

Shaping women's image through western music videos

An analytic study

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Abstract :

This study aims to reveal the real image of women in western music industry through analyzing existing studies that studied the portrayal and objectification of women in western music videos.

Results of this research -after analysis- about women's image in western music videos clarifies that race is an important factor when gender roles and sexual content are examined in western music industry, and women are treated as sexual objects to provide visual pleasure to the viewers especially men.

Keywords: *Women; Music Industry; Western Music Videos; Mental Image.*

المخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الصورة الحقيقية للمرأة في صناعة الموسيقى الغربية من خلال تحليل نتائج الدراسات السابقة التي درست مظاهر تواجد المرأة وتصويرها في الأغاني الغربية المصورة. توضح نتائج هذه الورقة البحثية - بعد التحليل - حول صورة المرأة في مقاطع الأغاني الغربية المصورة أن العرق الإنساني يلعب دورا مهما عند فحص أدوار الجنسين والمحتوى الجنسي في صناعة الموسيقى الغربية، حيث يتم التعامل مع المرأة كأشياء جنسية هدفها هو توفير المتعة البصرية للمشاهدين خاصة الرجال منهم. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** المرأة، صناعة الموسيقى، الأغاني الغربية المصورة، الصورة الذهنية.

1. Introduction:

The study of the field of music industry is one of the fertile fields that still need a lot of research because the music in general and the music videos particularly are among the entertainment contents that are popular with viewers, especially the youth category, the reality shows us that music, especially Western one, is known to have a global reach among the youth audience, mainly with the various developments taking place in its industry and method of production.

Historically, the proliferation of the music videos is due to the music TV channels, especially the MTV channel that started broadcasting in 1981, it was the first TV channel specialized in displaying the music videos, hence the launch of the viewers' awareness of this type of TV content where MTV was known for its popularity, and contribution to create competition between artists and production companies in order to achieve successful music videos, this which created what is known nowadays as the music industry, including major stand-alone companies whose role is to produce everything related to music, it is the division of the entertainment industry that creates financial gain from the music business and music business related activities, later in this study we will talk deeper about the music industry with more details and facts that show how much that business becomes so important and it has much effects in the nature of the culture all over the world.

Music videos is part of this business so the producers try to gain much money through the production of music videos, trying to use all the tools to attract the attention of the audiences and try to get millions of views in the different platforms and win nominations and get Grammys.

In this scientific article, we will try to focus on Western studies that dealt with the topic of using a woman in a music video can add more value for it in the eye of the audience, for instance, **Dauphinais** observes that in nearly any genre of music there are numerous music videos with barely clad women marching around with no function other than to offer eye candy or to please a man¹.

The objectification of women in the society through the entertainment media, specifically music videos has attracted an array of studies conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Despite this considerable number of studies, a review of literature on the portrayal of women in music videos is scarce, so in this in article we will try to answer these questions:

- **What is the real image of women in western music videos?**
- **How women are portrayed in western music videos?**

1-1- *The aim of the study:*

Each study has specific goals that the researcher seeks to reach and this study entitled "shaping women's image through music videos" aims to:

- Reveal the real image of women in western music industry through an analytic study of existing studies.
- Detect how women are portrayed in western music videos.
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1-2- *The importance of the study:*

¹ Oberiri Destiny Apuke, Lingbun Goodness JigemM **Portrayal and objectification of women in Music Video? A review of existing studies**, Journal of communication and media studies, Volume 02, Number 01, 2019, p 161.

The importance of this study emerges from the nature of the topic itself; today music industry is an important and successful business that uses many tools to ensure its continuity, as music has become an integral part of daily life, especially among young people, as it is considered a source of entertainment for them and it is noticeable the increasing employment of women in this industry and accordingly, through the analysis of previous studies, the image of women in the western music industry will be revealed, especially what is has relation to the music videos.

2. Research Method:

The method is considered a necessity in all research because it is the means for the researcher to achieve objective and precise scientific results and the choice of the appropriate method for the study is not chosen by chance. On the contrary, the researcher must take into account the characteristics and nature of his subject of study and his objectives.

A snowball method was used which involves obtaining additional cited papers from the initially retrieved articles; snowball sampling is a convenience sampling method. This method is applied when it is difficult to access subjects with the target characteristics. In this method, the existing study subjects recruit future subjects among their acquaintances. Sampling continues until data saturation¹.

2.1. Selected data for the analysis:

Data sources included **Google Scholar and Academia.edu** these databases were selected because they have a lot of high impact journals and they are devoted to publish peer-reviewed publications.

