

## Dear Eminem

### A letter to Eminem asking for a small favor



Eminem performs in Detroit.

AP Photo/Jason DeCrow

By **MELISSA DANKO**

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Dear Mr. Mathers,

Can I call you Eminem? Or even Em? I feel like I know you, even though I can see you thinking to yourself, “Bitch you don’t know me.” Anyways. This isn’t your typical fan letter. I really want to talk to you about something serious, but first I want you to know that I really am a huge fan.

Your music is so powerful and raw that I feel like I know the ins and outs of your past. I love you for that. Your honesty is refreshing, and I’m sure that a lot of people out there are relieved to hear that they aren’t alone in their struggles. As for me, I won’t even pretend that I understand what you’ve gone through, and I certainly can’t attempt to relate the deepest, darkest parts of your music to my life. I would bet that some of your fans love you because they hear their life stories when you open your mouth, but that’s not my reason.

I love you for the way you write, putting together words that have no business being together. You stretch words and phrases, emphasizing syllables that most people didn’t know existed. I love the way you spit your rhymes out as if the words are searing your tongue and you have to get them out before they scorch your insides. You sound so angry sometimes, but it makes it all feel so real. I think you are brilliant at what you do, and I am inspired by the way you work. Your scribbles on hotel napkins or insignificant scraps of paper that will one day be significant—it’s so haphazard but it mimics how my thoughts come to me when I’m writing. Little bursts here and there that are too good to be forgotten and too perfectly worded to risk trying to re-write later.

It’s obvious that you have a gift with writing. Most people don’t see you as a writer, necessarily, but I do. And a brilliant one at that. Here’s my issue, though: some of the words you use aren’t just obscene, they are hateful. Swear words are something I can deal with. Hell, I use them too.

But hate? Hate is not something I can look the other way on. I did for a long time. I loved you too much to hold you accountable for the awful things you say, but now it's time to call you on it. I'm not the first to do so, and I'm certainly not the last who ever will, but just hear me out.

I'm sure people could write pages and pages on all of the words you use that you shouldn't, but I have just one on which I'd like to focus. Faggot. Em, you are so good with words—why can't you come up with a better one than that?

I get that a lot of rappers use this word. They use a lot of other anti-gay slurs, too, and it is a pretty common thing throughout the hip-hop industry. People have even written scholarly articles about the existence of homophobia in hip-hop. I don't know if the existence of hip-hop studies surprises you, or maybe you already knew about it, but it surprised me. Marc Lamont Hill wrote a really eye-opening article analyzing the prevalence of anti-gay sentiments in hip-hop music, and he explained the reasons why you and other rappers use the language that you do. According to him, you might use it to emasculate other men, or you might use it to boost your own picture of masculinity. I really doubt that it is the latter, because you don't seem like that kind of guy, so I think it's safe to say that it has a lot to do with the first reason.

I know this to be true, because you have talked a lot about how your language reflects the harshness of the environment in which you were raised. You've said things like "People just don't understand where I come from" or "I come from Detroit where it's rough and I'm not a smooth talker." To be honest, Em, that sounds like bullshit excuses to me. I get that you came from a tough place and that all kinds of language got thrown around during your rap battle days, but that doesn't make it okay. It just makes it the way it is. But that also doesn't mean that you have to perpetuate it.

You say you don't hate gay people and that you're "not into gay bashing." If you really meant that, you might be more careful about what you say. I don't really see how you can claim that you're "not into gay bashing" when you bash homosexuals and homosexuality in your music. I believe that you don't hate them, but I also believe that you have no respect for them. When you talked to Anderson Cooper about your hurtful lyrics, you focused more on the fact that everyone does it than the fact that you do it and should be held accountable. This seemed like kind of a cop-out to me, because the fact that a bunch of rappers say "faggot" doesn't mean that it's right.

Macklemore has a song called "Same Love." Have you heard it? In case you haven't, I'll tell you that it's a rap song about support for same-sex marriage and tolerance. Pretty revolutionary, if you ask me. Not considering the fact that it's 2013 and that society has been making a lot of progress in many social areas, but when you remember that he is a rapper, it is. Macklemore not only pleads with society to be more accepting in general, but he also calls out his fellow rappers, saying, "If I was gay, I would think hip-hop hates me." In reference to the word "faggot," he says "A word rooted in hate, yet our genre still ignores it." This is what I'm talking about, Em. It doesn't matter that you grew up throwing the word around. If you want to say that you don't hate homosexuals, you can't keep using such hateful words to refer to them. You are undoubtedly one of the most brilliant rappers of our time—and possibly ever—but society is changing. The things you say, while they've never been fully acceptable, are even less so now. If you want to remain the powerhouse that you are, you might want to rethink your word choice. Anyway, listen to "Same Love." Watch the music video, too. It's a good song with a powerful message, and Macklemore is actually a pretty good rapper.

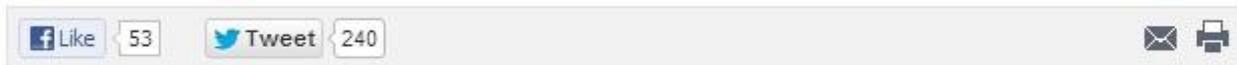
I know you're probably thinking that Macklemore doesn't represent the norm, and that a lot of rappers before and after you have said some pretty nasty things as well. You're right, you didn't invent saying offensive things. But you also haven't made any efforts to stop it, despite claiming to have no hard feelings towards homosexuals.

Around the time that you got a lot of shit for hating gays, you whipped out a Grammy performance with Elton John, who, as you now know, is openly gay. Well played, Em. I hate that I doubted your intentions, but I always assumed that some publicist came to you and said, “Hey Em, you should perform with Elton John to surprise everyone and throw it in their faces that you’re not actually homophobic.” After seeing the close friendship that you and Elton share, I realize that may not have been the case. But you weren’t friends yet, and it seemed a little too convenient for my cynical self to fully accept. Regardless of your original intentions, you and Elton are now very close and it makes me happy to know that he doesn’t hate you for the hateful things you’ve said. He even supported you through your entire recovery process, which I think is really cool of him.

Following your recovery, it seems like you’ve chilled out a bit. You seem more mature and less angry. Now I see you as more than a brilliant rapper. I see you as someone who has been through a lot and as someone who has a really great story to tell. I see you as someone that I would want to hang out with and talk to, partly because you’re Eminem, and also because you just seem like a really cool person. I have to wonder though—have your views changed at all? If you made another album today would we hear “faggot” being tossed around so liberally? Would we hear other slurs? Is that really a part of the whole you, or is that more directly linked to the younger, angrier you?

I don’t mean to criticize you for what you write in your songs, because you’re allowed to express whatever you want. I guess I just wanted to make you think about what you say, and how it is perceived by even your biggest fans. You are much too talented to be using such hateful words. It’s time for you to be above using the word “faggot,” because let’s be honest, you could find a million other things to rhyme with that instead. I know this because you can make “door hinge” rhyme with “orange.”

All the best,  
Melissa



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