations. The music video for "Stan" illustrates the consequences of idolization and fandom, and although it is an extreme case and it is rare that the events would occur in a similar way, it is not impossible. In the TRL interview referenced earlier, Eminem stated that he receives fan mail similar to Stan's all the time, and although Stan's situation was the perfect storm, it is not far-fetched. Things fall into place, and all it takes is another perfect storm to bring these consequences to life.

Conclusion

Although Eminem is a controversial rap star known for speaking his mind and making a mockery of celebrities, he is also the mastermind behind the infamous song "Stan." Eminem utilized his own personal experience with the type of fan mail he receives as the inspiration for "Stan." He considers "Stan" to be a warning for his fans to not take everything he says literally because his works are not meant to be instructions for how to live. His songs are a form of expression, not a set of directions. His vision for the song contributed to the making of the music video, and it has been deemed one of the most disturbing music videos ever created.

Although it is disturbing, the music video's notoriety cannot be ignored. The music video was the first of its kind to bring the potentially problematic relationship of

artist and fan to life, therefore it provided a unique medium to discuss the potentially distressing subjects of idolization and fandom. Through the fantasy theme framework, I examined how Eminem's music video for "Stan" illustrated the potential consequences of idolization and fandom. The music video tells the story of an otherwise regular guy who becomes increasingly obsessed with Eminem, and how his growing obsession negatively affected his own life, but also the lives of those around him. Due to his severe case of idolization and fandom, Stan kills himself and his pregnant girlfriend, neglects his younger brother, and makes Eminem feel guilty for something that is not his fault. The music video illustrates a societal issue that some would find uncomfortable and distressing to discuss; therefore it breaks the music video genre convention, and is why it should not be ignored.

CHAPTER III

LINDSAY LOHAN'S MUSIC VIDEO FOR

"CONFESSIONS OF A BROKEN HEART (DAUGHTER TO FATHER)"

In 2005, actor Lindsay Lohan released an album titled, *A Little More Personal (Raw)*. This album differed from her debut album, *Speak*, in that it was less "bubblegum-pop," and the songs were centered on the artist's personal life. In a review for *AllMusic*, writer Stephen Thomas Erlewine describes Lohan's purpose for the album, writing that "she's going to shed the glitzy trappings of her debut, *Speak*, and dig down deep in her heart, letting feelings flood onto the page."¹ Lohan accomplished that task by co-writing several of the songs on the album, one of them titled, "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)." The song is essentially a letter written to her father, Michael Lohan. In the song, Lohan is crying out to her father and communicates about the pain that his absence and alleged abuse has had on her; her mother, Dina; and her younger sister, Ali. Lohan not only wrote the song, but also directed the accompanying music video. It was her first attempt at directing, thus making the creation of the video more personal. Lohan not only lived through the events portrayed in the video, but she was also able to communicate the effects they had on her and her life.

1. Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Lindsay Lohan *A Little More Personal (Raw)*," *AllMusic*, accessed November 5, 2017, <https://www.allmusic.com/album/a-little-more-personal-raw-mw0000260413>.

The music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)” “was released October 24, 2005 via MTV.”² The video accompanies the song, and is often considered Lohan’s cry out to her father Michael. In the music video, Lohan is in her bathroom, while her parents fight in the living room right next to her. She places her ear against the wall of the bathroom, and begins to cry when she realizes how violent their dispute has become. MTV News writer Jennifer Vineyard writes about what sparked the domestic dispute writing,

the video depicts her father, Michael Lohan (portrayed in the video by actor Drake Andrew), coming home to find Lohan’s mother, Dina (played by British actress Victoria Hay), reading a magazine while the TV blares the news of his most recent arrest for drunk driving. Enraged, he knocks Dina to the floor, drags her across the room by her hair and throws her against the wall.”³

Lohan lip-syncs along with the song, becomes visibly emotional, cries out to her parents to stop, throws items across the room, and bangs on the wall. Lohan’s younger sister, Ali Lohan, plays herself in the video. She stands in her bedroom on the opposite side of the living room wall. The camera pans out, and viewers see that the three rooms are set up as store window displays. People are simply walking up and down the street and can easily see the turmoil happening in the Lohan “home.” Eventually, the police are called to the scene, yet they too just stare through the window. There are times throughout the music video when Lohan walks from room-to-room, but she is not “actually there,” so the other characters do not acknowledge her. In the *Making the Video* segment that her music

2. Bill Lamb, “The Story Behind ‘Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)’,” *ThoughtCo.*, November 27, 2015, <https://www.thoughtco.com/story-behind-confessions-of-a-broken-heart-3245540>.

3. Jennifer Vineyard, “Lindsay Lohan Cracks the Mirror,” *MTV News*, accessed November 5, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20081202003040/http://www.mtv.com/bands/l/lohan_lindsay/news_feature_051017/.

video appeared on, Lohan described this effect as, “I’m kind of a ghost; I’m not really there.”⁴ When Lohan is in the bathroom, she is wearing a glamorous, dark purple dress, jewelry, and a lot of makeup. However, when she is in her “ghost form,” she is wearing a simple, lavender dress (and a blue one when she is in Ali’s room), no jewelry, and her makeup is not as dramatic. Towards the end of the music video, family photos begin rising up from the floors of Ali’s bedroom and the bathroom and stick to the windows. The photos are visible to the people outside, and they look up at them until the bathroom window shatters. The video concludes with Lohan lip-syncing the final verse to the camera, and sniffing—visibly choked up.

Rhetorical Situation

Lindsay Lohan is known for being an actress more so than an artist, but her music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)” showcases the domestic abuse she witnessed between her parents. Lohan even directed the video herself, therefore making it more personal. Its graphic nature depicts the severity and complexity of domestic abuse, and in the following section, I will cover the rhetorical situation of the artifact in order to better understand its concept, beginning with the rhetor.

