



**Report of the Division 46 Task Force on the**

# Sexualization of Popular Music



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Division 46 of the American Psychological Association

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# Executive Summary

In 2016, it was reported that music is the preferred media outlet of teens, with 66% reporting listening to music daily (Rideout, 2017). Advances in current technology have made music more readily accessible and geographic distance irrelevant in distribution and dissemination of music (Sen, 2010; Warburton, Roberts, & Christensen, 2014; Whelan, 2010).

Many popular music lyrics and videos have become sexualized, containing high levels of sexual content with an increasing number of songs including demeaning messages of men controlling women, sex as a top priority for men, objectification, sexual violence against women, sexual exploitation, degradation of women, women being defined by having a man, and women as not valuing themselves without a man (Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2007; Flynn, Craig, Anderson, & Holody, 2016; Primack, Gold, Schwarz, & Dalton, 2008).

The impact of these messages has been examined with respect to sex-role stereotyping and attitudes toward women (Carpentier, 2014), dating and sexual behaviors (Wright & Qureshi, 2015), misogynistic beliefs (van Oosten, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2015), rape beliefs (Burgess & Burpo, 2012), perceptions of potential dating partners (Carpentier, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Blumhoff, 2007), sexual beliefs (Aubrey et al., 2011), sexual scripts (Stephens & Few, 2007), violence against women (Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995), and state self-objectification, mood, and body satisfaction (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2012). These studies indicate that messages in popular music negatively influence listeners' perceptions of and interactions with women.

In 2016 the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 46 Society for Media Psychology & Technology established the Task Force on the Sexualization of Popular Music. The purpose of this report is to (a) expand the review of current research in the area of music influences, (b) review current guidelines pertaining to music regulation, production, and airing, (c) summarize the history of music guidelines and research on the sexualization of popular music, (d) identify ethnic/racial, gender, biological sex, social class, and age differences, strengths, and vulnerabilities to sexualization relative to exposure to popular music, and (e) provide recommendations for popular music media education and literacy as well as policy and music industry recommendations.

## Methodology

In this report, the task force defined *sexualization*, in accordance with the definition provided by the APA's 2007 Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls report. Sexualization occurs when one or more of the following occur: (1) a person's value is derived solely from sexual appearance or sexual behaviors, (2) physical attractiveness is considered equivalent to being sexy, (3) a person is considered a thing for another person's sexual use, or is sexually objectified, and/or (4) sexuality is inappropriately imposed on another person.

This report focuses specifically on music media, examining popular music (Top Charts), music lyrics, and music videos, as well as more recent ways in which music artists present their brand to consumers. Content in music is considered to be of a sexual nature, or sexualized, if it meets the criteria for sexualization described above. It is important to note, however, that not all sexual content in music is sexualized content.

The task force identified literature published since 1969 related to sexual content in music and its potential influence on consumers. While this report largely focuses on the United States and Australia, it is designed to provide insight to an international audience. We aimed to review all relevant research, consider the exceptional contributions of various methodological approaches, and determine which research conclusions

are supported by multiple research designs. Thus, this report includes a review of research studies that used qualitative and quantitative designs, experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal designs as well as meta-analytic reviews. Both large and small samples are included. Each approach aids in providing a more thorough representation of the sexualization of popular music.

## **Challenges**

Research on the sexualization of popular music is somewhat challenging and includes gaps and weaknesses in the empirical research that has been conducted to date. The various studies reviewed measured sexual content and music sexualization somewhat differently, leading to generalization and interpretation difficulties. Additionally, while some experimental and longitudinal studies have been conducted in this area, the vast majority of research is correlational in nature. This makes determining a causal direction difficult. It may be difficult for researchers to determine the exact direction of a relationship among the variables being examined. Even so, findings related to the impact of sexualized music are nonetheless important. Relationships found in correlational research can later be tested further using experimental and longitudinal designs, and conflicting findings can be resolved by implementing a different research approach (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012; Wong et al., 2015).

Research in this area is extremely heteronormative in nature, failing to consider how sexualized music could influence LGBTQA consumers. The majority of research in this area also focuses on outcomes related more-so to women. The lack of research on impacts on men or the LGBTQA population is an important oversight as popular music frequently includes depictions of men in both lyrical content and related video and television imagery and historically men have outnumbered women in music videos (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Gow, 1996). It is recommended that research in this area expand on the amount and impact of objectification and sexualization of both male and female artists on both men's and women's sexual health outcomes. Further examinations of the lyrics as well as the related imagery produced by male music artists are needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the current state of music content.

## **Current Characteristics of Sexualized Music**

Research has found that women are frequently sexualized and objectified within music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Bretthauer et al., 2007; Flynn et al., 2016; Gow, 1996; Ross & Coleman, 2011; Seidman, 1992; Somers-Flanagan, Somers-Flanagan, & Davis, 1993; Turner, 2011; Wallis, 2011). Additional themes related to sexual references in music includes women engaging in implicit sexual behaviors (Somers-Flanagan et al., 1993), sex as a priority for men, sexual violence, women defined by having a man (Bretthauer et al., 2007), women artists using increased sexual references in music compared to men artists (Dukes, Bisel, Borega, Lobato, & Owens, 2003), simulated sexual acts, and sexual innuendos (Andsager & Roe, 2003). Music genre differences in sexual references have also been found with Hip Hop, rap, soul, and pop music containing higher levels of sexual content compared to other music genres (Bretthauer et al., 2007; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Holody, Anderson, Craig, & Flynn, 2016; Jones, 1997; Primack et al., 2008; Tapper, Thorson, & Black, 1994; Turner, 2011; Wright & Qureshi, 2015). It has been found that music in the United States contains the most sexual content when compared to other forms of media (Pardun, L'Engle, & Brown, 2005) and that sexual content is much more common in the United States compared to other countries (Vandenbosch, Vervloessem, & Eggermont, 2013). Additionally, by examining the studies that have researched the intensity and frequency of sexual content in music, it can be concluded that sexual content in music has increased over time (Baxter et al., 1985; Cole, 1971; Madanikia & Bartholomew, 2014; Pardun & McKee, 1995; Somers-Flanagan et al., 1993; Turner, 2011). In fact, researchers have estimated that between 37% and 75% of music lyrics and videos contain sexual references (Cummins, 2007; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Pardun et al., 2005, Primack et al., 2008; Turner, 2011; Zhang, Miller, & Harrison, 2008).

## **Consequences of Sexualized Popular Music**

### ***Gender Ideals and Identity Development***

There is increasing evidence that exposure to sexual content in music may be impacting children and young people's identity and gender role development (Bosacki, Francis-Murray, Pollon, & Elliott, 2006; Gonzalez de Rivas et al., 2009; Hanna, 1988; Hogan et al., 1996; Middleton, 2001; Morgado, 2007; Russell, 1997; Shuker, 2005; Timmerman, Allen, Jorgensen, Herrett-Skjellum, Kramer, & Ryan, 2008; Wall, 2003), stereotypical gender role attitudes, sex role stereotypic schemas, and gender ideals (Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Kalof, 1999; ter Bogt, Engles, Bogers, & Kloostermann, 2010; Ward, Hansbroughn & Walker, 2005). Additionally, sexualized music is likely to partially contribute to the shaping of children's and young people's sexual attitudes and behavior, which may influence gender role expectations and identity development (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, 2006b; Stephens & Few, 2007; Villani, 2001; Walter, 2010). Young children may also experience premature sexualization as a result of exposure to sexualized music in that they adopt an adult persona in attempt to emulate popular music artists' portrayed image and stage persona (Ey & Cupit, 2013). According to Berk the seeds of identity are planted early, and children draw on role models, including media models, to inform their behavioral repertoire (Hall et al., 2011; Sanson et al., 2000; Timmerman et al., 2008).

### ***Objectification and Sexualization***

Research has found that exposure to sexualized music is related to self-objectification among adolescent girls, which is then related to the development of beauty ideals, body surveillance, body esteem, dieting patterns, anxiety levels, and mathematical performance (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Other survey research has found music video exposure to be significantly related to a stronger drive for thinness in adolescent girls (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996), greater perceptions of appearance importance and weight concerns in ninth-grade girls (Borzekowski, Robinson, & Killen, 2000), feeling less attractive, having less confidence, experiencing lower levels of body satisfaction, and greater feelings of being overweight (Tiggemann & Slater, 2004), increased levels of body dissatisfaction (Bell, Lawton, & Dittmar, 2007), and more negative body image in African American girls ages 14 to 18 (Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2007).

### ***Sexual Attitudes***

Previous research has reported that even when controlling for other known correlates with sexual attitudes, consumption of music television is related positively to the endorsement of sexually permissive attitudes for adolescent girls (Strouse, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Long, 1995) and young women (Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987; Zhang et al., 2008). Similar relationships have been found between acceptance of sex-role stereotypes, especially negative beliefs and attitudes toward women, and consumption of pop music (Strouse, Goodwin, & Roscoe, 1994), hip-hop music (ter Bogt et al., 2010), and music videos (Ward et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2008). Sexually suggestive popular music has also been found to influence social judgments regarding potential romantic partners (Carpentier et al., 2007) and dating behaviors (Gueguen, Jacob, & Lamy, 2010). While the majority of this research has centered on music lyrics, other research has examined how the combination of music lyrics and music videos affect social judgments related to sex and sex roles (Hansen & Hansen, 1990).

## *Sexual Behaviors*

Research has overwhelmingly found that exposure to sexualized music is associated with risky sexual behaviors (Coyne & Padilla-Walker, 2015; Johnson-Baker, Markhan, Baumler, Swain, & Emery, 2015; Martino, Collins, Elliott, Strachman, Kanouse, & Berry, 2006; Peterson et al., 2007; Primack, Douglas, Fine, & Dalton, 2009; Wingood et al., 2003; Wright, 2013; 2014; Wright & Brandt, 2015; Wright & Qureshi, 2015; Wright & Rubin, 2017). The influence of sexualized music on sexual behaviors has been found to vary based on music genre with rap, hip hop, pop, and R&B having more of an effect on risky sexual behaviors compared to other genres (Wright, 2014; Wright & Qureshi, 2015; Wright & Rubin, 2017). It has been suggested that music artists can influence consumers' sexual behaviors not only through their music lyrics and videos but also their public image and brand and social media posts (Wright & Qureshi, 2015; Wright & Rubin, 2017).

## *Sexual and Gendered Violence*

Research to date provides some evidence that music that approves of sexual violence may be a factor that contributes to attitudes approving of sexual violence and to sexually aggressive behavior (e.g., Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995; Johnson et al., 1995; Kistler & Lee, 2009). There are a number of studies examining the impacts of music with lyrics that approve sexual violence or gendered violence. These studies tend to converge to suggest that both long- and short-term exposure to such lyrics may have a subtle impact on long-term beliefs/attitudes and short-term attitudes, including a reduced respect for women and a greater likelihood of approving sexual violence and gendered aggression. (e.g., Aubrey et al., 2011; Hansen & Hansen, 1991; Kaestle, Halpern, & Brown, 2007; Kistler & Lee, 2009; Malamuth, 1983; Peterson & Pfof, 1989; St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991; Rubin, West, & Mitchell, 2001; Strouse et al., 1994). Fischer and Greitemeyer (2006) demonstrated experimentally that these attitudes can translate into actual aggressive behavior.

## **Recommendations**

The Task Force on the Sexualization of Popular Music offers specific recommendations in the following areas: future research, education systems, popular music media literacy, public policy, public awareness, and the music industry.

### *Future Research*

1. Researchers should examine the effects of sexualized music on populations that are commonly omitted, such as men and members of the LGBTQA community. However, it should be noted that the sexualized content in popular music is heteronormative, making examining the effects on these populations somewhat problematic.
2. Researchers should conduct additional research using not only cross-sectional designs using self-reported questionnaires, but also longitudinal designs, experimental or quasi-experimental designs, as well as additional meta-analyses on the effects of sexualized popular music.
3. Researchers should conduct future research more globally, as the majority of research in this area has been conducted in the United States and Australia.
4. Researchers should aim to clearly outline vulnerabilities among populations that may increase the potential negative effects of sexualized popular music.
5. Future research should increasingly be sponsored by government agencies.



### *Education Systems*

1. Formal education regarding music media influence should be a mandatory inclusion in formal school curriculum.
2. Media literacy, including music media, should be introduced at a young age and should be included at every grade level, alongside children's engagement with contemporary music media.
3. Media literacy should cover controversial topics related to media (e.g., violent and sexual content portrayed in music media) in an age-appropriate manner.
4. Sex education taught via the education system should address issues in gender identity, behavioral scripts, and stereotyping portrayed in music media.
5. Educators must reinforce self-esteem based on character and behavior and address sexual self-presentation as seen in music media.

### *Popular Music Media Literacy Recommendations*

Popular music media literacy:

1. should be included in all media education programs.
2. should begin at a young age and continue through the lifespan.
3. should present information based on a consumer's stage in development.
4. should view young consumers as both passive and active consumers.
5. when aimed at children should ensure materials are presented at an age-appropriate level, academic level, and reading level.
6. when aimed at children should include topics related to fantasy versus reality and celebrity stage persona versus real-life persona.
7. when aimed at children should include hand-on activities to demonstrate music creation using instruments and technology, as well as auto-tune and photoshop.
8. when aimed at adolescents should provide means for consumers to create their own music.
9. when aimed at adolescents should provide tools for consumers to decipher and reject overtly sexist messages that may be included in lyrics and videos.
10. when aimed at adolescents should allow the examination of the social functions of music and genre specific histories.
11. when aimed at adult consumers should include a capacity to know and understand the various avenues of music, music ownership, global comparisons of music, and the future of music.
12. should include protectionist resources for parents, caregivers, and educators.
13. should provide tools for consumers to understand stereotypes related to gender, race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality that are present in popular music.
14. should emphasize the social context of music.
15. should provide consumers will tools for control and resistance related to music.
16. should include information and education regarding the music industry.
17. should emphasize that music content results from both the artist and record label.
18. should include a thorough discussion of consumerism and music.
19. should use multimedia resources in its development.
20. should incorporate understanding about music's role in identity formation and presentation.
21. should involve discussion about how music media contributes to creating subcultures.
22. should involve discussion about how music media influences social norms.

### *Public Policy*

1. Legislative bodies and policy makers consider the emerging research related to the negative impact of sexualized music in proposing and crafting public policy.

2. The regulation of popular music content with a regulation body that is independent from the current self-regulation system that is currently in place.
3. The APA encourage federal agencies to support the development of programming to address and counteract the negative impact of the sexualization of popular music on consumers.
4. The APA advocate for funding to support the development and implementation of media education and popular music media literacy programs to specifically address and combat sexualization of popular music.
5. The APA advocate for the inclusion of information about the sexualization of popular music in school health education and other related curricular programs.

### *Public Awareness*

1. The APA, in collaboration with other organizations and agencies, provide parents with resources and information to promote, assist, and support parenting practices and approaches related to popular music.
2. The APA work together with the Ad Council to produce informative and accurate public service announcements describing the negative effects of sexualized content in popular music on consumers.
3. Increasing public awareness of the negative associations between sexualization of popular music and negative impacts on healthy development and general wellbeing.
4. Schools should work in collaboration with public and private organizations to increase awareness of the exposure to, and impact of, the sexualization of popular music on consumers.

### *Music Industry*

1. Revamped music industry parental advisory warning labels which categorize explicit content to better inform consumers, parents, and youth. This categorization should extend to music videos and concerts as well.
2. The broadcasting industry work together with the music industry to explore options for decreasing sexualization in popular music in mainstream broadcasting whilst working to ensure profitability is not compromised.
3. The music industry considers and explores the profitability of music promoting counter stereotypes, positivity, and pro-social skills.
4. The music industry and broadcasting be proactive in seeking feedback about its products and encourage open communication with consumers.

