



**SEMIOTICS OF ROLAND BARTHES ON LANA
DEL REY SONG LYRICS**

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ABSTRACT

This research is a study of semiotics on the lyrics of Lana Del Rey song *A&W*. The purpose of this study is to reveal the hidden meaning behind the song through the lens of Roland Barthes semiotics. This research focuses on the concepts of semiotics used on Lana Del Rey song lyrics. Using qualitative methods, the researchers focus on literary sources and use Roland Barthes semiotics theory on the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth which focuses on the cultural beliefs within American culture. The findings show that most of Barthes' semiotics concepts were found in the lyrics of Lana Del Rey's song *A&W*. The song portrayed a narrative of societal pressure and challenges faced by women in American society. In conclusion, by uncovering the signs and symbols within the song, it helps create the interpretation of the song and identify the hidden meanings conveyed within it.

Keywords: Myth, Roland Barthes, Semiotics, Song Lyrics.

A. INTRODUCTION

Song is a piece of music that contains tones and sounds that are arranged in a sequence, combination, and temporal flow (Muchalif, et al, 2022). Song conveyed emotions and messages which can be found within the combination of its sounds and lyrics. Lyrics within a song are known as the text of the song, usually written by the songwriter, which gives a song its meaning. In Chomsky (1968:38) perspectives, songs serve as a way for artists to express their inner thoughts behind its lyrics. Therefore, the song often conveyed hidden meaning and messages within it. These hidden messages can be found in the form of signs, symbols, metaphors, and others. Among the many artists that conveyed hidden messages within their song lyrics, Lana Del Rey is one of them. Lana Del Rey is a known American singer and songwriter whose songs often resonate with the listeners in a deep and emotional way. She often sings about love and fame within American culture. Lana Del Rey is also known to put

hidden and thought-provoking messages behind her lyrics in which she has won several awards and nominations for it.

Lana Del Rey song lyrics can be analyzed through the study of linguistics. According to Pullum (2014:37-60), song lyrics offer a unique way of understanding how language is used and expressed. The statement indicates that examining song lyrics can help gain a better understanding of the language's meaning and structure in a more insightful way and to understand how language is used in different situations and cultures. Aronoff (1997:44-50) stated that studying how song lyrics are structured can help people see how language expresses feelings and messages. It shows that song lyrics are perfect for exploring the way language is being used. In linguistics, song lyrics can be analyzed through the study of semiotics, which is the study of signs and symbols.

Through the study of semiotics on Lana Del Rey song lyrics, it helps show how feelings are expressed using language. Songs are a way for the singer or songwriters to connect with their listeners (Dallin, 1994:37). The statement shows that a song is more than just words, it carries a deeper meaning within it. Barthes (1977:56) claims that the way listeners understand a song depends on their experiences, culture, and the situation they hear it in. Using Barthes' ideas, this study focuses on the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth in Lana Del Rey song lyrics. Denotation refers to the literal and direct meaning, connotation refers to the meaning within context, and myths are the cultural meanings conveyed through the signs and symbols within the lyric (Barthes, 1957:58). The indicator of denotation is the literal interpretation of signs, while connotation is indicated by the secondary significance, and myth is indicated by its cultural ideologies.

Barthes (1964:40-51) claims, semiotics is the study of signs and their interpretation. A sign in this context, refers to anything that stands for something else and carries meaning. It can be a word, phrases, image, gesture, and any other form of representation. Barthes' approach to semiotics differs from other approaches. Firstly, he believes in the importance of the reader's interpretation and the subjective nature of meaning making. Secondly, Barthes' approach is highly interdisciplinary and draws ideas from other literature, philosophy, anthropology, and psychoanalysis.

The researchers choose to analyze Lana Del Rey is due to the fact that among many other studies of semiotics, there are still few studies that analyze Lana Del Rey lyrics through the lens of semiotics, which give the researchers an opportunity to explore her work in which

Lana Del Rey's songs are known to contain hidden meaning and are rich in signs and symbols which is the best object for a semiotics study. The aim of this study is to reveal the depth of semiotics in Lana Del Rey's music.

In this study, the researchers choose one of Lana Del Rey's songs entitled *A&W*. The song is from her latest album "Did you know that there's a tunnel under Ocean Blvd" which was published in 2023 and has several nominations in the 2024 GRAMMYS. The song *A&W* is short for American Whore. The song consists of two parts, which is the first part of the song explores the protagonist's detachment from societal norms and having a sexual affair with a married cop, which the protagonist did not know about. It also tells the story of the protagonist experience on sexual violence and the societal perceptions of the victim, especially on women, while the second part of the song shifts to tell the story of the protagonist and her relationship with someone named Jimmy, who only seems to be present in certain times. Overall, the song explores the themes of identity, societal expectations, and women's struggle.

The research question and objective of this study is related to the issues presented in the introduction, this study aims to reveal the hidden meaning and the cultural messages contained in the song *A&W* by Lana Del Rey using Barthes' semiotics concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers applied a qualitative method, which only focuses on literary sources instead of field research. This study focused solely on Roland Barthes theory on semiotics that examine denotation, connotation, and myths on Lana Del Rey's song *A&W*. The source of data is Lana Del Rey's *A&W* song lyrics, while the data are in the form of text, such as words, phrases, and sentences.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Song	Concepts of Semiotic Sign		
	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
A&W	v	v	v

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As seen from the table above, most of Barthes's concepts of semiotics were found in the song *A&W*. The song consists of two parts, the first part of the song consists of 8 stanzas and the second part of the song consists of 5 stanzas in which most of them contain repetition of some line. There are a total of 6 data found within the song that contains Barthes' denotation, connotation, and myth. Below are the analysis of the said 6 data:

Data 1. *I haven't done a cartwheel since I was nine.* (Stanza 1, Line 1)

The data above is in the form of a sentence that consists of both denotation and connotation. The denotation as seen from its literal interpretation refers to the singer mentions not having performed a cartwheel since they were nine years old.