Rhetor

Lindsay Lohan was born on July 2, 1986 to Michael and Dina Lohan in The Bronx, New York City. Michael is a former Wall Street trader, and Dina is a former dancer and singer. A *Rolling Stone* article reports that Lohan was “signed to the Ford

4. “Leo Es Ro,” “Lindsay Lohan Making the Video Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father). HD Full,” November 2, 2012, from *Making the Video*, YouTube Video, 16:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6_1nhZ37KM.

modeling agency when she was three years old.”⁵ She “later acted in commercials for companies including Duncan Hines and Jell-O” but got her big break at the age of 11 when she starred in *The Parent Trap*.⁶ The film was very successful, and Lohan continued to act in Disney movies such as: *Life-Sized*, *Get a Clue*, *Freaky Friday*, and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*. She also assumed the lead role in the 2004 teen comedy *Mean Girls*, a film that 13 years later is still frequently shown on television. Due to the success of her modeling and acting career, Lohan became a household name.

Despite the fame, Lohan’s home and personal life was not as glamorous. Throughout her career, she has been arrested several times for charges ranging from cocaine possession to driving under the influence, and she has also been to rehab on several occasions for alcohol addiction. Lohan is also known as a celebrity who has had conflicts with the paparazzi. In 2005, she was taken to the hospital for minor injuries after she crashed her car into another vehicle. An *MTV News* article quoted witness to the crash, Lori Satzberg, who reported that “she [Lindsay] got into her black Mercedes across the street, and they literally were like sitting on her car, trying to take pictures of her. She was like yelling at them to get off.”⁷ This event prompted then California Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to pass a law that holds paparazzi who commit assault while pursuing their subject accountable for their actions.

Lohan’s father also had some run-ins with the law. In 1990, Michael was “convicted of criminal intent after being investigated for insider trading,” and spent three

5. “Lindsay Lohan Bio,” *Rolling Stone*, accessed October 8, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/lindsay-lohan/biography>.

6. “Lindsay Lohan Bio.”

7. Corey Moss, “Lindsay Lohan Taken to Hospital After Car Accident,” *MTV News*, October 4, 2005, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1510909/lindsay-lohan-taken-to-hospital-after-car-accident/>.

years in prison.⁸ His relationship with Dina was also very tumultuous. The two fought often from the time Lohan was a young girl. Dina accused Michael of physical and emotional abuse and stated that “[Lindsay] Lohan is ‘screwed up’ as a direct result of a lifetime of witnessing domestic violence.”⁹ Her parents separated when she was three years old, later reunited, separated once more, only to finalize their divorce in 2007. The divorce case was a two-year affair, and it was reported that in 2005, Michael requested that a portion of Lohan’s earnings be part of the divorce settlement. The judge denied his request, stating that Lohan’s earnings were not considered a “marital asset.” As a result of this, Lohan’s management team encouraged her to distance herself from her father. However, she continued to openly support him. On Father’s Day 2005, she said of her father, “I hope he’s well. God bless him and I love him.”¹⁰ In 2004, Michael got into an altercation with Dina’s youngest brother, and was charged with attempted assault. While awaiting his conviction, he was involved in a car accident that led to his being charged with driving under the influence. Michael admitted that he had a drinking problem and attempted to go to alcohol rehabilitation instead of prison, a request that was denied by a judge. Around this same time, Lohan wrote the song and directed the music video for “Confessions.”

Her father’s series of legal troubles and the domestic abuse she witnessed while growing up inspired the creation of the song and music video for “Confessions.”

8. Spencer Morgan, “The Parent Trap,” *Observer*, August 15, 2007, <http://observer.com/2007/08/the-parent-trap-2/2/>.

9. Kevin Genovario, “Lindsay Lohan ‘Screwed Up’ Because Her Dad Allegedly Raped Her Mom,” *Heavy*, January 7, 2013, <http://heavy.com/entertainment/2013/01/lindsay-lohan-screwed-up-dad-raped-mom/>.

10. Lamb, “The Story Behind ‘Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)’.”

Directing the music video was a very good healing process for the star, and at one point Lohan said, “this was the only way I could do it and talk because I don’t really speak to him [her father] at all, so this was a release for me and it was really therapeutic for me.”¹¹ In the same *Making the Video* episode referenced earlier, Lohan discussed the setup of the music video, saying that

my life is on display for the public, and it’s a window store setup um, and it’s kind of like I’m living in a bubble and um, in this small, contained space and trying to break out and show people how I feel within this. And everyone’s kind of standing there watching me, but I’m still living this world on my own inside, and that’s what I’m dealing with internally.¹²

Lohan directed this video to not only show how disturbing her life was at home growing up, but she also wanted to communicate how trapped and helpless she felt throughout the ordeal. She purposely wanted the rooms of the home to be set up like window displays to mimic how the public watches her, but she also wanted to showcase how she yearned to break out. In the same MTV segment, Lohan explained the overall message of the video; claiming that,

I’m a pretty honest person and I kind of just let it out, and I have the liberty and I’m very lucky and blessed to be able to use my music videos to kind of put it out there for other people, that it’s ok to say how you feel. It’s ok if your family is—pardon my French, fucked up. It’s ok, that happens. And um, people go through things in their life and it’s made me the person I am, and made me so much stronger. It’s normal, no one’s perfect, and that’s what I think the song is about, and the video, and everything in life.¹³

Lohan’s life growing up was hectic and turbulent, but she wanted people to know that if they can identify with that, then it is ok. There are things in our lives that we cannot

11. “Leo Es Ro,” “Lindsay Lohan Making the Video Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father). HD Full.”

12. “Leo Es Ro,” “Lindsay Lohan Making the Video Confessions.”

13. “Leo Es Ro,” “Lindsay Lohan Making the Video Confessions.”

control, but Lohan wants people to know that the things we suffer through can make us stronger. She wanted her music video to be honest and raw, but to also communicate her larger message clearly.

The music video does not show her father Michael in the best light. He is seen as abusive and apathetic about how the abuse could affect his daughters, but despite these negative elements, Lohan did not want to offend her father. In an article published by *ThoughtCo.*, writer Bill Lamb quotes her saying that,

I hope he'll see what I say in the song is, "I love you," so many times, that I need him and the crazy things in my life. I hope he sees the positive side of the video rather than the negative. The video is kind of offensive, but it is very raw. He's my father.¹⁴

Lohan recognized that this video was offensive, but did not forget that Michael was her father. Lamb discussed how Michael reportedly said he was thrilled with the new song and even wrote his own song in response. Lamb writes that,

among his [Michael's] statements is, "While I always considered and expressed how truly blessed Lindsay, as well as my other children are, I never realized how blessed I am to have a daughter as amazing as Lindsay. Hold onto my shirt honey, soon enough you'll be able to hold on to me!"¹⁵

Considering the content of Lohan's song and music video, some audience members have questioned the appropriateness of this message, but according to this quote, her father did not walk away looking at the music video in a negative light.

