Emerging Adults’ Perceptions of Romantic Relationships through Music Videos

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Précis

The popularity of music videos in the digital age has raised questions about the influence of this media on its target audience’s thoughts and behaviors. A number of studies have found modern music videos to be rife with over-sexualized portrayals of women, sexual violence, and reinforcements of stereotypical gender scripting. Media in general has been found to contribute at least in some ways to the socialization of gender roles and how we perceive the world around us, including romantic and sexual relationships. Emerging adults (aged 18-25) are large consumers of digital music videos and because they are still forming their perceptions about the world, the question of how music videos inform their views on relationships is an important topic of discussion.

This thesis focused on understanding the cognitive aspects of media consumption as outlined by Kay Bussey and Albert Bandura, and examined how these cognitions differ by a number of demographic groups. Previous research has found that gender and race are important considerations to make when understanding how an individual perceives media, and that people will focus on different content in the same video.

These ideas formed the basis of the statistical analyses conducted in this thesis. A sample of Washington State University students were given an online survey to complete in conjunction with the viewing of two music videos of their choice from a set of twelve videos. The survey asked questions about the students’ demographic information as well as the content of the music videos they viewed in relation to how it portrayed men, women, and relationships.

Analyses of the responses revealed that gender is the most significant demographic variable in how emerging adults perceive relationship messages in music videos, with race providing some influence as well. The results were not so clear cut that we can definitively say
one gender consistently thinks a certain way, as individual differences must be taken into account. Nevertheless, the stark differences in what males and females reported viewing in each music video give insight as to how emerging adults interpret the world through media.
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Introduction and Literature Review

Media exposure and its subsequent influence on behavior has been a popular subject in national news headlines for the last few decades. The media-behavior relationship has been studied academically across many forms of media, but the results are too nuanced to arrive at a general conclusion (Villani, 2001). Nevertheless, the need for research is relevant now more than ever, with the rise of digital technology making access to media easier. Some estimates say that modern teenagers spend around 7.5 hours a day engaged in some type of media, typically digital media such as cell phones or the Internet (Ahuja, 2013).

Music videos as an art have evolved from their inception around thirty years ago, with popular musicians now making high-cost productions that may qualify as short films. Kanye West’s “Runaway,” Lady Gaga’s “Telephone,” Beyoncé’s “Run the World (Girls)”, and Drake’s “Hold On, We’re Going Home” are some examples of music videos from the last four years with high, ambitious production values—music videos no longer exist simply to promote the song, but exist for their own sake as artistic expression. In 2013, Pharrell Williams’ song “Happy” was accompanied by a 24-hour music video hosted on its own website. The music industry has undoubtedly changed to fit with the digital age, with a large focus on digital music videos. A recent ComScore survey shows that 40% of YouTube’s viewers watch music videos—a statistic that is higher than any other video category (Lee, 2011), and a recent Nielsen survey reveals that as of 2012, modern teenagers prefer to watch their music on websites like YouTube rather than using iTunes, the radio, or CDs (Nielsen, 2012), attesting to the prominence of music videos in the life of a modern teenager.

The existing literature reveals some troubling effects of excessive music video consumption by adolescents, and so the issue of music videos’ impact on teenagers is a pertinent
area of study. Bolls, Chen, and Popeski (2003) describe a desensitizing effect of consuming a high amount of violent and sexual music videos. After an adolescent has viewed a high amount of videos that are violent and/or sexually explicit, they begin to perceive less violence and sexual content than there actually is. Similarly, Brown and Witherspoon’s research (2002) note how glamorized depictions of sex and violence in media reduce the perceived risks and make these behaviors more attractive and normalized.

Watching specific content in videos has also been connected to changes in behavior. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2009) has found repeated portrayals of violent behaviors, drug/alcohol use, and sexual objectification in popular music videos, and correlated frequent viewing of music videos to an increase of violent tendencies, higher acceptance of drugs/alcohol use, stronger beliefs in sexual stereotypes, and greater willingness to engage in risky sexual activities.

The focus of this thesis is on sexual objectification in music videos, which remains a worrisome trend because of the idea that teenagers will form at least some of their perceptions of romantic/sexual relationships from sexually objective and stereotyped music videos (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). The intent of this thesis is to examine the perceptions of emerging adults’ perceptions of messages in music videos, and to see how these perceptions differ. “Emerging adulthood” as defined by Arnett (2000) is the developmental period in which an individual transitions from teenaged to adult life. The concept of emerging adulthood has only developed over the last few decades where 18-25 year olds are more likely to live on their own while still being financially dependent on their parents, have no children, and undergo extensive exploration of the direction of their life. Because it is a large transitional period of life and is a relatively new phenomenon, it is a key focus of this study.
Theoretical Frameworks

Cognitive

Theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between media consumption and replicated behavior can be traced back to Albert Bandura’s social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which states that an individual is likely to imitate actions that they observe from someone else modeling that behavior. Bandura later expanded upon these ideas with his social cognitive theory of behavior (2002). He describes how observations of behavior that an individual makes are filtered through different value systems and beliefs that are unique to everyone. In this section I describe four theoretical frameworks that help explain how media can influence individuals’ attitudes and behaviors.