A broad range of search terms to include : Race and Sexuality, Gender and Sex, Sexual content in western music video and Sexual objectification of females, women's portrayal, Gender representation, Sexuality in western music videos, Sexuality of females, Female objectification in music video.

Moreover books and thesis were also used to identify other related studies, finally it should be noted that since keywords in this research, are not based on common lists, it is possible that some of them were missed, but the researcher has ignored all studies that demonstrate the portrayal of women in movies and advertisement.

The initial electronic search yielded about 50 articles, the retrieved articles and studies were speed-read by checking the title, abstract, results related to the subject matter.

This process resulted in a total of ten (10) **purposefully selected studies** used in this current article, and as it mentioned before that, the main rational for the included references is that the articles contain significant content concerning objectification and the image of women in music videos while studies that demonstrate portrayal of women in movies or advertisement were ignored because they are not part of the main aim of this current study.

While reviewing the included papers in these study **two themes** emerged, these themes are categorized into studies that examined:

- The women's race and body size in western music videos

¹ Mahin Naderifar, Hamideh Goli,Ghaljaei Fereshteh: **Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research**, The Strides in Development of Medical Education Journal, 2017, p52

- Sexuality in the same kind of western music videos.

Table N° 01 : The study sample

N°	Authors	Title of the research paper:	University:
01	<i>Erika Van Dyke's</i>	Race,body and sexuality in music video	Grand Valley State University
02	<i>McKenna Booralis Elizabeth Boosalis and Kim Golombisky</i>	Women's interpretation of music videos featuring woman artists	University of South Florida
03	<i>Gotz, Maya., & Eckhardt Rodrigue, Ana</i>	I Just Want to Look Good For You Stereotype in Music Videos and How to Overcome the Self-Evident Sexism in Germany	International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI), Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation, Germany; Prix Jeunesse Foundation
04	<i>Steven Aubrey Jennifer., & Frisby Cynthia. M</i>	Sexual Objectification In Music Videos: A Content Analysis Comparing Gender and Genre	University of Missouri
05	<i>Frazier Elijah</i>	Girls,Girls,Girls: Analyzing Race and Sexuality Portrayal in Music Videos	Stanford university
06	<i>Deanna Niccole Kimbrel</i>	The visual analysis of heterogeneous sex role interactios: a content analysis of popular music videos	Rochester Institute of Technology, New York
07	<i>Ivana Armer, T</i>	Black Women's Body Image and Black oriented Media Consumption	The University of Alabama
08	<i>McKay Evans Keith</i>	One More Drinkin song: A Longitudinal Content Analysis of Country Music Lyrics Between The years 1994 and 2013	Brigham Young University
09	<i>McKenna Libby</i>	Audience Interpretations of The Representation of Women in Music Videos By Women	University of South Florida

		Artists	
10	<i>Steven Aubrey Jennifer</i>	Check that body the effects of sexually objectifying music video on college men's sexual beliefs	University of Missouri

Source: Hana Achour, 2021

3. Discussion and results:

3.1 . The relationship of music industry with music videos:

Before talking about the music industry, we should mention that MTV was used to save the music industry. It was started and implemented as a channel of music video distribution used primarily as a promotion vehicle. MTV, like any business was motivated by the commercial imperatives of profit, market control, and corporate growth. Expanding on the general movement in media industries toward categorizing lucrative audience groups, MTV's originating company sought to target a youth audience known for its expendable income and liberal consumption patterns .The target audience, 12 to 34 year-olds makes up the majority of the music buying market and makes for a dynamic cultural group ¹

So music videos are a large part of American and popular culture. They provide the public with stories behind popular songs and introductions and/or appearances of admired artists. Music videos have added a visual aspect to the music industry allowing the average person to feel as if they are part of the glitz and glamour of the entertainment world, even if only for five minutes.

In cases of heavy viewing, it is possible that viewers could develop personal relationships with artists in music videos, identify with the artists and even consider them friends and/or real parts of their lives. Relationships between television figures and heavy media viewers have been coined parasocial relationships. Intense parasocial attachments may be formed with figures that are clearly not "authentic" such as a pop star who takes an obvious pseudonym² .

To understand the dynamics of the music industry, it is first of all necessary to recognize that the music industry is not one, but a number of different industries that are all closely related but which at the same time are based on different logics and structures.

The overall music industry is based on the creation and exploitation of music-based intellectual properties. Composers and songwriters create songs, lyrics, and arrangements that are performed live on stage; recorded and distributed to consumers; or licensed for some other kind of use, for instance sheet music or as background music for other media (advertising, television, etc.).