As I mentioned earlier, this music video is darker and more personal than Lohan's previous works. She discussed how parts of the music video were violent and disturbing, but she purposely included the drama, saying, "I'm giving them [the public] the drama,

14. Lamb, "The Story Behind 'Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)'."

15. Lamb, "The Story Behind 'Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)'."

and that's why I wanted to direct this video and make it my own. It's all there to see."¹⁶

Rather than giving others the opportunity to write about this part of her life in the tabloids (thus also giving them the opportunity to misconstrue the story), Lohan laid it all out there for them. The music video centered on a very important part of her life, and because she accurately communicated the experience she lived through, there is no room for confusion or misunderstanding. It is a dark and sad part of her life, but she has no shame in showcasing it through the music video. Next, I will discuss the target audience and the group most affected by the music video.

Audience

Lindsay Lohan starred in many Disney movies prior to 2005, and the target audience for those films was a younger generation. As a singer, her music falls into the “pop” genre, where the target audience is dominantly females within the fifteen to- thirty age demographic. However, the music video for “Confessions” is dark and distressing, so I argue that the target audience is a bit different. The music video includes displays of domestic abuse; therefore, the music video is better suited for young adults and older, and it can appeal to both males and females. More specifically, the music video is meant to communicate a message that resonates with older young adults. Lohan elaborated on the message in an interview with *Access Hollywood*, saying that,

if I can use my music video to kind of show people what is really going on, as kind of offensive and vulgar as it may be, that's ok because that happens and I want young people to know that as well.¹⁷

16. “Leo Es Ro,” “Lindsay Lohan Making the Video Confessions.”

17. “Letsgohawaii,” “Lindsay Lohan Talks About Confessions of a Broken Heart 2005,” April 19, 2009, from *Access Hollywood*, YouTube Video, 2:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-VTLcH6RPQ>.

As mentioned earlier, this music video served as a creative outlet and form of therapy for Lohan. However, in this quote, she explains that she also wanted the music video to assure young people who have gone through a similar experience that they are not alone and that this type of situation is not uncommon. Unfortunately, young adults are sometimes placed at the center of domestic abuse unfolding between their parents, and the events that take place can have an effect on their lives. We see this through Lohan's life, but it can also apply to the audience's lives, thus enabling her to connect with viewers on a personal level. Next, I will discuss how fans and society received the "Confessions" music video.

Reception

The reception for Lohan's music video was mixed. Because she is a former Disney star and had so many run-ins with the law, some found it difficult to take "Confessions" seriously. In a *Rolling Stone* article, writer Brian Hiatt reviewed *A Little More Personal (Raw)* writing that,

as the title suggests, Lindsay Lohan makes a fatal mistake on her second album: She tries to, like, express herself. The album de-emphasizes the (very) guilty pop pleasures of her 2004 debut in favor of leaden I-hate-you-Daddy laments such as "Confessions of a Broken Heart" and "My Innocence."¹⁸

It is obvious from his language that Brian does not take Lohan's attempt at being serious seriously. Although it is unfair to say that this was a universal opinion, it is worthy to note that this album stood in sharp contrast to Lohan's past endeavors and her debut

18. Brian Hiatt, "Lindsay Lohan: A Little More Personal (Raw)," *Rolling Stone*, November 28, 2005, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/a-little-more-personal-raw-20051128>.

bubblegum-pop songs. Still, it is hard to ignore the authentic and raw style of the music video. *Entertainment Weekly* writer Leah Greenblatt elaborates on this, arguing that

it's hard to imagine a more explicit snapshot of the highly publicized family problems that have plagued the star than "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)." The accompanying video, which Lohan also directed, features intense depictions of a verbally abusive dad, a cowering mother, and a terrified little girl—as seen, appropriately enough, by a rubbernecking public through a plate glass window. Lindsay herself plays the anguished (if distractingly glamorous) 19-year-old in the corner, lamenting it all. There's rage ("Tell me the truth, did you ever love me?") along with vulnerability ("I don't know you, but I still want to"), and a pretty solid hook, too.¹⁹

In this quote, Greenblatt explained how the intensity of the music video is hard to ignore.

The fact that this music video tells a true story about Lohan's own parents and life enhances the authentic feel of the video, and offers justification for including elements of rage and vulnerability in the video. Even though Lohan had never directed prior to "Confessions," this particular music video stands out because of its intense visual representation of her feelings towards her father. It is raw and honest and should not go unnoticed.

It is also worth noting that several sources show a scene of the music video where Michael slaps Dina across the face, but this portion is not in the final cut of the official music video. However, it is fair to say that, due to its explicit content, that part was left out so that the video could be shown on television. Next, I will discuss how the message of the music video has enhanced its legacy.

19. Leah Greenblatt, "A Little More Personal (Raw)," *Entertainment Weekly*, December 5, 2005, <http://ew.com/article/2005/12/05/little-more-personal-raw/>.

Legacy

The music video for “Confessions” is over a decade old, but its message still resonates with viewers. The public was aware of the alleged domestic abuse that occurred in the Lohan home, but the music video lays it out for everyone to see. The music video is deeply personal and shows a side of Lohan the public had never seen prior to the music video. In an article for *Salon*, writer Mary Elizabeth Williams discusses how Lohan showcased the pain caused by her father, writing that

many of us who had shitty dads—and folks, we are a legion—can’t help feeling a little heartsick watching Lohan take that deep, instantly recognizable anguish and act out on such an epic scale. Because while lots of us have baggage, few have made a music video called “Confessions of a Broken Heart” about it.²⁰

Lohan’s feelings towards her father were never really a secret, but she took this opportunity to honestly and authentically showcase those feelings in her music video. By doing this, Lohan revealed an intense event from her life and her feelings about surviving it, but she also sought to comfort those who might be going through a similar situation. Her music video should not go unnoticed because although Lohan typically sings pop songs, the music video for “Confessions” illustrates issues and emotions that would otherwise be distressing and uncomfortable to discuss. Lohan accomplishes such a task in a mere four-minute music video, making it worthy of further study in my analysis.

