

## Sexualization in Lyrics of Popular Music from 1959 to 2009: Implications for Sexuality Educators

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**Abstract** This study analyzed sexualization in lyrics of popular music in the final year of six decades. The study sample was comprised of *Billboard Hot 100* year-end songs from 1959, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009 ( $N = 600$ ). Regression analysis was used to compare the presence of sexualized lyrics from 1959 with other study years. Male artists' lyrics ( $OR = 2.163$ ;  $p = .029$ ;  $CI = 1.080-4.333$ ), non-White artists' lyrics in 1999 and 2009 ( $OR = 2.670$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $CI = 1.554-4.586$ ), and 2009 lyrics ( $OR = 3.439$ ;  $p = .003$ ;  $CI = 1.515-7.809$ ), were significantly more likely to contain sexualization. Recent research associating sexual content in media with adolescent sexual activity together with findings demonstrating a connection between exposure to objectifying media and self-sexualized behavior make this study's findings significant to sexuality educators desiring to improve sexual health outcomes and promote healthy adolescent sexual development. Sexuality educators should be cognizant of the recent significant trend toward the inclusion of sexualization in music lyrics and the probable impact such music may have on adolescent sexual behavior and attitudes.

**Keywords** Sexualization in music lyrics · Sexualized lyrics · Sexual content in music · Sexual content in media · Sexualization in popular-music lyrics · Adolescent sexual behavior · Adolescent sexual development · Sexuality education

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## Introduction

Child and adolescent media consumption continues to increase. Television is the most consumed media platform among 8- to 18-year-olds (Roberts et al. 2010). However, the gap between television and music, the second most consumed media platform, is narrowing quickly. Music consumption among 8- to 18-year-olds increased by 45% in recent years, compared to only a 16% increase in television viewing (Roberts et al. 2010). The average young person consumes approximately 2.5 h of music each day (Roberts et al. 2010). The availability and popularity of MP3 players (i.e., iPods) has facilitated the increase in music consumption among children and adolescents. During the 5 years from 2004 to 2009, MP3 ownership alone increased among 8- to 18-year-olds by over 400% and currently more than 75% youth own an MP3 player (Roberts et al. 2010). Youth now consume the majority of their music (64%) through MP3 players, computers, and cell phones, while music consumption from radio and CDs account for just 23 and 12%, respectively (Roberts et al. 2010). Despite the increase in music consumption, and the greater opportunities for private listening, only 10% of youth report that their parents have established restrictions related to their music consumption (Roberts et al. 2010).

Recent research has begun to demonstrate a relationship between adolescent exposure to sexual content in media and sexual activity. Bleakley et al. (2008) identified a nonrecursive relationship between exposure to sexual content in television, music, magazines, and video games and sexual behavior. In their study of 501 adolescents, Bleakley et al. found that the more sexual activity in which adolescents engaged, the more likely they were to be exposed to sexual content in media. Similarly, the more adolescents were exposed to sexual content in media, the greater the likelihood that they were engaging in sexual activity. Longitudinally, exposure to sexual content in media was more predictive of sexual behavior than sexual behavior was of exposure to sexual content. Chandra et al. (2008) further established an association between exposure to media sex and sexual activity in their study investigating viewing sex on television as a predictor of teen pregnancy. In this study of 701 adolescents who were exposed to high levels of sexual content on television were twice as likely to experience a teen pregnancy compared to those with low levels of exposure. Several studies have specifically examined the relationship that sexual content in music may have on the sexual behaviors of adolescents. Pardun et al. (2005) found a significant association between both sexual activity and future intentions to be sexually active with music exposure. In a longitudinal study of over 1,000 teens, Brown et al. (2006) found heavy exposure to sexual media between the ages of 12 and 14 more than doubled the likelihood that teens would have sexual intercourse between the ages of 14 and 16. Similarly, exposure to degrading sexual references was significantly related to initiating non-coital and coital sexual activity among adolescents in a longitudinal study conducted by Martino et al. (2006).

