

Gender Differences in the Perception of the Levels and Potential Effects of Violence in Popular Music: A Case of University of Nairobi Students.

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Abstract

The effect of popular music on the behavior and emotions of youth is of significant concern to policy makers in government and the general public. Lyrics have become more explicit in their references to drugs, sex, and violence over the years. Notably, rap music is characterized by sexually explicit language in its lyrics as well as messages of violence, racism, drugs, homophobia, and hatred toward women. These depictions of violence and deviance are likely to have negative influence on the behavior and moral values of the youth who listen to such music with far reaching impact of risky behavior in future. Therefore, this study was interested in uncovering the type of the popular music that Kenyan youth listen to; the type of violent and deviant information contained in such popular music and the subsequent effect of these violent and deviant messages on their attitude and behavior. The study targeted male and female undergraduate students from the University of Nairobi. A sample of 200 undergraduate students (100 male and 100 female) was drawn using multistage sampling procedures and systematic random sampling. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire with both structured and open-ended questions. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics where frequency, percentages and measures of central tendency were used. Inferential statistics (chi-test) were used to test the effect of popular music on attitude and behavior of youth in Kenya. The study confirmed gender difference in the attitude towards popular music among the youth with female students having negative attitude while their male counterparts had a more favorable attitude towards popular music. It was also established that increasing exposure to popular music had detrimental effects including; increased vulnerability to drug and substance abuse, violence, crime, illicit sexual behavior, disease burden and loss of moral values. The study concludes that popular music was likely to have profound immediate and long term negative effects to the attitude and behavior of youth in Kenya. Their lyrical content was found to be offensive to both male and female but with bias against women and therefore likely to promote aggressive and violent behaviors towards women.

Key Words: popular music; attitude; behavior; gender differences

1.0 Introduction

A historical view of violence in media reveals several changes, including increasing explicitness (such as clear visual and auditory presentations), intensity and moral ambiguity (Freedman, 2002). An

accumulating body of scientific research spanning four decades supports the hypothesis that exposure to disorderly online media or music is harmful to both short and long-term time frames (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Bushman & Anderson, 2001). The possible connection between media and antisocial behavior is a cognitive phenomenon—a connection of ideas, perceptions, attitudes (Anderson & Bushman, *ibid*).

There are co-relational relationships between preference to music and antisocial behavior, including suicide but, research, does not show the existing link between bad music or lyrics with behavior among the youths (Epstein and Pratto: 2002). It has been proposed that heavy metal and rap lines endorse harmful behavior, violence among youths, hatred, fights, and disrespect (Bushman et al, 2006; Hogan, 2005). Some rap music is characterized by too much explicit sexual words that tend to foster bad behavior among the young people (Fischer et al, 2006; Segal, 2001). Other bad behaviors such as drug abuse and violence are also encouraged in these songs.

If these findings are valid and generalizable, then understanding the perception of youth towards the levels and effects of violent language in popular music needs to be investigated in other contexts.

This paper is a case study that investigated the gender differences in the perception of college students towards the types, levels and potential effects of violence in popular music among the youth. The participants in the study were a total of 200 undergraduate students at the University of Nairobi.

2.0 Literature Review

Using a meta-analysis approach, Timmerman *et. al.* (2008) established that listening to songs creates an effect on listeners dependable with the songs, such as when rap/hip-hop artists pass themes condoning power over, objectification of and violence against women. Baran & Davis (2006), demonstrated a correlation between exposure to misogynistic music and audience attitudes regarding violent acts against women, but did not establish a causal link between listening habits and resulting misogynistic behavior. However, according to Bretthauer et al., (2006), continued audience exposure to misogynistic lyrics in popular rap/hip-hop music influences college students' attitudes toward the issue of domestic violence.

Co- relational studies have suggested a connection between the kind of music youth listen to and various maladaptive behaviors and attitudes, though the direction of causality is not clear. Rubin, West, and Mitchell (2001) found that college students who preferred rap and heavy metal music reported more hostile attitudes than students who preferred other genres of music, such as alter- native, adult contemporary, dance–soul, or country.