Now that I have overviewed the music video for “Confessions,” I will move into the analysis portion of this chapter. In this portion, I will use a fantasy theme framework

20. Mary Elizabeth Williams, “Lindsay Lohan’s Slow Meltdown: It’s All About Dad,” *Salon*, April 30, 2010, https://www.salon.com/2010/04/30/lindsay_lohan_family_drama.

to further analyze the music video, and thus, answer my proposed research question: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse?

Analysis

This portion of my thesis is dedicated to the fantasy theme analysis of the music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father).” Similar to the “Stan” analysis portion, I will go through this analysis in the following order: character themes, action themes, setting themes, and the rhetorical vision. Within each fantasy theme element, I will provide specific examples from the video that support each theme. As a result, I will answer my proposed research question: how can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse? To clarify, in my analysis, “complexity” is synonymous with complicated, intricate, and multiplex. Ultimately, the provided examples from the music video will illustrate how/why the issue of domestic abuse can be more convoluted than one may think. The themes may seem obvious, but the reasoning behind the themes may be harder to comprehend and understand.

Character Themes

There are four main characters in the music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)”: Lindsay, her mother Dina, her younger sister Ali, and her father Michael. In my analysis, I will discuss how Lindsay, Dina, and Ali all illustrate the same character theme, hopeless; I will then discuss how Michael illustrates the character theme, apathetic. To begin, I will cover how Dina displays the hopeless theme.

Hopeless

Michael and Dina begin fighting at the very beginning of the music video. Their dispute is sparked when Michael walks into the living room and sees a news report about

his latest run-in with the law. Dina is reading a magazine on the couch and tells him that she did not know that was on the television. He disregards her, and the two begin yelling at one another. As Dina is yelling at Michael, the camera quickly switches to Lindsay banging on the bathroom door from inside the bathroom, and then the camera returns to the living room, where Dina is now on the floor. As mentioned earlier, several sources show that parts of the video depicting Michael's physical violence were removed so that it could be shown on television, but viewers can infer that Michael is the reason for Dina ending up on the floor. The camera closes in on Dina cowering on the floor, while Michael is standing over her, pointing, and continuing to yell at her. Dina is crying and unable to steady her hands. She is visibly shaken up, but she also wears an expression of defeat and hopelessness. It can be assumed that Dina just endured some form of physical abuse, but she is also enduring emotional abuse. The domestic abuse has worn her down, thus demoralizing her. This is shown as Michael is the physically dominant one, but also by the defeated look on Dina's face. Not only has the physical abuse taken a toll on Dina, but the emotional abuse has caused her to display feelings of hopelessness.

A second way that Dina illustrates the hopeless theme occurs when she leaves the house. Towards the end of the video and after arguing with Michael, she tells him, "I'm taking the kids!" as she walks out of the house.²¹ Going forward, all references to the music video come from this source. In this instance, Dina is clearly fed up with Michael, but she is leaving the house because she has lost hope in their relationship. She finally realizes that there is no sense in trying to reason with Michael anymore because he will

21. "LindsayDeeLohanVEVO," "Lindsay Lohan – Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)," August 24, 2012, 4:03, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tW5gt-Q8e8.

just continue to yell at her, thus continuing the vicious cycle. It took some time for Dina to leave, and it is the moment that she decides to stand up for herself, but it is the moment that viewers see that she loses hope in salvaging her relationship with Michael.

Lindsay is the second character that displays the hopeless theme. Lindsay has resorted to hiding in the bathroom while her parents argue. This room is her sanctuary, but it is also where she can hear the ordeal between her parents, as the bathroom shares a wall with the living room. There is nothing that she can do but listen to it happen. As a result, Lindsay displays several forms of expression that sparked from her feeling of hopelessness throughout the video. She writes in her journal, covers her ears, splashes the water in the bathtub, tosses a trash can, bangs on the window, and breaks the mirror. She never leaves the bathroom or gets involved with the ordeal, so she does the only things that she can do. She acts out her frustration and hopelessness by writing, hitting, and throwing things around the bathroom. Some of the actions are more dangerous and dramatic than others, but they all spark from the same hopelessness trait that Lindsay possesses.

The second way that Lindsay displays hopelessness is towards the end of the video when the family pictures begin covering the windows of the bathroom. The pictures rise and stick to the windows, so that onlookers can see them. The pictures surround Lindsay as she places her hands on the window, weeps, and lip-syncs the lyrics, "Did you ever love me?" Based on the desperation and despair on her face, and based on the fact that she even asks this question, viewers can assume that Lindsay has doubts that her father loves her. Her overwhelming sadness display the hopelessness trait that Lindsay possesses. This is a complicated and complex emotion that Lindsay feels, and it

is not as if she felt it out of the blue. The domestic abuse that happened in the room next to her has made her feel this way, making it a multiplex series of events.

Ali is the final character to illustrate the hopeless theme. She returns from dance practice (viewers can assume that Michael brought her home because she enters her room after he comes into the living room) and remains in her ballerina outfit throughout the video. Michael and Dina have been fighting for some time, and Ali is visibly saddened and anguished by this. Similar to Lindsay, she cries, bangs on the walls of her room, and covers her ears. At one point, she even picks up her telephone and looks out into the crowd of people forming outside the window of her bedroom. She appears to be pleading with them to do something or to help, but everyone just keeps walking, or stares. Ali is hopeless when it comes to the domestic abuse, and this makes sense as she is the youngest Lohan girl in the home. No matter what she does, she does not have any power to stop the fighting, which brings me to my second example as to how she displays the hopeless theme.

