

The Evolution of Masculine Vulnerability in Selected Lyrics of Rich Brian (2017-2025)

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Abstract: This article examines the development of masculine vulnerability in selected lyrics by Rich Brian from 2017 to 2025. This study is based on the difference between the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which positions men as strong, rational, confident, and able to control their emotions, and the development of contemporary hip-hop, which increasingly provides space for men to express emotional experiences such as pain, anxiety, self-doubt, and self-reflection. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a thematic analysis approach to examine four Rich Brian songs, namely Glow Like Dat, Kids, New Tooth, and She. The findings show that masculine vulnerability in Rich Brian's lyrics is represented through various emotional experiences, including emotional wounds, anxiety, inner conflict, personal struggles, emotional openness, and self-reflection. The study also finds that these lyrics do not completely reject the concept of hegemonic masculinity because elements such as ambition, achievement, self-confidence, and resilience are still presented. However, these elements are combined with emotional experiences and psychological pressures experienced by men. Therefore, this article demonstrates that Rich Brian's lyrics portray masculinity as a dynamic, flexible, and continuously evolving identity in contemporary hip-hop, where strength and vulnerability can exist together.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, masculine vulnerability, Rich Brian, hip-hop, thematic analysis.

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1. Introduction

Masculinity is often understood as a concept formed through the social and cultural environment that influences the way men behave, speak and present their identity in society. In many social environments, men are often considered to be strong, independent, rational, confident, and able to control their emotions. This view is related to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is the form of masculinity that is considered the most ideal and dominant in society (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In the traditional view of masculinity, showing vulnerability is often considered to be at odds with the image of a strong man. Feelings such as sadness, fear, insecurity, regret,

loneliness, and anxiety are often considered emotions that men should hide. However, masculinity is not a fixed identity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that hegemonic masculinity can change according to social, cultural, and historical developments. Therefore, the meaning of masculinity can undergo changes through various social practices and cultural texts, including music and song lyrics.

Music is an important cultural medium for understanding how masculinity and male emotions are displayed. Through song lyrics, a musician can convey personal experiences, build identity, and express feelings that are sometimes difficult to convey directly in everyday life. Thus, song lyrics not only serve as entertainment, but can also be understood as cultural texts that describe various social meanings regarding identity, emotions and gender.

Hip-hop is one of the interesting music genres to be studied in the discussion of masculinity because from the beginning of its development it is often associated with images of men who are strong, confident, competitive, dominant, and successful socially and economically. In many of rap's earlier works, masculinity was often displayed through strength, courage, and the ability to master circumstances. However, the development of contemporary hip-hop indicates a change in the way men are represented. Male rappers not only display success, ambition, and confidence, but also begin to express emotional experiences such as inner wounds, anxiety, mental stress, loneliness, and the process of understanding oneself.

Rich Brian is a relevant object in this study because he is an Indonesian rapper who has influence at the international level. The presence of Rich Brian provides a different point of view because research on masculinity in hip-hop has previously focused more on Western musicians. Much of the earlier research dealt with aspects such as hyper masculinity, violence, dominance, misogyny, and material success in hip-hop culture. Meanwhile, the discussion about how Asian rappers with global reach portray vulnerability as part of a masculine identity has yet to do much.

This article analyzes Rich Brian's four selected songs, namely *Glow Like Dat* (2017), *Kids* (2019), *New Tooth* (2021), and *She* (2025). The four songs were chosen because they show the development of Rich Brian's expressions of masculinity in several stages of his career. The song *Glow Like Dat* describes emotional experiences of pain, loss, and regret in personal relationships. *Kids* ' Songs show confidence, ambition, and an effort to gain recognition in the hip-hop industry. The song *New Tooth* shows the pressures of life, inner conflicts, and the struggle to deal with difficult mental conditions. Meanwhile, *She*'s songs show a more mature form of masculinity through emotional openness, self-reflection, and awareness of relationships.

Based on this background, this article discusses three main focuses. First, How Rich Brian's choice lyrics describe a form of masculine vulnerability. Second, how such vulnerability relates to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Third, how the representation of vulnerability in Rich Brian's lyrics shows the changing meaning of masculinity in contemporary hip-hop music. This study aims to explain that vulnerability does not necessarily conflict with masculinity, but can be part of a masculine identity that retains elements of strength, ambition, confidence, and resilience in the face of various life experiences.?

