

The 1999 hit “Bills, Bills, Bills” by Destiny’s Child perpetuates the idea that a man’s worth to a woman is based solely on what he can provide for her. Though this idea was prevalent when women weren’t common in the workforce and were typically dependent on their husband’s income, perpetuating this idea in the modern world is harmful; men shouldn’t be demeaned only to what they can provide, especially with women now being educated and often employed in higher-income jobs.

The singer begins by recounting the beginning of her relationship with her male partner; they were “cool” because he would “take [her] places [she] ain’t ever been” – a shallow appreciation for him on her end, and based entirely on what he can do for her. She now feels dissatisfied because he’s “slowly making [her] pay for things” when “[his] money should be handling”. This shows a complete disregard for his financial situation, and also reveals the shallowness of her values; she never mentions any way in which she finds him endearing that isn’t based on his money or what he can do for her.

The singer makes it clear he is using her for money, which absolutely makes her disillusionment with him understandable: she says that he now asks to “use her car”, then “drive[s] it all day and don’t fill up the tank”, and also asks to “hold some money” from her until he receives his next cheque in the second verse. So far, this isn’t describing a gendered issue, but a dissatisfaction of one partner over an unbalanced financial divide—until she accuses him of not knowing “what a man’s about” in the third verse, which shifts the problem from him being a freeloader to him being less manly for not providing for her. The fact that the song is focused primarily on money and on what the partner should be providing as the man in the relationship exposes its faulty

messaging. Because the singer evidently isn't satisfied with this divide in income and the man is portrayed as a freeloader who isn't fulfilling his duties, or "what a man's about" (making money for the woman), the song ends up perpetuating outdated gender roles.

The song's chorus is especially driven by the idea of the man being the provider. "Can you pay my bills?" is the sole and most important question regarding his connection to her. "If you did, then maybe we could chill", the singer remarks, as if her primary motivation for being with him is to have her bills paid. Even while knowing the man in the song is leeching off of her and his money-spending habits are toxic, the message still centers most prominently around his purpose being simply to pay her bills and bring her places. Not fulfilling this purpose means he is useless to her; admittedly, however, being an irresponsible money-spender and freeloader adds a lot to her breaking up with him, because not only is he not providing for her, but also taking away from her own savings. Still, the singer demands not that he financially contributes and stops using her money, but for him to pay (as the song's title makes quite clear) her bills. She doesn't want to "pay for things", which she is slowly being forced to do herself, and presumably didn't need to do at the start of the relationship. She doesn't want to be a financial partner. She wants *him* to be the one paying, presumably for everything, by himself; she readily lists "bills" generally, and then "telephone bills" and "automo' bills", not to mention that she already hinted that she wants him to be paying for other "things" that aren't specified as bills in the first verse. Through this, men's desirability is degraded to the role of provider and nothing more. While this financial dynamic can work, provided that both partners consent to it, a popular song reducing a man to his income is degrading.

As traditional gender roles have eroded and changed, so too must the expectations for each partner change in a modern relationship, especially as “Bills, Bills, Bills” has recently re-surged in popularity over TikTok in 2021. Though the song isn’t intentionally problematic and places a major focus on irresponsible spending (with some smooth vocals), it also prominently propagates the message that women largely seek men for wealth and value them based on what they can provide to them—a message we can leave behind in the late 20th century.