After she fails to call for help on the telephone, she resorts to sitting on her bed, crying and praying with a rosary in her hand. Lindsay is also shown holding the rosary at one point, and Dina wears it around her neck throughout the video. This item connects the three women and is a sign of faith and comfort. Ali is clutching the rosary and is weeping while looking up at her ceiling. After trying to shield out Michael and Dina's screaming and trying to call out for help, she has lost hope, and just starts to pray. She turns to a higher being because at this point, that is all that she can turn to. It took several steps to get to this degree of hopelessness for Ali, but she reaches this point when all else has failed her, thus enabling her to illustrate this personality trait.

Apathetic

Michael is the only character in the music video to illustrate the apathetic character theme. The first example of Michael portraying this trait is when he initiates the fight with Dina at the beginning of the music video. He sees the news report about his latest run-in with the law playing on the television and asks Dina, "What are you doing?" Rather than diminish the fight after Dina replies to him, he continues to yell at her and physically abuse her, even though he knows very well that Lindsay and Ali are in the rooms surrounding the living room. His insecurity and embarrassment have caused him to become apathetic towards not only his wife Dina, but also to his children. He does not lower his voice so that they cannot hear, nor does he stop himself from knocking down items from the top of the fireplace. He does not care that nothing positive can come out of the domestic abuse, and instead, chooses to take his out frustration and insecurities. The apathy that Michael is portraying is clearly geared towards the other three characters, but it sparked from anger and embarrassment.

A second way that Michael illustrates the apathetic character theme is when he looks at the crowd outside the living room. Dina just left the house, and he begins to walk towards the window. Michael looks out at the crowd, but he is emotionless. It is the first time that he acknowledges the crowd, but it is fair to say that he was aware of their presence the entire time. Despite this, Michael did not censor the fight with Dina. He is apathetic towards the crowd; although he knew they were there, he did not care that they could witness the disturbing fight that was occurring in the home.

Action Themes

In this section, I will overview two action themes I identified in the music video: abuse and love. Although the two actions are opposite, both are often present in cases of domestic abuse, which is something that Lohan communicates via “Confessions.” For each theme, I will provide specific examples from the video that help support the theme. Doing so will further help me answer my research question: how can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse? To begin, I will discuss the abuse action theme.

Abuse

The fight between Michael and Dina is at the center of the music video and does not end until halfway through when Dina leaves the home. It is apparent that Dina is at the center of Michael’s physical and emotional abuse, but one cannot forget that Lindsay and Ali are being affected, as well. Visually, Dina is the target for Michael’s tirade, but emotionally, all three Lohan women are affected. The fighting and abuse occurring in the living room is incredibly traumatizing for the children, and I argue that Michael is being emotionally abusive towards Lindsay and Ali. His words clearly harm Dina, but they also harm the children because they are visibly scared, worried, and traumatized by Michael’s abusive actions. Lindsay and Ali are cowering in their respective rooms, and they are constantly crying, screaming, and just want the abuse to end. The fighting has a negative effect on them and can be seen as a form of emotional abuse.

Michael also portrays the abuse action theme during the only audio break in the video. As Michael and Dina are arguing, Michael backs Dina up against the wall, slams his hand on the wall next to her head, and screams, “Shut up! Don’t you put me down in

front of my children!” Then, the camera shifts to Lindsay who cries, “Stop it!” This moment in the video is when the abuse reaches its peak. The fact that it occurs during an audio break prevents any of the music from overshadowing what is happening, and it forces the viewers to pay attention to the confrontation between Michael and Dina. There is no build up to the audio break; it just happens, which makes it that much more raw and shocking. The crowd outside the living room looks horrified, and a police officer is seen in the crowd, but does not actually do anything to stop Michael. This series of events illustrates the point that the abuse reaches its peak, but also how the abuse got to this point.

Love

Although abuse is an action theme present throughout the music video, love is also shown in the music video. Both examples are illustrated by Lohan, but I begin with an example involving only her and Michael. In the second verse of the song, she sings, “And I wear all your [Michael’s] old clothes/your polo sweater.” Right after singing this, she puts on a black jacket (presumably Michael’s). This action shows that Lohan still loves her father, and longs for his company and comfort. A jacket can be viewed as a form of warmth and comfort, and by putting on his jacket, it is as if her father is placing his arms around her. Lohan has been quoted saying that she does not speak to her father, but this action shows that she misses him and loves him. This complex action is worth noting because even though Michael is portrayed as an angry, abusive man in the video, she still loves him because he is her father. Despite all the chaos and the abuse illustrated in the video, and although it may be difficult to understand, she still has a loving connection with him, and wants him in her life.

The second way love is illustrated in the video is by Lohan in her “ghost form.” Throughout the video, Lohan is shown walking through the living room and Ali’s room, wearing different dresses than when she is in the bathroom. As stated earlier, these dresses are much simpler than the one she wears in the bathroom. Along with that, she is not wearing any jewelry, and her makeup is very simple. This difference in her appearance shows that when she is in the spotlight (in the bathroom), the public sees her as a glamorous celebrity. However, when she is in her “ghost form,” she is just a simple girl. Neither her family nor the crowd outside can see her in this form, but viewers can see that underneath it all, Lohan is only human, and not this glamorous celebrity that people see in the spotlight. Because of this visual characterization, her “ghostly” actions are communicated as particularly authentic, a point that is important to note because most of these actions connect with the “love” theme. Lohan is a celebrity, but underneath it all, she is just a simple girl who loves her family.

At times, she gets pretty close to the characters, but she never interacts with them. However, she displays looks of worry and love for Dina and Ali when she is in the room with them. She wants to provide love and comfort to the two characters and acts as a guardian. While she is in the living room, Lohan actually gets on the floor near her mother when she is cowering under Michael. She slightly leans in towards Dina, as if to ensure that she is OK, displaying her love for her. She does not interact with Dina by speaking or touching her, but she is still watching over her. Afterwards, Lohan goes to Ali’s room. First, she sits on the floor next to Ali’s bed as Ali empties her backpack of the family pictures. As Ali grows increasingly upset and clutches her stuffed animals on the bed, she switches and sits on a vanity chair. As she sits down, Lohan’s eyes never waver from Ali.