Social Cognitive Theory of Gender

Bandura’s later research with Kay Bussey examined the ways media is often used to subtly convey ideas that reinforce gender roles (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) which suggests more complexities to the situation. Bussey and Bandura identify four major cognitive processes that occur during media consumption and influence the modeling of behavior: attention, retention, production, and motivation.

Attentional processes are the cognitive functions that govern how people invest attention, what they are investing attention in, and what type of information they extract. This is determined by factors such as salience and accessibility—the level of personal relevance the model and actions hold for the consumer. A higher personal relation likely means that the consumer will be more attentive to the content or message. For example, actions modeled by someone of similar age, sex, and ethnicity as the consumer will have more salience, which will hold their attention more. Prevalence is an important factor as well. If there is an abundance of
these behavior models, or if the behavior is particularly widespread in one’s culture, then the exposure is much higher and is more likely to be given attention.

The second component, retentional processes, refers to the ways that consumers’ conceptions of models are stored for later recall. Mental frameworks are constructed to help individuals understand and make sense of what they are consuming. Cognitive rehearsal of modeled behavior helps with the retention of these conceptions. For example, someone conceptualizing and envisioning the behaviors they observe a musician performing in a music video helps to keep those behaviors readily available in the person’s mind.

Production refers to the process of converting these abstract media conceptions into real-life actions and behaviors. These actions can be adapted and reshaped to fit different situations in order to best match the conception held in the mind. For example, if an individual has a conception of a suave, stylish singer from a music video they wish to emulate, they may try and reproduce similar clothing, appearance, or body language in everyday life in order to meet this stylized conception.

The final aspect of Bussey and Bandura’s model is motivational processes. These refer to factors that influence the extent to which modeled actions are replicated by the consumer. For example, what are the costs and benefits that may affect the desirability of replicating certain behaviors? Is there a sense of self-satisfaction that drives a person to replicate the behavior? These questions inform the process of motivation. Bussey and Bandura make sure to stress the distinction between the acquisition of behaviors and the adoption of behaviors. Anyone can observe a modeled action and acquire a mental conception of it, but understanding why a person adopts and carries out a behavior requires examining the motivations that influence it. Some of these motivations are embedded in culture, like conforming to modeled gender roles, while other
motivations are more visible like the knowledge of tangible rewards or punishments.

Media Practice Model

The media practice model, as theorized by Brown and Steele (1995), focuses on how individuals (and specifically, adolescents) select the media they will consume. Rather than treating the audience as a passive participant in the media-consumer relationship, this model suggests that one’s motivations and choice in the media they attend to are essential considerations in understanding how media affects behavior and cognition.

Steele and Brown emphasize three main components in their model: selection, interaction, and application. Selection is the process of an adolescent choosing what media they will invest their interest in. Similar to Bussey and Bandura’s idea of attentional processes, selection is based on how appealing media is to the adolescent, which may be influenced by similarities of gender or ethnicity.

Interaction encompasses the wide range of cognitive and behavioral responses one can have in regards to a piece of media. As adolescents make sense of what they have consumed and process the information, they may react in different ways, such as having an emotional response. Again, Brown and Steele are interested in the ways in which different people respond to media, especially when the media model is perceived as similar to the adolescent.

Finally, application is the end result of how adolescents use media in their lives. This also refers to a wide range of cognitions and behaviors that adolescents partake in, from adopting an identity to provoking emotional responses. Here, Steele and Brown believe that the adolescent incorporates their notions of the media into their life and idea of self-identity. The implications of the media practice model are important for this thesis because they stimulate
interest in understanding how and why different emerging adults will attend to the media they do, while attempting to explain what makes certain media appealing for different demographics.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and gratifications theory helps frame media audiences as active participants in the media-consumer relationship (Ruggiero, 2000). According to this theory, media consumers select which media they will consume based on how they expect it to gratify various needs. These needs may include the facilitation of social interaction, sensation seeking, mood management, or simply entertainment. This casts the audience in a more active manner and brings up the possibility that people seek out media which conforms to their perceptions of relationships and sexuality, rather than being a passive participant completely subordinate to messages found in popular media. Relevant to this thesis, uses and gratifications theory provides another explanation for why some individuals may attend to particular music genres or messages in music media.

Receiver-Oriented Message Interpretation

A final theoretical perspective that helps inform this thesis is the receiver-oriented message interpretation of media. The receiver-oriented message perspective draws from the cognitive application of Bandura’s attentional dimension of social cognitive theory. This perspective focuses on what a specific audience perceives and believes to be the intent of a piece of media based on their understanding of media content, critical thinking, and media literacy. Comparing college students’ perceptions of advertisement messages to the perceptions of trained media coders, non-trained viewers were more likely to perceive implied and overt messages such as sexual connotations, sexual objectification of both men and women, and expected appeal to younger audiences (Austin, Pinkleton, Hust and Miller, 2007). A receiver-oriented message
approach holds value because it gives greater insight into what types of ideas are actually being communicated to target audiences, rather than simply assuming what messages are being communicated. It also highlights how perceptions may be drastically different among various populations.