Brown et al. (2006) discovered one of the strongest predictors of risk for early sexual intercourse for both Black and White teens was the perception that his or her peers were having sex. Adolescents consistently overestimate the risky sexual

behavior of their peers (Lewis et al. 2007). One source of these misperceptions is the entertainment media that teens consume (Ward 2003). Research on media consumption suggests that with added exposure, teens largely adopt sexualized displays and portrayals in media as normative (Gerbner et al. 1994; Shrum 1999). Such findings support multiple theories on human behavior including Social Cognitive Theory, Cultivation Theory, and Super-Peer Theory. According to Social Cognitive Theory, observational learning is the result of exposure to behavioral models in displayed in the media or through interpersonal interactions (Glanz et al. 2008). Observational learning is the primary source for the development of outcome expectations, or the anticipated results and subsequent reinforcements of a particular behavior. Likewise, Cultivation Theory addresses the impact that mass media themes have on communities and cultures (Glanz et al. 2008). Cultivation Theory specifically states that as individuals are increasingly exposed to a particular media message or perspective, the greater the likelihood this message or perspective will be adopted or accepted as reality (Gerbner et al. 1994). Cultivation Theory thus results in a “mediated reality” where that which is seen or heard most becomes that which is most believed. According to Super-Peer Theory, media is a powerful factor in defining social norms for teens (Strasburger 2002; Strasburger and Wilson 2002), even exceeding the influence of traditional peer groups (Strasburger 1997). Outcome expectations derived from the glamour, attention, and fame paid to media icons shapes the attitudes and behaviors of those teens that consume this media. This influence is even more pronounced for teens observing media icons who are most similar to them, and whom teens aspire to become and often attempt to pattern their own behavior and attitudes after (Escobar-Chaves et al. 2005). In the absence of reliable and accurate information related to normative and responsible sexual behavior, media becomes a super-peer capable of teaching and encouraging risky sexual behavior. Each of these theories links messages and themes observed in an increasingly media saturated environment with personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

Teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) continue to be major concerns for school health sexuality educators. While teen pregnancy rates have declined dramatically in the past 25 years, nearly 750,000 adolescent girls in the US become pregnant each year (Kost et al. 2010). The cost of teen pregnancy is estimated at 9.1 billion dollars annually (Hoffman 2006). Teen pregnancy rates in the US vary widely by race and ethnicity. According to a 2010 Guttmacher Institute report, teen pregnancy rates for Black and Hispanic females ages 15–19 are 126/100,000, which is nearly three times the rate for White teens of the same age (44/100,000) (Kost et al. 2010). Among all ages, births to unmarried women also varies greatly by race and ethnicity, with 28.7% of White, 72.3% of Black, and 52.6% of Hispanic births to unwed mothers (Martin et al. 2010). STI rates are greatest among adolescents and young adults and have increased for all racial and ethnic groups. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), young people ages 15–24 years old have 5 times the Chlamydia rate, 4 times the Gonorrhea rate, and 3 times the Syphilis rate of older Americans (CDC 2008). Racial and ethnic STI rate disparities are immense, as Blacks have approximately 9 times the Chlamydia rate, 20 times the Gonorrhea rate, and 8 times the Syphilis rate

of Whites (CDC 2008). While each of these health disparities is extremely complex in nature, based upon research connecting exposure to sexual content in music with sexual behavior (Brown et al. 2006), further investigation of differences in music according to race and ethnicity are warranted.

In addition the these general public health consequences stemming from exposure to sexual content in music, ramifications related to adolescents' development of sexually healthy attitudes and expectations may also exist. First, the distinction between degrading and non-degrading sexual references in music holds important implications for healthy adolescent sexual development since not all sexual content in music is equal or has been shown to have the same impact on listeners. Lyrical depictions of mutual respect between consenting partners fostering intimacy, bonding, and shared pleasure may be helpful in socializing adolescents toward a conception of healthy and responsible sexuality (USDHHS 2001). By comparison, degrading music, which is characterized by lyrics where one person has a large sexual appetite, the other person is sexually objectified, and sexual value is placed solely on physical characteristics may have deleterious effects. Music, for example, depicting a sex-driven male emotively pursuing an objectified female whose sole value is derived from her sexual behavior, hypersexuality, or sexual attractiveness reinforces and perpetuates harmful stereotypes related to gender and sexuality. Similarly, music that commodifies a woman's body, rendering it the property of others and assigning value equal to its sexiness, may reinforce sexist gender roles and scripts related to the subordination of women in society. Degrading and sexualized music can teach both adolescent males and females that women are sexual objects that exist for the pleasure of others (Papadaki 2001). Exposure to such content may teach a woman to sexually objectify herself by willingly presenting her body as a sexual object for others' use. This type of self-imposed sexual objectification has been termed self-sexualization and is generally distinguished from healthy sexually expression and empowerment as the woman largely neglect's her own desires and pleasure for that of another (APA Task Force 2007). While it is noted that self-sexualized displays can be considered an empowering act for a female who has taken ownership of her body and is exercising sexual agency (Kipnis and Reeder 1997; Lerum and Dworkin 2009), the dehumanizing act of presenting oneself as a sexual object, the primary focus on pleasuring others, along with the pressure to conform to narrow sociocultural definitions linking attractiveness and sexiness make self-sexualization a troubling phenomenon (APA 2007). According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, a female can self-sexualize in three main ways: (1) assuming that her individual value comes primarily from her sexual appeal and behavior; (2) assuming that her sexiness is equivalent to a narrowly defined level of attractiveness; and (3) thinking of herself in objectified terms, that is, as an object for others' sexual use (APA Task Force 2007). Just as evidence mounts linking exposure of sexual content in media to sexual activity, degrading and sexualized displays of women in media may lead females to internalize such messages and engage in self-sexualized behaviors. In their recent study examining the impact of objectifying media content on women's attitudes and behaviors, Nowatski and Morry (2009) found that consumption of media portraying highly sexually objectified content