Young adults between the ages of 16 and 30 are the most likely age group to consume rap/hip-hop music, and in turn, may become desensitized to the derogatory lyrics condoning relationship violence and sexual aggression (Smith, 2005). Specifically, the college-aged demographic has been influenced by the prevalence of sexually explicit media and the negative images of women presented in hip-hop culture, which “teach men that aggression and violence are closely linked to cultural views of masculinity” (Wood, 2012, p. 105).

In the past two decades, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women “reported a surge in the exemplification of vehemence against females, particularly sexual violence, in the media” (Stankiewicz &

Rosselli, 2008, p. 581). This echoes the findings that music, contained substantially more sexual content than any other media outlets ;and that rap music, has been criticized for its graphic derogatory presentation of women using lyrics that objectify, exploit or victimize them (Pardun, L'Engle, and Brown ,2005; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009; Cobb & Boettcher, 2007).

Weitzer and Kubrin (op.cit) analyzed the description of female gender of in 403 rap songs through a content exploration, in which refrains of pejorative baptism and embarrassing of female gender; sexual objectification of women; cynicism of women; legitimation of violence against women; and celebration of prostitution and pimping appeared at the greatest frequency.

According the Bretthauer et al., (2006) continued audience exposure to misogynistic lyrics in popular rap/hip-hop music influences college students' attitudes toward the issue of gender violence. This supports the finding that "misogynistic music also serves as a means to desensitize individuals to sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, and violence toward women" and "legitimizes the mistreatment and degradation of women" (Adams & Fuller, 2006, p. 953). Exposure to rap music also makes the youths adopt violent behavior and bad thoughts which adds to hostility towards women. (Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p. 190). A majority (more than half) of the respondents noted that rap songs tend to drive for violent behavior towards women as well as creating disrespectful attitudes toward women. Listening to violent lyrics may lead to listeners' adopting bad attitudes in their lives. This may even include the victimization of female gender persons (Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2009, p. 348).

Survey respondents agreed that continued audience exposure to misogynistic rap/hip-hop music might reinforce negative attitudes about women because this content is "typically gender specific in its messages" (Martino, et. al, 2006, p. 432). Cobb & Boettcher (2007) determined that males will more likely experience "priming effects of misogynistic rap because they will be less motivated than will women to thoughtfully process the content of the lyrics". In turn, "because women are often the targets of misogynistic rap lyrics," they will be more inclined to reject these demeaning messages (Cobb & Boettcher *ibid*, p. 3029).

Lydia (2009) studied the relationship between hip hop music and aggression among secondary school youth in Kenya. The study showed that most of the youths in Kenya imitate violent behaviour learnt from violent hip hop music. This is because a majority of these youth perceive most hip hop artists as idols and role models. The violent words used in hip hop music lyrics also influence the speech mannerisms of the youth. Likewise, the violent themes preached in such hip hop lyrics negatively affect the youth's attitudes towards different forms of authority in society, including school. Other studies established that the youth are likely to adopt behavior exhibited in popular music based on the relative importance attached to the lyrics (Roberts et al, 2001; Kilgour et al, 2000).

The impact that popular lyrics has on youths' behavior and emotions is of paramount concern to the government and the general public (Gibson et al, 2000; Burns et al, 2002; Knobloch-Westerwick et al, 2006; Anderson et al, 2003; Bushman et al, 2006; Hogan, 2005).

3.0 The Study

This study used Cultivation theory to examine gendered audiences' interpretation of violence in popular rap/hip-hop songs to see if there would be differences in their perception of effects of media content

(Martino, et. al, 2006). Many people are alarmed by the potential deleterious effects of listening to songs with violent lyrics yet little research has been done in Kenya on the potential effects of songs that depict violent words and deviant behaviour. Therefore, this study was interested in uncovering the type of the popular music that the youths in Kenya listen to; the type of violence and deviant information contained the popular music and the perception of the youth towards the potential effects of such music on behavior. The research was guided by the following objectives:

- i. Identify the perceived types and levels of violent language in popular music by the youth in Kenya.
- ii. Investigate the gender differences in the perception and preference of the popular music among the youth.
- iii. Establish gender differences in the perceived effects of violence in popular music.