**Demographics and Current Research**

Musical taste has been linked to certain life outcomes, such as correlated preference for rap/hip-hop music and poor academic performances (Miranda & Claes, 2004). However, these studies identify media as only one contributing factor to behavior, noting the abundance of other factors such as ethnicity, peer influences, and family that may affect musical taste and behavior or interact to influence life outcomes (Brown and Witherspoon, 2002). Some of these other factors have been the subject of further investigation. For example, in a study conducted by Monique Ward, black teenagers watched more rap and hip-hop music videos than other ethnicities, and this genre was found to have more sexual content and racial stereotypes in their videos than other genres. Ward argued that black teenagers are at the highest risk for consuming negative messages regarding race and sexual roles and subsequently acting upon the behaviors promoted by such media (Ward et al., 2005).

As previously mentioned, high consumption of music videos may produce a desensitizing effect. Research conducted by Bolls, Chen, and Popeski (2003) used physiological measures of arousal to quantify how “heavy viewers” became less aroused than “light viewers” when being exposed to the same music videos, both in terms of sexual and violent content. Similarly, Brown and Witherspoon’s research found that low-risk portrayals of behaviors like drug use or sexual activities may add to their appeal (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002). Their work is also cognizant of the fact that not every adolescent will perceive and process a specific piece of media in the
same way. Given this, exploration of race and gender are equally deserving of academic
attention in understanding media’s role in influencing behavior.

Ward (2003) has identified demographic factors such as race, peers, family life, and
religious background as important components that may help mediate the internalization of
media messages. For example, a non-black adolescent’s ethnicity may be a mediating factor for
the content in a gangsta rap music video, making the message less likely to be internalized. A
mediational model proposed by Kistler, Rodgers, Power, Austin, & Hill (2010) is concerned with
the identification of cognitive processes that take place in between the consumer listening to
music and forming perceptions on that media. They proposed an interactive view where the
music listener engages in the socially desirable mental images they perceive to be present in the
music and then relate them to their own self-image.

A number of studies have linked certain demographic factors with musical preference.
Connections have been made with female preference towards lighter types of music such as pop
and dance, and male preference for heavier forms of music such as rock and hip-hop. Both of
these links are believed to be in conformance with conventional gender identity (Schwartz &
Fouts, 2003). Some links have been made connecting females with a preference for dance,
gospel, and easy listening, and males for R&B, rock, metal, and jazz (Mizell, 2005).

Social class is believed to play a role in music preference as well, with some studies
finding a working class preference towards heavy metal and soul music, and a higher class
preference for classical and jazz music (Bryson, 1996). Others have found links with lower-
income and preference for country, gospel, and rap/hip-hop.

In regards to ethnicity, non-whites have shown a stronger preference for R&B, gospel,
jazz, reggae, and rap/hip-hop than whites, whereas whites show a stronger preference for every
other genre than nonwhites. This holds especially true for country music (Mizell, 2005).

Religiosity is a dimension with significantly less literature, though there is some evidence to suggest that higher religiosity (as determined by rate of church attendance), is related to stronger disapproval of both metal and rap/hip-hop genres (Lynxwiler & Gay, 2000).

The literature promotes an understanding of the multifarious characteristics that influence an individual’s perception. At the same time, it is important to view those individuals as active consumers of media, who will seek out different media to view, and attend to different aspects of them (Ruggiero, 2000). Because of the diverse ways media may be perceived by different people, it is important to identify who may be at risk for taking away harmful messages about relationships from the media they consume.

**The Purpose of This Study**

The literature review suggests a number of patterns to be explored, such as demographic variables that co-vary with genre preference, and variables that influence one’s likelihood of finding media to be realistic and/or appealing. Both of these are important questions for this study, but cognitive effects will also be given considerable interest as well. Using Bussey and Bandura’s social cognitive theory of media influence on gender (1999), this study will identify how the cognitive process of attention differs by gender and race. Specifically, I am interested in knowing how college men and women perceive messages in music media and in what ways those perceptions differ or are similar.