positively correlated with female self-sexualizing behaviors. Furthermore, exposure to sexual objectification can lead to a host of health related issues including poor body image (McKinley 1998), depression (Muehlenkamp and Saris-Baglama 2002; Szymanski and Henning 2007), disordered eating (Tiggemann and Kuring 2004), and substance abuse (Car and Szymanski 2011).

## Purpose

Recently the APA has called for an examination of the sexualization of girls and women in all media, especially in movies, music videos, music lyrics, video games, books, blogs, and Internet sites (APA 2007). Dramatic increases in music consumption among adolescents (Roberts et al. 2010), along with mounting evidence that exposure to sexual content in music is associated with adolescent sexual activity (Brown et al. 2006), together with findings demonstrating a link between exposure to objectifying media and female self-sexualization, warrants an examination of sexualization in music lyrics. Primack et al. (2008) conducted a content analysis of degrading and non-degrading sexual references in 279 songs from various 2005 Billboard charts and concluded that future research should focus on long-term analyses of music lyrics. Indeed, without a longitudinal perspective of degrading and sexualized music lyrics, it is difficult to forecast how current music content and consumption may impact the future sexual behavior and attitudes of adolescents. The purpose of this study was to conduct a content analysis of sexualization in lyrics of popular music in the final year of each of the past six decades. In addition, this study aimed to determine if sexualization in music lyrics was associated with artist characteristics, specifically gender and race/ethnicity.

## Methods

### Sample

The *Billboard Hot 100* year-end most popular songs across all genres from 1959, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009 comprised this study sample ( $N = 600$ ). Beginning in 1958, *Billboard* began tracking one main all-genre singles on its *Hot 100* chart. The *Billboard Hot 100* has been the industry standard for measuring the popularity of music singles ever since. Currently *Billboard Top 100* songs are ranked by radio airplay audience impressions as measured by Nielsen BDS, retail and digital sales data as compiled by Nielsen SoundScan, and streaming activity data provided by online music sources. Whereas previous studies have analyzed songs according to genre, the number of “cross-over” artists and songs has grown tremendously (e.g., Taylor Swift), making genre less important for the current study. For this reason, the *Billboard Hot 100* year-end most popular songs comprised this study sample. Additionally, this study selected the final year of each decade to study as the *Billboard Hot 100* for 2009 was the most current list available at the time of data collection.

## Procedure

A document with links to each of the 600 song lyrics was created and organized by sample year. Following initial training related to each study measure, two coders, the principal investigator (PCH) and a research assistant, independently analyzed the top five songs from each sample year ( $N = 30$ ). Concordance between the two raters was 96.7% in coding for general sexual references and 93.0% for specific references to sexualization, both of which exceed inter-rater reliability standards established in the literature (Landis and Koch 1977). Songs 6–95 for each sample year were then coded independently with all even numbered songs assigned to the principal investigator and all odd numbered songs to the research assistant. When this portion of the coding was complete, both raters independently coded songs 96–100 for each sample year to check for rater-drift. Rater agreement was 100% in coding for general sexualized references and 93.0% for specific references to sexualization. Provided the rater agreement, the principal investigator's coding for songs 1–5 and 96–100 were used for the final study analysis.