4.0 Methodology

A study used a mixed method approach with cross-sectional survey that sourced data from target respondents at a single point in time through quantitative and qualitative methods. The study targeted male and female undergraduate students across all levels of study at the University of Nairobi.

Both probability and non-probability sampling procedures were used to determine the study participants. Multistage sampling procedures were applied to select both male and female students. In this regard, the departmental registers were used to come up with a sampling frame of all students after which a systematic random sampling procedure was applied to obtain the desired sample size. This study had a sample size of 200 students with proportionate gender inclusion.

Data collection was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire with both structured and open-ended questions. The self-administered approach was appropriate for the study because it gave the participants (students) the confidentiality they needed to respond to sensitive questions touching on their personal life. Once the data was collected, the questionnaires were checked and cleaned for completeness and consistency which was followed by data coding and entry in SPSS version 21. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics where frequency, percentages and measures of central tendency were used. Inferential statistics was applied in assessing the impact of popular music on behaviour of youths in Kenya.

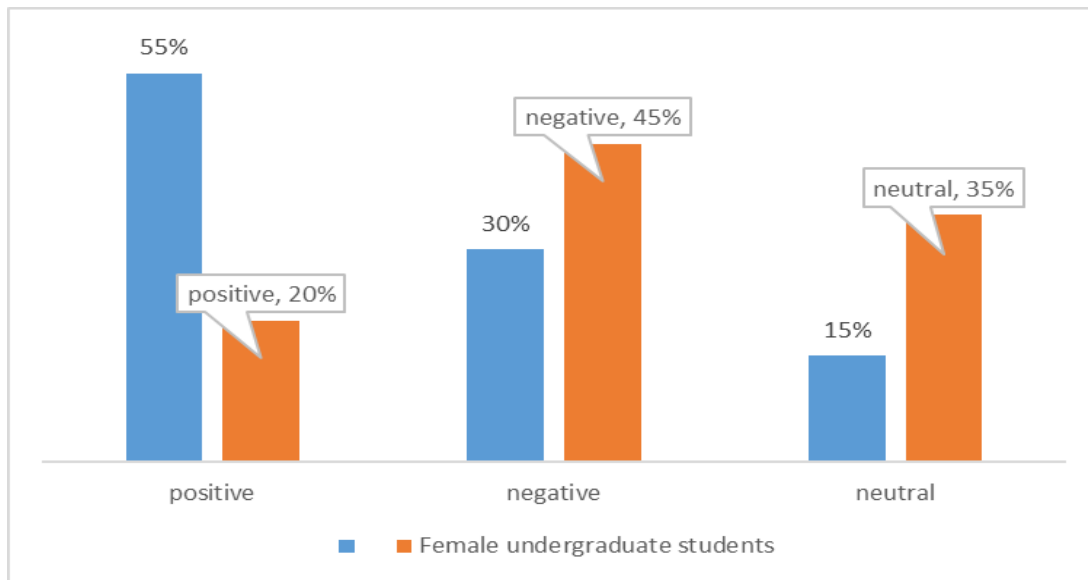
5.0 Results.

The study targeted 100 male and 100 female undergraduate students to whom questionnaire were administered. All the target respondents returned the questionnaires duly filled in giving rise to a 100% response rate.

5.1 Perception of the popular music by the youth

On the attitude towards rap/hip-hop music, the majority (55%) of male undergraduate students classified their attitude towards rap/hip-hop music as positive, 30% as negative and 15% as neutral. On the contrary, most (45%) of female undergraduate students classified their attitude towards rap/hip-hop music as

negative, 35% as neutral and 25% as positive. From the findings, it is evident that the women had negative attitude towards popular music while their male counterparts had a more favorable attitude towards popular music, confirming gender difference in terms of attitude towards popular music among the youths. This agrees with the findings of (Cobb & Boettcher, 2007, p. 3029) that women will be more inclined to reject demeaning messages in popular music.