**Research Questions:**

1. Does preference of music genre differ by sex, race, religiosity, or social class?
2. Do perceptions of content in music videos differ by gender or race?
Method

Sample Recruitment and Procedure

Students were recruited from a pool of various Communications courses taught at Washington State University to participate in an on-line study which took approximately 50 minutes to complete. They received extra credit for their participation. Participants were asked a series of demographic questions regarding age, gender, race, religiosity, and socioeconomic status, as well as music listening habits such as preferred method of music listening, and music genre of preference. About halfway through the survey, participants were asked to choose one video to view from a list of 6 different genres (country, hip-hop, rock, pop, R&B, and alternative), and then completed a set of questions about that video after they finished viewing it. This procedure was repeated so that participants watched a total of 2 music videos of their choice and responded to them. Participants’ perceptions of music media were assessed with the MVROMA (Music Video Receiver Oriented Message Analysis), an adapted version of the ROMA first developed by Austin and colleagues (Austin, Pinkleton, Hust, & Miller, 2007). The MVROMA assessed participants’ perceptions of video’s realism and entertainment, character features (explicit representations of power), and implied messages about gender and relationships. Responses were on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The first selection of music videos included Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” (Country), Eminem’s “Love the Way You Lie” (Hip-Hop), Pink’s “Blow Me One Last Kiss” (Rock), Cee Lo Green’s “Forget You” (R&B), Britney Spears’ “Three” (Pop), and Muse’s “Madness” (Alternative). The second selection of music videos included Taylor Swift’s “We Are Never Getting Back Together,” (Country), Lupe Fiasco’s “Bitch Bad” (Hip-Hop), Buckcherry’s “Crazy Bitch” (Rock), Bruno Mars’ “Grenade” (R&B), Enrique Iglesias’ “I Like
It” (Pop), and Passion Pit’s “Carried Away” (Alternative). All videos were chosen to span a variety of popular music genres and for their portrayal of misogynistic and/or dating/sexually violent attitudes, albeit to varying degrees.

Measures

All demographic measures—sex, race, socioeconomic status, and religiosity—were taken via self-report responses from the online survey. For sex, respondents had a choice between male and female options (1=male, 2=female). For race, respondents had a choice between non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black/African-American, Hispanic white, Hispanic black, unspecified Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, or other. The results were dichotomized into white (including Hispanic white) and nonwhite responses to allow for analyses to be conducted by race (White=1, racial minority =2). There were too few of any one racial minority group to conduct analyses by specific racial group. Socioeconomic status was estimated by the respondents’ own socioeconomic level on a five-point scale and is not an objective measure of their income. Response choices were 1 (Very Low Income), 2 (Low Income), 3 (Medium Income), 4 (High Income), and 5 (Very High Income). Scores ranged from 1-5, M=2.52, SD=1.08, with higher scores indicating higher perceived SES. Rate of attendance of religious services was also estimated by respondents and was rated on a five-point scale; response choices were 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Quite Often), and 5 (More than once a week). Responses 4 and 5 were collapsed together because so few students indicated religious attendance of more than once a week. Scores ranged from 1-4, M=2.26, SD=.99, with higher scores indicating more frequent religious attendance.

Analyses

Descriptive analyses (frequencies and cross-tabulations) were first conducted to
understand the sample and to answer research questions about genre preference by gender, race, SES, and religious attendance. Independent T-tests were conducted to examine how men and women differed in their perception of music video content (i.e., the MVROMA items). T-tests were repeated by race (white versus non-white) to analyze differences in perception of music video content by race. A third set of analyses were run to more fully understand observed differences in the T-tests. For each MVROMA item, crosstabs were run by gender and choice of music video selection. These crosstabs were repeated for each set of music videos. Cross-tabulations help to understand the likelihood that a particular viewing group (e.g. men versus women) perceives specific content in a particular music video.

**Results**

**Sample Characteristics**

The sample was made up of 364 Washington State University students. Of those, 44% identified as males and 56% identified as females. Approximately 43% were freshmen, 29% were sophomores, 17% were juniors, and 12% were seniors. The sample included a variety of ages ranging 18 to 44 but in the interest of focusing on emerging adults, participants older than 25 years of age were omitted from any statistical analyses (7 participants were excluded).

Race was a variable that needed to be dichotomized into categories of either white or nonwhite in order to perform any substantial statistical analyses. 71% of the sample identified as white, and 29% identified as nonwhite. With regards to socio-economic status, around 22% of the sample describes their income as “Very low,” 19% selected “low,” 36% selected “middle,” 14% selected “high, and 3% selected “Very high.” In terms of religious attendance, 28% of the sample indicated never attending religious services, 29% indicated rarely attending religious
services, 31% indicate sometimes attending religious services, and 12% indicate frequent attendance of religious services.

Music Preference and Use Responses

As seen in Figure 1.1, Roughly 44% of students denoted listening to music more than 7.5 hours in a typical week, although over half (52%) said they watched less than one hour of music videos in the same amount of time. When asked about musical genres of preference, the most popular choices were Rap/Hip-hop (32%), Country (20%), and Pop (12%).

![Music Genre of Choice](image)

Figure 1. Music Preference Percentages

Music preference by demographics

The notion that music genre preference may differ by demographic is important to this study because it may indicate which groups are at the highest risk for consuming highly sexualized, objectifying, and violent videos. For example, if a specific genre that typically contains highly sexualized videos is predominantly preferred by only one portion of the population, it is important to identify how that population perceives those videos in an effort to
help them identify healthy and unhealthy romantic and sexual relationships. Conversely, if genres containing highly sexualized music videos are preferred at a high frequency across different demographics, it is important to acknowledge the seriousness of how prevalent these sexual images are in our culture, and what implications this has for our societal views of romantic relationships.