## Measures

### *Artist Description*

Coders performed an Internet search for each individual artist or band to determine basic descriptive characteristics. Coding categories included: (1) male soloist; (2) female soloist; (3) male group; (4) female group; and (5) mixed gender group/duo. Race/ethnicity was also coded based upon information gathered online and included the following categories: (1) White, (2) Black, (3) Hispanic, (4) Asian, (5) Native American/Pacific Islander; (6) mixed; and (7) other.

### *Reference to Sexual Activity*

Each song was analyzed for sexual references, which was dichotomized according to: (0) No sexual reference and (1) sexual reference. Songs which included a sexual reference were further coded using the following categories and subcategories: (1) sexual readiness (prepared to give/receive sexual activity); (2) sexual response (excitement, plateau, climax, resolution); and (3) sexual activity: (a) kissing/hugging/embracing; (b) manual sexual stimulation; (c) penile-vaginal sex; (d) oral-genital sex; (e) anal sex; and (f) other.

### *Reference to Sexualization*

Each song was analyzed for references to sexualization. Coding categories included: (0) no sexualization; and (1) sexualization. Based upon the APA's definition of sexualization, references were also coded into subcategories of sexualization including: (1) a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior; (2) person is held to a standard of beauty equating physical attractiveness with being sexy; (3) a person is sexually objectified, or made into a thing for others

sexual use; (4) sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person; and (5) one person has a large sexual appetite. It is noted that the APA's definition of sexualization does not include the final subcategory coded in this study (one person has a large sexual appetite). This code has been used in previous research measuring degrading music lyrics and has been included in this study in an attempt to connect to extant literature and findings related to sexualized music lyrics.

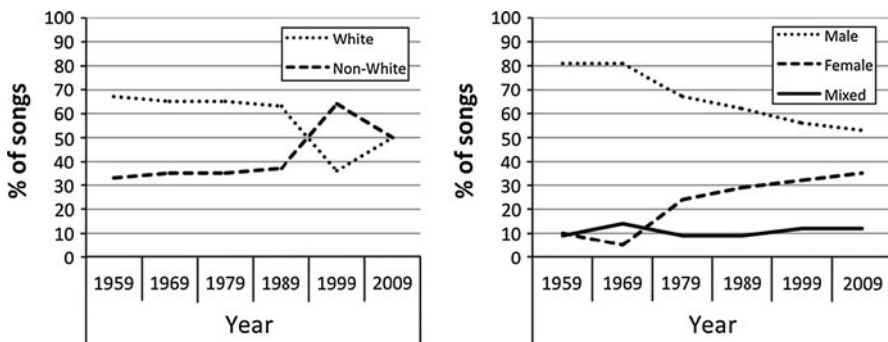
## Analysis

For analyses, the race/ethnicity categories were collapsed to include White and non-White. Without using this dichotomous measure, the results were not likely to lead to meaningful interpretations due to the small number of artists that were Hispanic, Asian, Native American/Pacific Islander, mixed or other. Unadjusted logistic regression models were constructed to determine the differences between White and non-White artists with respect to the type of sexual references contained in lyrics. Chi-square test statistics were computed to compare the percent of sexualization in lyrics between White and non-White artists and among male, female and mixed gender groups. Adjusted logistic regression analysis was used to compare the presence of sexualization in hit songs from 1959, with songs from 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999 and 2009 after controlling for gender and race/ethnicity.

## Results

Figure 1 shows that White artists performed the greatest percentage of songs for the first three decades of the study period. Whereas in 1989 and 2009 the percentages were equal, in 1999 non-White artists composed the majority of songs. In all decades, male artists composed most of the songs, with mixed gender groups accounting for the smallest percentage, while Female artists steadily increased their representation.

White artists were more likely to include lyrics that made reference to kissing, hugging, and embracing ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 1). Non-White artists' lyrics



**Fig. 1** Percentage of songs performed by race and gender by decade

**Table 1** Type and percentage of lyrics that contain sexual reference by race (*n* = 600)

	White	Non-white
Kissing/hugging/embracing	20.5*	13.00
Prepared to give/receive sexual activity	15.60	22.80*
Excitement, plateau or climax	5.80	13.80***
Manual stimulation	2.60	3.10
Penile-vaginal sex	4	12.60***
Oral sex	1.20	4.30*
Anal sex	0.00	0.04

Chi-square test statistics were computed to compare % sexual reference by White/Non-white

\* *p* < .05

\*\* *p* < .01

\*\*\* *p* < .001

involved more sexual references related to preparation to give or receive sexual activity (*p* < 0.05), sexual response (excitement, plateau, climax, resolution) (*p* < 0.001), penile-vaginal sex (*p* < 0.001), and oral-genital sex (*p* < 0.05).