Thus, as she walks through the rooms, she demonstrates love for her mother and younger sister. This action is complex because Lohan is not physically able to do this, but her “ghost” is. Viewers can infer that she wishes she could be in the rooms with Dina and Ali to comfort them through the domestic abuse, but only her “ghost” could. Things are so chaotic, scary, and traumatic in their home, that Lohan feels the need to show her love for Dina and Ali in any way that she can.

Setting Themes

In this portion of my analysis, I will discuss the themes related to places where the events take place in the music video. Similar to “Stan,” the number of physical places is limited in the music video, but their importance cannot go unnoticed. The setting themes are important to understanding the music video’s message, and the two themes I identified in the video are: trapped and exposed. Within each section, I will provide specific examples from the music video that support each theme, and explain how they help answer my research question about how music videos illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse.

Trapped

The bathroom Lohan hides in and Ali’s bedroom are examples of the trapped setting theme. These two rooms serve as safe havens for the two characters, as it is where they can candidly express themselves, but at the same time, Lohan and Ali are trapped in the rooms. Both rooms have doors leading in and out of them, so one would think the girls could simply leave, but it is more complicated than that. Both doors lead right into the middle of the domestic abuse going on between Michael and Dina, so leaving the room would be comparable to walking into the fire. Therefore, the two characters are

trapped in their sanctuaries. Throughout the video, neither character is seen leaving their respective room, yet they both act as if they want to. Lohan and Ali constantly bang on the walls of their rooms and cry out, and Lohan is shown banging on the glass window between her and the crowd. They both desperately want to get out of the distressing setting, but cannot because they are trapped in an abusive environment.

Exposed

The rooms of the Lohan home are set up as window displays on a popular street, and the only thing between the crowd and each room are glass windows. The people walking on the street can see the drama and turmoil occurring in the home, and they begin to crowd around the windows to watch the events unfold. Despite the domestic abuse happening in the home, no one from the outside ever interferes or tries to stop them from occurring. Even when an officer arrives on the scene, he does not try to get involved. Normally, the bathroom, living room, and bedroom are all viewed as private spaces, but that is not the case in the music video. Each of the rooms is exposed for complete strangers to see. This reflects the notion that because Lindsay's entire life is constantly in the spotlight, the most traumatizing events from her life are in the spotlight, as well. The setup is intricate because a home is not meant to be exposed; a home is meant to be a private and safe place for a family, but the setup communicates how Lohan's home life was (and is) put on display for everyone to see. The domestic abuse is no exception; it can happen behind closed doors, yet still be exposed.

Rhetorical Vision

The themes and examples provided in the sections above have led me to the conclusion that through the music video for "Confessions," Lohan is communicating that

domestic abuse is not a clear and concrete matter; rather, it is a complex situation that can be difficult to understand. The fantasy theme elements I discussed support this argument. First, all three Lohan women illustrate a hopeless character theme, while Michael shows the apathetic character theme— explaining the complexity of domestic abuse. There are reasons why each character possesses these personality traits, but it is not always clear as to why. At face value, the personality traits may seem straightforward and clear, but the examples I referenced here prove that the reasons why each character possesses the personality trait are more complicated.

The action themes, abuse and love, are present throughout the video. These themes support the rhetorical vision because they are complete opposites, yet both are present in a music video centered on domestic abuse. Therefore, the actions support the complexity argument because at face value, it is not always clear how both love and abuse can be involved in an abusive situation such as the one illustrated in the music video. Nevertheless, abuse and love combine in the actions portrayed in the music video.

The two setting themes, trapped and exposed, are important to the narrative because they explain the themes communicated through the places where events take place in the music video. Along with that, the setting themes help explain the complexity of domestic abuse because they connect to the feelings portrayed by the characters and help explain how an otherwise private situation (domestic abuse) can be put on display. The trapped setting theme explains how Lohan and her sister feel stuck in the abusive environment, and the exposed setting theme explains how the domestic abuse in the Lohan home is visible to everyone.

The character themes, action themes, and setting themes come together to communicate that domestic abuse is not a clear and concrete matter; rather, it is a complex situation that can be difficult to understand. At face value, domestic abuse can appear straightforward and clear, but the music video provides reasons and ways it can be complicated. Thus, illustrating how domestic abuse can be more intricate and complex. The personality traits possessed by the Lohan family, each character's actions, and the places where the events take place all contribute to the rhetor's ability to communicate the complexity of domestic abuse to her audience. Lohan has personal experience with the domestic abuse portrayed in the music video, and she utilized it to explain the complexity of the subject.

Conclusion

Lindsay Lohan is an actress known best for her parts in popular teen movies and her "bubble-gum pop" songs, but she is also the mastermind behind the song and music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)." Lohan lived through the domestic abuse between her parents, and she utilized her experience to create the music video. Her purpose for creating the song and video was not only to showcase the domestic abuse that occurred in her home, but also to comfort those who may find themselves in similar situations. In the same *Access Hollywood* interview referenced earlier, Lohan was quoted saying that "it's [domestic abuse] normal, no one's perfect, and that's what I think the song is about, and the video."²² Directing the video was a form of therapy for her, but it was also meant to serve as a reassurance for young people at the center of domestic abuse that it is not uncommon, and that they are not alone.

22. "Letsgohawaii," "Lindsay Lohan Talks About Confessions of a Broken Heart 2005."

Lohan accomplished these tasks by crafting a narrative that illustrates the complexity of domestic abuse. The music video is disturbing, but it is also very raw. Although Lohan has been criticized for trying to be serious, and despite the fact that it was her first attempt at directing, her music video should not be ignored. She utilized a unique medium to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse, a potentially distressing subject to discuss. In my analysis, I used fantasy theme analysis to examine how the music video illustrated the complexity of domestic abuse. The music video portrays the domestic abuse that took place in the Lohan home, but it also helps explain how the concept of domestic abuse can be complex.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

I chose to center my thesis on music videos because they are a unique form of rhetoric. A music video is essentially a two- to four-minute short film meant to accompany a song, but it harnesses so much power. A music video combines images, music, and song lyrics to communicate messages, and it can be as intricate, entertaining, or complex as the artist wants it to be. Artists can use the medium to visually communicate the message of the song, but that purpose is not always fulfilled. There are some instances where artists will simply lip-sync along with the lyrics, and the video does not connect with the message of the song at all. Furthermore, present-day music videos are utilized to push big-name brands and/or artists, and/or the only purpose it fulfills is to entertain. Despite this, some artists have chosen to take things a step further and have used their music videos to communicate about sensitive matters that would otherwise be distressing to discuss.