It was established that exposure to rap/hip-hop songs shapes audience attitude towards the issue of domestic violence to a great extent (male students=45%; female students=40%), to a very great extent (male students=32%; female students=35%), and to a moderate extent (male students=23%; female students=25%). This depicts that exposure to popular music had detrimental effects to the youths as it socialized them to domestic violence against women where youths socialized to popular music were likely to perceive Gender based violence (GBV) as a social norm.

On perception of women’s portrayal in popular music by the youth, majority of the male students indicated that; rap/hip-hop music promotes insolent attitudes towards women (Mean=3.9500), popular hip-hop and rap artists increasingly depict women as objects of violence or male domination (Mean=3.5200), popular music lyrics glorify violence against women, including rape, torture and abuse, and foster an acceptance of sexual objectification and degradation of women (Mean=3.4200), exposure to popular rap/hip-hop songs significantly shapes audience attitudes toward the issue of domestic violence (Mean=3.3800), misogynistic music serves as a means to desensitize individuals to sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, and violence toward women and legitimizes the mistreatment and degradation of women (Mean=3.2500), rap/hip-hop music promotes aggressive and violent behaviors toward women (Mean=3.0200) respectively.

The female students on the other hand reported that; rap/hip-hop music encourages disrespectful attitudes towards women (Mean=4.1400), popular hip-hop and rap artists increasingly depict women as objects of violence or male domination (Mean=3.6700), popular music lyrics glorify violence against women, including rape, torture and abuse, and foster an acceptance of sexual objectification and degradation of women (Mean=3.6400), exposure to popular rap/hip-hop songs significantly shapes audience attitudes toward the issue of domestic violence (Mean=3.5800), misogynistic music serves as a means to desensitize individuals to sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, and violence toward women and legitimizes the

mistreatment and degradation of women (Mean=3.3500), rap/hip-hop music promotes aggressive and violent behaviors toward women (Mean=3.0100) respectively.

5.2 Effects of music on attitudes and behavior of youth

The majority of the male undergraduate students agreed that various types and levels of violence and deviant messages were contained in the popular music. They indicated that they were in agreement with statements that; lyrics of popular music are evident in their disorderly behavior and of drug abuse. (Mean=3.6900), popular music lyrics revolve around topics such as sexual promiscuity, death, homicide, suicide, and substance abuse (Mean=3.4500), as listeners they are capable of recognizing themes of popular music such as violence, sex, suicide, and Satanism (Mean=3.4200), students are more likely to accept stereotypic sex-role behavior after being exposed to popular music videos that display similar behavior (Mean=3.41), youths who consume rap/hip hop music become desensitized to the derogatory lyrics condoning relationship violence and sexual aggression (Mean=3.1000), the physical abuse of women is celebrated in rap/hip-hop songs promoting models of masculinity that sustain and encourage misogyny (Mean=3.0100) respectively.

Similarly ,the female undergraduate students reflected expressed their agreement to the following statements; lyrics of popular music are explicit in their references to drugs, sex, and violence (Mean=3.6900), popular music lyrics revolve around topics such as sexual promiscuity, death, homicide, suicide, and substance abuse (Mean=3.6000), as listeners, they are capable of recognizing themes of popular music which includes violence, sex, suicide, and Satanism (Mean=3.4500), students are more likely to accept stereotypic sex-role behavior after being exposed to popular music videos that display similar behavior (Mean=3.2200), youths who consume rap/hip hop music become desensitized to the derogatory lyrics condoning relationship violence and sexual aggression (Mean=3.1000), the physical abuse of women is celebrated in rap/hip-hop songs promoting models of masculinity that sustain and encourage misogyny (Mean=3.0100) respectively.