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## Introduction & Overview

There is a great deal of research identifying that children and young people interact extensively with music and that this interaction increases with age (Christenson & Peterson, 1988; Gonzalez de Rivas et al., 2009; Kaestle et al., 2007). For example, Common Sense Media (2013) surveyed more than 1,400 American parents of children age 8 years and under about their children's media use and found that on average children spent approximately 20 minutes a day listening to music. In their research with American tweens (8-12-year-olds,  $n = 1,196$ ) and teens (13-18-year-olds,  $n = 1,462$ ) Common Sense Media (2015) found that 62 percent of teens and 37 percent of tweens listened to music every day. They also found that 34

percent of teens and 24 percent of tweens viewed videos online daily, such as music videos, how-to videos, podcasts and other videos that are not movies or television replays.

Research in this area has demonstrated that interaction with music has not only changed in modality but also in frequency, moving from exposure via music videos and MTV (Christenson, 1992, Kaestle et al., 2007; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003) to downloading, streaming, or viewing music videos on the Internet (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2010; 2016). Advances in technology have made music more readily accessible and geographic distance irrelevant in distribution and dissemination of music (Sen, 2010; Warburton et al., 2014; Whelan, 2010).

In 2010, 2,002 American children aged 8-18 were surveyed about their daily media use including a subsample of 702 respondents who also volunteered to complete seven-day media use diary. This study found that these children and young people were spending over two and a half hours a day listening to music (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). More recent research conducted in 2014, with 2,096 Americans aged 13+, who kept a 24-hour 7 day audio diary to measure their music consumption found that Americans listened to music on an average of four hours each day (Edison Research, 2014). The Generation M2 study surveyed 2,704 American children and young people aged 8-18 years and found that children aged 8-10 years listened to music on average 1:48 minutes a day, 11-14-year-olds 2:14 minutes, and 15-18-year-olds 2:52 minutes (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Research specific to viewing of music videos, conducted with 904 young adolescent Americans (aged 12-15 years), found that the average viewing time of music videos per week was 4.3 hours (Kaestle et al., 2007). In 2016, it was reported that music remains the preferred media outlet of teens, with 66% reporting listening to music daily (Rideout, 2017).

Music consumption is not equally high in all locales. In an Australia survey conducted with 626 adolescents aged 14-17 years, 40 percent of adolescents downloaded music or video clips online in the month of June 2015, and 40 percent streamed music (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2016). Additionally, 28 percent of Australian adolescents downloaded music or video clips and 34 percent streamed music using wireless devices (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2016).

Although music media can be creative and captivating, it can also be a vehicle for detrimental messages about sex and relationships (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008). Many popular music lyrics and videos have become sexualized. Although some music references sexual interests, romantic desires, crushes, feelings, love, passion, commitment, and honor, many songs include demeaning messages of men controlling women, sex as a top priority for men, objectification, sexual violence against women, sexual exploitation, degradation of women, women being defined by having a man, and women as not valuing themselves without a man (Aubrey et al., 2011; Bretthauer et al., 2007; Flynn et al., 2016; Primack et al., 2008). The impact of these messages has been examined with respect to sex-role stereotyping and attitudes toward women (Carpentier, 2014), dating and sexual behaviors (Wright & Qureshi, 2015), misogynistic beliefs (van Oosten et al., 2015), rape beliefs (Burgess & Burpo, 2012), perceptions of potential dating partners (Carpentier et al., 2007), sexual beliefs (Aubrey et al., 2011), sexual scripts (Stephens & Few, 2007), violence against women (Johnson et al., 1995), and state self-objectification, mood, and body satisfaction (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2012). These studies, focusing on heteronormative sexual messages in music, indicate that messages in popular music negatively influence listeners' perceptions of and interactions with women.

Some recording artists have participated in self-censorship; they make radio versions of their songs by altering or bleeping out explicit content. However, research indicates that these lyric censorship strategies are ineffective because listeners may generate some of the censored words on their own using context clues in the song as a guide (Kelly, Goldman, Briggs, & Chambers, 2009). Additionally, labeling media for mature audiences, providing age recommendations, and/or content disclaimers may be ineffective (Frederick, Sandhu, Scott, & Akbari, 2016) or may unintentionally and paradoxically attract youth to age-inappropriate media (Jöckel, Blake, & Schlutz, 2013).

In sum, there is a potential negative impact of exposure to specific types of sexual content in music on a variety of social judgments, sex-related beliefs, and behaviors. Existing efforts by industry and government to reduce exposure to this potentially detrimental content do not appear to ameliorate these possible harms. Therefore, popular music media literacy is perhaps the most viable method of raising consciousness and promoting best consumer practices for music consumption.

### **Task Force on the Sexualization of Popular Music**

The American Psychological Association (APA) Division 46 Society for Media Psychology & Technology 2016 Presidential Task Force on the Sexualization of Popular Music extends the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Music and Media under the auspices of the 2016 Division 46 Task Force on Entertainment Psychology. The Music and Media Committee reviewed current research in the area of music influences as well as current guidelines for music regulation, production, and airing. Based on their findings, the Committee advocated that music media literacy and education, a long-standing goal of Division 46, is the ideal method to provide awareness of potential effects of exposure to sexual content in music as well as best practices for music consumption. Research and current trends in music exposure support the need for music media literacy starting at a young age and continuing throughout life. Literacy related to music must include aspects of understanding, analysis, and reflection on the content based on a consumer's stage in development. Additionally, music media literacy should include means that parents and educators can utilize to protect children and youth.

This report largely focuses on the United States and Australia but given the globalization of music media it is designed to provide insight to an international audience. The United States and Australia were chosen for comparison because they are recognized as culturally similar in relation to media, lifestyle, and consumerism (Craig, Douglas, & Bennert, 2009). Additionally, while those in the United States and Australia report similar sexual histories (Finer & Philbin, 2014), sexual health outcomes are quite different, with those in the United States having more negative outcomes in comparison to those in Australia (Australia Department of Health & Human Services, 2015; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Much of the literature around sexualization and music media has come from both of these countries (Ey, 2017). Additionally, previous research has drawn comparisons between these two countries in relation to sexual behavior and attitudes, the sexualization of youth, and educational practices (Egan & Hawkes; 2008, Ey, 2017; Perloff, 2014; Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 1998).

Considering the nature of this report, it is important to conceptualize and define key terms that will be used throughout. In accordance with the APA's 2007 Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, the current Task Force on the Sexualization of Popular Music defines sexualization as occurring when one or more of the following occur: (1) a person's value is derived solely from sexual appearance or sexual behaviors, (2) physical attractiveness is considered equivalent to being sexy, (3) a person is considered a thing for another person's sexual use, or is sexually objectified, and/or (4) sexuality is inappropriately imposed on another person.

We also focus specifically on music media. Our examination of music media focuses on popular music (Top Charts) and considers both music lyrics (audio and written), music imagery (music television, music videos, other visuals accompanying music presentation), as well as more recent ways in which music artists present their brand to consumers, such as via social media. Content in music is considered to be sexualized if it meets the criteria for sexualization described in the preceding paragraph.

In this report, we (a) expand the review of current research in the area of music influences, (b) review current guidelines pertaining to music regulation, production, and airing, (c) summarize the history of music guidelines and research on the sexualization of popular music, (d) identify ethnic/racial, gender, biological

sex, social class, and age differences, strengths, and vulnerabilities to sexualization relative to exposure to popular music, and (e) provide recommendations for popular music media education and literacy as well as policy and music industry recommendations.

## History and Current Trends of Sexual Content in Popular Music

There have been concerns about overt sexual content in music media and the potential impact on youth culture, in particular, since the rise of commercial music (Street, 2001), generating research in this area. In order to examine the potential influence of sexual content in music, it is important to consider current trends in music in this area as well as how sexual content and exposure to such content has evolved over time in terms of how they have been defined and examined by researchers and how they have been presented in music. It appears that the first examination of music lyrical content took place in 1969. Since then, research examining the sexual content in music has focused on both lyrics and videos and is ongoing.

Overall, research in the past 50 years has varied in the sexual references examined ranging from themes related to love and sex (Cole, 1971; Dukes et al., 2003; Madanikia & Bartholomew, 2014) to overt depictions of sexualization such as provocative clothing, sexual dance moves, or sexual bondage (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Baxter, De Riemer, Landini, Leslie, & Singletary, 1985; Pardun & McKee, 1995). The majority of research in this area has found that women are frequently sexualized and objectified within music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Bretthauer et al., 2007; Flynn et al., 2016; Gow, 1996; Ross & Coleman, 2011; Seidman, 1992; Somers-Flanagan et al., 1993; Turner, 2011; Wallis, 2011). Additional themes related to sexual references in music includes women engaging in implicit sexual behaviors (Somers-Flanagan et al., 1993), sex as a priority for men, sexual violence, women defined by having a man (Bretthauer et al., 2007), simulated sexual acts, and sexual innuendos (Andsager & Roe, 2003). Some research has reported that women artists use increased sexual references in music compared to men artists (Dukes et al., 2003), Music genre differences in sexual references have also been found with Hip Hop, rap, soul, and pop music containing higher levels of sexual content compared to other music genres (Bretthauer et al., 2007; Conrad et al., 2009; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Holody et al., 2016; Jones, 1997; Primack et al., 2008; Tapper et al., 1994; Turner, 2011; Wright & Qureshi, 2015). Country music sometimes contains sexual references; however, some such lyrics are aligned with fulfilling and problematic love relationships (Armstrong, 1986), including sexual content more in reference to romantic relationships (Holody et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Rasmussen and Densley (2017) have also argued that county music lyrics have become more sexual and antisocial over time, and there are some exemplars in the genre of more explicit content such as masturbation, eroticism, and forcible rape (Armstrong, 1986).

Researchers have also found racial and gender differences in how sexual references are depicted in music. For instance, African American music artists are more likely to display sexual content in their music videos in comparison to White artists (Turner, 2011). African American women artists have also been found to dress more provocatively than White women artists (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). Aubrey and Frisby (2011) also found that men artists are more likely to have women background characters serve as decorative objects in comparison to women artists.

In 2012, Hall, West, and Hill conducted an analysis of sexual lyrics from the American Billboard's Hot 100 year-end songs from 1959, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009, with a total of 600 songs. They found that minority artists (20.7%) included more sexual references about both initiating and receiving sexual activity, sexual response, oral-genital sex, and penile-vaginal sex in their lyrics in comparison to White artists

(7.5%). They also found that women artists (6.9%) portrayed less sexual content in comparison to men artists (13.8%). Additionally, for both men and women artists, the amount of sexual content in music increased from 1959 to 2009 (0% to 14.3% for women artists; 11.1% to 32.1% for men artists). Overall, they concluded that song lyrics in 2009 were three times more likely to contain sexual content than songs in 1959.

Researchers that have examined sexual content in various forms of media in the United States have reported that music contains the most sexual content compared to other forms of media (Pardun et al., 2005). Additionally, by examining the studies that have researched the intensity and frequency of sexual content in music, it can be concluded that sexual content in music has increased over time (Baxter et al., 1985; Cole, 1971; Madanikia & Bartholomew, 2014; Pardun & McKee, 1995; Somers-Flanagan et al., 1993; Turner, 2011). In fact, researchers have estimated that between 37% and 75% of music lyrics and videos contain sexual references (Cummins, 2007; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Pardun et al., 2005, Primack et al., 2008; Turner, 2011; Zhang et al., 2008). A summary of the key findings of content analyses of sexual content in music over the past 50 years can be found in Table 1.

Although most research examining sexual content in music has focused on Western samples, finding that sexual content in music is much more common in the United States than in Western European countries (Vandenbosch et al., 2013), other studies have focused elsewhere. In an examination of sexual content in Jamaican music, Rowe (2013) found that 53% of Jamaica’s most popular music genre contained sexual content. Ey (2016) found that of the Australian music videos broadcast on free-to-air TV during times of the day when children may be in the audience, 55% contained sexual content. Additionally, Wright and Rubin (2017) found that Australian pop, dance, and rock music lyrics and rock music videos contain more sexual content in comparison to other music genres.

While research has recognized that the explicitness and frequency of sexualized content in popular music has increased, and that most popular music artists incorporate sexuality into their persona, brand, lyrics, and videos (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Arnett, 2004; Bosacki et al., 2006; Ey & McInnes, 2015; Greeson & Williams, 1986; Hogan et al., 1996; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, 2006b; Villani, 2001; Walter, 2010), more recent research has examined other ways music artists are presented to consumers, such as via magazine covers (Hatton & Trautner, 2013), public image (e.g., photographs from magazine covers, newspapers, Internet news sources) (Wright & Qureshi, 2015), and the artist's use of social media (Wright & Rubin, 2017).

Table 1. *Research Examining Sexual References in Music*

<b>Researchers</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>
Carey (1969)	Rebellion and autonomy were found to be themes in music lyrics, which were speculated to potentially influence the sexual values and behaviors of consumers.
Cole (1971)	Four themes were found in music lyrics: love and sex (71% of songs), religion, violence, and social protest.

Baxter et al. (1985)	Sexual content was included in 59.7% of music videos. Sexual content included wearing provocative clothing (31%), physical contact (31%), sexual dance moves (27%), sexual movement not related to dance (21%), heterosexual courtship (15%), kissing (11%), men chasing women (and vice versa) (11%), using a musical instrument in a sexual manner (8%), sadomasochism (5%), homosexual courtship (2%), and sexual bondage (2%).
Armstrong (1986)	Sexual content in country music is covert.
Seidman (1992)	Objectification and sexualization of women exists in MTV American music videos.
Somers-Flanagan et al. (1993)	Men appear in music videos twice as often as women, that men engage in more aggressive and dominant behavior in comparison to women, that women are often objectified in music videos, and that women engage in implicit sexual behaviors, such as provocative dancing and long lip licking. Additionally, 89% of music videos on MTV contained implicit sex, and an additional 4% contained explicit sex.
Tapper et al. (1994)	Rap, soul, and pop music videos were more likely to contain higher levels of sexual content compared to other music genres.
Pardun & McKee (1995)	Sexual references, as defined by Baxter et al. (1985), exist in 62.5% of American music videos.
Gow (1996)	Women are presented in American music videos based on physical appearance and sexuality.
Jones (1997)	Hip Hop contains the most sexual references in American music videos compared to other genres.
Andsager & Roe (2003)	Sexual content in music videos is increasing in prevalence and intensity and includes simulated sexual acts, sexual innuendos, and provocative clothing (or the absence of clothing).
Dukes et al. (2003)	Categories of love observed in music lyrics were romantic love, feelings of hurt, songs written for a loved one, and sex and passion. They also found that women artists used twice as many sexual references (0.19) per line of lyrics than men (0.08) and that the use of sexual references peaked between 1976 and 1984.
Pardun et al. (2005)	Music in the United States contains the most sexual content in comparison to television shows, movies, Internet sites, and newspapers.
Brethauer et al. (2007)	The following themes are common in American music lyrics: men and power (20%), sex as a top priority for men (18.3%), objectification of women (18.3%), sexual violence (16.7%), women defined by having a man (10.8%), and women not valuing themselves (5.5%).

Turner (2011)	95% of BET's Un:Cut music videos contain sexual content. African American music artists are more likely to display sexual content in their music videos in comparison to White artists.
Ward et al., (2013)	84% of BET videos coded contained sexual imagery. The most common sexual behaviors (of 18 coded) were sexual objectification (58.6% of videos), women dancing sexually (57.1%), fondling self (45.7%), and fondling others (45.7%).
Madanikia & Bartholomew (2014)	80% of songs contain themes of love and lust. Of these, 19% showed purely lust themes and 42% showed the love theme only. Around 20% of the songs showed a combination of both themes.
Holody et al. (2016)	Rap music mentions sex the most in the context of casual sex and sex the most in a degrading way (followed by R&B/Hip-Hop). Country music mentions sex the most in the context of a romantic relationship.
Rasmussen & Densley (2017)	Country music lyrics have become more negative, antisocial, self-focused, and sexual over time.