While the connotation, seen from its secondary significances, represents a nostalgic reflection on childhood innocence as seen from the word "cartwheel" which represents carefree spirit at a young age and by saying that the singer refers to her transition into adulthood.

Data 2. *I mean, look at me / Look at the length of my hair, and my face, the shape of my body / Do you really think I give a damn / What I do after years of just hearing them talking?* (Stanza 1, Line 3, line 4, line 5, line 6)

The data above is in the form of sentences which consist of denotation, connotation, and myth. The denotation, seen from its literal interpretation, refers to the singer expressing that she does not care about others' opinions regarding her appearances.

The connotation, seen from its secondary significance reflects the singer's self-acceptance within external criticism, particularly regarding her appearances. The line "What I do after years of just hearing them talking?" implies that the singer has been facing criticism and judgment about her appearance for many years and now she finally decided to not give any thoughts on others opinion of hers.

In terms of myth, the sentence is analyzed from its cultural ideologies, the sentence critiques societal pressures on women to conform to the ideal beauty standards. As seen in Bawinur (2023) study which shows that 71% of women in America feel the pressure to be physically attractive. The singer's rejection towards these social norms represents her challenging the said norms.

Data 3. *I say I live in Rosemead, really, I'm at the Ramada.* (Stanza 2, Line 1)

The sentence above consists of both denotation and connotation. The denotation, seen from its literal interpretation, refers to the singer claiming to live in Rosemead but actually lives at the Ramada, indicating telling false information regarding her living situation.

The connotation, as seen from its secondary significance, reflects societal perceptions and judgments associated with where one lives. Rosemead represents a nice lower-middle class neighborhood, whereas the Ramada symbolizes lower income housing in the form of a hotel or a motel. The singer is attempting to project a false image of wealth, stability, and status due to the pressure of societal expectations to maintain a certain image.

Data 4. *This is the experience of being an American whore.* (Stanza 3, Line 4)

The sentence above consists of denotation, connotation, and myth. The denotation, as seen from its literal interpretation, refers to the experience of being a sex worker in America.

The connotation of the sentence according to its secondary significance reflects the singer's critique of the hyper sexualization and objectification of women in American culture. It symbolizes the struggles and challenges faced by women based on their sexuality.

The myth as seen from the cultural ideologies is surrounding the hyper sexualization and objectification of women in American society. The statement is supported by a report made by the American Psychological Association APA in 2023, which shows that women tend to get sexualized from social media and it happens more often on women than men and it has grown ever since. In American society, there are the beliefs of sexual double standards where being a whore is not acceptable on women and ruining their reputation, while for men it is that those behaviors are permissive (Klein, et al, 2023).

Data 5. *If I told you that I was raped / Do you really think that anybody would think / I didn't ask for it? I didn't ask for it.* (Stanza 7, Line 3, line 4, line 5)

The data above is in the form of sentences. The denotation of the sentence as seen from its literal interpretation expresses the singer's doubt about whether others would believe that she did not consent to act of rape.

The connotation of the sentence as seen from the secondary significances reflects the singer's frustration with societal actions towards women who are the victims of sexual assault. It shows how society tends to blame and doubt victims.

The myth of the sentence as seen from the cultural ideologies exposes the myth surrounding sexual assault within American society. It highlights how women tend to be the one to blame on their own assault based on their behavior and appearances. As shown in the study of Health (2023), that 50% of women in the United States have experienced sexual violence. The sentence is a reflect to the harmful stereotypes and lack of supports rape survivors within the justice system and society.

Data 6. *I won't testify, I already fucked up my story.* (Stanza 7, Line 6)

The sentence above consists of both denotation and connotation. The denotation of the sentence as seen from its literal interpretation expresses the singer's refusal to testify due to the belief that she has ruined her story.

The connotation based on the secondary significance implies that the singer is hesitant to testify due to societal perceptions of her sexual history. The phrase "I already fucked up my story" suggests that her past experiences regarding sexual activities could be used against her in court if she testified. According to the Bureau of Justice United States, in 2023, it is shown that the number of cases regarding those issues are hard to determine due to some survivors choosing not to report their crime (D, 2023). It symbolizes the fear women feel in coming forward due to the potential of societal judgment and scrutiny.

D. CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the song *A&W* consists of three Barthes' concepts of semiotics which are denotation, connotation, and myth. The exploration of these concepts on the song lyrics helps reveal the hidden meaning behind the song which are the portrayal of societal perceptions and cultural ideologies regarding issues of women sexuality, consent, victim-blaming on American society. Through denotation, connotation, and myth is can be identified that the song explores the themes of sexual assault, victim-blaming, and societal pressures on women. By analyzing these linguistic elements, it becomes evident that societal support for rape survivors is crucial in addressing these issues. This shows how the study of semiotics can help find the hidden meaning behind song lyrics. The exploration of semiotics also helps the researchers to connect with the singer's personal experience and

emotions through the lyrics and recognizing the power of sign and symbols help shaping perceptions and emotions of the songs.

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