Sexualization in Popular Music and the Need for Music Media Literacy

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Sexual Cues in Popular Music

- Analyses of lyrics and videos show sex (and love) as dominant theme
  - Lyrics emphasize recreational sex, sex role stereotypes
    - e.g., Primack, Gold, Schwarz, & Dalton (2008)
  - Videos emphasize sexual objectification, including body parts, sexual gaze, provocative dress
    - e.g., Aubrey & Frisby (2011)

- Themes span genres
  - More prevalent in hip hop/rap, heavy metal
Examining the Impact of Exposure to Sex in Music

**Surveys**
- Matching cross-sectional self-reported exposure with content analyses
- Longitudinal self-reports of music and music video use
- Exposure relates to:
  - Sexual permissiveness
  - Stereotypical sex role beliefs
  - *r’s* between .20-.40
  - (Timmerman et al., 2008)

**Experiments**
- Immediate exposure to sexualized content vs control
  - Sometimes with aggression
- Sexual themes reflected in
  - Social judgments
  - Sexual attitudes
  - Sex role beliefs
  - Effect sizes between .02-.04
  - (Timmerman et al., 2008; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007)
Explaining Effects as Priming and Assimilation

- Based on network models of semantic memory
  - Collins & Loftus, 1975

- Applying associative network idea to non-deliberative processing of media
  - e.g., Berkowitz, 1984; Anderson, 1997

- Extending research on how priming concepts bias social judgments
  - e.g., Srull & Wyer, 1979

- Examining possible moderators of these priming effects
  - e.g., Hanson & Krygowski, 1994
RQ: How does sexual objectification impact beliefs?

Evaluating how sexually objectified female artists in music videos impacted young men’s sexual beliefs and attitudes toward women
Young men randomly assigned to...

**Low Objectification (n = 41)**
- Three pretested videos
- Rated **low** in objectification
  - Defined by indicators from content analysis
- Similar ratings for artist attractiveness, liking of artist
  - Beyonce
  - Fergie
  - Hilary Duff

**High Objectification (n = 44)**
- Three pretested videos
- Rated **high** in objectification
  - Defined by indicators from content analysis
- Same artists featured in other condition
  - Beyonce
  - Fergie
  - Hilary Duff
Measures

▪ Adversarial sexual beliefs
  ▪ “most women are sly and manipulating when they are out to attract a man”

▪ Acceptance of interpersonal violence
  ▪ “being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women”

▪ Rape myth acceptance
  ▪ “a woman who goes to the home of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex”

▪ Sexual harassment attitudes
  ▪ “people who receive annoying sexual attention often times provoke it”
### Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Mediating Condition and Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence, Sexual Harassment Attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adversarial Sexual Beliefs</th>
<th>Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence</th>
<th>Sexual Harassment Attitudes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.18***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.18+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.07+</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.20***</td>
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<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>.02+</td>
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<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adversarial sexual beliefs</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.43***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.17***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** $^+p < .10$, $^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$. Condition was dummy coded, 1 = high sexually objectifying music videos; 0 = low sexually objectifying music videos.
RQ: How robust and overarching are these effects?

Examining evaluation criteria used when forming social judgments of a given target when music features a **variety** of sexual cues.
Suggestive Music
- Participants chose from list
- Two upbeat / two slower
- Two female / two male artists

Innocuous Music
- Participants chose from list
- Two upbeat / two slower
- Same artists as above
30 Men Saw…
Three personals from a male author

30 Women Saw…
Three personals from a female author
Measures

- Sexy*
- Desirable*
- Sensitive
- Dependable
- Aggressive
- Assertive
- Sincere
- Impulsive

If you were to meet [person], how much would you be attracted to [him/her]?

- Items from Zillmann & Bhatia (1989)
- * Sexy and Desirable $r = .79$, $p < .001$
Sexual primes changed cognitions

- Desirability was the strongest predictor of attraction...
- And it was an even stronger predictor after sexual music was played.
  - From a slope of .60 to .68, $p < .05$
RQ: Are effects also robust for different targets?