## History of Music Regulation

### Parental Advisory Label in the United States

The labeling of music based on lyrical content has a history in the United States. The actual parental advisory label (PAL) (Recording Industry Association of America [RIAA], 2016) (see Figure 1) itself came out of Senate hearings in 1985. Almost immediately after the launch of MTV, parents and policy-makers developed concern regarding both music lyrical and video content (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Communication, 1996). This led to the formation of the Parent's Music Resource Center (PMRC) in the 1980's, which was the main proponent of the PAL, under the presumption that exposure to explicit content could be associated with outcomes such as unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, it does not appear that the existing scientific evidence was reviewed prior to coming to such a conclusion (Chastagner, 1999).



Figure 1. Parental Advisory Label (PAL)

After meeting with members of the PMRC, the RIAA agreed to ask its members, roughly 85% of American record companies, to affix a warning label or print the lyrics of songs on the sleeve. Most companies have chosen to affix the label. While both the PMRC and RIAA state that the goal of the label is to better inform consumers, some critics at the time, and now, believed that the goal was censorship (Chastagner, 1999; Snider, 2015). 'Censorship occurs whenever particular words, images, sounds and ideas are suppressed'



(Shuker, 2005, p. 39). However, while some artists engage in self-censorship, no United States legislation has passed that censors music production, distribution, or sales, and the use of the label by artists and record companies is strictly voluntary (Chastagner, 1999). In fact, it is the artist and/or record label that determines if a song contains explicit content, such as strong language or depictions of violence, sex, or substance abuse, and should be labeled (RIAA, 2016). However, some retailers have in-store policies that prohibit the sale of music containing the PAL to those under the age of 18 or others, such as Wal-Mart or Hoguuld Records, that only sell edited versions of music albums (Chastagner, 1999; RIAA, 2016; Strauss, 1996). Some online retailers attempt to do the same (RIAA, 2016). Additionally, according to the RIAA (2016), record companies may, in some instances, request an artist to revise a song due to explicit content or remove it from an upcoming album.

The RIAA (2016) contends that certain music releases contain explicit lyrics, including explicit depictions of violence, sex, and substance abuse. They also agree that this content should be identified so parents and consumers are aware of the content of their purchase. The RIAA continues to administer the PAL program and updates the program as advances in technology change how consumers listen to music. Additionally, considering that the use of the label is voluntary, some music that is labeled may not contain explicit content and some music containing explicit content may not be labeled at all. Furthermore, the RIAA recommends that artists create edited versions of songs that originally contain explicit content. Whereas television, movies, and video games have specific labeling or age recommendations (as per the Motion Picture Association of America, 2016 and Entertainment Software Rating Board, 2016, respectively), there is no content specific labeling or age recommendations for music, only that a song or album contains explicit content.

### **Australian Music Media Codes of Practice**

Roughly 10 years after the implementation of the PAL in the United States, codes of practices relating to Australian music were developed under the Classification (Film, Publications and Computer Games) Act in 1995. These include the Labelling Code of Practice for Recorded Music. The Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA/AMRA) (2003) states that their labelling guidelines support the ‘standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults’ (p. 4), supply consumers with sufficient information to avoid material that may offend them, and support consumers to make informed decisions in relation to content not suitable for children. However, the labelling code for music is only enforced for audio recordings (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2005), as there is no formal classification system applicable to the performing arts or visual arts (Arts Law Centre of Australia [ALCA], 2006), such as music videos, live concerts, and musical performances (ARIA/AMRA, 2003; Classifications (Film, Publications and Computer Games) Act, 1995).

Although there is no code of practice that enforces classification or specific guidelines for concerts the ALCA (2006) suggests that “performances anywhere in Australia that are arguably obscene, indecent or blasphemous risk infringing Common Law and/or the relevant state’s or territory’s criminal legislation” (p. 7). However, they also acknowledge the difficulty in predicting ‘with any degree of certainty whether a particular work will be considered obscene’ (p.7) but do suggest guidelines:

“Determination of what is offensive and what are contemporary community standards involves highly subjective assessments. Issues to consider in determining whether a performance or other work is likely to breach such laws include; the context of the performance or work; the context of any potentially offensive material; the location of the performance or work; the target audience; the manner in which the performance or work is promoted and; the extent to which prospective audience members or prospective visitors are warned of possibly offensive elements” (ALCA, 2006, p. 7).

Although the United States does not have a music labeling system comparable to the rating system for film by the Motion Picture Association of America, Australia has adopted a labeling system for both visual and audio media (see Figure 2) (ARIA, 2014).



Figure 2. ARIA Labelling Code

In comparison with Australian television classifications, level 1 would be defined as not suitable for consumption by children and would reflect an ‘M’ rating (Mature audience recommended) and level 2 would reflect ‘MA15+’ (Mature audience, must be aged 15 years or above or be accompanied by an adult). Only at level 3 of the labelling guidelines is the classification restricted for child consumption. Level 3 would be comparable with ‘R18+’ (restricted to adult viewing only) classifications. Additionally, the ARIA/AMRA also has an ‘Exceeding Level 3’ label for music, which contains content that is not to be sold. However, the Festival of Light Australia (2008) and Parliament of Australia (2013) cites two examples of song lyrics from albums approved for sale by ARIA/AMRA with a level three classification that should have been classified as ‘Exceeding Level 3.’ One is ‘Stripped, Raped and Strangled’ by Cannibal Corpse and the other is ‘The Corpse Garden’ by Prostitute Disfigurement. Both songs depict a serial killer who rapes, tortures, and murders women.

A possible distinguishing feature that allows music to go beyond the visual media classifications is the fact that they are audio. However, the accompanying DVDs and visual content are not, which raises questions as to why music videos are not regulated by the regulations of the Publications, Film and Computer Games Act.

Even so, similar to the United States, record companies in Australia can refuse to distribute potentially controversial records or videos, record companies can refuse to sign up artists that they perceive as lacking in commercial potential, retail outlets can decide not to stock less commercial or controversial artists/genres, and radio stations can choose not to play records that do not fit their general formats (Shuker, 2005, p. 39). Record companies can be seen as the gatekeepers of the music industry because they have the power to hinder new releases reaching the public (Frith, 2001). Many of these record companies make decisions to suppress music artists “based on commercial rather than moral considerations; nevertheless,

their effect may be censorial” (Shuker, 2005, p. 39). An emerging avenue for performers to access their audiences directly has been through the Internet. New releases have been posted on YouTube and have bypassed some of the traditional gatekeepers along the way.

### **Communications Regulation**

Presently the Federal Communications Commission regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable in the United States, in essence regulating music videos on television or music lyrics broadcasted via radio (Federal Communications Commission [FCC], 2016). The regulation of forms of communication has had a long legal battle resulting from attempts to protect the First Amendment of the Constitution. Even so, the Supreme Court has determined that government may make an exception to the First Amendment by censoring speech if it is (1) intended to incite or produce imminent lawless action and (2) likely to incite or produce such action (FCC, 2016). The Court has ruled that such censorship is constitutional because of society’s interests in protecting children from potentially harmful programming (Conrad, 2010; FCC, 2016). However, some have proposed that there is a lack of concrete evidence that exposure could harm children (Rivera-Sanchez, 1995; Ferguson, Nielsen, & Markey, 2016).

Furthermore, obscene material is not protected by the First Amendment of the United States and is not permitted to be broadcast at any time. Material is considered obscene if it meets the *Miller* test: “(1) an average person, applying contemporary community standards, finds that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; (2) the material depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law; and (3) the material, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (Conrad, 2010; FCC, 2016; Rivera-Sanchez, 1995). Indecent and profane material are protected by the First Amendment of the United States and must be allowed to be broadcast. Indecent material has been defined as “language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory organs or activities.” Profane material is defined as language that is both “so grossly offensive to members of the public who actually hear it as to amount to a nuisance” and is sexual or excretory in nature or derived from such terms (Conrad, 2010; FCC, 2016).

Even so, the United States Congress has specified that indecent and profane material can only be broadcast during times of day when it is less likely that children would be in the audience. This is particularly relevant to the airing of music videos on television. The time frame specified when indecent and profane material cannot be aired is between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Similarly, in Australia, commercial television imposes classifications that forbid restricted content being shown at particular times of the day in Australia; for instance, MA15+ classification can only be broadcast between 8:30 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. (Free TV Australia, 2015). Those who violate these regulations in the United States can be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than two years, or both (Conrad, 2010; Rivera-Sanchez, 1995). The FCC may also revoke the license of a radio station, withhold or place conditions on the renewal of a broadcast license, or issue a warning for the broadcast of obscene or indecent content (Conrad, 2010).

### **Artist Self-Censorship**

Many in the recording industry have participated in self-censorship to avoid penalties of regulatory authorities. The recording industry may play radio edits of songs or bleep out words and material that could be considered obscene or indecent by social standards (Conrad, 2010; Kelly et al., 2009). For example, Beyoncé’s ‘Run the World (Girls)’ song clearly bleeps out profanity. The intent of this self-censorship appears to be to prohibit awareness of explicit material and to hinder any negative consequences of such exposure. However, it is unclear if self-censorship is effective in this regard, particularly given that research examining the effectiveness of music censorship is rather sparse. Research that has been conducted in this area suggests that lyrical censorship is ineffective in that listeners can generate some of the censored words

on their own using the context of the song as a guide, often referred to as the generation effect (Gabriel et al. 2016; Kelly et al., 2009). Additionally, labeling media for mature audiences, providing age recommendations, and/or content disclaimers may be ineffective (Frederick et al., 2016) or may have unintended effects in that it may increase attractiveness to age-inappropriate media (Jockel, Blake, & Schlutz, 2013).

Research that has been conducted in this area suggests that censorship is ineffective in that some listeners can generate some of the censored words on their own using the context of the song as a guide, often referred to as the generation effect (Gabriel et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2009). Other research has found no difference in participants' sexual attitudes, or views regarding sexuality and sexual behaviors, after exposure to censored and uncensored sexually explicit music (Sprankle & End, 2009). Additionally, using the PAL or other labelling system and/or censoring music content may increase attractiveness to age-inappropriate media for some young consumers (Jöckel et al., 2013). Censoring music content may even project ideas of inappropriateness onto censored songs or artists (North & Hargreaves, 1999) and may promote negative views on specific music genres (e.g., rap music) (Schneider, 2011). Even with a lack of research backing, music censorship has much support among the general public and policy makers (Lynxwiler & Gay, 2000). Some research suggests that individuals in the general public who advocate for censorship believe that there can be negative effects associated with exposure to explicit content for others but not necessarily themselves (McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997).

## Theoretical Perspectives

Throughout this report the potential impact of music media will be discussed within the context of several key theoretical perspectives. This section provides a brief overview of these theories, including cultivation theory, cultural spillover theory, general learning model, objectification theory, reinforcing spirals perspective, priming, and social cognitive theory.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory addresses the stability of social reality that television themes have on individuals. Cultivation theory specifically states that as individuals are increasingly exposed to a particular media message or perspective, their individual perceptions are subtly “cultivated” toward the likelihood that such messages or perspectives will represent reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). Cultivation theory thus explains a mediated reality where that which is seen or heard most often becomes that which is most believed. Furthermore, cultivation theory posits that media socializes individuals to accept specific attitudes, beliefs, and roles prominently represented in television as social reality. While the original cultivation theory focused on the role of television, more recent researchers have applied cultivation theory to other forms of media, including popular music (e.g., Wright & Craske, 2015).

### **Cultural Spillover Theory**

Leading on from cultivation theory is what Zurbiggen et al. (2007) and Papadopoulos (2010) describe as cultural spill-over theory. This theory proposes that the more a society tends to legitimize a behavior for which there is widespread cultural approval, the greater the likelihood that behavior will spillover into other aspects of life (Baron, Straus, & Jaffee, 1988). Thus, this theory argues that behaviors which have been accepted in one context become justifiable in others. For example, when women present sexually or are objectified in music videos, the spillover effect will justify the objectification of women in other contexts. Another example is the use of physical force to attain ends for which there is widespread cultural approval, typically maintaining a level of social order and obedience, the greater the likelihood that using physical force will spillover into other aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, where using force to

control or dominate is generally not approved (Brown, Straus, & Jaffee, 1988). In direct relation to this report, spillover effects from popular music with violent themes that may be accepted as legitimate for entertainment among listeners, spillover or progress into actual sexual violence considered illegitimate in real life. Indirect spillover effects of themes and lyrics found in popular sexualized music, which may be likewise legitimately accepted in the context of entertainment, spillover into other aspects of social life where such attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are not generally supported or desirable.

### **General Learning Model**

General learning model is helpful in examining the effects of media. This model suggests a strong relationship between media exposure and learned attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Barlett & Anderson, 2012). Specifically focusing on the development of knowledge structures and attitudes derived from exposure to violent media, and their relation to subsequent aggressive behavior, general learning model can also be used to explore the long-term attitudes and knowledge structures formed with continued exposure to any type of media.

### **Objectification Theory**

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides a framework for understanding the experiences of women in cultures that sexual objectify them. This theory proposes that exposure to sexually objectifying experiences from media outlets and interpersonal relationships socialize women to adopt an observer's perspective as the primary view of their own bodies. According to objectification theory, increased exposure to sexualization causes women to view their bodies as objects separate from their person. This perspective, known as self-objectification, results from habitually engaging in body surveillance where individuals monitor their own body in comparison to cultural ideals and expend significant amounts of attention considering how others may perceive their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Even limited exposure to sexualization has been shown to have a significant impact on the initiation of self-objectification (Roberts & Gettman, 2004). Using objectification theory as a framework, a growing body of research has helped illuminate a myriad of negative consequences of self-objectification stemming from media exposure. In particular, a pattern of self-objectification, can lead a woman to sexually objectifying 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 by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (APA, 2007).

### **Reinforcing Spirals Perspective**

Reinforcing spirals perspective theorizes that media use serves as both an outcome variable and a predictor variable in many social processes. Therefore, media use is shaped by social context and individual characteristics which combine to influence many attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Slater, 2015). For example, media content and exposure can influence attitudes and beliefs concerning the appropriateness of aggression to address conflict. Similarly, individual differences, such as one's dispositional need for arousal, work to influence media content consumed and the impact of that media on the individual. Key to the reinforcing spirals perspective is that the process of media selection and effects of exposure to selected media is dynamic and ongoing. Therefore, the influence of exposure to particular types of media content (determined in large measure by social context, social identity, and prior attitudes), will influence subsequent strength and accessibility of social group identification, attitudes, and behaviors, which then reinforce subsequent media choices and spiral back to bolster those associated elements of social identity, attitude, and behavior over time.

## **Priming**

Priming involves stimulating a person's mental representations of events or situations (i.e., schemas) outside of mental awareness, that then influences attitudes or actions (Eitam & Higgins, 2010; Higgins & Eitam, 2014; Loersch & Payne, 2011; 2014). Some research has indicated that if people are aware of the prime, the effect of the prime on attitudes and actions is reduced or even diminishes (Higgins, 1996; Loersch & Payne, 2014). Wentura and Rothermund (2014) concluded that priming had a short-term (e.g., seconds) effect on attitudes or actions, rather than a long-term (e.g., days) effect.

## **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1977) posits that learning is a cognitive process and can often occur purely through observation. Building upon behavioral theories rooted in the stimulus-response patterns of operant conditioning where learning is explained to occur through rewards and punishments, social cognitive theory is inclusive of cognitive processes which take place in various social contexts. A key tenet of social cognitive theory is that one can learn by merely observing (vicarious learning) the consequences of a particular action or behavior (vicarious reinforcement). Cognitive processes included in learning then include observation, extraction of information from those observations, and individual decisions about the performance of the behavior. Learning through observation requires models, often in the form of a person either demonstrating or explaining a desired behavior. Observational learning also includes symbolic models presented in media, typically movies, television, music, and literature. The degree and depth of learning from symbolic models is impacted by attention paid to the model, retention or recall of key behaviors modeled, one's ability to imitate the modeled behavior, and motivation to engage in the modeled behavior. According to social cognitive theory, observation learning, including the symbolic models abundantly presented in various media platforms, is a primary source for the development of outcome expectations, or the anticipated results and subsequent reinforcements of behavior.