Two examples of such artists are rap star Eminem and actress/singer Lindsay Lohan; Eminem used his music video for “Stan” to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom, while Lindsay used her music video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)” to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse. Although the two have completely different musical styles, both artists used their music videos to communicate issues and messages that might be distressing to discuss in other formats. Along with that, both artists have experience with the issue their music video is

centered on, thus making the videos unique and personal. Their music videos broke genre conventions because they were used as influential tools to discuss sensitive and distressing issues; I will go into further detail on this notion in upcoming paragraphs. Eminem and Lindsay's videos are so unique and fulfill a larger purpose than just to entertain, and that is why I dedicated my thesis to analyzing their music videos.

My thesis consisted of four chapters. In Chapter I, I discussed music video origins, symbolic convergence theory, and my chosen theoretical framework: fantasy themes. Chapter II was dedicated to overviewing the rhetorical situation of Eminem's music video for "Stan" and also included my fantasy theme analysis of the video. The organization of Chapter III mirrored Chapter II, but was dedicated to Lohan's music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)." The chapter began with the music video's rhetorical situation, and then the fantasy theme analysis followed. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly review the content covered in each chapter, including the two artifacts, and then conclude with my final remarks and takeaways.

Understanding Music Videos

In Chapter I, I discussed music video origins and how they have gone through a vast metamorphosis throughout history. As discussed by Dale Andrews in *Digital Overdrive: Communications & Multimedia Technology*, the unique medium started out with people acting out the songs and someone would hand-paint the accompanying images.¹ Fast forward to now, and technology has enabled music videos to be intricate

1. Dale Andrews, "Music Videos," in *Digital Overdrive: Communications & Multimedia Technology* (Burlington, ON: Digital Overdrive, 2008), 6.

and include as many visual effects as the artist and/or director wishes. The possibilities are endless.

Along with the way they were created, the purpose of music videos transitioned as well. Andrews also discussed how in the 1890's, music videos were created to illustrate the accompanying song, but then between the 1950's and 1970's, they were utilized to give publicity to growing artists and genres. Today, they are typically used to showcase big-name brands and artists. Bakula writes that this is particularly noticeable in Miley Cyrus's music video for "We Can't Stop" and Katy Perry's music video for "Roar."² Therefore, the music video medium is used to benefit not only the artist, but also the brand and/or product shown in the video.

As music videos became more and more popular, several television networks and shows such as MTV (often viewed as the original music television network), *Friday Night Videos*, and VH1 dedicated their air time to playing music videos. However, as the popularity of music videos diminished, the networks shifted their air time to showing other, more-popular segments such as reality television and comedy shows, etc. The video-sharing website YouTube is also considered one of the reasons for the decreasing popularity of music television. The accessibility of YouTube and their partnership with Vevo made it easier for people to view music videos on their smart phones whenever they wished, and it is now the go-to way for people to watch music videos.

Michael Jackson's music video for "Thriller" was the first music video to break the music video glass ceiling. It was the first time that an artist created the vision for the

2. David Bakula, "Behind the Music (Video): How Important Are Videos to Both Artists and Brands?," *Nielsen*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/behind-the-music-video-how-important-are-videos-to-both-artists-and-brands.html>.

music video, and it was also the first time that a music video was exceptionally elaborate and lengthy. The video is about eight minutes long and features several dance numbers. Prior to the video's release, people had this notion that the music video had to be exact and tailored to fit the artist and the song, but the success of the video proved that music videos could break the mold. An artist can make his or her vision a reality, and be as creative as he or she wishes with a video.

Transformation in the music video industry applies to not only the videos' creation, but also their purpose, and the way(s) in which the public can view them. Despite these shifts, music videos remain one of the most popular forms of entertainment, and their core purpose, to accompany a song, has not shifted. Even though they are not as popular as they once were, their notoriety should not go unnoticed.

Fantasy Theme Analysis

Although fantasy theme analysis was my chosen framework, it stems from symbolic convergence theory, so I will briefly review that concept first. Symbolic convergence theory focuses not on the individual, but rather the communication in/of groups. As I discussed earlier, it centers on the connections made among rhetorical themes, beliefs, messages, and people. Through these connections, people are enabled to develop their own beliefs and develop a shared worldview with others who think the same way; thus, these groups of people create a shared reality. In my thesis, I argued that the rhetors created and shared realities with other people through fantasy themes crafted in music videos.

Fantasy themes are stories or "realities" that craft symbolic convergence and can create shared knowledge amongst groups of people. Fantasy themes are artistic, and have

the power to help a group of people make sense of experiences. The ways in which fantasy themes are created vary, but nonetheless, they help organize and make sense of complicated, messy, and disordered events. In my thesis, I described how Eminem and Lohan crafted their music videos and utilized the fantasy theme elements to help make sense of their distressing, uncomfortable, and sensitive societal issue. Chapter II was dedicated to Eminem's music video for "Stan," and Chapter III was dedicated to Lohan's "Confessions" music video, which I am going to discuss in the following paragraphs.

Fantasy Themes in "Stan"

Chapter II was dedicated to Eminem's music video for "Stan." The research question that guided my analysis was: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the consequences of idolization and fandom? Eminem utilized the fantasy theme framework in the music video to illustrate the potential consequences of idolization and fandom. In my analysis, I identified specific examples that support each of the fantasy theme elements within the music video.

The first character theme I identified was helpless/powerless, which was illustrated by Stan's girlfriend, Matthew, and Eminem. The second character theme that I identified was dangerous/deadly, and this was portrayed by Stan. The character themes are critical to the analysis because each character possessed them as a result of the dangers of idolization and fandom, therefore connecting with the message of the video. As far as the action themes, the two I identified were fear/concern and obsession. The fear/concern action theme is demonstrated by Stan's girlfriend and Eminem, while Stan demonstrated the dangerous/deadly action theme. These action themes describe what occurred throughout the video and are consequences of Stan's extreme obsession, which

contributed to the characters' actions. The setting themes I identified in the music video were hidden and public. The setting themes also contributed to Stan's actions throughout the video. These two setting themes are important because they describe the physical settings in the music video and therefore contributed to the actions taking place.