Replication of previous finding for judgments of a target when the prime *should* be seemingly irrelevant (not a dating situation)
Suggestive Music
- Continuous stream of music
- 30+ songs were featured from various artists

Innocuous Music
- Continuous stream of music
- 20+ songs were featured from various artists
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EDUCATION:
Bachelor of Arts: Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff AZ, August 2003 to May 2007 (Biology).

WORK EXPERIENCE:
Crew Leader: This fall of 2005, started working at Mimi's Muffins in Flagstaff, AZ. I currently supervise crew, run the cash register, and manage the bakery's daily operations.

Server: In the summer of 2005, worked evening and weekend shifts at the Sherwood Forest Cafe in Pocatello, ID. I served customers and waited tables, and I trained five new employees.

Cashier: For the 2004-2005 school year, worked weekend and evening shifts at Norita's Corner Store in Flagstaff, AZ. I operated the cash register, made change, and performed minor accounting tasks.

Intern: I was an intern during the summer of 2004 for Northern Arizona University’s Center for Academic Computing in Flagstaff, AZ. I worked at the front desk of the student computer labs and assisted users on Windows 95 and Macintosh operating systems and various software packages.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE:
Study Travel Trip: In February of 2003, I participated with two teachers and 15 classmates in an eight-day "eco-exursion" to the tropical island of Belize.

AWARDS AND HONORS:
Public Speaking Award: Brusigreen High School, 2002.
Track and Field: Competed successfully in preliminary meets and qualified for conference finals.
Academic Honor Roll: Brusigreen High School, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03.

LANGUAGE SKILLS:
I am functional in speaking, reading, and writing French. English is my native language.

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Manhattan, Kansas, 66505
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Education
B.A. in Biology, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, July 2007

Experience
Shift Manager, Bozold's Bar & Grill, Manhattan, KS, Fall 2005 to present.
Supervising crew, operating cash register, and managing the daily operations.

Worked weekends and evenings setting customers and waiting tables, and was responsible for training new employees.

Summer Intern, IT Help Desk, Manhattan, KS, Summer 2005.
Worked at the front desk of several student computer labs at Kansas State University, and assisted students with different software packages and on Windows 95 and Macintosh platforms.

Cashier, 10-10 Convenience Store, Manhattan, KS, Fall 2004 through Spring 2005.
Worked weekends and evenings operating the cash register, counting change, and doing small accounting tasks.

Travel
Senior Trip, Senior Year 2003
Traveled with a group of 10 students and two teachers on a one-week trip to Ecuador to learn about the Galapagos Islands.

Achievements
Upper 10% of Graduating Class, Fairbanks H.S., 2003.
Honor Roll, Fairbanks H.S., 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03.
Swimming, Qualified for conference finals in freestyle and butterfly strokes.

Languages
English is my first language. Have moderate proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing Spanish.
Measures

- Racy
- Flirtatious
- Rebellious

\( \alpha = .92 \)

- Knowledgeable
- Thoughtful
- Moral
- Assertive
- Inspiring
- Has integrity

\( \alpha = .90 \)
Sexy music indirectly affected overall judgments

- Indirect effect of music on overall assessments was significant for both men and women ($B_s = .03$ and .02, $p_s < .05$)
- Marginal participant gender X music condition interaction ($B = -.18$, $p = .091$)
  - Men’s overall assessments were more strongly based on sexual qualities, compared to women ($B = .61$ and .30, $p_s < .01$)
- No direct effect of sex in music on overall assessments
Lessons from Studies of Other Sexual Media

- Sexual cues might trigger sexual thoughts regardless of their explicitness...
Lessons from Studies of Other Sexual Media

- But depending on how sex is contextualized, those thoughts might be employed differently in social judgments...
Lessons from Studies of Other Sexual Media

▪ And bias our attitudes toward the context, which might not be one of recreational sex...