# **Consequences of Sexual Content in Popular Music**

## **1. Gender Ideals and Identity Development**

### **Music Media Influence on Shaping Gender-Role and Self-Identity**

Research about music media and gender-role and self-identity formation in children and adolescents is scarce, however, such research began to emerge in the mid-1990s. A number of authors argue that music is an important factor in shaping the identity of children and adolescents (Bosacki et al., 2006; Gonzalez de Rivas et al., 2009; Hanna, 1988; Hogan et al., 1996; Middleton, 2001; Russell, 1997; Shuker, 2005; Timmerman et al., 2008; Wall, 2003). Wall (2003) suggests that 'music is not a separate phenomenon of identity but an integral part of the process of identity making' (p. 161). Music plays a role in how children and young people begin to understand and articulate who they are and helps them define social and subcultural boundaries (Hogan et al., 1996; Wall, 2003). Bosacki et al., (2006) and Russell (1997) claim that music preferences reflect and shape children's and young people's attitudes, values and social identity. A number of studies reported by Russell argue that music influences social identity in numerous ways, such as clothing style, self-presentation, attitudes, and emulation of behaviors exhibited by music idols. It is also argued that music reflects and promotes gender identity. For example, the music and accompanying clip that reflect issues of gender through sexual-stereotyped themes often prime perceptions and influence the mimicry of behaviors and attitudes viewed through the recall of schema (Russell, 1997).

There is increasing evidence that exposure to sexual content in music may be impacting children's and young people's identity and gender role development. (Bosacki et al., 2006; Gonzalez de Rivas et al., 2009; Hanna, 1988; Hogan et al., 1996; Middleton, 2001; Morgado, 2007; Russell, 1997; Shuker, 2005; Timmerman et al., 2008; Wall, 2003). It has been argued that music provides identity models and creates cultures (Cohen, 2001; Gonzalez de Rivas et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001). Cohen (2001) suggests that rock and pop performers construct social and sexual scripts by conveying conventions of expectations for the behavior of men and women and sexuality. She claims that popular music performers who are men tend to portray masculinity and dominance, while women performers portray images of glamour. These social scripts, although stereotypical, are adopted and emulated by music consumers. These social scripts, then, create and perpetuate particular cultures while also shaping identity. However, influence can be reciprocal in that culture also influences music (Cohen, 2001). Bosacki et al. (2006) argue that there are bidirectional influences on music preference in that music can shape attitudes but can also reflect an individual's already-established attitudes and cultural practices. Research suggests that popular music that displays high levels of sexual connotation is likely to partially contribute to the shaping of children's and young people's sexual attitudes and behavior, while also attracting the attention of those seeking sexualized content (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, 2006b; Villani, 2001; Walter, 2010).

It is well established that children and young people acquire social scripts from observational learning from role models, including those viewed in the media (Martino, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, & Berry, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, 2006b; Sanson et al., 2000; Su, St Clair, & Thome-Williams, 2004). According to Su et al. (2004), children and young people try to make their world similar to the world in which they are located. The information they receive from their environment is transformed into their social knowledge and social reality to form scripts. The agency comes from the individual but is driven by the social and cultural environment in which he/she is immersed. Children and young people draw on their social scripts to guide their conduct and to experiment and navigate their conduct within their milieu (Su et al., 2004).

An important feature in whether a child or adolescent will attend to and adopt social scripts from a media character is whether they identify with the character (Richert, Robb, & Smith, 2011). Children or adolescents who identify with a media figure, such as a music artist, are likely to learn from them, whether from watching them on television, listening to their music, or by following them on social media or their fan site. Research by Boden (2006) found that the contemporary overall image and lifestyle of music artists influence identity formation and presentation, noting that children desire to physically imitate their pop star idols. In her interviews with preadolescent children, an 8-year-old boy who liked to wear white singlets, baggy pants, denim jackets, hoodies, beanies and silver key chains, did so to imitate rappers, in particular Eminem. An 11-year-old girl who likes Avril Lavigne and Beyoncé expressed that she liked the casual grungy look of Avril and considers this look fashionable and accessible, and also liked Beyoncé's sexy glamorous look.

It is argued that music media provide role models and, social and sexual scripts, and create cultures. Music is documented as a significant influence on identity formation and, as such, it is important to explore how popular music may contribute to children's and young people's gender role and self-identity development.

### **Preadolescent Children**

Australian research conducted with 72 boys and girls aged six and 10 years of age found that the majority of children identified women music artists, but not men artists, as dressing provocatively, indicating that even young children are establishing sexualized scripts of women singers (Ey, 2014a). Such perceptions transferred into their considerations about how girls and boys should dress, signifying that from a young age, girls are expected 'to focus on their appearance and sexual presentation' (Ey, 2014a, p. 157). The same

study also found that children viewed boys as dominant in play, indicating that these children had already established gender power-inequality social scripts (Ey, 2014a). American research conducted by Starr and Ferguson (2012) ( $n = 60$ ) found that girls between the ages of six and nine showed a preference for sexy clothing and anticipated that social advantages would be generated by looking sexy. The authors proposed that girls may fear social rejection for non-compliance with this sexualized ideal. These studies suggest, that from a young age, children are embracing sexual scripts portrayed in music media in that women are viewed as sexually appealing and glamorous (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Emerson, 2002; Gow, 1996; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008; Papadopoulos, 2010; Somers-Flanagan et al., 1993; Zurbriggen et al., 2007) and men are viewed as hyper-masculine and sexually dominant (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Emerson, 2002; Gow, 1996; Papadopoulos, 2010). It is reasonable then to suggest that music media may be a contributing influence in children's beliefs about gender roles and developing self-identity.

Media can be seen as a powerful cultural force that disseminate culturally shared assumptions, images, values, ideologies and concepts, and views of what the world is like and what is culturally valued (Sanson et al., 2000). Cultivation theory discusses how individual perceptions, values, beliefs and agendas are cultivated through socializing agents such as the media (Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a; Sanson et al., 2000; Zurbriggen et al., 2007). Cultivation theory focuses on the influence mass media have on communities, cultures and individuals, and it asserts that exposure to media supports the construction of social knowledge (Hall et al., 2011; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a; Sanson et al., 2000; Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1998; Zurbriggen et al., 2007). Frequent exposure to a particular media message, perspective, or theme increases the likelihood that this concept will be adopted or accepted as reality, shaping social behaviours and attitudes (Hall et al., 2011; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a; Sanson et al., 2000; Shrum et al., 1998; Zurbriggen et al., 2007). Beauty and sexual ideals are promoted through media and are presented as cultural norms. Sexual attractiveness is linked to happiness, desirability and social status, providing a template for identity formation (Rush & La Nauze, 2006b).

In the primary school years children's evolving social identities are informed by their sense of belonging to social units and evaluating themselves against others, including media characters. At the same time, children are striving to achieve their ideal self (Sigelman, Rider, & De George-Walker, 2016). The ideal self is children's and young people's desired self-identity. If their perceived experiences and behavior align with their desired identity, they are concurrent with their ideal self (Rogers, 1959). When the music industry promotes female sexiness and male dominance as a cultural norm, children are cultivated to accept these values as social reality, which may shape their social behaviors and attitudes to strive to align with these social ideals (Berk, 2013; Hall et al., 2012; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a; Sanson et al., 2000; Shrum et al., 1998; Zurbriggen et al., 2007), contributing to children's identity and gender-role formation.

It is also possible that popular music facilitates premature sexualization among young children as a result of exposure to sexualized music in that they adopt an adult persona in an attempt to emulate popular music artists' portrayed image and stage persona (Ey & Cupit, 2013). For instance, research that observed 366 boys and girls aged 5-14 years in a school disco context found that children dressed and danced in a way that reflected adult sexuality (Ey & Cupit, 2013). This research found that some children directly imitated popular music artists' dress styles and sexualized dance movements, despite having no access to the music video (Ey & Cupit, 2013). This research demonstrates that the behavior repertoires of music artists, including sexualized behaviors, provide a guide for children's conduct.

Children's imitation of popular music media has also been reported by Levin and Kilbourne (2008), who noted their observation of American children 'sandwich or lap dancing; where a girl dances between two boys who press their bodies up against her front and back, and freaking; a dance where a boy and girl grind against each other in a simulation of sexual intercourse' (p. 83). Furthermore, Hamilton (2009) and Levin and Kilbourne (2008) state that Australian and American early childhood teachers report that preschool and



junior primary children are emulating sexualized music artists' dress, jewelry and dance moves, using sexually signified language, and acting out sexually. In consideration of cultural spillover theory, which posits that behaviors that are accepted in one context become justifiable in other contexts, these behaviors may be related to music media (Papadopoulos, 2010; Zurbriggen et al., 2007). While Hamilton (2009) claims that children are commonly naive about what they are saying or doing, Levin and Kilbourne (2008) argue that children who present themselves sexually are more likely to be popular, a factor that may drive this behavior. The latter claim is supported by Starr and Ferguson's (2012) research, which found that young girls associate sexualized dress with popularity. Children's choices about how to express themselves are based on their ideals established by self-socialization, which is informed by their environment (McDevitt & Ormond, 2010). The above research suggests that children emulate sexual presentation displayed by music artists, which may adversely shape their gender role and identity.

### **Adolescents and Young Adults**

In a study with 152 African American students (70% girls) aged 14-18 years, Ward and colleagues (2005) found that those who viewed music videos with high levels of sexual content (i.e., women presented as sexual objects and men portrayed as emotionally unavailable and sexually dominant), held more stereotypical gender role attitudes and assigned greater importance to sexiness in their gender ideals than those who were exposed to neutral music videos, suggesting that music videos are influential in shaping adolescents' gender schemas (similar findings were reported by Kalof, 1999). Research with 496 adolescents (47% girls, 53% boys) aged 13-16 years from the Netherlands found that frequent exposure to youth media, including music videos, was associated with stereotypical gender-role attitudes (ter Bogt et al., 2010). Additionally, a small-scale study which explored 15 African Americans (7 boys, 8 girls), aged 11-13, understanding of sexual scripts used in hip hop (e.g., Diva, Gold Digger, Gangster Bitch) found that pre-adolescents in the study used scripts from hip hop to inform their understanding of typical male and female sexual behavior (Stephens & Few, 2007). Discussion with these adolescents found that they commonly conceived that a woman's preferred sexual script involved being viewed as sexually appealing, but not sexually-aggressive, while men were conceived as being sexually promiscuous. Additionally, the adolescents were able to recognize and discuss how peers emulate these sexual scripts through their behaviors and dress, suggesting that sexual scripts from hip-hop music may be used by some adolescents to inform their gender schemas and identity development.

Australian research with 14 (8 boys, 6 girls), middle school, media studies students, explored music video influence on the construction of gender subjectivity, defined as gender ideologies, thoughts and behaviors that are applicable and subject to feminine and masculine characteristics (Hurley, 1994). Findings revealed that participants used music videos to inform and construct gender identity. For example, the girls used music videos to learn how to dress, dance and be sexually appealing, and the boys, who all played musical instruments, used music videos to construct a band member identity (Hurley, 1994). A four-phase study in the United Kingdom with over 500 boys and girls aged 10-19 years found that music preference was an important signifier of adolescent identity. Adolescents not only drew conclusions about others based on their music preferences, but also used music as a badge of identity as they idealized their self-to-prototype (i.e., striving to reinforce a desired image) with their music style (North & Hargreaves, 1999). These findings also suggest that adolescents use music as a model in which to portray an identity.

Experimental research with 220 American undergraduate men and women, exploring the influence of rock music videos on interpretation of social interactions found that sex role stereotypical videos increased sex role stereotypic schemas (Hansen & Hansen, 1988). Additionally, in an experimental study with 195 American college students aged 18-30 years (87% White), researchers found that men who were exposed to highly sexualized hip-hop music videos expressed significantly greater levels of stereotyped gender attitudes than those who were exposed to low levels of sexualized content. There were no significant differences found for women participants (Kistler & Lee, 2009).

Currently, research exploring the influence of music on children's and young people's gender role and self-identity is emerging, in particular research in America and Australia. More research is needed, internationally, across genres, across methods of interaction (videos/watching, CD/Radio/listening), across cultures and ethnicities, and across age groups to broaden our understanding in this field.

## **2. Objectification and Sexualization**

A great deal of research has examined the influence of media content containing the objectification and sexualization of women. The study of music, music lyrics, and imagery is one area within this line of research and several content analyses have been undertaken to examine the types of messages music lyrics and music video imagery communicate. Collectively, these studies have uncovered the potential for a less than positive influence. As Bretthauer et al. (2007) reported, the following themes are common in American music lyrics: men and power (20%), sex as a top priority for men (18.3%), objectification of women (18.3%), sexual violence (16.7%), women defined by having a man (10.8%), and women not valuing themselves (5.5%). More specifically, music videos have also been found to emphasize the stereotype of women serving as sex objects that exist mainly for the pleasure of male audiences.

These findings can be better understood when taking into consideration the tenets of objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). According to the theory, sexual objectification occurs when women are reduced to being represented only by the sexual value of their bodies. The media focus on the appearance of women more so than any other aspect by sexually objectifying women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This sexual objectification "occurs whenever people's bodies, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from their identity, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing them" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175). Building upon the notion of sexual objectification, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) assert that girls and women have come to perceive themselves based on how they think their bodies appear to others and thus focus on their externally perceivable traits rather than their internal traits. This self-objectification can be a chronic, trait-like tendency; however, it can also become a state when individuals are in certain situations or are exposed to certain stimuli that can temporarily intensify self-objectification by making personal appearance particularly salient (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003). This focus on one's own external traits can develop into a consistent self-conscious monitoring of one's own outer appearance that can negatively impact one's attention to other important tasks and feelings. Engaging in self-objectification can lead to harmful consequences such as feelings of shame and anxiety, an inability to experience peak motivational states, and a disconnect between individuals' external bodies and their own inner bodily experiences. In her review of research on objectification theory and adolescent girls, Tiggemann (2013) argues that existing studies provide evidence that beginning at 11 or 12 years of age, girls are already experiencing self-objectification and its consequences and experience them in much the same way as adult women. Further, while largely neglected in previous research, it appears that sexual objectification and its consequences do not significantly differ between ethnicity or cultural difference (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003).

Frequently sexual objectification occurs through the gaze of others on the woman body, according to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). Given that sexual objectification has been found to be prevalent within the messages communicated in music lyrics and associated imagery, the impact these messages have on individual's self-perceptions and attitudes regarding women have also been examined.

### **Sexual Objectification in Music and Women Consumers**

Both survey and experimental research has been conducted to examine the impact of sexually objectifying music lyrics and associated imagery on girls' and women's body image and results indicate a less than positive influence. Several studies have surveyed girls and women on their amount and type of exposure to

sexually objectifying music content and their perceptions of their bodies as well as other mental health aspects and abilities. For one, Grabe and Hyde (2009) used the tenets of objectification theory to examine the influence of the amount of music television use in surveying 195 American adolescent girls' (89.4% White) levels of self-objectification (conceptualized as body surveillance), body esteem, depressive symptoms, anxiety, and math confidence. Grabe and Hyde found that participants surveyed who reported greater amounts of music television exposure also reported higher amounts of self-objectification. This self-objectification was then found to negatively influence participants' body esteem, dieting patterns, and levels of anxiety. Furthermore, the self-objectification resulting from music television exposure was also related to lower levels of participant confidence in her mathematical abilities, which the authors suggest is related to the very limited variety of roles women are presented in when featured in music videos.

In yet a further application of the tenets of objectification theory, Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2012) took a comprehensive approach to the impact of media exposure on adolescent girls on multiple levels. More specifically, they surveyed 558 adolescent girls between the ages of 13 and 18 from Belgium on their amount of exposure to a variety of sexually objectifying media content, including music television found on MTV, as well as their levels of self-objectification, body surveillance, and internalization of beauty ideals. They found that participants' exposure to sexually objectifying music television was directly related to their reported levels of internalization of beauty ideals. Music television exposure was also indirectly related to body surveillance through internalization of beauty ideals and self-objectification. Interestingly, all of the sexually objectifying media content were directly related to internalization except for primetime television.