The literature review noted some trends to expect in regard to sex, race, socio-economic status, and religiosity. As seen in figure 2, almost half (46.9%) of males reported rap/hip-hop as their first genre of preference, compared to only 21.3% of females. The percentage of males who identify rock as their genre of preference is 14.4%, compared to only 4.5% of females. Females show a high preference for pop music (18.8%) compared to only 2.5% of males. Females also tended to prefer country music, with 27.2% of females indicating it as their favorite genre, compared to only 11.3% of males. All of these observations support previous research on genre preference by sex (Schwartz & Fouts, 2003). However, the female preference for R&B music in this survey (8.9% of females compared to 2.5% of males) is contrary to what some previous research has indicated (Mizell, 2005).

Figure 2. Music Preference by Sex
Racial differences are apparent by looking at Figure 3. Some of the racial differences described in earlier studies are upheld by these results. Country is widely preferred by whites (25%) to nonwhites (6.7%) and the inverse is true for R&B (16.7% nonwhite preference compared to 2% white preference). Both of these statistics are consistent with previous research (Mizell, 2005). Possibly the most interesting observation from these data, however, is the identical preference rate for rap/hip-hop among whites and nonwhites. Among both groups, it is the most preferred genre by far. Contrary to earlier research, these data emphasize how mainstream rap/hip-hop has become among college students.

Similarly, rap/hip-hop is the most popular genre across all social classes see (Figure 4). Previous research indicated that rap/hip-hop was mostly preferred by people in lower social classes (Mizell, 2005). Similarly, country music has been thought to be a lower-class preference, but is the second-most popular music genre, across social classes, among this sample of college students.

Music preference by religious service attendance yields similar results (see Figure 5). Rap/hip-hop is the most popular genre regardless of frequency of attendance, with country music
being the second most popular choice. Previous research found that high religiosity was correlated with a dislike for rap/hip-hop (Lynxwiler & Gay, 2000), so the genre’s widespread preference in this sample is somewhat surprising.

Demographic results mostly restate the overall genre preference statistics (see Figure 1).
Rap/hip-hop is consistently popular among students in the sample. The only demographic which shows a wide discrepancy in rap/hip-hop preference is by sex, where males are far more likely to prefer the genre than females. Taken together, these demographic preferences attest to the mainstream appeal of rap/hip-hop. This is especially troublesome because rap/hip-hop music videos have been found to contain more sexualized imagery than videos from other music genres (Ward et al., 2005). This indicates that any socialization occurring through the consumption of rap/hip-hop videos could potentially be affecting emerging adults across all demographics.

**MVROMA T-tests**

Table 1. Mean Scores and T-Tests by Sex: Music Video 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item variable</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>T-score</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were powerless</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.569</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were physically aggressive</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-2.947</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were powerful</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-3.162</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were perpetrators of violence</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>-1.979</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were intelligent</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.337</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were popular</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.851</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were physically aggressive</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>1.927</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were suggested to be sexually promiscuous</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-2.774</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were deceptive</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-3.092</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were powerful</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>2.548</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were attractive</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.921</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This video suggests that women often lie in relationships</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.641</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This video suggests that most men are focused on wanting to have sex</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-2.174</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This video suggests that men often lie in relationships</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-2.801</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This video suggests that men are sexually promiscuous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item variable</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>T-score</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were victims of violence</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>2.668</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were powerless</td>
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<td>1.97</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.428</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were physically aggressive</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.726</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were sexually promiscuous</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.679</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were sex objects</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.144</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were deceptive</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>2.871</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 displays mean scores for mens’ and women’s MVROMA responses after watching music videos. Responses were on a continuum of 1-4, with 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Agree), and 4 (Strongly Agree). Thus, smaller scores indicate stronger disagreement whereas higher numbers indicate stronger agreement that particular content are present in the music video.

T-tests were performed to examine significant differences between men’s and women’s perceptions of the video. Significantly different items are presented Table 2. The main differences in perceptions from the first music videos are in how power is perceived. Both males and females perceived their respective sexes to be more powerful than the opposite sex perceived them to be. Males were especially likely to view men as physically aggressive compared to how women perceived men. Males and females also believed the video reinforced stereotypes about the opposite sex, with females believing the videos suggested that men only wanted to have sex, and males believing the video suggested that women often lie in relationships.