▪ (love also a common theme in music)
In study testing different levels of explicitness, both sex primes elevated perceived sexual qualities, which predicted overall appeal.

- Indirect effect of sex primes (vs control) was significant ($B = .07, p < .05$)
- Indirect effect of different sex primes (weak vs strong) not significant ($B = -.08, ns$)
- Study 1 coefficients shown. Study 2 replicated findings with similar coefficients. Targets were based on social media profiles (LinkedIn, Facebook, dating site).
In study testing recreational (sex) vs relational (romance) contexts, perceived personality characteristics reflected the context.
In study examining romantic contexts, romance lessened self-reported permissiveness, but ONLY if the stimulus was enjoyed.

Study 1 tested media with romance as the theme; Study 2 tested media where romantic cues were embedded within a different primary theme. Study 1 findings shown; Study 2 replicated with similar values.
Enjoyment also shown to moderate effects of music
Examining effects of self-sexualized female artists (music videos) on young men’s and young women’s sexual cognitions and attitudes
### Results, summarized...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Effects on Men</strong></th>
<th><strong>Effects on Women</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If they liked the self-sexualized female artist, they agreed more strongly that</td>
<td>If they liked the self-sexualized female artist, they agreed more strongly that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women exist to be sex objects</td>
<td>- They enjoyed sexualization</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Men are sex driven</td>
<td>- ‘I feel empowered when I look sexy’</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ‘Modern sexism’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Discrimination no longer an issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflecting on Current Research

- Challenges
  - Small effects
    - Should be interpreted in light of prior exposure, likely cumulative effects
  - Media are complex
    - Multiple cues, contexts, modalities within single stimulus
  - Experiences differ
    - Solitary, social, deliberate (selected), incidental
Reflecting on Current Research

- Challenges
  - Popular media produced for wide appeal
    - Enjoyment (acceptance?) might facilitate assimilation
    - Entertainment aspect suggests little deliberation or scrutiny

- Opportunity?
  - What known limiters of priming effects are most promising for disrupting the assimilative effects of popular media?
  - When might attempts to disrupt these effects backfire?
MUSIC CENSORSHIP AND ALTERNATIVES
HISTORY OF PARENTAL ADVISORY LABEL (PAL)

- Concern for explicit content in music increased during 80’s.
  - Adaso, 2016; Christe, 2003; Peake, 2017

- Parents’ Music Resource Center (PMRC) formed.
  - Chastagner, 1999

- After Senate hearings (1985), the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAAA) agreed to ask members to affix the PAL.
  - Chastagner, 1999

- Censorship debate.
  - Chastagner, 1999; RIAA, 2016; Snider, 2015; Strauss, 1996
RECORDING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (RIAA)

- Agrees that music may contain explicit lyrics.
- Agrees that content should be identified.
- Continues the PAL program and updates as needed.
- Use of PAL is voluntary.
- Recommends artists create edited versions.
  - RIAA, 2016
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC)

- Regulates communications in the U.S.
- First Amendment debate.
- Supreme Court determined speech can be censored if it is
  1. “intended to incite or produce imminent lawless action”
  &
  2. “likely to incite or produce such action”
  - FCC, 2016
- Constitutional to protect children
  - Conrad, 2010; FCC, 2016
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC)

- Obscene material is not protected by the First Amendment.

- *Miller* test:
  1. an average person, applying contemporary community standards, finds that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest
  2. the material depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law
  3. the material, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value
    - Conrad, 2010; FCC, 2016; Rivera-Sanchez, 1995
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC)

- Indecent and profane material are protected.
- Congress has specified broadcast time.
  - 6:00 am – 10:00 pm
- Violators can be fined.
- FCC may revoke the radio station license, place conditions or withhold license renewal, or issue warning.
  - Conrad, 2010; FCC, 2016
ARTIST SELF-CENSORSHIP

- Intent is to prohibit awareness of explicit material and hinder negative consequences.