This basic structure has given rise to three core music industries: the recorded music industry—focused on recording and distribution of music to consumers; the music licensing industry—primarily licensing compositions and arrangements to businesses; and lives music—focused on producing and promoting live entertainment, such as concerts, tours, etc.

¹ Libby McKenna: **Audience Interpretations of the Representation of Women in Music Videos by Women Artists**, Mass Communications, University of South Africa, 2006, p 5.

² David C Giles: **Parasocial Interactions: A review of the Literature and A Model for Future Research**, Media Psychology, Volume 2, 2002, p291.

There are other companies that sometimes are recognized as members of the music industrial family, such as makers of music instruments, software, stage equipment, music merchandise, etc. However while these are important industry sectors they are traditionally not considered to be integral parts of the industry's core¹.

As video music gradually became an institutionalized part of the record business, the major labels incorporated this cultural product into the organizational structure of their companies. At some labels, video music operations were subsumed within pre-existing departments such as at A&M Records where video music was managed by the label's marketing department. Video music is often assigned to the label's promotion department since music clips are perceived foremost as an effective way to promote artists.

Other labels established separate divisions with the sole mandate of developing video music, like PolyGram Music Video. As music clips gained stature, some record labels shifted towards this latter approach, rather than treating video as an ancillary function of other departments for example, Atlantic Records consolidated its video music activities into one area in 1987².

Music video functions at the major record labels can be divided roughly into three areas: production, promotion and retail distribution. Some labels combine these areas into a single centralized department, like PolyGram Music Video which produces and distributes music programming for television and home video, while other labels disperse these operations into different divisions.

Music videos budgets steadily increased throughout the 1980s, leveling off in the early 1990s. According to various trade magazine reports, the average budget for videos rose from \$15,000 in 1981, to \$40,000-50,000 in 1984, and \$50,000-60,000 in 1988, remaining at \$60,000-80,000 in the 1990s.

Video budgets increase for larger established firms and successful recording artists. Record label executives also limit the creative latitude of video clip makers. When a record company commissions a video clip, the label often provides the producer with strong direction about the content and visual style of the proposed music video. Producers are frequently expected to make videos that visualize scripts or storyboards developed by the label video departments.

These video clip makers charge that the creativity of music videos suffers because record labels consider music videos solely as commercials rather than artistic endeavors in their own right. **John Beug**, vice president of video at Warner Bros, seems to accept this diminished conception of music clips, saying 'you have to maintain a perspective about what [the video maker] is doing. You're making a three-minute marketing tool³.

During the 1970s, new women-run music businesses were established, such as US-based Olivia Records. Various other feminist initiatives to emerge included music festivals that showcased the work of female musicians, including the annual Chard Festival of Women in Music, the New Zealand Composing Women's Festival, or the Michigan Women's Music Festival.

¹ Patrick Wikstrom: **The Music Industry in an Age of Digital Distribution**, <https://is.gd/0u0t5Y>, consulted on 07/02/20121 at 10:30.

² Jack Banks: **Video in the Machine The Incorporation of Music Video Into the Recording Industry**, Popular Music, 1998, p137.

³ Ibid, p295, 296.

Motivated by the desire to challenge male dominance within mainstream rock music and increase the prominence of females in music making, these festivals helped to challenge the inequalities prevalent in the production of cultural artifacts while raising the profiles of female artists and offering a platform for creative expression¹.

So once it is looked to music video as a commercial object so that it gives rights to the producers to use anything to gain the money that they expect and woman is one of these tools that can help to sell the music video, due to the existing studies that we took as a sample for this paper, we have noticed that women's image got always related to two main topics which are: women's race and body size and women's sexuality, **we will discuss all that below:**

3.2 . Women's race and body size in western music videos:

Recently there seems to be lot of talk about gender and race and the conflicts of representation of women in music videos especially western ones, the researcher preferred to gather the race and the body size in one theme since the kind of race defines the body size.

A race has been described as a grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society².

Many studies focused on revealing if women's race and her body size have effect on her image in music video as **Erika Van Dyke's study titled "Race, body, and sexuality in music video"** and **Elijah Frazier's study titled "Girls, girls, girls: analyzing race and sexuality portrayal in music videos"**, both studies show that black females were more likely to fill support roles, and there were virtually no white significant background characters, blacks with more Afro centric features such as darker skin tone, thicker lips and larger noses are more likely to be associated with stereotypical or negative assessments³.

There were many discussions to explain that there is a difference between how to represent white and black women, the beauty myth suggests that there is a universal beauty standard that is represented by Eurocentric features including white skin, blond hair, blue eyes and low body weight⁴.