Table 2. Mean Scores and T-Tests by Sex: Music Video 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>T-stat</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Z-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were gazing at women as though they were eye-candy</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2.979</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were gazing at men as though they were eye-candy</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>2.348</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were using their bodies to get what they want</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.627</td>
<td>354</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were perpetrators of violence</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.816</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were rewarded for being a man's physically attractive partner</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.332</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were sexually beckoning men</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.208</td>
<td>352</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were fully clothed</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-3.128</td>
<td>354</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were scantily clothed</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.997</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were dancing provocatively</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.552</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were victims of violence</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>2.516</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were intelligent</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>2.072</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were popular</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>2.638</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were enjoying being with a physically attractive partner</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>2.239</td>
<td>353</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were physically aggressive</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>3.117</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were sex objects</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>2.576</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were gazing at women as though they were eye-candy</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>2.884</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were attractive</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.541</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were perpetrators of violence</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.714</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were rewarded for being a woman's physically attractive partner</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.346</td>
<td>354</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were sexually beckoning women</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2.978</td>
<td>356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were treated badly</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>1.982</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Men in this video were scantily clothed 2.09 1.88 .014 2.479 355
Men in this video danced provocatively 2.13 1.92 .019 2.365 354
This video suggests that most men are focused on wanting to have sex 2.62 2.43 .045 2.008 357
This video suggests that most women are sexually promiscuous 2.48 2.29 .045 2.014 356

There are a number of items in Table 2 which suggest underlying sex differences in how romantic interactions are perceived. For example, males more strongly reported that women were sexually beckoning men, dancing provocatively, sexually promiscuous, sex objects, and used their bodies to get what they want. However, they also reported that men danced provocatively and that men were gazing at women as though they were eye-candy. Males consistently perceived both men and women’s actions as more sexualized than females did. This may be explained by males and females selecting different videos to watch, attending to different content in the video, or viewing the same actions within the video differently. The second selection of music videos produced nearly twice as many perceptual differences by sex than the first selection of music videos, suggesting that males and females’ perceptions vary widely based on what they are viewing.

Table 3. Mean Scores and T-Tests by Race: Music Video 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item variable</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Nonwhites</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>T-score</th>
<th>Df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This music video was realistic</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-3.033</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were attractive</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>2.736</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were enjoying being with a physically attractive partner</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>3.195</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were deceptive</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>2.761</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were powerful</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>1.968</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Men in this video were gazing at women as though they were eye candy | 2.95 | 2.68 | .006 | 2.745 | 354
Men in this video were gazing at men as though they were eye candy | 1.73 | 1.98 | .004 | -2.889 | 356
Men in this video were sexually beckoning women | 2.65 | 2.43 | .019 | 2.361 | 355

Table 4. Mean Scores and T-Tests by Race: Music Video 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item variable</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Nonwhites</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>T-score</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This music video was realistic</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-3.422</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were victims of violence</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-2.194</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were powerless</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>-2.578</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were deceptive</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-2.176</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in this video were gazing at women as though they were eye-candy</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>-2.272</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were enjoying being with a physically attractive partner</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>2.048</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in this video were deceptive</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>2.409</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This video suggests that relationships are about care and respect</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-2.418</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This video suggests that women are and men are equal partners in relationships</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-2.376</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptual differences by race are not as numerous as perceptual differences by sex, and the significantly different items are more difficult to make sense of. This is especially true when considering both music video selections together (Tables 3 and 4). For example, in the first selection of videos, white respondents reported that the music videos portrayed men as deceptive more strongly than nonwhite respondents, whereas in the second selection of music videos, nonwhite respondents agreed with the same statement more strongly than white respondents.

The most significant finding is how perceptions of realism differ. In both music video selections, nonwhites believed that the music videos were realistic more strongly than whites. It
is important to note that this item was not significantly different when comparing perceptions by
gender, which suggests that perceptions of realism are related to one’s race.

Cross-Tablatures Analysis

Despite the significant perceptual differences observed and because gender differences
were so striking, their implications about demographics are sometimes ambiguous and difficult
to grasp. To more fully understand these differences, I ran crosstabs analyses looking at each
MVROMA item by gender and choice of music video selection for each of the videos (i.e., those
offered in the first and second set of videos). Cross-tablatures give an idea of how likely a
certain demographic was to perceive a video in a certain way. The original scale was
constructed with responses of “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree,”
but these were dichotomized into two categories of “Agree” or “Disagree” in order to give
cleaner, more focused visuals of the data. Though most of the questions did produce perceptual
differences by gender, only a smaller selection that is representative of the general trends are
presented below.

Figure 6. Cross-tabulations by Gender and Video: Powerless Women MV1

"Women in this video were powerless"
Agreement Percentage for MV1
As seen in Figure 6, there were significant differences by sex in the likelihood of seeing a particular music video portray women as powerless. For example, among men who chose to view the video for Muse’s “Madness,” 40.7% reported seeing women as powerless, compared to only 21.2% of females who chose to view the video. Videos for Eminem’s “Love the Way You Lie,” Pink’s “Blow Me One Last Kiss,” CeeLo Green’s “Forget You” and Britney Spears’ “Three” also produced similar differences.

