

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Poetics

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/poetic](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/poetic)

## Music as a resource for the sexual self: An exploration of how young people in the Netherlands use music for good sex

Samira van Bohemen\*, Luna den Hertog, Liesbet van Zoonen

Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam, POBOX 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Young people  
Music  
Sexuality  
Everyday life  
Music voice

### ABSTRACT

Much has been written about young people, music and sexuality, often in the context of the sexualisation debate. However, little research has been conducted about the intricate ways in which young people actually use music in their everyday sexual practices. By drawing upon sociological approaches to music and everyday life, with special attention for the work by Tia DeNora (2000, 2003), the current study aims to analyse what young people consider good music for good sex. We introduce a methodological approach that we call ‘music voice’ as it is partly inspired by photo-voice methods. We asked young people to construct a playlist of what they consider good music for good sex, after which we discussed their choices in an in-depth qualitative interview. We found support for the theory that music has transformative power in the constitution and regulation of a sexual self. There were moments in which our young respondents talked about the sound and lyrics of the music and how they resonated with their conceptions of good sex, but most of the time the discussion hinged on the way they felt when the music played and how they actually used the music to move from one emotional, cognitive and physical state into another. Using music for good sex was not always about turning the music on during sexual activities, however. While for some of our respondents music helped to turn their ideas of good sex into reality, others felt music did not contribute to their experience of good sex.

### 1. Introduction

Consider these two reactions to pop-icon Beyoncé and her 2013 hit-single *Partition*:

The explicit video that accompanies Mrs. Carter’s new single would not look out of place on a porn channel, yet there it is, on YouTube, available for all to see. Admittedly, the word “explicit” is branded across it, but that’s like a red rag to a teenager.

*Partition* I think is... well yes probably one of the first times I had sex on music. (...) Beyoncé’s voice is already horny to me and *Partition* is just (...) it’s not tender-loving sex, but I really just find this a horny song.

The first reaction is from Sarah Crompton, former Arts Editor-in-Chief for the British newspaper *The Telegraph* (8 March 2014), and it is a prime example of the uneasiness and anxiety in Western societies about the sexualisation of young people. Much that has been written about young people, music and sexuality has been in the context of this sexualisation discourse. Empirical research in this area is mostly socio-psychological and is based on experimental- and survey designs that aim to measure the ‘effects’ that certain explicit songs and videos have on the sexual morality and psychological wellbeing of young people, mainly girls (for example see Hall, West, & Hill, 2012; Martino et al., 2006; Primack, Gold, Schwarz, & Dalton, 2008; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). The

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [vanbohemens@essb.eur.nl](mailto:vanbohemens@essb.eur.nl) (S. van Bohemen), [lunadenhertog@gmail.com](mailto:lunadenhertog@gmail.com) (L. den Hertog), [vanzoonen@egsh.eur.nl](mailto:vanzoonen@egsh.eur.nl) (L. van Zoonen).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2017.12.001>

Received 21 March 2017; Received in revised form 2 December 2017; Accepted 20 December 2017  
0304-422X/ © 2017 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

second reaction to Beyoncé and *Partition* comes from Halleh, a twenty-four year old English Major of Dutch-Afghan decent, whom we interviewed for the current article. She represents the other side of the sexualisation discourse, which often comes from more ethnographically oriented research and suggests that young people have a much more reflexive role in how they engage with sexual content in the media (Attwood, 2006; Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Duits & Van Zoonen, 2011).

The latter research argues that young people actively give meaning to the music and other media they consume, that they are often aware of the larger social implications and discourses of sexual inequality that are expressed by the media, that they tend to reflect on the influence of media, but that (sexually explicit) media are nevertheless also an important site of pleasure for them. In the current study we want to build on this approach and examine young people's everyday experiences with music and sexuality. Halleh says in the above quote that one of the reasons why she likes *Partition* is because the record played during one of the first times she had sex on music. This signals that the meaning of music is entwined with circumstances of use and with actual sexual activities, which – we may assume – will be aimed at reaching a pleasurable experience (Spronk, 2014; Van Oorschot, 2011). That is why this study looks at *what young people consider to be good music for good sex* and *how they make sense of their musical choices in relationship to their own sexual practices*. To study this we introduce a new and innovative methodological approach, which we call 'music voice' as it is partly inspired by photo-voice methods.