Other survey research has found music video exposure to be significantly related to a stronger drive for thinness in adolescent girls (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996), greater perceptions of appearance importance and weight concerns in ninth-grade girls (Borzekowski, Robinson, & Killen, 2000), and more negative body image in African American girls ages 14 to 18 (Peterson et al., 2007).

While participant populations within these studies have primarily consisted of White women, Ward, Rivadeneyra, Thomas, Day, and Epstein (2013) argue that a few studies that have examined African American youth indicate the effects of exposure to music content might differ due to their own ethnic identities and the connections these youth make to music artists. For example, Gordon (2008) examined the level of identification 176 black high school girls reported and their levels of importance of appearance for women. Gordon found that the stronger the identification the girls in the study reported feeling with artists rated as more objectifying, the more importance they reported placing on women's appearance, while those who identified more so with less objectifying music artists the less importance they placed on appearance. Further, a study conducted by Zhang, Dixon, and Conrad (2009) on 111 black undergraduate women and their exposure to 30 popular rap music videos that found the black women in the study who reported stronger levels of ethnic identity experienced differing effects of regular exposure to thin black women in rap videos. Specifically, greater amounts of exposure to these videos was related to higher levels of body dissatisfaction, increased bulimic tendencies, and increased drive for thinness in women who reported weaker ethnic identities, while greater exposure to these videos was related to lower levels of those negative consequences in women who reported stronger ethnic identities.

While not as frequent as survey research, experimental studies have also found negative consequences resulting from exposure to music video content. Prichard and Tiggemann (2012) looked at the simultaneous influence of music videos and exercise in an experimental study on women's perceptions of their own bodies. As music videos are often aired in exercise gyms across the world, the authors sought to test whether videos that are appearance focused influence undergraduate women's body image while they are exercising. Participants included 184 Australian undergraduate students between the ages of 17 and 25 who were randomly assigned to either an exercise group who were asked to exercise on a treadmill while completing the measures or a quiet rest group who were asked to simply stand on the treadmill while completing the

measures. Within each group, half of the participants watched appearance-focused music video clips and the other half watched neutral music video clips. Prichard and Tiggemann found that while exposure to music videos showing thin and attractive women in sexually objectifying ways did negatively impact women's feelings of attractiveness, these negative effects were not experienced by women who were exercising while watching the videos. Women who were in the exercise condition and watched appearance-focused music video clips reported feeling more attractive than the women who watched the same clips but were at quiet rest. However, exercise did not remove the effects of exposure to these videos on women's state self-objectification.

In another experimental study of undergraduate women in Australia, Tiggemann and Slater (2004) found that exposure to music video clips in which female attractiveness and thinness were focused upon resulted in feelings of being less attractive, less confident, lower levels of body satisfaction, and greater feelings of being fat post exposure than the women who viewed clips with no emphasis on attractiveness and thinness. Bell, Lawton, and Dittmar (2007) conducted an experimental study of the impact of music videos including thin, all-girl bands on body image perceptions of 87 high school girls in England. The girls who viewed the thin, all-girl band videos reported greater levels of dissatisfaction with their bodies after exposure compared to girls who listened to the songs but did not view the videos and girls who simply studied a list of words.

Taken together, these studies indicate that messages contained in music lyrics and accompanying visual images of music content have been found to largely objectify, sexually exploit, and degrade women. When exposed to this content and imagery, both college student and adolescent populations have been found to experience a negative influence on their beliefs about women and for female participants, a propensity to engage in self-objectification.

As music television appears to play a vital function in the socialization of young girls, Grabe and Hyde (2009) urge future research in this vein to find ways to encourage positive feelings in women rather than simply focusing on their bodies. The authors suggest that social intervention through media literacy campaigns and activism designed to quell the amount of objectification of women so prevalent in society are crucial to bringing about change. From the findings of studies examining retrospective accounts of adult women's exposure to music video programs at earlier stages in their lives, it appears these campaigns might be most effective when taken part during early stages of girls' lives. For example, Slater and Tiggemann (2006) surveyed 144 women undergraduates in Australia aged 18 to 25 years on their amount of music video consumption (as well as other media such as magazines and television) use during primary school at ages 7 to 12 and during high school at ages 13 to 17. Their results indicated that the participants' retrospective accounts of amount of exposure during primary school significantly predicted their current levels of body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, appearance anxiety, and body shame more so than during high school or current exposure.

### **Sexual Objectification in Music and Men Consumers**

Whereas a great deal of research has examined the sexualization and objectification of women in music lyrics and related imagery and the resulting impact of such content on both men and women, there have been very few research investigations into representation and impact of depictions of men in music content. For one, this is an important oversight as popular music frequently includes depictions of men in both lyrical content and related video and television imagery and historically men have outnumbered women in music videos (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Gow, 1996). Further, Robl and Mulgrew (2016) argued that although men's body image is studied much less frequently than women's body image, research, has indicated that a relatively similar number of men to women experience body dissatisfaction. Mulgrew, Volcevski-Kostas, and Rendell (2014) argued that in addition to adult men, pre-adolescent and adolescent boys also report experiencing body dissatisfaction. Whereas media depictions of women predominantly idealize a thin shape for women, for men the ideal communicated is that of hypermuscularity (Jung & Peterson, 2007). Thus,

research has found that men are concerned about their body weight and muscularity when judging their levels of satisfaction with their own bodies (Hamilton, 2010; Jung & Peterson, 2007). Additionally, in a review of the literature on men's body dissatisfaction, Bond (2008) identified an increase in media depictions of trim, muscular, well-groomed, and sexually objectified men's bodies. Bond noted that such depictions are present in music videos and result in high levels of dissatisfaction, making some men vulnerable to eating disorders, dieting, muscle dysmorphia, steroid use, and cosmetic surgery.

Research in this area has examined the impact of idealized men's bodies portrayed in other media content, such as in print and television advertisements, but there have been very few examinations of the impact of these portrayals within music content. In one of the few experimental studies to do so, Mulgrew et al. (2014) examined the impact of music video clips containing either men with a muscular appearance or men with an average appearance. They found boys that aged 12-16 in Australia who were exposed to the clips of men with a muscular and attractive appearance engaged in more social comparison, reported lower levels of satisfaction with their bodies, lower happiness, and higher levels of symptoms of depression than the boys who were exposed to clips with men of average appearance.

In an experimental study of adult men aged 18-73 in Australia, Robl and Mulgrew (2016) found that male men who were exposed to music video clips depicting muscular and attractive male singers reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction with their bodies than men exposed to images containing scenery only. However, there were no differences in participants' levels of depression, happiness, anger, confidence, or muscle satisfaction. The results of these studies, while few in number, point to the importance of extending research on the amount and impact of objectification and sexualization of both male and female artists on both men's and women's body image. Further examinations of the lyrics as well as the related imagery produced by male music artists are needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the current state of music content.

### **3. Sexual Cognitions and Risky Sexual Attitudes**

To provide an overall context for understanding the theoretical explanations for the impact of sexual music on how people understand sexual behaviors, including permissiveness toward sex, endorsement of risky sex, and interpretation of sex roles, it is useful to understand what the literature says about music, in general. Timmerman and colleagues (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of experimental and survey-based studies that primarily focused on the effects of popular music. The studies covered a range of genres (heavy metal, rap, jazz, folk, pop, rock) and with a variety of themes (e.g., antisocial, violent, sexual). In their meta-analysis, Timmerman and colleagues (2008) noted that the themes presented in music are likely to bias users' moods, attitudes, and cognitions in ways that reflect the music content. Their results indicate the influence of music on thoughts and attitudes tends to be small in magnitude across the survey and experimental studies reviewed (*r*-values between .20 and .30), but the impact of music is nonetheless significant and worthy of the attention of parents, educators, and policymakers alike.

#### **Cross-Sectional Surveys**

Arnett (1991) interviewed and administered questionnaires to 175 White American adolescent boys (average age of 16.9 years) and found that adolescents who consume heavy metal music are disproportionately likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors (see also Brown et al., 2006 about sexual media in general). When controlling for other known correlates with sexual attitudes, a survey of 475 undergraduate college students (55% women) found that young women who listened to pop music also rated higher on sexually permissive attitudes; exposure to soap operas was also a correlate with sexual permissiveness (Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987). Hip-hop and hard house music preferences have also been observed to correlate with acceptance of sex-role stereotypes, according to a survey with 496 adolescents (average age of 14, 47% girls) in the Netherlands (ter Bogt et al., 2010). These studies build

their argument upon prior findings that sexual themes have been frequently observed among the genres relevant to the sexual behaviors, attitudes, and cognitions assessed in the studies.

A second body of research related to the study of sexual music effects has focused on the combination of audio and video messages, namely music videos. Similar to the above surveys, consumption of rock music videos on music television related positively to the endorsement of sexually permissive attitudes for adolescent girls, based on a survey of 214 adolescents (average age 15, 74% girls, 83% White) (Strouse & Long, 1995). Similar relationships were found in a survey of 558 younger adolescents (average age 13, 49% girls, 87% White), in which acceptance of sex-role stereotypes, especially negative beliefs and attitudes toward women, was associated with consumption of pop music videos (Strouse et al., 1994).

Among studies of music videos expressly exhibiting sexual themes, Zhang and colleagues (2008) administered questionnaires to 266 undergraduates (58% women, 76% White) at a Midwestern university in the United States and found that both young men and women who reported exposure specifically to sexual music videos tended to hold permissive sexual attitudes, and to be more accepting of sex-role stereotypes, including negative attitudes toward women. Of course, it is difficult to assess with cross-sectional surveys whether relationships have a causal direction unless there is some component of time embedded within the design. Some scholars have conceived observed associations between popular music consumption and negative attitudes toward women in terms of media selection rather than media effect, meaning that attitudes motivate media choices (Rubin et al., 2001). Longitudinal and experimental studies help address this concern.

### **Longitudinal and Experimental Designs**

Using data derived from the Annenberg Sex and Media Study, Bleakley and colleagues (2008) engaged in a longitudinal assessment of the tendency for sexually active youth to select sexual music and music videos, and then the influence that exposure to sexual media has in the progression of these consumers' sexual activity. A total of 547 participants between the ages of 14 and 16 at wave 1 and a total of 501 at wave 3 (38% boys, 42% African American) indicated their exposure within the past year to a host of specific music, television, magazine, and video game titles, as well as their engagement in a list of sexual behaviors ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse. The most frequently used titles were subjected to a content analysis to evaluate the extent of sexual content in those titles. These findings were linked with each participant's level of exposure, as well as later sexual behaviors. After taking into account other correlates with sexual behavior (e.g., parental monitoring), the combined measure of sexual media consumption at Time 1 (media were combined rather than analyzed separately) predicted engagement of sexual behaviors at Time 2.

Experimental studies provide further evidence of causal direction regarding the link between sexual media exposure and sexual thoughts and attitudes. For example, in an experiment with 152 African-American adolescents (70% girls, average age of 16), Ward and colleagues (2005) found that exposure to rap and hip-hop music videos with gender-stereotypical content yielded stronger endorsement of stereotypical sex roles. Hansen and Hansen (1990) conducted a study with 56 American undergraduate students (66% women) and found that participants who had just seen a rock music video with antisocial behaviors related to sex role stereotypes were more accepting of a later real-world display of a man's antisocial behavior (making an obscene gesture) toward a woman, compared to participants who had seen a neutral video. Additional experimental studies of rap music videos (Gan, Zillmann, & Mitrook, 1997; Johnson et al., 1995) and hip-hop music videos (Kistler & Lee, 2009) have likewise found that the sexual and sex-role themes exhibited in the media content provided to research participants were reflected in those participants' attitudes and social judgments immediately after exposure (stereotypical judgments of women for Gan et al, 1997 and Johnston et al., 1995; participants' own sexual permissiveness in Kistler & Lee, 2009).

## Priming and Assimilation

The body of survey and experimental research of music and music videos, in general, provide the context for understanding the specific impact of sexual music on sexual cognitions, the primary lesson being one of assimilation. That is, if a song conveys a particular sexual theme, such as sexual desire, promiscuity, submission or objectification, the listener of that song is likely to adopt, at least temporarily (within the confines of the study itself), the attitudes and judgments that are similar to or supportive of that theme. To put it another way, music (and media content in general) has the potential to prime, or rather trigger, the ideas being conveyed in the content, which then biases the listener's cognitions and attitudes toward adoption of the primed ideas (Higgins & Eitam, 2014; Loersch & Payne, 2014). The specific studies examining popular music with sexual themes—without the presence of video, have used the notion of priming and assimilation as the primary explanation for effects.

In one experiment, Carpentier (2014) assessed 188 American undergraduate college students (65% women, 86% White) first impressions of job applicants, based on applicant resumes, after exposure to a popular music playlist with either sexually suggestive or non-sexual music lyrics. Although effects were stronger for men, both men and women rated their applicants as more sexy and desirable, yet also more knowledgeable and competent. These effects were mediated by participants' evaluations of the music itself as being sexy—participants had to first recognize the theme, in other words, in order to be biased by the song.

In a later study, Carpentier and colleagues (2007) noted that young adults in Germany ( $n = 66$ , 50% women, average age 22) who had been exposed to popular music with sexual lyrics were primed, such that they rated targets described via online dating profiles as being more sexually appealing compared to participants who were exposed to music with non-sexual lyrics. Again, these studies rely on a basic priming-assimilation model, which is also the primary explanation for the findings by Hansen and Hansen (1988, 1990) with respect to rock music videos, which were argued to prime sex role schemas, increasing the prominence of these schemas in participants' memory and therefore influencing social judgments in the direction of those schemas.

In their experimental study, Gueguen and colleagues (2010) relied on the General Learning Model (Buckley & Anderson, 2006) to explain their observation of music priming effects on dating behaviors. Briefly, the General Learning Model (see Barlett & Anderson, 2012 for additional explanation) posits that repeated exposure to a behavior depicted in media content (e.g., prosocial behaviors), as well as repeated practice of a behavior through media (e.g., in video game play) creates and then reinforces the representation of this behavior in one's mind. This representation includes beliefs about the behavior, attitudes toward the behavior, and emotions associated with the behavior, in addition to specifics of conducting the behavior itself (the script). To the extent that these cognitive and emotional pieces of the represented behavior are triggered in one's mind, for example if a person has just viewed a media depiction fitting with their mental representation of permissive sexual behavior, those cognitions and emotions can influence the person's current decision-making processes, and thus their behaviors. Over time and repeated exposure, the model suggests that these oft-triggered cognitions and emotions can lead to changes in a person's personality.

Gueguen and colleagues (2010) conducted an experiment with 183 single (no romantic partner) undergraduate women in France, in which they found that exposure to a song with romantic lyrics could influence dating behaviors. Compared to the women who were exposed to a song without romantic lyrics, more of the women exposed to romantic music gave a man confederate their phone number five minutes after exposure. It should be noted that this study focused on lyrics that were not overtly sexual; one line mentions watching a woman in her sleep, another line alludes to sexual activity via a repeated mention of not wanting to sleep, and a third line suggests embrace by indicating her opening her arms. It should also

be noted that willingness to be contacted for a date might or might not suggest a shift in how these women were understanding sexual behaviors (i.e., being more permissive or risky in their outlooks).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the explicitness of the sexual content in music lyrics might not intensify assimilation effects (Sprankle & End, 2009); merely recognizing a sexual theme might be sufficient to trigger the concept in one's mind (Carpentier, 2014). In fact, not all studies find an impact of music on attitudes or cognitions. Sprankle and End (2009) conducted an experiment with 129 American undergraduates (60% women, 81% White), in which participants were assigned to hear a single rap song with sexually explicit lyrics, the same song censored for the sexually explicit lyrics, a different song by the same artist without sexual lyrics, or no music (a control condition). They found no differences in attitudes toward premarital sex, perceptions of peer sexual activity, or attitudes towards women, based on song condition. These outcomes suggest that more research is needed to verify the robustness of the priming effects of popular music on a variety of sex-related attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. For instance, the study by Sprankle and End (2009) might be qualified by its particular nature of sexual content (it might have been seen as extreme), as opposed to the suggestive, yet non-explicit content in other studies.