The findings imply that popular music in Kenya contained significant amounts of violent and deviant messages that were likely to have harmful effects on behavior and moral values of youths. The violent and deviant messages that were contained in the popular music that youths had access to included; sex, violence, sexual promiscuity, death, homicide, suicide, drugs and substance abuse, Satanism, derogatory lyrics, sexual aggression, gender violence and misogyny. These violent and deviant messages are likely to be condoned by youths as they would view them as normal based on the extent that they exposed themselves to them.

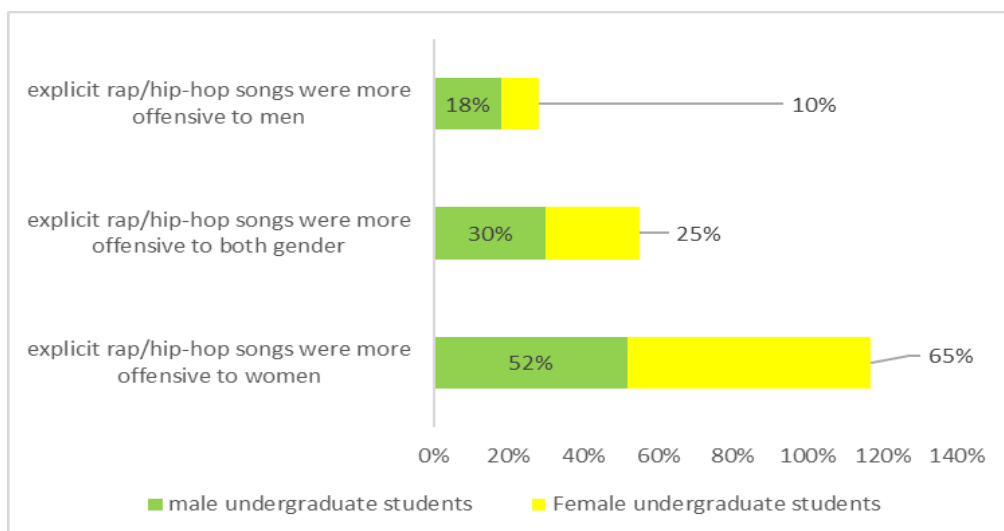
On the effects of music on behavior and moral values of youth in Kenya, the majority of the male students agreed that; most of the rap/hip-hop music suggest that women are just for male sexual satisfaction (Mean=3.6000), sexism in rap/hip-hop music contributes to sexual behaviors among the youths (Mean=3.5800), explicit rap/hip-hop music is offensive (Mean=3.3500), rap/hip-hop music glorifies domestic violence (Mean=3.1000), rap/hip-hop music provides harmful messages for its listeners (Mean=3.2200), exposure to violent popular music is related to subsequent expression of aggression in both short- and long-term (Mean=3.0100) respectively. On their side on effects of music on behavior and

moral values of youth in Kenya, the majority of the male students agreed that; most of the rap/hip-hop music suggest that women are just for male sexual satisfaction (Mean=3.6900), sexism in rap/hip-hop music contributes to sexual behaviors among the youths (Mean=3.4500), explicit rap/hip-hop music is offensive (Mean=3.41), rap/hip-hop music glorifies domestic violence (Mean=3.2500), rap/hip-hop music provides harmful messages for its listeners (Mean=3.1000), exposure to violent popular music is related to subsequent expression of aggression in both short- and long-term (Mean=3.0200) respectively.

The findings infer that popular music was likely to have profound immediate and long term negative effects to the behavior and moral values of youth in Kenya. The negative effects of youths’ exposure to popular music included; sexual violations on women who are viewed as sexual objects, increased illicit sexual behaviors, prostitution and domestic violence that the music seeks to legitimize, drug and substance abuse, loss of moral values, increased cases of suicide, disease burden, Satanism, death, homicide, suicide. To sustain these negative lifestyles, the youths are likely to be more vulnerable to criminal activities as a means to an end as they are likely to be unemployable due to lack of morals, yet they lack the finances and moral values required in self-employment and in the business sector. Eventually the negative effects of popular music would lead to youths being burden to the economy as their contribution to the economic growth would be significantly compromised.