Female soloists' and female groups' lyrics contained the lowest percent of sexualization at 6.9%, versus 13.8% for males and 13.2% in groups with mixed genders (Table 2). However, the relatively high percent of sexualization in mixed gender group lyrics should be interpreted in the context of the small number of songs performed by such groups. Male artists accounted for 66.6% of songs during

**Table 2** Percentage of degrading and sexualized lyrics by race and gender by decade

		1959	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009	Average %
<b>Race</b>								
White	% non degrading (N)	88.1 (67)	93.8 (65)	90.8 (65)	95.2 (63)	97.2 (36)	92.0 (50)	92.9
	% degrading	11.9	6.2	9.2	4.8	2.8	8.0	7.1
Non-White	% non degrading (N)	93.9 (33)	93.9 (35)	85.7 (35)	86.5 (37)	84.4 (64)	54.0 (50)	83.1
	% degrading	6.1	6.1	14.3	13.5	15.6*	46.0***	16.9
<b>Gender</b>								
Male <sup>a</sup>	% non degrading (N)	89.9 (81)	95.1 (81)	92.5 (67)	88.7 (62)	83.9 (56)	67.9 (53)	86.2
	% degrading	11.1	4.9	7.5	11.3	16.1	32.1	13.8
Female <sup>b</sup>	% non degrading (N)	100 (10)	100 (5)	79.2 (24)	96.6 (29)	96.9 (32)	85.7 (35)	93.1
	% degrading	0	0	20.8	3.4	3.1	14.3	6.9
Mixed <sup>c</sup>	% non degrading (N)	89.9 (9)	93.9 (14)	89.9 (9)	100 (9)	91.7 (12)	58.3 (12)	86.8
	% degrading	11.1	7.1	11.1	0	8.3	41.7	13.2

Chi-square test statistics were computed to compare % degrading by white/Non-white, and male/female/mixed for each decade

<sup>a</sup> Included male soloists and male groups

<sup>b</sup> Included female soloists and female groups

<sup>c</sup> Included groups with both male and female artists

\* *p* < .05

\*\*\* *p* < .001



the six-decade period, which involved more than 80% for the first two decades (81% in 1959 and 1969) (Fig. 1). Female artists performed just 22.5% of lyrics, most of which came during the years 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009. Mixed gender groups only accounted for 10.8% of the lyrics in this study.

Female artists were responsible for 0% of sexualization in 1959 and 1969; years in which they only accounted for producing 10 and 5% of songs. In 1979, 20.8% of female lyrics included sexualization, which was the highest value for the entire study period. After a marked decrease in 1989 and 1999, the percent of sexualization by female artists again peaked in 2009 at 14.3%. In 1959, 11.1% of male lyrics were coded for sexualization. After a brief post-1959 decline, sexualization by male artists' steadily increased each decade from 1969 (4.9%), 1979 (7.5%), 1989 (11.3%), and 1999 (16.1%). By 2009, 32.1% of male lyrics included sexualization.

Table 2 shows that Non-white artists' lyrics contained sexualization 20.7% of the time, while 7.5% of White artists' lyrics included sexualization. The percent of White artists' lyrics that contained sexualization maintained a constant level during the study period, which averaged 7.1%, with a high of 11.9% in 1959. By comparison, the percent of lyrics containing sexualization by non-White artists was at a low in 1959 and 1969 (6.1% in both years), but steadily increased to a high of 46% in 2009. Non-White artists were more likely than White artists to engage in sexualization, but only in 1999 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 2009 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Adjusted logistic regression analyses revealed that non-White artists were almost 3 times more likely to compose lyrics with sexualization ( $OR = 2.670$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) (see Table 3). Male artists were more than twice as likely as female artists to compose lyrics with sexualization ( $OR = 2.163$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). When comparing across years in the study period, lyrics including sexualization were not significantly different in 1969, 1979, 1989, or 1999, when compared to 1959. Comparing 2009 with 1959, lyrics in 2009 were greater than 3 times more likely to include lyrics with sexualization ( $OR = 3.439$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

## Discussion

The results of this study are significant given the established association between exposure to sexual content in media and adolescent sexual behavior. Human and social costs related to teen pregnancy and STIs, along with glaring disparities between racial/ethnic groups related to these social ills, should make the recent significant increases in sexualized music lyrics a concern for sexuality educators desiring to improve these sexual health outcomes. Similarly, recent research demonstrating the connection between consuming objectifying media and female self-sexualization, should make the current study's findings a concern to sexuality educators desiring to promote healthy adolescent sexual development. Increased exposure to sexualized music lyrics has the potential to negatively impact the development of healthy and equitable sexual attitudes of both adolescent males and females.