### **Physiological Arousal**

Although it is unclear whether the explicitness of sexual lyrics impacts priming effects, Hansen and Krygowski (1994) have provided promising evidence that physiological arousal might serve as an intensifier of music priming, at least generally. In two experiments using undergraduates as participants ( $n = 86$  for Study 1,  $n = 163$  for Study 2), Hansen and Krygowski (1994) replicated Hansen's prior findings on rock music videos, in that exposure to videos featuring sexual objectification led to greater reflection of those sex-object schemas in subsequent judgments of others, and the authors also showed that participants' physiological arousal intensified that reflection. Namely, participants who were subjected to engage in physical activity (the physiological arousal condition) seemed to be more strongly affected by the music themes than the other participants who did not engage in physical activity. Note that the arousal induced in this study came external to the music itself.

However, the findings by Hansen and Krygowski (1994) shed light on the observation that music yield their effects on listeners by first inducing emotional responses. To this end, Hansen and Krygowski's (1994) findings require replication, with music eliciting emotional responses. However, it is unclear what specific qualities of popular music universally elevate physiological arousal in a manner that would be similar to the application of physical activity. Gowensmith and Bloom (1997) assigned 137 undergraduates to either listen to heavy metal (half liked heavy metal, half preferred country music) or listen to country (half liked country, half preferred heavy metal) and then provide a self-report of their levels of arousal and anger. They found that all participants who listened to heavy metal reported high levels of arousal, suggesting a genre effect. Heavy metal listeners who preferred country music reported the highest levels of anger, suggestive that a mismatch with preferences might also induce arousal due to this negative emotion.

However, in their two experiments using skin conductance as a physiological measure of arousal on undergraduate participants, Carpentier and Potter (2007) did not find differences in physiological arousal based on music genre alone. Across their two studies ( $n = 25$  for each) a main effect of tempo was observed, in which faster music overall seemed to elicit greater arousal than slower music. This main effect was complicated by genre, in that the greatest effects of tempo were seen for classical music but not for rock.

Transcending genre, instrumental music identified by listeners as being emotionally powerful has been found to increase the listeners' physiological arousal (Rickard, 2004), which again suggests that music effects might be contingent upon the ability of the song to effectively trigger the desired cognition or affect. Clearly, there are many unanswered questions with regard to what elements of popular music are the greatest drivers of assimilative effects seen on listeners' social judgments, attitudes, and beliefs related to



sex and sex roles. Yet, the evidence is compelling that popular music, in its various forms, plays at least a small, yet significant part in influencing how adolescents and young adults form judgments and attitudes related to sex.

#### **4. Music Content and Sexual Behaviors**

Popular media are believed to play a critical role in the sexual socialization of young people in that adolescents consider the media to be an important tool for learning information about sexual activity and intercourse (Brown, 2008; Zhang et al., 2008). Music, in particular, is a form of popular media that emerges as an entertainment tool and area of interest during early adolescence (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005; Stevenson & Zusho, 2002) and continues through emerging adulthood (Behance, 2013; Newman, 2009; Ross, 2006) when there is a focus and emphasis on identity development (ter Bogt & Soitos, 2007; Thomas, 2016).

Young people interact with media in complex ways and may seek out sexualized media to satisfy curiosity and to obtain information related to sexual practices (Bale, 2011). Exposure to sexual content in music, then, may influence sexual behaviors through priming (Knobloch-Westerwick, Musto, & Shaw, 2008) in that those who are exposed to sexual content in music see the depictions of sexual behaviors in music as realistic, influencing their attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual relationships.

Furthermore, repeated exposure to sexual content in music may blur the line between reality and fantasy for fans (Agbo-Quaye & Robertson, 2010). Additionally, musicians may create a false reality regarding sexual activity and potential negative consequences based on how they depict and endorse such behaviors through their music (Beullens, Roe, & Van den Bulck, 2012; Wright & Qureshi, 2015). Fans are then more likely to make decisions, adopt attitudes and ways of thinking, and behave similar to the content that they are exposed to in music (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008; Kohn, 1969; 1983). Exposure to media containing sexual content may also subconsciously influence cognitive processes and the development and strengthening of sexual schemas (Doornwaard, van den Eijnden, Johnson, & ter Bogt, 2014).

There has been a variety of research that attempts to examine the association between sexual content in music and outcomes related to sexual behavior. The majority of research in this area include cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. Interestingly, while there are several meta-analytic reviews that have examined the effects of sexual content in media and sexual health outcomes only one meta-analysis to date specifically focuses on music (Wright & Centeno, 2018).

Wright and Centeno (2018) examined a total of 26 studies that were published between 2000 and 2017 that examined the influence of music lyrics or music videos on sexual attitudes and behaviors. They found that the overall effect size of music lyrics and videos on sexual behaviors was 0.16 and 0.25 for sexual attitudes. Participant ethnicity, biological sex, age, location, and study design were found to be significant moderators of the effect of sexual content in music lyrics and videos on sexual behaviors. Considering Cohen's (1988) effect size benchmarks, the overall effects can be considered small even though the effect for sexual attitudes approached 0.30, which is the cutoff point to be considered a medium effect. Additionally, both effects were larger than 0.10, which is the minimal level for the effect to not arise from inconsequential effects. Even so, even small effects (e.g., 0.03) can have important real-world implications (McCartney & Rosenthal, 2000), highlighting the importance of the effects reported in this meta-analysis.

#### **Cross-Sectional Designs**

Several cross-sectional designs have been conducted on the relationship between sexual content in music and sexual behaviors. Many of these have administered one-time questionnaires to emerging adults and then have used both participants' self-reported music consumption habits along with content analysis to

estimate participants' exposure to sexual content in music. For instance, a series of studies by Wright and colleagues have based exposure to sexual content in music (e.g., lyrics, videos, public image, social media) on measures of content analysis using the frequency method for a series of songs (or photographs, videos, social media posts) performed by the top artists rated by participants. In these studies participants have been given the option to select their favorite artists from the Top 40 charts. A series of artists have then been used to represent various music genres (e.g., rap, R&B, pop, rock, country, hip hop, dance). Music was coded for sexual behavior and body language, sexual language, and demeaning messages. Total exposure variables were created for the various aspects of music (e.g., lyrics, videos), often separated by music genre.

Using this method, Wright (2013) conducted two separate studies and found that participants from non-continuously intact homes report engaging in risky sexual behaviors (e.g., number of sexual partners, relationship cohabitation history) more than their counterparts from continuously intact homes and that increased exposure to sexual content in hip hop, pop, and R&B lyrics could partially explain this relationship. Study 1 included 366 undergraduate college students (77% women, 85% White) from a Midwestern public university in the United States and study 2 included 729 undergraduate college students (63% women, 70% White) from a southeastern public university in the United States. A follow-up study that included 357 undergraduate college students (75.9% women, 63% White) reported similar findings (Wright & Brandt, 2015). Results from hierarchical regression analyses found that sexual lyrical content in music moderated the relationship between parental marital status and sexual behaviors. Additionally, results from a Test of Joint Significance (TJS) concluded that sexual lyrical content in music mediated the relationship between sexual attitudes and risky sexual behaviors (Wright & Brandt, 2015).

Another study examined the immigrant paradox regarding sexual behaviors (e.g., number of dating, sexual partners) of 173 Hispanic emerging adults in the United States (61.8% women) from South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central America, and Mexico (Wright, 2014). The immigrant paradox is a phenomenon whereby subsequent generations of immigrants' experience more detrimental outcomes, compared with their first-generation immigrant counterparts (Raffaelli, Kang, & Guarini, 2012; Rumbaut, 1997). Previous research has documented the immigrant paradox in regard to sexual behaviors of immigrants, with later generations demonstrating an increase in risky sexual behaviors (Abraido-Lanza, Armbrister, Florez, & Aguirre, 2006; Choi, 2008; Harris, 1999; McDonald, Manlove, & Ikramullah, 2009; Raffaelli et al., 2012; Trejos-Castillo & Vazsonvi, 2009). Wright (2014) specifically examined how sexual behaviors were associated with sexual content in music lyrics based on music genre (i.e., hip hop, pop, R&B). Results indicated that the influence of sexual content in music varied with participant gender, family structure, and generational status (Wright, 2014).

Wright and Qureshi (2015) implemented this research approach and surveyed 729 American college students (62.7% women, 53.4% White, 24.0% Hispanic, 7.8% African American, 5.3% Asian, 9.5% other). They found that sexual content in music lyrics, videos, and the public image of artists (i.e., artist photographs from currently shelved magazine covers, newspapers, Internet news sources) were related to the dating and sexual behaviors of participants (e.g., number of dating, sexual partners). However, this relationship varied based on music genre. For instance, results indicated that as sexual content increased in rap music lyrics, age at first date, age at first boy or girlfriend, age at first sexual encounter, and age at first intercourse decreased and the number of sexual partners increased. However, as sexual content increased in pop music lyrics, age at first date increased, and as sexual content increased in country music lyrics the number of sexual partners decreased. Additionally, as sexual content increased in pop music videos, so did the number of dating partners and as sexual content increased in country music videos the number of dating and sexual partners decreased. Similar results were found for the public image of music artists.

Using this method to examine the relationship between sexual content in music and sexual behaviors internationally, Wright and Rubin (2017) examined the relationship between sexual content in music and sexual cognitions and risk among emerging adults in both the United States and Australia. American

participants included 902 college students (71.7% women, 68.0% White). Australian participants included 514 college students (78.4% women, 91.8% White). Results found that sexual content in music lyrics, videos, and social media posts were related to negative sexual cognitions, such as dominance themes for men and submission themes for women (see also Moyano & Sierra, 2014), and increased sexual risk (e.g., casual sex or ‘hook ups,’ multiple sexual partners, using substances prior to a sexual encounter, not practicing safer sex) among participants from both countries. Variations based on music genre, similar to that of Wright and Qureshi (2015) were also found.

These findings are correlational and do not imply causation. It is difficult for the researchers to determine the exact direction of the relationship among the variables examined. Even so, findings such as these are nonetheless important. Relationships found in correlational research can later be tested further using experimental and longitudinal designs, and conflicting findings can be resolved by implementing a different research approach (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012; Wong et al., 2015).

### **Longitudinal Designs**

Longitudinal studies focusing on sexual content in music and sexual behaviors have also been conducted. One of the earliest examples of such a study was conducted by Wingood and colleagues (2003). They surveyed 522 African American adolescent girls, aged 14-18 years, from the Southeastern United States over a 12-month period. Participants were asked to estimate the number of hours they viewed rap music videos daily, as well as the type of videos watched (i.e., gansta, bass, hip hop), and where and with whom they viewed the videos. Participants were also assessed on a number of health risk behaviors, including number of sexual partners and condom use. Participants were also tested for three sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (i.e., chlamydia, trichomoniasis, gonorrhea). Results indicated that those who reported greater viewing of rap music videos were two times as likely to have had multiple sexual partners and 1.5 times as likely to test positive for a STI. In a subsequent analysis of the same data, Peterson and colleagues (2007) found that those who perceived more portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos were more likely to report having multiple sexual partners as well as other adverse health outcomes.

In 2006, Martino and colleagues conducted a national longitudinal telephone survey of almost 1,500 American adolescents (47% girls, 68% White). Participants were interviewed first when they were between 12 and 17 years of age and then again one and three years later. Participants answered questions related to their sexual behaviors and music listening habits at each time period. Content analysis was conducted on music lyrics to identify songs as containing or not containing explicit sexual content. Results indicated that, after controlling for other variables that could influence sexual behavior, those who listened to more music containing degrading sexual content (i.e., depictions of sex-driven men who are competing with one another for women who are viewed as sexual objects or conquests whose value is based on physical appearance; portrayal of men as sexually insatiable and women as sexual objects) at Time 2 and those who spent more time listening to music at Time 2 were more likely to initiate sexual intercourse and engage in other forms of sexual behavior (other than intercourse) at Time 3. Results also found that exposure to nondegrading sexual lyrics at Time 2 was also associated with sexual intercourse initiation at Time 3 but not engaging in other forms of sexual behavior (other than intercourse) at Time 3.

Primack, Douglas, Fine, and Dalton (2009) focused on sexual content in music lyrics on the sexual behaviors of adolescent participants who completed school surveys in two consecutive years. Sexual content in music lyrics was computed with reported overall music exposure and content analyses of participants’ favorite artists’ songs. Participants included 711 American teens with an average age of 15 years (54% women, 56% African American). Results indicated that those adolescents who reported the most exposure to sexual content in music lyrics were more than twice as likely to have had sexual intercourse, after adjusting for potential covariates.

Johnson-Baker and colleagues (2015) conducted a longitudinal study examining the relationship between hours spent listening to rap music in the seventh grade and sexual initiation in the ninth grade, with perceived peer sexual behavior as a potential mediator. The researchers used longitudinal data from a school-based randomized control trial that evaluated the effectiveness of a middle-school sexual health education curriculum in the Southern United States. Participants included a total of 443 minority students (38.4% Black, 45.6% Hispanic, 16.0% other), 36.8% of which were men and 63.2% women. Results indicated that rap music use in the seventh grade was a predictor of sexual initiation in the ninth grade. Findings also indicated that this relationship was mediated by perceived peer sexual behavior.

Coyne and Padilla-Walker (2015) conducted a one-year longitudinal study examining associations between listening to specific content in music, including sexual content, and behavior outcomes among adolescents. Participants included 548 American adolescents with an average age of 15.32 years (52% women, 74% White) who completed questionnaires on music preferences, media use, and sexual outcomes, among other variables, at two different time periods, one-year apart. Results focusing on exposure to sexual content in music found that listening to sexual content in music (at Time 1) was associated with earlier initiation of sexual intercourse and a trend for a higher number of sexual partners (at Time 2).

Frison, Vandebosch, Trekels, and Eggermont (2015) conducted a longitudinal three-wave panel study using an interval of 6 months among 762 Belgium adolescents aged 12- to 15-years-old (66.7% boys). At each wave, participants completed questionnaires related to their music television exposure (i.e., how often they watched MTV music videos and other music television programs in Belgium), perceived peer sexual norms, and sexual behaviors. Their findings indicated that the relationship between exposure to sexual content in music videos and sexual behavior was mediated by adolescent gender. Music television exposure directly affected the sexual behavior in boys. However, for girls, sexual behavior directly influenced their music television exposure. Also, an indirect impact of sexual behavior on adolescent music television exposure through perceptions of the sexual behavior of boy peers was found. Sexually active boys and girls believed that many of their peers were also sexually active. For boys, the perceptions of the sexual activities of same-gender peers resulted in increased music television exposure. For girls, however, the perceptions of the sexual activities of boys resulted in decreased music television exposure.

The majority of research to date in this area has lent similar results in that they have repeatedly concluded that exposure to sexual content in music is associated with engaging in risky sexual behaviors. Numerous researchers, regardless of the type of study conducted and methodology used, have found that sexual content in popular music may influence the sexual behaviors of both adolescent and emerging adult consumers.

## **5. Sexual and Gendered Violence**

In the last two decades, there has been an increase in the availability and popularity of music with themes that approve sexual violence (Warburton, 2012, 2014; Warburton et al., 2014). This trend is most notable in the growing popularity and mainstreaming of rap music, a genre where lyrics approving sexual violence are more common. Such themes are also prominent in some heavy metal genres (such as death metal), where extreme lyrics approving rape, dismemberment during sex, and necrophilic sex are not uncommon, and where extreme content has become more easily available with 24/7 access to high-speed internet services via a range of portable devices (e.g., Warburton et al., 2014; Whelan, 2010).