Each of the fantasy theme elements came together to communicate the rhetorical vision, or the overall message of the artifact. Through the music video for "Stan," Eminem communicated that idolization and fandom can be detrimental to not just the fan, but to those around him or her. Due to Stan's extreme case of idolization and fandom, he put himself, his girlfriend, Matthew, and Eminem in undesirable, often dangerous, and ultimately deadly situations. Although this was an extreme case of fandom gone wrong, it is worth noting because it is not far-fetched. All it takes is another perfect storm (like Stan's) to bring the consequences to life.

By utilizing the fantasy theme framework in his music video for "Stan," Eminem effectively illustrated the consequences of idolization and fandom. The music video serves as a cautionary tale for people not to idolize a celebrity too much, as viewers can witness the detrimental and tragic effects that Stan's obsession had on him and those around him. Eminem once said that he receives letters like Stan's all the time. However, his songs are merely forms of expression, not a set of instruction on how to live, and that is something that his fans need to realize before things go too far.

The music video for "Stan" fulfilled a purpose greater than simple entertainment. As the rhetor, Eminem utilized the music video medium to communicate a message about idolization and fandom. The music video also helped to make sense of his experience with receiving letters similar to Stan's, and it enabled him to create and share this reality.

Although the music video is known as one of the most disturbing music videos ever created, it broke music video genre conventions and communicated a powerful message about the consequences of idolization and fandom.

Fantasy Themes in “Confessions”

In Chapter III, I discussed Lohan’s video for “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father).” The research question that guided my analysis was: How can a rhetor utilize music videos to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse? Similarly to Eminem, Lohan used the fantasy theme theoretical framework to discuss the complexity (which is synonymous with complicated, intricate, and multiplex) of domestic abuse. When I conducted my analysis, I identified specific examples from the video that support each fantasy theme element.

The two character themes I identified were hopeless and apathetic. Lohan, her mother Dina, and her younger sister Ali all illustrated the hopeless theme, while her father Michael illustrated the apathetic theme. These two character themes are important because they describe the personality traits that the characters possess, and those traits contribute to the complexity of domestic abuse. There are reasons why the characters possess those traits, but it is not always clear why. Then, I discussed the two action themes I found in the music video: abuse and love. These two action themes are complete opposites, but they are both present in a music video centered on domestic abuse. At face value, it is not always clear how the two could be present in an abusive situation such as the one illustrated in the video. Regardless, they are both present in Lohan’s music video and contribute to Lohan’s ability to communicate about domestic abuse. Next, I identified the setting themes in the music video: trapped and exposed. The number of physical

places in the music video is limited, but the themes communicated by the settings are critical to understanding the video. In this case, the setting themes help explain the complexity of domestic abuse because they connect to the characters' feelings, and help explain how an otherwise private situation (domestic abuse) can be visible to the public.

All of the fantasy theme elements come together to communicate that domestic abuse is not a clear and concrete matter; rather, it is a complex situation that can be difficult to understand. Through the music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)," Lohan provided reasons and ways that domestic abuse can be complicated. Domestic abuse can sometimes appear straightforward, but Lohan's message is that the matter can be complex.

As the rhetor, Lohan utilized the fantasy theme theoretical framework to illustrate the complexity of domestic abuse through her music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father)." The music video was Lohan's first attempt at directing, but her personal experience with the domestic abuse between her parents inspired her to write the song and create the video. She crafted the music video to help make sense of her experiences, to serve as a comfort for young adults who find themselves in the same situation, and to communicate the complexity of domestic abuse. Her music video broke genre conventions because she used it to discuss domestic abuse, an otherwise distressing and sensitive subject, making it worthy of praise.

Conclusion

Eminem and Lohan are completely different artists. Their music styles fall into vastly different music genres, but two of their music videos unite them. Eminem's music video for "Stan" and Lohan's music video for "Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter

to Father)” break genre conventions surrounding music videos. Eminem’s music video discusses idolization and fandom, while Lohan’s discusses domestic abuse. Both subjects are sensitive and disturbing societal issues, but the two artists dedicated their music videos to openly discussing them, and even help serve as a form of therapy for both stars. Eminem and Lohan utilized the fantasy theme framework in their music videos to communicate about a topic that they both have experiences with, making them more authentic and unique.

By breaking the music video mold, Eminem and Lohan’s videos have had an impact on society. Due to their authenticity, they are raising awareness and opening the doors for discussion on the subjects their music video address. As a result, others who may be going through the same, or similar issues can begin trying to make sense of their own experiences, and not be fearful of stigmas attached to the accompanying issue. Some people would be uncomfortable discussing their experiences with idolization and fandom or domestic abuse because the subjects are sensitive and can even be difficult to understand if one has not experienced it his or herself, but Eminem and Lohan fearlessly address them via their music videos. Thus, viewers see that it is okay to not only experience these issues, but it is also okay to express yourself and share your experiences. Although both videos are disturbing and can be hard to watch, they are worthy of praise because they are unique, authentic, and fulfill purposes greater than the average music video.

At the core, a music video’s purpose is to accompany a song, but their more noble potential should be recognized and harnessed more often. Music videos are a unique rhetorical medium because they can be as lengthy, elaborate, and creative as the artist

wants them to be, so they should strive to accomplish tasks bigger than to just entertain. Artists have the power to influence their fans in several ways, including through their music videos.

I went through several music videos when I was deciding which ones to analyze for my thesis. There were several instances where I found a song with a powerful message behind it, but the music video did not follow suit—whether that was because the music video did not follow the message of the lyrics, and/or because the artist did not have a personal connection with the song and video. I set out to find music videos that centered on distressing and disturbing societal issues, whose lyrics fit into the message of the video, but also whose artists connected to the artifact; I found those qualities in Eminem and Lohan’s music videos. I greatly admire Eminem and Lohan for breaking the music video genre convention with “Stan” and “Confessions of a Broken Heart (Daughter to Father).”

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