2. Method

This study uses qualitative descriptive methods. This method was chosen because the research did not focus on data in the form of numbers, but on understanding the meaning contained in the text, especially song lyrics. Qualitative research is used to understand a phenomenon in depth by looking at meanings related to social problems, cultural experiences, identity, as well as the way a person expresses emotions (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was used to explain how masculinity and masculine vulnerability are portrayed through words, phrases, and meanings contained in Rich Brian's song lyrics.

The objects in this study were the lyrics of four Rich Brian songs, namely Glow Like Dat (2017), Kids (2019), New Tooth (2021), and She (2025). The four songs were chosen because they have themes related to men's emotional experiences, such as inner wounds, anxiety, life pressures, personal struggles, self-confidence, and self-reflection.

This study only focused on song lyrics as textual data. Therefore, the study did not address other elements such as melodies, musical arrangements, music videos, stage performances, Rich Brian's public image, interviews, listener responses, and fan interpretations. This restriction is done so that the analysis remains focused on how song lyrics as cultural texts portray forms of masculinity and emotional vulnerability in the context of contemporary hip-hop.

Table 1. Selected Songs and Dominant Themes

Song	Year	Dominant Theme in the Analysis
Glow Like Dat	2017	Emotional wounds, anxiety, regret, and sensitivity in personal relationships.
Kids	2019	Ambition, confidence, recognition, and the personal pressure behind achievement.

New Tooth	2021	Mental stress, self-doubt, internal conflict, and the pressure to stay strong.
She	2025	Emotional openness, self-reflection, relationship responsibility, and mature vulnerability.

The main Data in this study is the lyric text of four songs chosen by Rich Brian, namely Glow Like Dat (2017), Kids (2019), New Tooth (2021), and She (2025). In addition to the main data, this study also used supporting data in the form of books, journal articles, theses, and previous research that discussed related topics, such as hegemonic masculinity, masculine vulnerability, emotional expression, music, and hip-hop culture. The main theoretical basis in this study uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell as well as the concept of masculine vulnerability that looks at how men express their emotional side through experiences such as openness to feelings, anxiety, self-doubt, personal struggle, and self-reflection.

Data collection is done through documentation techniques. At the initial stage, the researcher collects lyric texts from trusted music sources and lyric platforms. After the lyrics are obtained, the researcher performs a double check by comparing several sources to ensure that the text of the lyrics used is appropriate and reduces the possibility of writing errors. Furthermore, researchers read the lyrics repeatedly to understand the content, context, and meaning contained in each song. The lyrical part in the form of words, phrases, or lines related to the focus of the study was then selected as data, such as parts that show emotional wounds, anxiety, insecurities, loneliness, inner conflicts, personal struggles, ambition, confidence, and openness in expressing emotions.

The data collected were then analyzed using thematic analysis method. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method used to find, group, and explain patterns or themes that appear in qualitative data. In this study, the analysis process is carried out through several stages. First, researchers read the lyrics over and over to understand the overall meaning of the song. Second, the researcher chooses the part of the lyrics that corresponds to the focus of the study. Third, the lyrical part is given a code based on the meaning that appears. Fourth, codes that have similar meanings are grouped into themes, such as emotional wounds, anxiety, personal struggles, self-reflection, and emotional openness. Fifth, the themes found are analyzed using the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and masculine vulnerability. The results of the analysis are then linked to the formulation of research problems to explain how Rich Brian represents masculine vulnerability and the changing meaning of masculinity in contemporary hip-hop.

3. Result & Discussion

3.1. Representation of Masculine Vulnerability in Rich Brian's Selected Lyrics

The results showed that masculine vulnerability is one of the important forms in describing masculine identity in Rich Brian's lyrics. In four songs analyzed, namely *Glow Like Dat* (2017), *Kids* (2019), *New Tooth* (2021), and *She* (2025), men are not only shown as confident, ambitious, and successful in achieving goals, but also as individuals who experience pain, anxiety, pressure, and conflict within themselves.

These findings suggest that vulnerability does not necessarily conflict with masculinity. Rather, vulnerability becomes part of the masculine experience of understanding oneself and dealing with various emotional states. This is in accordance with the view of Connell (1995) who explained that masculinity is not a fixed identity, but is formed through social and cultural processes that are constantly changing.

1. Emotional wounds and regrets in the song *Glow Like Dat*

In the song *Glow Like Dat* (2017), masculine vulnerability is displayed through the experience of emotional wounds and regrets resulting from personal relationships. The song describes someone who is still feeling the impact of a past relationship and is not yet completely free from the experience.

One part of the lyrics that show the emotional state is: "Always anxious"

This lyrics describes the feeling of anxiety that continues to arise in the characters. The word anxious indicates a sense of unease and emotional distress experienced after facing a difficult personal experience. In the context of masculine vulnerability, these lyrics suggest that men can also experience anxiety and emotional instability.