**Table 3** Adjusted logistic regression model for degrading and sexualized lyrics ( $n = 600$ )

Variable	B	SE	<i>P</i> value	Exp (B)	CI	
					Lower	Higher
Gender						
Female <sup>a</sup>	–	–	–	–	–	–
Male <sup>b</sup>	0.772	0.354	0.029	2.163	1.08	4.333
Mixed <sup>c</sup>	0.557	0.492	0.258	1.745	0.665	4.579
Race/Ethnicity						
White	–	–	–	–	–	–
Non-White	0.982	0.276	<0.001	2.670	1.554	4.586
Year						
1959	–	–	–	–	–	–
1969	–0.797	0.573	0.164	0.451	0.147	1.385
1979	0.21	0.47	0.655	1.234	0.491	3.101
1989	–0.153	0.506	0.762	0.858	0.318	2.312
1999	–0.03	0.477	0.95	0.971	0.381	2.474
2009	1.235	0.418	0.003	3.439	1.515	7.809

Statistics in the columns are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients (B), associated standard errors (SE), odds ratios of the individual coefficients (Exp (B)), associated *p* values (*p*), and 95% confidence intervals of Exp (B)

<sup>a</sup> Included female soloists and female groups

<sup>b</sup> Included male soloists and male groups

<sup>c</sup> Included groups with both male and female artists

The goodness of fit measure was appropriate; Naglekerke R-square value was 11.9%

The current study identified distinct differences in sexual references made by White and non-White artists in this sample. Whereas White artists made significantly more references to kissing, hugging, and embracing, non-White artists made significantly more references to preparation to give/receive sexual activity, sexual response, penile-vaginal sex and oral sex. Additionally, the current study found that non-White artists were significantly more likely to produce degrading and sexualized lyrics in 1999 and 2009. Historically, non-Whites have confronted persistent sexually aggressive stereotypes and expectations of hypersexual behavior (Brooks 2010). Bartky (1990) notes that people of color have persistently been stereotyped as hypersexual “animals” unable to control their sexual appetites and desires. The inclusion of more explicit sexual references in songs by non-White artists in this study may stem from sociocultural expectations and stereotypes under which some non-Whites have historically had to operate. In addition, Black and Hispanic youth consume more media than their White counterparts (Roberts et al. 2010), which may both create, and reinforce, sociocultural norms related to sexuality. Based upon the tenants of Super-Peer Theory, time spent with this persuasive and impactful “super-peer” shapes sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, especially for listeners most like these artists. For example, Gordon (2008) found a connection between more objectifying music videos and Black girls’

acceptance of objectifying attitudes. According to Cultivation Theory, such presentations and portrayals of women of color lead to acceptance of these displays as accurate and normal. Results from this study related to racial and ethnic differences may stem from differences in media consumption, as well as acceptance and adoption of sexualization-related beliefs and attitudes among some cultures.

One explanation for recent increases in lyrics containing sexualization is the parent advisory label affixed by the Recording Industry Association of America. Beginning in 1985, this label has been attached to music containing excessive use of profanity or sexual references (Recording Industry Association of America 2011). Viewed originally by some as censorship, warning labels appear now to have allowed artists an unbridled freedom of expression in their music. This may be a case where attempts to protect young people from degrading material has backfired and ironically increased exposure to that from which it was intended to protect. With the application of a parent advisory label, today's artists are able to write and compose music that previous generations of musicians would not have been able to produce. It is interesting to note, however, that based upon findings of the current study, lyrics containing sexualization only significantly increased for non-Whites following the introduction of the parent advisory label. One possible explanation for this which necessitates future study may be that non-White artists have responded differently than White artists in the post-parent advisory era due to their history of oppression. In other words, once a group that has been oppressed is granted new freedoms, they are likely to explore the boundaries of their newfound freedom. While the parent advisory label extended to all artists, it is possible that it uniquely influenced the frequency of sexualization of non-White artists included in this study.