Although research into the impacts of music with violent and sexually violent themes is still relatively sparse, findings to this point tend to suggest that music that implicitly or explicitly approves sexual violence or violence toward women can subtly change the attitudes (and perhaps behavior) of the listener. These changes may manifest as attitudes more approving of such violence, or a greater willingness to aggress towards women. Most of the studies involve brief and mild short-term effects, usually in a laboratory setting, and more research is needed to confirm these effects in the real world, and to examine whether such

changes become embedded into personality over time. Nevertheless, the findings to date provide some evidence that music that approves of sexual violence may be a factor that contributes to attitudes approving of sexual violence and to sexually aggressive behavior (e.g., Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995; Johnson, Jackson & Gatto, 1995; Kistler & Lee, 2010).

Before reviewing these findings in detail, it is important to note that in this section, studies which use either music alone or a music video clip will not be distinguished. This choice is done for simplicity, and seems a reasonable approach given research suggesting that music lyrics with violent content likely has a similar effect on behavior with or without an accompanying video clip (Brummert Lennings & Warburton, 2011).

Before reviewing findings, it is also important to suggest possible psychological mechanisms by which sexually violent music may influence attitudes and behavior. It seems likely that listeners can learn from the music they hear through the key learning mechanisms (associative learning, operant conditioning and social cognitive) and that music lyrics can add to and/or change people's beliefs, attitudes, feelings and schemas about the world. These changes may translate into aggression towards women through the activation of aggression-related concepts, scripts and action plans in the person's neural network, emotional desensitization to the suffering of others, dehumanization and imitation (among others), The General Aggression Model (GAM: Anderson & Bushman, 2002, see also Warburton & Anderson, 2015) incorporates all of these factors into its explanation of instances of human aggression. In the GAM, the person brings their personality, biology and learned experiences to any situation. If the situation has the right trigger, the person may have aggressive cognitions and/or hostile affects activated in their neural network, and these may also be influenced by levels of physiological arousal. This activation can lead to an impulse to aggress, which may be acted on immediately (and perhaps moderated). Factors that increase aggressive beliefs and attitudes, or which create aggressive schemas or scripts for behavior, can increase the predisposition to aggress. In the GAM, environmental cues, activated cognitions, emotional state and levels of arousal are all important in determining whether someone will aggress in the moment.

In the last 15 years, findings have been more consistent in the research examining aggressive lyrics, and sexually aggressive and misogynistic lyrics (Warburton et al., 2014). However, early research findings were somewhat mixed, and reviews of these findings have suggested that there may have been methodological issues around poor clarity of lyrics in the songs used and a failure to hold physiological arousal constant (e.g., Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003). In terms of the GAM, poor lyric clarity would impact the activation of relevant cognitions and holding arousal constant is important because it is a key predictor of aggression. Arousal may also be relevant because the arousal produced by listening to some music has been theorized by some to intensify the assimilation effects of the themes found in that music. Musical tempo has been found to increase psychophysiological measures of arousal (Dillman Carpentier & Potter, 2007; Holbrook & Anand, 1990) and might explain, in part, why pop music has been shown to increase physiological arousal, compared to the arousal effects of classical music (Kellaris & Kent, 1993). It should be noted however that in some studies tempo variation in music did not generate differences in self-reported arousal and did not moderate the effects of musical theme (violent or prosocial lyrics) on social judgments related to sex and sex roles (Pieschl & Fegers, 2016).

### **Attitudes toward Women and Sexual and Gendered Violence**

In research examining the impact of music with misogynistic and sexually violent themes, the largest body of empirical work has examined its influence on the attitudes and beliefs of listeners. There are a number of studies examining the impacts of music with lyrics that approve sexual violence or gendered violence. These tend to converge to suggest that both long- and short-term exposure to such lyrics may have a subtle impact on long-term beliefs/attitudes and short-term attitudes, including a reduced respect for women and a greater likelihood of approving sexual violence and gendered aggression. The earliest such studies were conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

An early American study by Peterson and Pfof (1989) exposed 144 men participants to music videos that were erotic-violent, erotic-nonviolent, non-erotic-violent, or non-erotic-nonviolent, and then measured affect, arousal, rape myth acceptance, sexual stereotypes, acceptance of interpersonal violence and adversarial sexual beliefs (beliefs that women manipulate and exploit men and that men need to dominate women in order to avoid this). Participants who viewed non-erotic-violent rock music reported significantly higher adversarial sexual belief scores and an increase in negative affect compared to other groups. It should be noted here that a previous laboratory study by Malamuth (1983) has shown that higher adversarial sexual beliefs in men predicted aggression against women.

St Lawrence and Joyner (1991) exposed 75 emerging adult American men participants to one of three types of music – rock music with sexually violent lyrics, Christian rock music, and classical music. They found that both rock genres increased men's sex-role stereotyping and negative attitudes toward women, suggesting that musical characteristics rather than lyrics were responsible for this effect. These results are a little hard to decipher because there is some question as to the interpretability of the lyrics, and the participants with a stronger religious orientation also reported higher levels of stereotyped and negative attitudes toward women prior to the experimental manipulation.

In 1991, Hansen and Hansen surveyed 96 American emerging adult undergraduate students (66 women, 30 men) and separated them into fans and non-fans of heavy metal and punk music. They then surveyed various personal characteristics and assessed the degree to which participants estimated the prevalence of various social phenomena. They found that heavy metal fans had lower respect for women in general, estimated date rape at much lower levels than other groups and were more likely to agree that young men need sex even if coercion of women is needed to obtain it. The authors interpreted the lower estimates of date rape to likely reflect a reduced recognition that date rape and sexual coercion are unacceptable behaviors.

Strouse and colleagues (1994) surveyed 558 American early adolescents (age 11-16, 50.2% boys) about their attitudes toward sexual harassment. The adolescent boys had attitudes that were significantly less rejecting of sexual harassment than the attitudes of adolescent girls. However, for girls, greater exposure to pop music and music videos predicted reduced rejection of sexual harassment, and girls who were heavily exposed to pop music had attitudes toward sexual harassment that differed little to the attitudes of comparable boys.

A study by Barongan and Hall (1995) had 54 American undergraduate college men students listen to misogynistic or neutral rap music and then watch three 2-minute vignettes from the film '*I spit on your grave.*' One vignette was neutral, one depicted a woman being raped (sexually violent) and the other a semi-nude woman being assaulted and abused (violent and sexual). Participants then chose a vignette to show to a woman confederate. Those who had listened to the misogynistic music were significantly more likely to choose the assaultive (violent and sexual) vignette, despite participants reporting that showing such a vignette to the woman confederate would be distressing and discomfiting for them.

Two studies conducted in 1995 by Johnson and colleagues in the United States examined attitudes toward sexual aggression after exposure to rap music. Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto (1995) tested the impacts of exposure to violent rap music on various attitudes in 11-16-year-old African American boys. Participants were shown rap music videos that were either violent or non-violent or were not shown a music video at all. Afterwards they read one of two vignettes. One depicted a man grabbing and pushing his girlfriend after she chastely hugged and kissed a friend who was a man in greeting, and then aggressing against the friend. The other was about two young men with differing approaches to success. Participants were then asked questions about the vignettes and whether they would behave similarly themselves. Participants in the violent rap music condition later expressed greater acceptance of violence, reported being more likely to engage in actual violent behavior, and expressed greater acceptance of violence towards women.

Johnson, Adams, Ashburn and Reed (1995) tested African American adolescents' attitudes toward teen dating violence after either watching a non-violent rap music video in which women were in sexually subordinate roles or seeing no video (i.e., there was a 2 [boys vs girls] \* 2 [video vs no video] between-subjects design). Participants then read a vignette in which there was teen dating violence perpetrated by a boy and then asked whether the boy should have pushed and shoved the girl (from 1= *Definitely No* to 9 = *Definitely Yes*). The greatest approval of teen dating violence was in the two groups (boys and girls) who watched the rap video. However, the endorsement of boys in the no-video control group was only slightly less than boys who saw the video (*Ms* 3.0 vs 3.6, difference non-significant), while the girls in the control group endorsed such attitudes significantly less (*Ms* 1.3 vs 3.7). Although seeing the rap video may have caused girls in that group to become more approving of date violence it is not clear why this did not occur to the same extent for boys. The authors contend that the boys may have already condoned dating violence to some extent, with the vignette thus having less effect on them. It should be noted that the mean for no group reached the 5.0 midpoint between 'definitely no' and 'definitely yes' and it may be that there was a ceiling effect whereby participants did not want to cross the midpoint and thus demonstrate clear acceptance of the violence.

Wester, Crown, Quatman, and Heesacker (1997) had 60 emerging adult American undergraduate men students either listen to sexually violent 'gangsta' rap music that had (a) sexually violent lyrics, or (b) was the same song without the lyrics; or to (c) read violent lyrics without the music, or (d) experience no music and no lyrics. Following exposure, the groups did not differ in their levels of sex role stereotyping or sexual conservatism, but there was a significant main effect whereby participants exposed to violent lyrics (groups a and c) had significantly higher adversarial sexual beliefs than participants from the no lyrics groups (b and d).

Rubin and colleagues (2001) surveyed 243 undergraduate college students with an average age of 21.58 years (52.7% women) and categorized them by preferred music genre (alternative/pop, classic rock, dance/soul, country, rap, heavy metal). They then compared groups for dispositions (anger, self-esteem), aggressiveness, trust, and attitudes toward women. Compared to other genres, heavy metal and rap listeners were more aggressive and less trusting, and heavy metal listeners had less regard for women as measured by the *Attitudes to Women Scale* (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973). In discussing their findings, Rubin and colleagues note that Weinstein (1991) and Walser (1993) had already found the lyrics of heavy metal music to be "preoccupied with male dominance, and, to a lesser extent, female submission" (p. 37), and concluded that in their study heavy metal listeners appeared more likely to "hold women in subordinate positions regarding societal roles and rights" (p. 37). That is, they implied that heavy metal lyrical content may have become internalized by listeners.

A study conducted by Kaestle and colleagues (2007) addressed the issue of sexual violence more directly. They asked 904 12-15-year-old adolescents from the United States about their media use and rape acceptance. In their study a surprising number of students (8.1% of women, 14.2% of men) disagreed or strongly disagreed that "forcing a dating partner to have sex is never OK." When they looked more deeply into which students held such attitudes toward rape, odds ratios showed that men students who either watched music videos or pro wrestling daily were more likely to approve of rape, with men students who did both 1.7 times as likely to hold such attitudes.

In an experimental study by Kistler and Lee (2010), 195 American undergraduate students (87% White) of both sexes viewed a set of 5 hip hop videos that had either high or low sexual content or were in a no-video control. Subsequent measures revealed that male participants in the high sexual content condition expressed significantly greater objectification of women, stereotypical gender attitudes and acceptance of rape than men in the low sexual content condition. In contrast, female participants in the two video groups did not significantly differ on any outcome measure.

Aubrey and colleagues (2011) examined how exposure to music videos by female artists who engaged in the sexual objectification of their own bodies affect the sexual beliefs and aggression-related attitudes of college men. Participants included 85 American undergraduate male college students (88.2% White). Findings indicated that college men who viewed music videos in which the featured woman artist highly objectified herself were more likely to accept interpersonal violence, hold more adversarial sexual beliefs, and hold more negative attitudes about sexual harassment than college men who viewed videos in which the woman artist engaged in very little objectification of herself.

Finally, in a study of American male and female college students ( $n = 130$ , 71.5% women, 78.9% White), Burgess and Burpo (2012) found an influence of music videos on participants' perceptions of a date rape scenario involving a high school boy as the perpetrator and his girlfriend as the victim. They found that men who viewed a music video with high levels of sexuality and sexual objectification reported lower levels of judgment of guilt for the man perpetrator and less empathy for the victim than did participants who viewed a music video with low levels of sexuality and objectification. Further, women who viewed the high sexualized/objectified music video were more likely to place blame on the victim of the rape in the scenario than the women who viewed the low sexualized/objectified video.

Together, these studies seem to find a fairly consistent pattern of exposure to music that is misogynistic, sexually violent or which objectifies women appearing to impact the attitudes and beliefs of listeners, particularly men, toward being less respectful of women and/or more accepting of aggressive or violent behavior toward women.

### **Aggressive Behavior toward Women**

Although there were a number of studies showing an effect of listening to misogynistic and sexually violent music on misogynistic attitudes and greater acceptance of sexual aggression toward women from 1989, there were few (if any) studies that examined whether these attitudes translated to actual aggressive behavior until 2006.

In that year, Fischer and Greitemeyer (2006) ran a series of three studies, two of which had behavioral aggression as an outcome. In the first study, men and women participants heard either misogynistic or neutral song lyrics and then had the opportunity to aggress against either a man or woman confederate. Aggression was measured using the hot sauce paradigm, where aggression is quantified as the amount (in grams) of hot chili sauce participants would make another participant eat, knowing they dislike hot foods and would have to eat the entire allocation. The highest level of aggression was by the men who heard the misogynistic song lyrics and were asked to allocate hot sauce to a woman (rather than a man) confederate; the other groups differed little. That is, the misogynistic songs facilitated aggression against women but not men. In the second study, participants heard either misogynistic, men-hating or neutral songs. Men who heard misogynistic songs recalled more negative attributes about women and demonstrated more vengeful thinking (Rudman & Lee, 2002 found similar results with misogynistic rap music). Women who heard men-hating songs reported more negative attitudes about men, and also demonstrated more vengeful thinking. In the third study, participants listened to either misogynistic, men-hating, or neutral songs, and were given the chance to aggress against either men or women confederates by choosing how long their hand should be submerged in icy water. The most aggressive groups were men who had listened to misogynistic music and could aggress against a woman, and women who had listened to men-hating songs and could aggress against a man.

Together, these studies suggest that in the short-term, listening to music that approves of aggression against the opposite sex facilitates aggression against the opposite sex. These findings are important, because unlike studies with only male participants, these studies demonstrate that the same underlying psychological processes likely drive the effects found in both men and women. Possible psychological processes have



already been noted (e.g., activated cognitions, affects and scripts for behavior, desensitization). Fischer and Greitemeyer (2006) used the GAM, which incorporates such processes, as a theoretical underpinning for their studies. A number of studies linking violent music to aggression have taken the same approach. Anderson, Carnagey, and Eubanks (2003) argued for and tested the propositions of the GAM model in five experiments that demonstrated the impact of music with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings. Warburton, Gilmour and Laczowski (2008) explained the links they found between the consumption of music with violent themes and trait aggression with key underlying principles from the GAM. Brummert Lennings and Warburton (2011) used the GAM to explain their finding that violent music elicits significantly greater aggression when the lyrics are present rather than digitally removed, regardless of whether it is accompanied by an aggressive video clip. LaMarre, Knobloch-Westerwick, and Hoplamazian (2012) found support for the general propositions of the GAM in an experiment in which White young adults who were exposed to White power rock music (compared to mainstream rock and pop music) were more likely to allocate higher budgets to White Americans and lower budgets to African Americans and Arab Americans in a budget allocation scenario.

## Conclusions

Overall, empirical study of the impact of songs that approve sexual violence on gendered and sexual violence converges to suggest that such music can impact attitudes and behaviors in the short-term and may have an impact on attitudes in the long-term. These impacts are generally negative and include greater acceptance of sexual aggression and gendered aggression, and a greater likelihood of gendered aggression toward the opposite sex. These effects are also generally small to moderate in size and need to be considered in the context of other influences in the listener's life. Nevertheless, the results are also somewhat concerning, as even small effects may be important if they contribute (with other factors) to serious social problems, such as rape and gendered violence. It has already been shown that attitudes approving of sexual violence are linked with perpetrating sexual violence (e.g., Burt, 1983; Scully & Morolla, 1984), and that moderating such attitudes may reduce the subsequent incidence of forced sex (e.g., Lanier, 2001). If music is one potential contributor to such attitudes, then more research is needed to replicate existing findings and to extend our understanding in this area. Most notably, more research is needed with behavioral outcomes, with women participants, and with studies that examine the impacts of sexually violent music longitudinally.