In addition, there are lyrics: "Break my heart"

The phrase indicates the experience of pain due to an ending relationship. This lyric shows that the characters in the song are not trying to hide the pain they are experiencing. On the contrary, he admitted that the emotional experience had an effect on him.

This representation shows a change from the traditional view of masculinity that considers men should always be strong and not show weakness. Through *Glow Like Dat*, Rich Brian illustrates that accepting and understanding pain can also be part of masculine identity.

2. Anxiety and inner conflict in the song *New Tooth*

The song New Tooth (2021) shows a form of masculine vulnerability through anxiety, mental stress, and inner conflict. Although the song still features a confident and courageous character, there is another side that shows the psychological pressure.

This is seen through the lyrics: "Thoughts goin' too fast"

The lyrics describe a condition when a person's mind runs too fast that is difficult to control. This shows the experience of anxiety and mental stress experienced by the character in the song.

In addition, there are lyrics: "Fightin' with my thoughts"

The phrase indicates an internal conflict. Problems experienced not only come from the outside environment, but also come from his own thoughts and feelings.

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, men are often associated with the ability to think rationally, control emotions, and remain calm in the face of problems (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, through this song, Rich Brian shows that men can also experience confusion, pressure, and emotional struggles.

Thus, New Tooth shows that being a strong man does not mean not having emotional problems. Conversely, the ability to be aware of and deal with inner conflict is also part of the masculine experience.

3. Ambition and the pressure of success in Kids Songs

In the song Kids (2019), masculine vulnerability is shown through the relationship between ambition, achievement, and pressure for recognition. The song depicts a masculine figure who is confident, has great goals, and wants to show his abilities in the hip-hop industry.

This is seen through the lyrics: "Kids wanna be me"

The lyrics show the confidence and social recognition gained by the characters in the song. He describes himself as someone who has achieved success and become an inspiration to others.

However, behind the success picture there is a pressure that must be faced. This is seen through the lyrics: "Forgot how to sleep"

The lyrics show the sacrifice in the process of achieving success. Lack of sleep illustrates that ambition and the desire to succeed can put pressure on a person's physical and emotional condition.

In the context of hegemonic masculinity, success and achievement are often considered symbols of masculinity. However, the Kids song shows that the achievement also has another side in the form of pressure, fatigue, and demands to constantly prove themselves.

Thus, the song illustrates that behind the confidence and success of men lies an emotional struggle that is often invisible.

4. Emotional openness and self-reflection in the song She

The song She (2025) shows a form of masculine vulnerability through emotional openness and self-reflection. In this song, the masculine is shown not only through romantic relationships, but also through the ability to understand feelings and evaluate oneself.

One of the lyrics that shows emotional openness is: "My songs"

The lyrics show that music is a medium for characters to convey personal experiences and emotions that are difficult to express directly. Songs become a space to express feelings as well as understand the experience of self.

In addition, there are lyrics: "Self control"

The lyrics show an attempt to manage oneself and understand the actions that have been committed. In this context, self-control not only means holding back emotions, but also the ability to carry out evaluations and personal development.

The representation in She suggests a more mature form of masculinity. Men are judged not only by strength or success, but also by the ability to understand emotions, recognize shortcomings, and reflect on life experiences.

Based on an analysis of four Rich Brian songs, it was found that masculine vulnerability appears in various forms of experience. Glow Like Dat shows emotional hurt and regret, Kids shows the pressure behind ambition and achievement, New Tooth shows anxiety and inner conflict, while She shows emotional openness and self-reflection.

The four songs show that masculinity in contemporary hip-hop is not only about strength, success, and confidence. Masculinity can also be shown through a man's ability to understand emotions, deal with pressure, and accept his vulnerable side. Thus, Rich Brian's lyrics portray masculinity as a more flexible identity, where strength and vulnerability can be present simultaneously.

3.2. Masculine Vulnerability and Hegemonic Masculinity

The second finding suggests that masculine vulnerability in Rich Brian's lyrics has a strong connection to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Based on the results of the analysis, the Selected Lyrics still display some characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as self-confidence, ambition, achievement, strength, resilience in the face of problems, and the ability to control themselves. However, these characteristics are not presented as a perfect form of male strength and without weaknesses. Instead, the elements appear together with emotional experiences such as anxiety, self-doubt, mental stress and the process of understanding oneself.