The current study's findings raise serious concerns related to the promotion of healthy sexuality by sexuality educators. Indeed, even the most effective sexuality education efforts in promoting healthy sexual behaviors are overshadowed by the frequency of sexualization in media. The *14 Characteristics of Effective Health Education Curricula* identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health (CDC-DASH) promote teaching ideas designed to increase skills related to media literacy (Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards 2006). The inclusion of media literacy skill development in sexuality education where young people learn to both identify, deconstruct, and challenge sexualization in media messages is vital in promoting healthy adolescent sexuality. While not all media messages related to sexuality are false, they very often distort healthy and equitable sexual relationships. As an important component of sexuality education, media literacy skills will help young people to place the messages they receive from media in perspective.

Provided the recent increase in sexualized lyrics in popular music, these behaviors and attitudes are likely to be increasingly perceived as socially normative. Consistent with several behavior change theories, the abundant modeling of sexualized behavior by the "super-peer," places added pressure on adolescents to engage in risky sexual behavior. As has been demonstrated by a brief review of the lyrics found in this study sample, popular music can teach young men to be sexually aggressive and treat women as objects, while often teaching young women that their value to society is to provide sexual pleasure for others. Both the frequency and the

boldness with which these messages are communicated offer a significant challenge to sexuality educators concerned with sexual behavioral outcomes such as teen pregnancy and STIs, as well as the development of healthy sexual attitudes among adolescents. Family and community involvement provides one opportunity to establish social norms supportive of healthy sexuality (Michael et al. 2006). Sexuality educators must reach out to parents and community leaders to inform them of the recent increases in sexualization in lyrics of popular music. Parents and community leaders should also be included in the process of implementing effective sexuality education strategies to promote adolescent sexual health. In addition, sexuality educators should encourage parents and teens to establish boundaries for media consumption, including music. Helping and encouraging parents to have regular discussions with their children related to messages presented by media should be an ongoing focus of sexuality educators as these discussions help to establish a subjective and social norm supportive of sexual health.

Efforts to improve the effectiveness of sexuality education in general must be ongoing. Sexuality educators often have limited opportunities to fully promote healthy sexual behaviors. Those teaching in settings where efforts are limited to risk-avoidance approaches, or abstinence-only curricula, are restricted in their ability to provide complete information and teach important skills in promoting sexual responsibility. This study's findings coupled with ongoing racial and ethnic disparities in teen pregnancy and STI rates, make these curricular approaches both harmful and discriminatory to racially and ethnically diverse groups. Improved efforts in providing culturally-inclusive instruction comprised of age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate information and materials in sexuality education are essential in helping youth gain the understandings and skills required for healthy, satisfying, and responsible lives (Goodlad et al. 1993; Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards 2006).

### Limitations

The current study has several key limitations. Study sample selection included just 1 year from the end of each study decade. It is possible that temporal trends exist related to sexualization in lyrics of popular music, which this study was unable to measure given this limited sample. Study procedures were consistent with similar studies of degrading music lyrics and an acceptable inter-rater reliability was established, however, content analysis is a research methodology prone to rater bias. Music is a fluid cultural script comprised of language and references specific to various groups and time periods, which further decreases the odds of coding reliability. Furthermore, lyrics frequently contain euphemistic terms that can be otherwise glossed over by the coder or difficult to identify as sexualized. Artist characteristics, as well as actual song lyrics, were determined using Internet sources, which are subject to error. In addition, this study employed measures and coding criteria for sexualization based upon the APA's report on the sexualization of girls. The APA's conceptualization of sexualization has been criticized for its lack of consensus among sexuality educators with regard to healthy female sexual development. While most would agree that females should be protected from

objectified versions of sexual expression, others are concerned that such protection may limit sexual freedom, expression, and experiences (Peterson 2010). Lastly, study design and measures failed to distinguish between qualitative differences in sexualization among study samples. Despite these limitations, this study offers sexuality educators a valuable insight related to sexualization in popular music lyrics at the conclusion to each of the past six decades.

## Conclusion

The recent significant increase of sexualization in lyrics of popular music, combined with both increasing amounts of time consuming music and few parental restrictions, are problematic for sexuality educators endeavoring to promote healthy sexual relationships and attitudes. Framed by previous research establishing an association between sexualized music lyrics and adolescent sexual behavior, the current study findings unfortunately offer sexuality educators a stormy forecast. Improved and ongoing sexuality education efforts are required help to meet these challenges.

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