Physical appearance and attractiveness are often equated with power and prestige, having lighter skin is regarded as an adherence to the dominant (Eurocentric) standard of beauty. This particular facet of the standard is also linked to "feminine sexual behavior and attitudes"⁵ where the lighter skin epitomizes "purity, modesty, and goodness," and darker skin signals the inverse. Thus, it would not be a stretch to see how African American women may view damaging stereotypes based on their skin tone as important to their overall body image satisfaction⁶.

¹ Simone Kruger Bridge: **Gendering Music in Popular Culture**, <https://is.gd/79cXCT>, consulted on 11/02/2021 at 19:30.

² Richard T Schaefer: **Encyclopedia Of Race, Ethnicity and Society**, Sage Publications, United States Of America,2008, p275.

³ Elijah Frazier: **Girls, Girls, Girls: Analyzing Race and Sexuality Portrayal in Music Videos**, thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's Project, Media Studies, Department of Communication,2013.

⁴ Kate Conrad, Travis Dixon, Yuanyuan Zhang: **Controversial Rap Themes, Gender Portrayals and Skin distortion: a Content Analysis of Rap Music Videos**, Journal Of Broadcasting and Electronic Media,2009,p 134.

⁵Shyon Baumann: **The moral underpinnings of Beauty: A Meaning-based Explanation For Light and Dark Complexions in Advertising**, Volume 36, Poetics, 2008, p 18.

⁶ Taylor Ivana Armer: **Black Women's Body Image and Black oriented Media Consumption**, thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Journalism & Creative Media, University of Alabama, 2017, p11.

So when Pop stars and actresses show off their bodies in music videos, it is viewed as sexy and constrained, larger bodies however are seen as vulgar and uncontrollable, and that linked to western culture's idea of hyper sexuality that is embedded in larger, darker bodies, claiming: while black female sexuality is always embodied and fixed in the flesh - precisely the fleshiest parts of the body- white sexuality, in displacing the origin of the body, is open to redefinition¹.

One of selected studies did find that black women's body image was not always lowered by viewing this women in Rap videos, however, ethnic identity moderated the influence of the image such that black women with low ethnic identity were much more likely to show body dissatisfaction and a desire for thinners, In another study, the black and white women were surveyed about how content they were with specific parts of their bodies, results showed that black women preferred a curvier body in general, they still showed dissatisfaction if they did not meet their ideal body type.

Ultimately, concluding that black women in general are more content with their bodies does not mean that they are unaffected by the messages about Eurocentric beauty in the media, nor does it mean that all black women are affected equally² and it is necessary to mention that black heterosexual womanhood has been historically constructed differently to its white counterpart, in other words it is important to acknowledge that black women sexuality is rooted in a different historical background than white female one does.

Women, both black and white, are not only receiving messages about what it means to be beautiful but also about how they should express their sexuality. Historically, black and white women have been defined as opposites in terms of how their sexuality was constructed. As Europeans colonized Africa, black women were viewed as animalistic, hypersexual curiosities. This view was juxtaposition with the restrained, "civilized" Victorian women who were essentially asexual and whose purity needed to be protected by men³.

Taylor's study resulted that the more women compared themselves to mainstream media body shapes, the less satisfaction they reported with their body parts. The more pressure women felt from mainstream media concerning body shape, the less satisfaction they reported with their body parts.

Due to **the results of the sample of this current study**, it is noticed that:

- Black women are still presented as hypersexual, close to the Earth and available through the display of their bodies while white women are more restrained and controlled in their sexuality. In addition all that affects badly girls and they don't feel comfortable in their bodies anymore due to what they see in music videos.

3.3 . Women's race and body size in western music videos:

Sexuality was the most common topic that got found in the entire sample studies, the word sexuality came from the word sex which refers to biological apparatus, the male and the female, our chromosomal, anatomical organization⁴ .

¹ Diane Railton, Paul Watson: Music Video and The Politics of Representation (Music and Moving Image), Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p103.

² Erika Van Dyke: Race, body and sexuality in music video, <https://is.gd/MPV42w>, consulted on 15/01/2021 at 20:05.

³ Diane Railton, Paul Watson, Op cit p 132.

⁴ Michael S Kimmel: The Gendered Society, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p3.

Conceptual definitions for sex are easier to implement when not restricted to text or spoken words. Scholars who concentrate on visual media content use any number of indicators and lump them into the broader category of “sex”, such as revealing and alluring clothing, dance moves that double as simulated sex acts, and of course, sexual activity itself, ranging from kissing to intercourse. Conceptual definitions of sex in textual studies must rely only on descriptions of such clothing, dancing or physical activity.