5.3 Gender differences in the levels of violence in popular music

On which gender that the rap/hip-hop songs were more offensive to, the majority of both male (52%) and female (65%) undergraduate students felt that explicit rap/hip-hop songs were more offensive to women, 30% of male and 25% of female students said they were more offensive to both women or men while 18% of male students and 10% of female students said that explicit rap/hip-hop songs were more offensive to men.



It was established that the most offensive contents in rap/hip-hop songs included; legitimization of violence against women (male students=41%; female students=46%); sexual objectification of women (male students=33%; female students=26%) and derogatory naming and shaming of women (male students

=26% and female students=22%). From the findings, it is evident that there are gender differences in the levels of violence in popular music.

On the levels of violence in popular music in Kenya, the majority of the male students agreed that; college aged women are the most susceptible to experiencing gendered violence (mean=3.9000), misogynistic lyrics are prevalent in rap/hip-hop music (mean=3.6700), rap/hip-hop artists intend to degrade women through their lyrics (mean=3.6500), rap/hip-hop music promotes aggressive and violent behaviors towards women (mean=3.6500), sexually explicit and derogatory lyrics are apparent in rap music (mean=3.6000), rap music perpetuates ideas, values, beliefs, and stereotypes that debase women (mean=3.5400), popular music contains themes of derogatory naming and shaming of women; sexual objectification of women; distrust of women; legitimation of violence against women; and celebration of prostitution and pimping (mean=3.1100) respectively.

On the levels of violence in popular music in Kenya, the majority of the female students agreed that; college aged women are the most susceptible to experiencing gendered violence (mean=3.6700), misogynistic lyrics are prevalent in rap/hip-hop music (mean=3.6600), rap/hip-hop artists intend to degrade women through their lyrics (mean=3.6500), rap/hip-hop music promotes aggressive and violent behaviors towards women (mean=3.6400), sexually explicit and derogatory lyrics are apparent in rap music (mean=3.4500), rap music perpetuates ideas, values, beliefs, and stereotypes that debase women (mean=3.3500), popular music contains themes of derogatory naming and shaming of women; sexual objectification of women; distrust of women; legitimation of violence against women; and celebration of prostitution and pimping (mean=3.2500) respectively.

The findings depict gender differences in the levels of violence in popular music which depicts women as victims and men as the perpetrators of the sexual violence and male dominance on women. The gender violence perpetuated in the popular music is in form of; misogynistic lyrics; sexually explicit and derogatory lyrics, lyrics that contain ideas, values, beliefs, and stereotypes to debase women; lyrics with themes of derogatory naming and shaming of women; lyrical content for sexual objectification of women; distrust of women; legitimation of violence against women; and celebration of prostitution and pimping. Popular music promotes aggressive and violent behaviors towards women with minimal violence towards men hence exhibiting gender differences in terms of lyrical content.

Chi test results showed a significant positive relationship between exposure to popular music and loss of moral values of youth in Kenya (p=0.013).

	Value	df	P-Values
Exposure to popular music	6.817 ^a	4	.0013

6.0 Conclusion

Popular music contains significant amounts of violent and deviant messages that are likely to have profound immediate and long term negative effects to attitudes and behavior youth in Kenya. Besides, there significant gender differences in perception of the levels and effects of violence in music among the youth. Their Lyrical content was found to be offensive to both male and female respondents but with both

agreeing that violence was more targeted at women than men with the potential to encourage gender based violence against women. The findings support past studies that popular music promotes aggressive and violent behaviors towards women (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; Pardun, L'Engle, and Brown ,2005;Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009; Cobb & Boettcher, 2007;Weitzer and Kubrin ,2009)).There is therefore need to review existing policy and strategies that regulate the music industry to enhance surveillance of the lyrical content of popular music played in Kenya from both local and international musicians through the different broadcast channels.

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