

I cringe at the thought of my daughter listening to the misogynist hip-hop I once loved

By Hafsa Lodi, *The Guardian*, December 4th, 2023

During my final year of university, I remember hanging out with friends by a lake one summer. I offered up my iPod to the friend-of-a-friend who had a portable speaker and was controlling the music. But as she scrolled through my music library, the mood soured; she looked at me aghast, berating me for my choice of “un-feminist” music.

5 One by one, she read out the titles of songs by Eamon, Busta Rhymes and other artists whose names I can no longer remember, who rapped profanities that I no longer feel comfortable typing on my keyboard, disgusted. As a woman, I shouldn’t be listening to such music, she told me.

Her public admonition of my music choices irked me, but I didn’t let her condemnation get in the way of my enjoyment. My favourite artist as a teen was Eminem. I memorised all the lyrics to
10 Without Me and was certain that his songs enriched my own vocabulary – especially after he revealed that he studied the dictionary as a child.

But I’m the mother of two young children now, and I cringe at the thought of my four-year-old daughter hearing one of the hip-hop songs I once loved. The explicit lyrics, the not-so-subtle innuendoes and the music videos that accompany many of these songs on YouTube – just the
15 thought of her consuming this sort of content at her age makes my stomach turn.

Some may find my new attitude to what was once my favourite music extreme. But something has changed since I became a mother. I realise I was naive and desensitised as a teen, ignorantly listening to chart-topping hip-hop, oblivious to how it can demean women. For many of the artists I once listened to, it has become clear their song-writing may indicate deeper misogynistic
20 perversions. R Kelly has been convicted of child sexual abuse, while Sean Combs was accused of rape and physical abuse, and Soulja Boy of sexual assault.

Of course, this isn’t solely a hip-hop issue – the prolific Black feminist author bell hooks rightly emphasised that we cannot blame one, predominantly Black genre of music for the sexism that plagues all levels of our society. Still, with age and experience, I have come to recognise some of
25 my once favoured artists to be purveyors of propaganda that’s harmful to my gender, and I feel a responsibility to filter the voices I allow into my personal space – especially since there are other little ears listening too.

Now I shudder at the thought of my daughter hearing, repeating and internalising the lyrics to these rap songs I once proudly memorised as a young woman – lyrics that unfortunately still remain
30 etched in my brain. I’m innately aware that my lifestyle choices, be it my commentary about clothing or my taste in music, will influence her. In an age when governments can backtrack on the rights and freedoms granted to us, I need my daughter to know her worth as a girl – a sense of self-worth that the music I used to listen to would only diminish.

I now wholeheartedly agree with that young woman by the lake who wore her feminism on her
35 sleeve. These songs truly are derogatory to women.

That’s not to say all rap is bad. But when it comes to songs that blatantly vilify and objectify the female gender, I’m out, for good.