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## In The Thicke Of It

Jessie M. Pierce  
*Gettysburg College*

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# In The Thicke Of It

## **Abstract**

If you've been anywhere near your Facebook newsfeed in the last few days, you're probably familiar with the most recent images of Miley Cyrus at her less-than-graceful VMA performance. From CNN's front page headline, "What Was Miley Thinking?" to BuzzFeed's gifset of a cartoon Cyrus twerking on famous paintings, her antics have, for better or for worse, become a hyper-inflated mega-sensation that I, frankly, don't care about at all. I'm not going to talk about Miley anymore. Instead, let's talk about her co-performer, Robin Thicke. *[excerpt]*

## **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, VMA awards, Miley Cyrus, Robin Thicke, rape culture

## **Disciplines**

American Popular Culture | Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Gender and Sexuality

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu/) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

## IN THE THICKE OF IT

September 2, 2013

If you've been anywhere near your Facebook newsfeed in the last few days, you're probably familiar with the most recent images of Miley Cyrus at her less-than-graceful VMA performance. From CNN's front page headline, "What Was Miley Thinking?" to BuzzFeed's gifset of a cartoon Cyrus twerking on famous paintings, her antics have, for better or for

worse, become a hyper-inflated mega-sensation that I, frankly, don't care about at all. I'm not going to talk about Miley anymore. Instead, let's talk about her co-performer, Robin Thicke.



Thicke is the R&B artist responsible for the hit single of the summer, "Blurred Lines." The song has been at the top of the charts for nine weeks running, and the music video has over 125 million views. But as "Blurred Lines" has gained popularity, it has come under some pretty intense fire for its perpetuation of rape culture. According to Tricia Romano of The Daily Beast, "The song is about [how a girl really wants crazy wild sex](#) but doesn't say it—positing that age-old problem where men think no means yes into a catchy, hummable song." The chorus, in which Thicke croons "I hate these blurred lines, I know you want it," has led many critics to accuse the song of trivializing consent and [perpetuating rape myths](#), including the notion that a woman's clothing (or lack thereof) may indicate sexual availability, or that even if a woman gives a verbal "no," her behaviour really means "yes." In other words, that if the line of consent is blurred, it is acceptable to cross it.

Although the song itself has inspired dissent, the biggest controversy has been from the music video, which primarily features Thicke and guest stars T.I. and Pharrell Williams cavorting goofily around in suits while three female models strut indifferently in circles around them. In the unrated version, the women are clad only in [flesh-coloured G-strings](#), while the clean version has them sporting the more modest look of [white underwear covered in clear vinyl](#). In both, the juxtaposition of the fully-clothed charismatic men and the scantily-dressed vacant-faced women presents a glaring power dynamic that has made many people uncomfortable. "The only function of their nudity in the video is as an accessory to male desire, and they have no other function in the video at all, which is pretty reductive and demeaning," said Youtuber Abigail Rose in response to the unrated Vevo version. "[The silence of the women in the video](#) exacerbates that." In addition, the video features a clip of one of the models on her hands and knees with a teeny-tiny stop sign perched on her bare rump. Yeah...pretty rapey.

So, knowing all of this, I was eager to jump on the bandwagon, pouring fiery feminist condemnation down upon Thicke's wretched head and admonishing the sheeplike acceptance of such atrocities in a blog post searing with ardour. So I set out into the depths of the internet to affirm my suspicion (read: rock-solid opinion) that Robin Thicke is a chauvinist dirtbag and "Blurred Lines" is the all-American rape anthem. But the more I investigated, the more the lines became, well, blurred. For example, the music video was directed by Diane Martel— a woman. And her intention was to film the video "in a way where the girls were going to overpower the men." Rather than offensive, she finds the video "meta." The models in the video all stated that [they never felt uncomfortable](#) on set. Paula Patton, Robin Thicke's wife, actually pushed him to release the topless version of the video when he said he liked the clothed version better. And Robin Thicke himself said that the video was conceived in a playful, ironic manner, and was supposed to convey humour and light-heartedness. "[We tried to do everything that was taboo,](#)" he said in an interview with GQ . "Bestiality, drug injections, and everything that is completely derogatory towards women. Because all three of us are happily married with children, we were like, 'We're the perfect guys to make fun of this.'"

...Oh.

Oh wait.

Okay, so let me get this straight: Robin Thicke wanted to make a video that pokes fun at misogyny...by making his video as misogynistic as possible.

That doesn't sound funny or light-hearted to me. Actually, it sounds more like a thinly-veiled excuse to exploit the shock value of a NSFW music video as thoroughly as possible in order to gain publicity. Martel even admits that the primary intent was to make videos that sell more records.

Even if "Blurred Lines" was designed to satirize the misogyny present in American culture, its method of doing so—namely, by being shockingly and outstandingly misogynistic—is ineffective. This is mostly because, within the context of the American popular music industry, neither the song nor the music video is unusually misogynistic. "Blurred Lines" is no more extreme than the slew of the chart-topping hits from the last decade that have undertones of male entitlement and lyrics that perpetuate rape culture. Take Usher's "Yeah!" for example, which features the lyric "Forget about the game, I'm'a spit the truth, I won't stop till I get 'em in they birthday suits." Or remember that song "Laffy Taffy"? "Big old ass you shaking bitch, close your mouth and don't say shit." Yikes. Seriously. As stated by Jimmy Johnson, a blogger for truthout.org, "Indeed, neither the song nor the video is much more 'rapey' than average. Both fall within what American society currently deems [an acceptable level of rape](#). Herein lies the problem."

Speculation about whether "Blurred Lines" was intended ironically is irrelevant. The primary problem is that it is being perceived not as a provocative statement condemning misogyny, but as a cultural sensation, released into a present and enduring climate of rape culture acceptance. Psychological studies show that rapists "[genuinely believe that all men rape](#), and that other men just keep it hushed up better."Dismissals and normalizations of rape in popular culture, such as those intoned by Thicke et al, serve to reinforce this horrifying notion. Indeed, the fact that Thicke believes he has the authority to define what constitutes misogyny in the first place indicates a strong undercurrent of patriarchal entitlement. "Blurred Lines" is, at best, a bad rape joke, and at worst, intentional female dehumanization for the sake of record sales, which is why its wild popularity is so worrying. I know, I know. It's just so catchy. But allowing it to top our charts isn't just benign acceptance, it's willful ignorance, and it's a setback for women's autonomy and safety.

As trivial as pop culture may seem, it is nonetheless a reflection of our society, and, more importantly, what our society accepts. Every time a song with a misogynistic message rockets to the top of the charts, it reinforces a norm of acceptance, even approval, of rape culture, and it sends a clear signal to the music industry to continue producing more of the same—more [“videos that sell records”](#) without care for the perpetuation of violence. When we sing along to it, request it on radio stations, or dance to it at parties, we’re condoning and encouraging patriarchy and toxic misogynistic behavior . And the worst part is, it’s not even necessary; we could listen to any of a million other songs that don’t glorify those norms. There’s so much music out there that’s just as catchy and just as sexy as “Blurred Lines” without the medieval power dynamic—in fact, sexism isn’t sexy at all. And that’s why the next time I hear Robin Thicke murmuring “I know you want it” on my car radio, I’m going to change the station

Jessie Pierce '14  
Contributing Writer

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