# Popular Music Media Literacy Recommendations

Media are actively involved in processes of constructing and representing what is considered reality for many consumers, rather than simply transmitting it or reflecting about it (Rodesiler, 2010). As such, popular music media literacy is ideal for promoting awareness and best consumer practices about music consumption. However, recent research examining primary school curriculum in the United States and Australia found that neither country adequately provides education regarding media influence on personal development (Ey, 2016). Some of the inadequacies include, introducing education about media influence on personal development at an age far later than children's engagement with contemporary media, avoidance of the more controversial topics, and deficiency of ensuring this education is compulsory. In Australia, the primary school curriculum introduces media influence in Year 5, where in the United States, media is not addressed at all in the education curriculum. The curriculum in neither country addresses controversial topics related to media, such as violent or sexual content (Ey, 2016).

Whilst there is an increasing need for media literacy due to the digital age, advances in technology, easy access and consumption of media, and potential negative influences based on media content, most media

literacy programs do not focus on music. Rather, they often focus on newspapers and other forms of print media (Olson & Pollard, 2004), television advertising (Austin, Pinkleton, & Fujioka, 1999; Draper et al., 2015), video games (Walther, Hanwinkle, & Morgenstern, 2014), and social media (Soetaert, Vlieghe, & Vandermeersche, 2014). Experts agree that media literacy and education need more attention, especially during the elementary school years (Austin & Johnson, 1997; Ey, 2016, Šupšáková, 2016). Considering the content of popular music and music consumption habits during the developmental process, and the research that recognizes media are a contributing influence on shaping cultural and personal behaviors and attitudes, this need relates to popular music media literacy, as well (Ey, 2016).

Media literacy programs have been effective in reducing middle-school students' preference for alcohol related advertisements, improving media deconstruction skills, improved ability to discern advertising techniques (Draper et al., 2015), and decreased frequency and time spent playing video games (Walther et al., 2014). Media literacy programs have also been effective at reducing alcohol use among adolescents (Austin et al., 1999). Additionally, media literacy has been found to improve media awareness and critical thinking in terms of media content, especially video game violence (Laras, Walsh, O'Malley, & Sharrer, 2016) and other forms of media violence (Sekariashih, McDermott, O'Malley, Olsen, & Scharrer, 2016).

### **Media Education**

Based on recent research in the field, media education must include discussion of easy access to media via the internet and smartphone (Olson & Pollard, 2004). Whilst it should not discourage media use or exposure, and should provide usage skills and content creation skills, it should balance “empowerment” and “protectionist” orientations (Sekariashih et al., 2016; Šupšáková, 2016). According to Hobbs (2010) there are essential competencies that should be included in media literacy programs, including skills and constructs such as access, analysis and utilization, creation, reflection, and action. Participants should also be provided with the tools needed to compare and contrast various forms of media from different cultures and countries (Hobbs, 2010; The New London, 1996). One of the goals of media literacy, in general, is to ensure that consumers do not perceive the media as reflecting the real world (Robillard, 2012). It has also been recommended that participants should be able to question the intentions and contents of the media that they consume (Ey, 2014b; Rodesiler, 2010).

Five core concepts of critical media literacy have been outlined by the Center of Media Literacy. These are: (1) all media messages are constructed, (2) media are constructed using a unique creative language dictated by the media format, (3) different people (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, social class) can experience the same media message differently, (4) media have embedded values and points of view that are reflected by those who create it, and (5) profit and/or power is the main motivation of media (Kellner & Share, 2005).

### **The Need for Popular Music Media Literacy**

With advances in technology making music readily accessible regardless of the geographic distance in distribution and dissemination of music (Sen, 2010), it is important that popular music media literacy be included in all media education programs. Popular music media literacy should include aspects of understanding, analysis, and reflection on content based on a consumer's stage in development (Wright et al., 2016). Additionally, popular music media literacy should include protectionist avenues for parents' and educators (Ey, 2014b). Popular music media literacy can also aid in the critiquing and analyzing of media representations related to unhealthy ideals associated with gender, race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality as well as social context, control, resistance, and pleasure as it relates to media use (Ey, 2014b; Tobias, 2014). Education regarding the music industry itself must be included in addition to specifications that music content is a result of both the music artist and business people at the record labels (Tobias, 2014). Thorough discussion of consumerism and media should also be included (Ey, 2014b).

The APA Division 46 Committee on Music and Media concluded that popular music media literacy should begin at a young age and continue through the lifespan (see also Ey, 2014b). Current popular music media literacy is rather scarce. Presently there is just one legitimate media literacy site that includes a focus on popular music (<http://mediasmarts.ca>). While this site includes information about the popularity of music, music content, and accessibility of music, there are no materials provided specifically for a young audience. Rather, resources for parents and educators regarding co-viewing media, managing media use in the home, discussing stereotypes portrayed in media, and lesson plans are included. However, young consumers are not just passive consumers of music media. They are often active consumers, as well.

Popular music media literacy aimed at children should be presented based on the child's stage in development and at an age-appropriate level (Ey, 2016; Wright et al., 2016). The child's academic level should also be considered, and materials should be developed at various reading levels. Popular music media literacy for children should include topics such as the difference between fantasy and reality and celebrity stage persona versus their real-life persona (Ey, 2016). Popular music media literacy should use multimedia resources to provide educational materials and resources that represent ethnic and cultural diversity. Popular music media literacy should include hand-on activities to demonstrate autotune, photo-shop, and music creation with instruments and accompanying tools.

Research has suggested that adolescents have little to no knowledge of the core concepts of critical media literacy when it comes to music (Robillard, 2012). This situation is unfortunate as research has suggested that popular music media literacy can be a beneficial aspect of sex education programs (Robillard, 2012). Teens need tools that can help them decipher and reject the sexually laden and overtly sexist messages that are often included in music lyrics and videos (Robillard, 2012). Chung (2007) recommends engaging adolescents by providing means for creating their own music and assisting them in understanding the portrayal of gender roles in music. Teens also need to be able to examine the social functions of music (Hobbs, 2009) and understand the history behind the music genre and the contexts that contribute to it (Tobias, 2014).

Experts in the field have suggested that critical media literacy among adults is a step in addressing the very complex and potentially adverse effects that exposure to explicit content in music can have on consumers (Guy, 2004). Adult media literacy, then, should include a capacity to know and understand the various avenues of media, media ownership, global comparisons of, and the future of media (Dennis, 2004).

## **Recommendations**

### **Future Research**

Considering the limitations of previous research in this area, we make the following recommendations for future research on the sexualization of popular music and consumers:

1. Researchers should examine the effects of sexualized music on populations that are commonly omitted, such as men and members of the LGBTQA community. However, it should be noted that the sexualized content in popular music is heteronormative, making examining the effects on these populations somewhat problematic.
2. Researchers should conduct additional research using not only cross-sectional designs using self-reported questionnaires, but also longitudinal designs, experimental or quasi-experimental designs, as well as additional meta-analyses on the effects of sexualized popular music.
3. Researchers should conduct future research more globally, as the majority of research in this area has been conducted in the United States and Australia.
4. Researchers should aim to clearly outline vulnerabilities among populations that may increase the potential negative effects of sexualized popular music.

5. Future research should increasingly be sponsored by government agencies.

### **Education Systems**

Considering the lack of media literacy provided in the education curriculum in both the United States and Australia, as well as research on the effectiveness of media education, we make the following recommendations to both education systems:

1. Formal education regarding music media influence should be a mandatory inclusion in formal school curriculum.
2. Media literacy, including music media, should be introduced at a young age and should be included at every grade level, alongside children's engagement with contemporary music media.
3. Media literacy should cover controversial topics related to media (e.g., violent and sexual content portrayed in music media) in an age-appropriate manner.
4. Sex education taught via the education system should address issues in gender identity, behavioral scripts, and stereotyping portrayed in music media.
5. Educators must reinforce self-esteem based on character and behavior and address sexual self-presentation as seen in music media.

### **Popular Music Media Literacy**

Considering the lack of education regarding popular music, and music consumption habits through the lifespan, we make the following recommendations for popular music media literacy:

Popular music media literacy:

1. should be included in all media education programs, use multimedia resources, and begin at a young age and continue through the lifespan.
2. should present information based on a consumer's stage in development, presenting information at an age-appropriate level.
3. should view consumers as both passive and active consumers.
4. should include music media influence on personal development, including how music media can shape beliefs, attitudes, self-concept, decisions, and behaviors.
5. when aimed at children should include topics related to critical analysis of depictions and messages, such as fantasy versus reality and celebrity stage persona versus real-life persona and should include hands-on activities to demonstrate music creation using instruments and technology, as well as auto-tune and photoshop.
6. when aimed at adolescents should include critical analysis in relation to music media influence on personal development, provide means for consumers to create their own music, provide tools for consumers to decipher and reject overtly sexist messages that may be included in lyrics and videos, and allow the examination of the social functions of music and genre specific histories.
7. should include a capacity to know and understand the various avenues of music, music ownership, global comparisons of music, and the future of music.
8. should include protectionist educational resources for parents, caregivers, and educators.
9. should provide tools for consumers to understand stereotypes related to gender, race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality that are present in popular music.
10. should emphasize the social context of music and involve discussion about how music media influences social norms.
11. should include information and education regarding the music industry, marketing, and profit, and emphasize that music content results from both the artist and record label.

12. should include a thorough discussion of consumerism and music and about how music contributes to creating subcultures.
13. should incorporate understanding about music's role in identity formation and presentation.

## Policy and Music Industry Recommendations

Policy and regulations for music media are currently inadequate in both the United States of America and Australia. The following recommendations are made based on these two countries; however, they can be applied globally to produce a more rigorous and accountable system to reduce the potential negative impacts music media is evidenced to have on consumers.

### Public Policy

In addition to increased media education and popular music media literacy efforts, addressing the sexualization of popular music through public policy is warranted. While the primary responsibility for regulating media consumption resides with consumers and parents, governments and policy makers at all levels have a responsibility to protect children (Ey, 2014b; Ey & McInnes, 2015). With regard to public policy and lobbying efforts, we recommend:

1. Legislative bodies and policy makers at all levels consider the emerging research related to the negative impact of sexualized music in proposing and crafting public policy. Such evidence should inform guidelines for parents and educators in addressing sexualization of popular music with children and young people. This evidence should also inform the necessary dialogue between policy makers and industry officials.
2. The regulation of popular music content with a regulation body that is independent from the current self-regulation system that is currently in place. This rating system must also extend to every music medium consumed by youth, specifically music videos and concerts.
3. Increasing or imposing a sales tax on sexualized music and earmarking the subsequent revenue for media education or popular music media literacy.
4. The APA encourage federal agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Adolescent and School Health as well as the Australian Human Rights Commission, to support the development of programming to address and counteract the negative impact of the sexualization of popular music on consumers. All governing agencies with a stewardship over child or adolescent health should work to ensure that products targeted at youth serve to promote health and well-being.
5. The APA advocate for funding to support the development and implementation of media education and popular music media literacy programs to specifically address and combat sexualization of popular music.
6. The APA advocate for the strengthening of school health education programs in general, and the inclusion of information about the sexualization of popular music in school health education and other related curricular programs in particular. While such inclusion is in alignment with both the National Health Education Standards and the National Sexuality Education Standards within the United States and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA), support and advocacy are needed at all levels to ensure these programs are implemented with fidelity.

## **Public Awareness**

Increasing public awareness of the proliferation of sexualized music and its impact on consumers is also of great importance. We recommend:

1. The APA, in collaboration with other organizations and agencies, provide parents with resources and information to promote, assist, and support parenting practices and approaches related to popular music. For example, online clearinghouses and websites can serve as portals disseminating research findings, providing reviews of popular music, detailing lyrics of popular songs, and listing suggestions for monitoring the music media consumption of youth, as well as provide recommendations to support educators and inform curriculum construction.
2. The APA work together with the Ad Council to produce informative and accurate public service announcements describing the negative effects of sexualized content in popular music on consumers.
3. The APA supports and promotes activities which increase public awareness of the negative associations between sexualization of popular music and negative impacts on healthy development and general wellbeing, including the impact on children, adolescents, and emerging adults' social, emotional, and physical health.
4. Schools should work in collaboration with public and private organizations, including national and local parent teacher associations, to increase awareness of the exposure to, and impact of, the sexualization of popular music on consumers. Such collaborations are perhaps best equipped in meeting specific needs and finding solutions that reflect local community values.

## **Music Industry**

The music industry is driven by profit and develops products to that end. Promoting health, advocating for effective parenting practices, and protecting consumers from potentially harmful media influences are not direct concerns of music industry executives, producers, or performers. Exploring opportunities that meet both the financial interests of industry and improve health outcomes for consumers is essential. With this intent, we recommend:

1. Revamped music industry parental advisory warning labels which categorize explicit content to better inform consumers, parents, and youth. Such labels would help distinguish between sexualized lyrics as well as lyrics that objectify men or women from those deemed objectionable for other reasons. A more detailed parent advisory warning label could also include associated consequences of exposure to sexualized lyrics based upon research findings. Such labels are not intended to censor musicians, curtail artistic liberties, or decrease profits, rather they serve to better inform consumer decision making and buffer the music industry from future complaint and criticism. This categorization should extend to music videos and concerts as well.
2. The broadcasting industry work together with the music industry to explore options for decreasing sexualization in popular music in mainstream broadcasting whilst working to ensure profitability is not compromised.
3. The music industry considers and explores the profitability of music promoting counter stereotypes, positivity, and pro-social skills (see Greitemeyer, 2009). Such products would serve to increase the diversity of industry offerings and may appeal to a broader consumer audience, thus increasing industry profits.
4. The music industry and broadcasting be proactive in seeking feedback about its products and encourage open communication with consumers, including parents and advocacy groups. Such efforts provide the opportunity to understand opposing views and realize shared goals.

# Conclusion

This report details the history, regulatory efforts, and current trends of sexualization in popular music. The existing research exploring the influence of sexualized music on young consumers, including its impact on gender and identity development, objectification and sexualization, sexual attitudes and behaviors, and sexual and gendered violence has been outlined. As a whole, the research reviewed herein provides support for the potential negative impact of exposure to sexualized music on a variety of social judgments, sex-related beliefs, and behaviors. However, research in this area is not without limitations.

Research examining the impact of sexualized music on consumers thus far has focused on sexualized music that is overwhelmingly heteronormative. Most research in this area has been conducted in the United States and Australia. Additionally, most of the research in this area focuses on the sexualization of women in music, with few investigations examining the impact of depictions of men in sexualized music content. Much research in this area is also based on correlational research designs, with few studies examining the impact of sexualized music content using longitudinal or experimental research designs. The experimental designs that have been conducted have been administered in a laboratory setting. Additional research is needed to confirm that the effects noted in these research designs translate to the real world. Furthermore, some research in this area appear to be duplicated or fragmented publications, possibly resulting in misleading conclusions or a distortion of the scientific literature. Additional research is needed, internationally, across genres, across methods of interaction (videos/watching, CD/Radio/listening), across cultures and ethnicities, and across age groups to broaden our understanding in this field.

Additional funding for future research on the sexualization of youth in general, and the impact of sexualized popular music in particular is essential to inform public policy, educational programs, and parenting practices in support of children and adolescents. Furthermore, additional research exploring the impact sexualized music has on not just girls, but all youth, as it relates to self-esteem, body image, and psychosexual development are needed. Funding to support high-quality longitudinal studies related to sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is of particular importance.

Finally, this report provides recommendations for popular music media literacy, public policy, and industry policy. To be clear, these recommendations are not just a call to parents, educators, or policymakers. The health and well-being of young people should be a collective concern for all, including those who make a livelihood in the music industry. Working together to ensure optimal outcomes for the next generation is a shared and worthy task.

*This statement is an official statement of Division 46 of the American Psychological Association: the Society for Media Psychology & Technology, and does not represent the position of American Psychological Association or any of its other Divisions or subunits.*

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