The connection between masculine vulnerability and hegemonic masculinity is evident in the songs Kids and New Tooth. In the Kids song, the character in the lyrics describes himself as someone who has big ambitions and believes in his abilities. He showed a desire to achieve success, gain recognition, and have an important position in the world of hip-hop. It is related to the concept of hegemonic masculinity because it emphasizes values such as success, competition and social status.

However, behind the picture there is a pressure that must be faced. The desire to succeed not only shows strength, but also brings demands and sacrifices. The process of achieving success is described as an experience that requires great effort and can be emotionally and physically stressful. Thus, songs Kids show that achievement and ambition in masculinity also have a vulnerable side that is often invisible.

The same can be seen in the song New Tooth. In this song, the character in the lyrics still displays the image of a strong, confident man, and has the determination to face various challenges. Activities in the studio, the process of working, and maintaining success became part of his masculine identity. However, behind the image, the lyrics of the song also show the presence of psychological pressure in the form of thoughts that are difficult to control, a sense of uncertainty, and inner conflict.

The condition shows the difference between how a person looks from the outside with what is actually experienced inside him. A man can show strength and confidence in the presence of others, but still experience emotional stress personally. This shows that masculinity has not only to do with the ability to look strong, but also with how one deals with and understands one's emotional experiences.

Meanwhile, the song She shows a form of redefinition of masculinity through emotional openness and self-reflection. In this song, the concept of self-control is still visible, but it is not described as the ability to always look perfect or have no mistakes. Instead, self-control is presented as a process for learning, understanding emotions, and developing into a better person.

The character in the lyrics begins to show awareness of her limitations, understand her feelings, and consider emotional responsibility in a relationship. This suggests that masculine strength is seen not only in the ability to control circumstances, but also in the ability to evaluate oneself and accept emotional experiences.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that Rich Brian's chosen lyrics do not completely reject the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Instead, the lyrics provide a broader understanding of the meaning of masculinity. Masculinity is not only related to dominance, toughness, success, or the ability to hide emotions. Masculinity can also include the ability to acknowledge pain, deal with anxiety, understand one's weaknesses, reflect, and thrive through emotional experiences.

Thus, vulnerability does not become something contrary to masculine identity. Vulnerability is precisely one of the parts of the formation of masculinity that is more flexible and in accordance with the male experience in the context of contemporary hip-hop.

Table 2. Relationship between Hegemonic Masculinity and Vulnerability

Aspect	Hegemonic Masculinity	Masculine Vulnerability
Ambition	Desire to achieve success and recognition.	Pressure, exhaustion, and sacrifice behind success.
Confidence	Public image of strength and control.	Anxiety and uncertainty behind the confident image.
Self-control	Expectation to manage emotion and remain stable.	Ongoing process of learning, reflection, and emotional responsibility.
Resilience	Ability to endure difficulty and continue working.	Inner conflict and mental burden experienced while enduring difficulty.

3.3. Development of The Meaning of Masculinity in Contemporary Hip-Hop

The third finding suggests that Rich Brian's chosen lyrics illustrate a change in the way masculinity is understood in contemporary hip-hop. The change is seen through the development of themes in the four songs analyzed. The song *Glow Like Dat* shows an early form of masculine vulnerability through the experience of emotional pain, loss, and anxiety. The *Kids* song then shows the side of masculinity through ambition, confidence, and the desire to get recognition. Furthermore, the song *New Tooth* shows the mental stress and inner conflicts that arise behind the image of a confident man. Meanwhile, *She's* songs showcase a more mature form of masculinity through emotional openness, self-awareness, and reflection on personal experiences.

The development shows that masculinity is not a fixed and unchanging identity. Masculinity can evolve through life experiences, social changes, and the process of

understanding oneself. In Rich Brian's lyrics, the image of a man not only changes from a figure with emotional wounds to a successful one, but also develops into an individual capable of dealing with pressure, understanding emotions, and self-reflection. Thus, masculinity in the lyrics is described as a constantly evolving process, not as a condition that is always the same.

One of the changes in contemporary hip-hop is the shift away from a masculine only image of power toward a more emotionally open form of masculinity. Rich Brian's lyrics do not eliminate elements of masculinity such as ambition, self-confidence, and the desire to achieve success. However, the lyrics also provide space for men to show emotional experiences such as fear, pressure, doubt, and the process of understanding oneself. This suggests that vulnerability is not always perceived as weakness, but can be part of the masculine experience.

In addition to the change from strength to emotional openness, the results of the study also showed a relationship between strength and vulnerability in the formation of masculine identity. The character in the lyrics can be described as an individual who has ambitions and achieves success, but at the same time remains subject to anxiety and emotional stress. He can show confidence, but also have doubts about himself. He can try to control himself, but still experience a learning process in understanding emotions and growing personally.