Figure 7 shows the results for the same question, but in response to the second selection of music videos. In these results, large differences are also observed in a number of videos, especially for Enrique Iglesias’ “I Like It.” Of the males who chose to view this music video, 7% believed that women were portrayed as powerless, while 25% of women said the same. Again, we see similar discrepancies in the responses for Taylor Swift’s “We Are Never Getting Back Together,” Lupe Fiasco’s “Bitch Bad,” Bruno Mars’ “Grenade,” and Passion Pit’s “Carried Away.”
It is important to note that we do not observe gender-specific patterns across the videos, i.e. neither gender consistently views women as powerless more than the other. Even when only taking a single genre into consideration, there are differences in how the music videos are perceived. For example, in the first music video in the alternative genre, “Madness,” males were more likely to view women as powerless, but in the second alternative video, “Carried Away,” females were more likely to view women as powerless. So while there is no immediately identifiable pattern in who views women as powerless, results across the different music video selection show evidence that there are clear differences in perception of the videos by sex.

When asked whether men in music videos are portrayed as perpetrators of violence, more perceptional differences emerge, as seen in Figure 8. For the first selection of music videos, females were consistently more likely to view men in the music videos as perpetrators of violence. The largest discrepancy is seen in the responses for Muse’s “Madness” video in which 26.3% of females who viewed it reported that men were perpetrators of violence, whereas only 7.7% of males reported seeing this. Eminem’s “Love the Way You Lie,” Pink’s “Blow Me One Last Kiss,” and CeeLo Green’s “Forget You” also produced similar differences in perception.

!["Men in this video were perpetrators of violence" Agreement Percentage for MV1]

Figure 8. Cross-tabulations by Gender and Video: Violent Men MV1
The second selection of videos also shows a similar pattern with one exception—of those who viewed the video for Taylor Swift’s “We Are Never Getting Back Together,” males (21.4%) were more likely than females (10.5%) to report that it portrays men as perpetrators of violence. For this question, this music video is the only instance in which males proportionally responded higher than females. However, this is consistent with men viewing women in the same video as powerless at a rate proportionally higher than females who watched the video. It is also important to note the glaring sex differences in how the music video for Buckcherry’s “Crazy Bitch” was perceived—45.5% of females who watched it believed that men in the video were perpetrators of violence compared to only 11.1% of men. The Buckcherry statistic is important because unlike some other videos, roughly an equal amount of males (27) and females (22) chose to view the video, so differences in how respondents answered are not due to disproportionate viewing of either sex. Videos for Enrique Englesias’ “I Like It” and Passion Pit’s “Carried Away” also see similar sex differences. Viewing men as perpetrators of violence was not a statistically significant item shown in the t-tests when across all videos, and yet individual videos show noticeable differences.

Figure 9. Cross-tabulations by Gender and Video: Violent Men MV2
Perceptions of women as sex objects differed by sex as well. Figure 10 shows clear differences in how two music videos in particular were perceived. In CeeLo Green’s “Forget You,” 70.4% of the males who viewed it reported seeing women as sex objects, compared to only 44.4% of females who viewed the same video. Of those who watched the video for Britney Spears’ “Three,” 86.7% of females reported that women were sex objects, while only 42.9% of men felt the same.

Figure 10. Cross-tabulations by Gender and Video: Women Sex Objects MV1

The second selection of music videos did not produce differences as dramatic as the first, but the responses to Taylor Swift’s video are again worth noting. Males who viewed this video (25%) were more likely than females (8.5%) to believe that women were sex objects, consistent with previous male responses that tended to be sympathetic to women in the video. There was also a large difference in how Lupe Fiasco’s “Bitch Bad” was perceived, with 90.5% of female viewers reporting that women were sex objects, compared to 70% of males.

Males and females also differed in perceptions of sexual beckoning. This is an important
measure because the t-test analyses revealed that males reported seeing sexualized imagery more strongly in the videos they watched. Cross-tabulations for the first selection of videos (Figure 12) shows differences in almost all videos. The largest differences were in response to the video for Pink’s “Blow Me One Last Kiss.” 20% of males who watched the video believed that women were sexually beckoning men, while 55% of women believed the same thing. Carrie
Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” shows that 30.8% of males who viewed the video believed women sexually beckoned men, compared to only 12.7% of females. The only video where the responses were equal was in Eminem’s “Love the Way You Lie.”

Figure 13 shows the results for the second selection of videos’ cross-tabulation, which again shows differences across almost all videos. The responses to Taylor Swift’s “We Are Never Getting Back Together” shows that 21.4% of males who viewed the video believed women sexually beckoned men, compared to only 6.4% of women who viewed the video. By contrast, 37.4% of males who watched Lupe Fiasco’s “Bitch Bad” agreed that women sexually beckoned men, but 81% of women agreed with this statement—more than twice the rate of males.

Discussion

A goal of this study was to explore how music is used and perceived by various demographic factors. A demographic analysis of musical genre preference revealed a mostly
consistent pattern. Rap/hip-hop was the most popular genre among college students, followed by country. The only instance where this was not supported was when breaking the results up by gender, which showed that females are much less likely to report rap/hip-hop as their preferred musical genre. These results were not predicted by previous literature (Mizell, 2005) and indicate the mainstream appeal of rap/hip-hop music to modern emerging adults.