- Radio edits of songs that bleep out obscene or indecent content.
  - Conrad, 2010; Kelly et al., 2009

- Limited research on censorship effectiveness.
RQ: Are people able to generate and subsequently remember censored lyrics?
Three experiments examined the generation effect in lyric censorship.

Participants listened to an original song that was censored and then completed a recognition test for heard, censored, and distractor items.

Recognition accuracy did not differ for censored (never presented) and uncensored items.

Authors concluded that by omitting certain words from songs, censors might actually make those words more memorable.
RQ: How does lyrical censorship of sexual content influence attitudes toward premarital sex, perceived peer sexual activity, and attitudes toward women?
Participants were randomly assigned to listen to an uncensored sexually explicit song, a censored version of the same song, a nonsexual song by the same artist, or no music.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for hypothesized comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PSPS</th>
<th></th>
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<th>PPSAS</th>
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<th>ATWS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censorship effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censored lyrics</td>
<td>17.28</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>54.04</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>81.72</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncensored lyrics</td>
<td>15.74</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>48.74</td>
<td>18.48</td>
<td>82.16</td>
<td>7.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual content effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual lyrics</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>48.34</td>
<td>17.20</td>
<td>81.11</td>
<td>8.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonsexual lyrics</td>
<td>16.57</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>51.59</td>
<td>19.11</td>
<td>81.92</td>
<td>7.98</td>
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<td>Rap music effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rap music</td>
<td>16.27</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>51.92</td>
<td>18.79</td>
<td>81.88</td>
<td>8.00</td>
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<td>Control</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>44.53</td>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>80.53</td>
<td>8.09</td>
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</table>

Note. PSPS = Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale; PPSAS = Perception of Peer Sexual Activity Scale; ATWS = Attitudes Toward Women Scale.
RQ: How does music censorship influence sexual priming and sexual cognitions?
Participants were randomly assigned to watch music videos containing explicit imagery and lyrics, the same music videos with censored lyrics, music videos with no explicit content, or no videos.

Participants then completed a timed word-completion task to assess sexual priming and then items related to sexual cognitions.
Using the PAL and/or censoring music may increase attractiveness.
- Jockel, Blake, & Schlutz, 2013

Censorship may project ideas of inappropriateness and negative views of music genres (e.g., rap).
- North & Hargreaves, 2005; Schneider, 2011

Music censorship is generally supported by public and policy makers.
- Lynxwiler & Gay, 2000
ALTERNATIVES TO CENSORSHIP: MUSIC MEDIA LITERACY

- Music literacy may be effective.

- Promoting awareness and best consumer practices.

- Begin at a young age and continue through lifespan.
  - Division 46 Committee on Music and Media, 2016

- Include protectionist avenues for parents and educators.

- Less “real-world” experience.
  - Robillard, 2012

- Gender, race, class, sexuality, & social context, control, resistance, and pleasure.
  - Tobias, 2014
Most current media literacy focuses on

- Newspapers and print media
  - Olson & Pollard, 2004
- Television advertising
  - Austin, Pinkleton, & Fujioka, 1999; Draper et al., 2015
- Video games
  - Walther, Hanwinkle, & Morgenstern, 2014
- Social media
  - Soetaert et al., 2014
ALTERNATIVES TO CENSORSHIP: MUSIC MEDIA LITERACY

- Research-informed music media literacy is needed.

- Should include:
  - Music industry
    - Hobbs, 2009; Tobias, 2014
  - Easy music access
    - Olson & Pollard, 2004
  - Consumer empowerment and protectionist orientations
    - Sekarash et al., 2016; Šupšáková, 2016
  - Cultural examinations, stereotypes, mindful media consumption

- Template for an effective popular music literacy program.
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[ THE POWER OF ]

US

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