The representation shows that masculinity in contemporary hip-hop is no longer limited to one specific image, such as a man who is always strong, dominant, and does not show emotions. Instead, masculinity can encompass a wide range of experiences, from successes, struggles, pressures, emotional openness, to processes of self-reflection. Being a man is not only about the ability to look strong, but also the ability to understand and deal with emotional experiences.

In addition, Rich Brian's position as an Indonesian rapper in the global hip-hop industry provides an important perspective in this study. Much of the research on masculinity in hip-hop has focused on Western rappers and Western cultural contexts. Through Rich Brian's work, this study shows that representations of masculine vulnerability can also be found in Asian musicians participating in global popular culture.

Thus, Rich Brian's lyrics show that the meaning of masculinity in contemporary hip-hop is undergoing development. Masculinity is not only built through strength, success, and confidence, but also through the ability to acknowledge emotions, deal with pressure, do self-reflection, and accept the vulnerable side in a person. These findings suggest that strength and vulnerability can be present simultaneously in shaping a more complex and flexible masculine identity.

3.4. Discussion Based on the Formulation of Research Problems

The first formulation of the problem in this study discusses how Rich Brian's chosen lyrics describe masculine vulnerability. Based on the results of the analysis, the masculine vulnerability in Rich Brian's lyrics arises through various emotional experiences, such as emotional wounds, anxiety, self-doubt, personal struggles, openness in showing feelings, and self-reflection. Each song shows a different form of vulnerability. *Glow Like Dat* depicts more pain and regret in relationships, *Kids* shows the pressure behind ambition and achievement, *New Tooth* portrays inner conflict and mental stress, while *She* shows emotional openness and the process of understanding oneself. Overall, the songs show that men can also experience a variety of complex emotions and have their own way of expressing those feelings.

The second formulation of the problem addresses the relationship between masculine vulnerability and the concept of hegemonic masculinity. The results show that vulnerability does not completely contradict hegemonic masculinity. In Rich Brian's lyrics, elements often associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as ambition, confidence, success, resilience, and self-control, are still featured. However, the element appears together with emotional experiences such as anxiety, pressure, doubt and inner conflict. This suggests that the masculinity in Rich Brian's lyrics does not eliminate the concept of male power, but provides a broader understanding of how men experience and deal with various emotional states. In other words, a man can still have strength and confidence, but at the same time also have a vulnerable side in him.

The third formulation of the problem addresses how the representation of vulnerability demonstrates the changing meaning of masculinity in contemporary hip-hop. The results showed that masculinity in Rich Brian's lyrics experienced a development from a male image that focused only on strength, success, and a confident image in front of the public, towards a more open and flexible form of identity. In these representations, men are not only judged through achievement and ability to face challenges, but also through the ability to understand emotions, deal with mental stress, and reflect on themselves.

This change suggests that contemporary hip-hop is beginning to provide a wider space for men to display emotional experiences. Honesty in expressing feelings is no longer always considered a weakness, but can be part of the process of building a masculine identity. Through Rich Brian's lyrics, masculinity is portrayed as an ever-evolving identity, where strength, ambition, vulnerability, and emotional awareness can be present simultaneously.

4. Conclusion

This article concludes that the masculine vulnerability in Rich Brian's Selected Lyrics is displayed through various forms of emotional experience, such as inner wounds, anxiety, self-doubt, struggle in dealing with personal problems, openness in showing feelings, and the process of understanding oneself. Such representations suggest that male identity does not necessarily have to do with power, dominance, or the ability to always appear emotionally strong. Men can also experience pain, pressure, uncertainty, and emotional development processes in their lives.

The relationship between masculine vulnerability and hegemonic masculinity in the lyrics does not indicate the presence of completely opposite opposites. Although there are still characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as ambition, confidence, achievement, resilience in the face of adversity and the ability to control oneself, these aspects are displayed through more complex emotional experiences. In other words, masculinity is understood not only as a form of strength and obstinacy, but also as the ability to accept, understand and express emotions.

In addition, Rich Brian's lyrics show the development of a sense of masculinity in contemporary hip-hop culture. Masculinity is no longer only associated with stubbornness, dominance, and material success, but also includes the ability of individuals to recognize emotions, reflect on life experiences, and express their vulnerable side through works of art. Through Rich Brian's songs in the period from 2017 to 2025, masculinity is described as a complex, flexible and constantly changing identity in accordance with individual social and emotional experiences.

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