In regard to perceptual differences, there is enough data to suggest that perceptions of messages in music videos differ by sex, and to a lesser degree, race. Certain music videos incited consistent responses by sex. Taylor Swift’s “We Are Never Getting Back Together” was singled out numerous times for showing perceptual differences between males and females. Males who viewed the video were more likely to believe it showed women as powerless, sex objects, and sexually beckoning men, and that it showed men as perpetrators of violence. Lupe Fiasco’s “Bitch Bad” also evoked sharply contrasting responses from males and females—of particular interest is whether or not each gender perceived women to be sexual beckoning men. Females (81%) were much more likely to report that this music video portrayed women sexually beckoning men (37.4%).

The ideas of power, particularly women’s power, as well as relationship dynamics, were some of the most variable perceptions between the sexes. Not only was this statistically significant in both selections of music videos, but almost every individual music video showed discrepancies in how power was perceived. The level of a women’s sexualization also showed important differences. Across the videos, males and females disagreed over when a woman was sexually beckoning men, suggesting that there are different ideas of what constitutes “sexually beckoning.”

The social cognitive theory of gender (Bussey and Bandura, 1999) can be used to explain
some of these differences. This theory holds that males and females receive subtle ideas about gender roles through consumption of media. Ergo, differences in perceptions of power, for example, may be based on typical gender stereotypes about power, who holds it in relationships, and how power is observed. Figure 9, which shows perceptual differences in men as perpetrators of violence in the Buckcherry video, is a good example of this. This particular music video shows the male band members arrested, bodily searched, and held in a prison cell by a sexualized female police officer. Females were far more likely to believe that this video showed males as perpetrators of violence (45.5%) compared to males (11.1%).

Uses and gratifications theory (Ruggiero, 2000) may help explain some other nuances in the data. For example, country music is widely preferred by females over males (see Figure 2.1), which may indicate that the males who do choose to view country music videos may hold non-gender typical views. This is supported by the fact that males who viewed the video for Taylor Swift’s “We Are Never Getting Back Together” were more likely than females who viewed the same video to believe that women in the video were sexually objectified and that men were perpetrators of violence.

Ultimately, it is impossible to explain every statistic reported in this thesis. The idea of social cognitive theory of media is that everyone has their own unique, individual lenses through which they perceive the media, and while cognitive theories may aid in understanding perceptual differences, they cannot explain every observed difference. Rather than attempting to explain all of these differences, it is important to understand the implications that these perceptions have in real life. It is already established that excessive consumption of music videos impacts real-life outcomes (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009), including increased acceptance of gender stereotypes. It is reasonable to assume, then, that gender-stereotyped attitudes and beliefs would
impact relationships. Differences in perceptions of power, perpetration of violence, and what constitutes sexual beckoning are all troubling when considering the real-life consequences. If there is a disagreement over whether an action or behavior is sexual beckoning or a perpetration of violence, we can then imagine how sexual scripts may be carried out. That is, men and women’s perceptions of music media may both inform and reinforce their ideas of how men and women should interact in romantic or sexual situations. Although much of the analysis and discussion was dedicated to sex differences, there is one particularly worrisome racial difference to discuss as well—the increased likelihood of nonwhites to view the music videos as realistic. That alone may signal to the videos’ audiences that the behaviors portrayed in the video are normative and to be expected, which, in the context of romantic or sexual relationships, may lead to dangerous outcomes.

There are important considerations to make in how this study was conducted. Everyone who participated in this study did so to earn extra credit for a communications class they were enrolled in. While the intent was to get a well-rounded sample of emerging adults, the results may not be generalizable beyond students enrolled in communication classes, or those not enrolled in college at all. The information collected is all self-report, which makes it inherently difficult to analyze objectively. This is especially true when measuring socio-economic status in this study, which was estimated by the respondents. It is therefore possible for someone with a higher income to estimate themselves into a lower group than they should belong to. There were further problems analyzing data by race, which had to be dichotomized into white and nonwhite categories. This makes it more difficult to draw conclusions about what racial differences mean, and to what racial groups they apply to. The option for sex forced participants to choose between male and female options. This means that there was no option for transgender or
intersexed participants, although such responses would most likely be too few to conduct proper statistical analyses.

It is also possible that the selection of music videos was not optimal in reaching the desired target audience. In the write-in option for “Other” as the preferred music genre, electronic music was the single most popular choice and may have warranted inclusion among the other genres.

In spite of these shortcomings, the data that this study produced shows strong evidence for perceptual difference among males and females. The implications of those differences are likely to impact views on gender, sexuality, and how romantic relationships are carried out in real life. It is vitally important that everyone has a more comprehensive understanding of how media messages affect everyone, including emerging adults, and to stay educated about the types of media we consume every day.
References