Still, at the core of any study examining sexual content is the representation of anything related to romantic physical interaction between individuals¹ the main idea of sexuality of women in music videos through the studies is related to treating women’s bodies as objects and the way they wear or dance, **Jennifer and Cynthia’s study titled: "Sexual objectification in music videos: a content analysis comparing gender and genre"** resulted that female artists were more sexually objectified than male ones, the first two of the three sexual objectification variables focused on visual elements of music video that serve to train viewer’s eye on bodies, the baring of sexual body parts and the use of gaze, not only in global way where female artists were more sexualized than male artists, but also in specific ways, female artists used often more dance and dress to appear sexy².

The study of **Maya and Ana titled "I just want to look good for you stereotypes in music videos and how to overcome the self-evident sexism"** proved that music videos often portray women as highly sexualized and subordinate to men and make them de-individualized, sexualized objects, especially with the clothes they wear and the camera perspectives in which the female body is shown only in parts³.

Similarly, women were portrayed as sex objects by the use of revealing or provocative clothing, typically displaying excessive skin exposure. Another recent content analysis found that 91,6% of the sample of music videos of female artists contained at least one of the following indicators of sexual objectification: close-up shots of individual body parts, self touching of sexual body parts, ample skin exposure, or sexualized dancing. Thus it is not the case that sexual objectification is exclusively done to female characters by male artists rather a majority of female artists engage in sexual objectification of their own bodies⁴.

Investigators found that women in music videos are mostly used for sexy dance and also audiences enjoy the sexual contents in music video because it gives them sexual arousal. Congruently, **Bell, Lawton and Dittmar** remark that models, especially ladies who dance in the music videos, show their body shapes, size of them body while doing the movement.

Jhally argued that music videos are often constructed around the “pornographic imagination,” in which women are seen as sex symbols that simply must have sex and submit to any fantasy that a man may have. The sexual content of music videos has tended to be gender stereotypic. Specifically, women in music videos have often been portrayed as the objects of

¹ Keith McKay Evans: **One More Drinkin song: A Longitudinal Content Analysis of Country Music Lyrics Between The years 1994 and 2013**, Brigham Young University, 2014, p 06.

² Jennifer Steven Aubrey, Cynthia M Frisby: **Sexual Objectification In Music Videos: A Content Analysis Comparing Gender and Genre**, Mass Communication and Society Journal, Volume 14, 2011, p 23.

³ Maya Gotz, Ana Eckhardt Rodrigue: **I Just Want to Look Good For You Stereotype in Music Videos and How to Overcome the Self-Evident Sexism in Germany**, <https://is.gd/XIUUSp>, consulted on 25/01/2021 at 23:16

⁴ Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, K Megan Hopper, Wanjiru G Mbure: **Check That Body the Effects of Sexually Objectifying Music Videos on College Men's Sexual Beliefs**, Journal Of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 2011, p 362.

sexual attention, for the gratification of on or off-screen men. The supporting female characters in music videos have often appeared as hypersexual objects without agency, lack a role outside their function as living decor, or have no identifiable personality traits¹ and that because the most of music videos are produced by men for male audience.

So it's obvious now **the female artists meant that marketability is defined by their youth and beauty which has become ever more important than musical ability and skill.**

4. Conclusion:

This article which contains a research provides a review and analysis of existing studies that discussed the image of women in western music videos that has continued to be a bond of contention among scholars. Through the sample of this study, there are **two themes** that emerged to express the image of women as the race and body size, sexuality.

Results of this research concerning of women's image in western music industry clarify that:

Race is an important factor when gender roles and sexual content are examined in music videos because the black artists were nearly twice as likely to wear sexually provocative clothes, it has also been shown that there is some appreciation for white skin in western music videos suggesting that a great emphasis is put on skin color and white skin is given more importance as compared to black or brown skin. In addition, black women were relegated to the background and were almost always portrayed in revealing bathing suits, lingerie or nothing at all, and sometimes with provocative dance showing some intimate parts of their bodies.

To conclude this paper of study, we should mention that female artists are still expected to be both beautiful and sexy, and are marketed by their female attractiveness and sexuality regardless of their musical capabilities.

5. Recommendations:

After finishing this research, we conclude it with suggesting some recommendations as:

- Media literacy becomes a necessity to spread awareness of the danger of music industry including music videos by its negative impacts.
- Teach youth girls the value of being female away from sexuality.
- Fight the racism by color of skin or race among women in music videos.
- Make more researches and analysis that study the women's image in music videos

¹ Whitney Stefani, Ralf Greenwald.: **Sex, Power and Women: Female Viewer's Perceptions of Popular Music Video Themes**, <https://is.gd/oZS6wj>, consulted on 02/02/2021 at 15:19.