In what follows we start with a discussion of theory and research about young people, sexuality and music. This literature situates the current, seemingly antagonistic discourses of 'sexualisation' on the one hand and 'sexual pleasure' on the other, within a larger transformation of everyday life in the West, in which identity has become part of a so-called 'choice biography'. After this discussion, we will present our music voice approach and method. In the broadest sense the results of our study support the idea that music functions as a resource for the constitution and regulation of a sexual self, but that does not mean that its presence is always experienced as conducive to good sex.

## 2. Music and everyday life

Several prominent sociologists have published extensive descriptions of what they considered to be a transformation of intimacy towards a so-called 'choice biography' (Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992). Young people are no longer regulated by a prohibition morality, but engage in a situational ethics of sexuality (Ravesloot et al., 1999); an unprecedented freedom, which nevertheless has come with its own obligations, strains and ambiguities, as attachments have lost much of their former stability (Bauman, 2003).

It is within this social context of high flexibility, fluidity and demandingness, Tia DeNora argues, that music has become an important 'technology of the self' (1999; 2000; 2003), a device of remembering and constructing an image of 'who one is' and of presenting this image of 'self' to oneself and others. Scholars like sociologist Frith (1996, 2003) and anthropologist Ruth Finnegan have argued similarly:

"Whether in deeply intense fashion or more light-touch action, music provides a human resource through which people can enact their lives with inextricably entwined feeling, thought and imagination." (Finnegan, 2003; 188)

Building in part upon the work of music psychologist John Sloboda (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; Sloboda, 2005), DeNora argues furthermore that music is part of embodied experience and is used to transform psychological, physiological and emotional states of being; shifting moods, energy levels, self-perception and movements. She draws a parallel with the concept of 'emotional work' developed by Hochschild (1983), which also refers to doing specific activities to get oneself out of one emotional state and into another. Such 'work' also occurs in intimate situations, where music helps to define the setting of the interaction, serving as an aid to relaxation and a pre-text for further action, disciplining conduct and (enhancing) bodily sensation (DeNora, 1997, 2000). Criticism of this approach comes from Hesmondhalgh (2008, 2013), among others, who argues that it presents an overly optimistic view of personal agency with everyone being capable of using music according to personal needs. There is always larger social contexts of power and inequality that need to be considered, he argues, as well as the fact that music may be used for creating experiences of solidarity and attachment as well as creating distance and detachment (for a discussion see Bull, 2007; Negus & Velázquez, 2002; Prior, 2014).

Similarly, in *After Adorno* (2003) DeNora herself adds to her previous work a more exhaustive discussion of how music operates on an 'interactive plane' where it is not only used as a tool for self-determination, but also as a tool for the control over others and over specific situations (see also Bull, 2007); a tool, moreover, that is itself situated within a larger cultural context of conventions, modes of being and doing, discourses, habits and inequalities. Where music functions as a mediator for sexual agency, these situational factors mediate the mediations of music (see DeNora, 2003; Hennion, 2015). The properties of the music itself are also important in these processes, as music is not an empty signifier but has certain properties that afford or prevent certain types of use. Musical affect is thus accomplished by means of active sense-making by social actors who work with the music, bringing in their own personal and cultural associations which, depending on other circumstance of use, may help accomplish pleasure as well as other cognitive, emotional and physiological experiences from music (Gomart & Hennion, 1999; Hennion, 2003).

Such attention for the socio-political context of music and everyday sexuality, inevitably brings in the literature about the sexualisation of young people in and through music and music videos. While there is considerable attention for various psychological repercussions of sexualised music, the discussion also pays attention to the overall social and sexual inequalities in which music production and consumption take place (see for example Paardekoper & Van Rijsbergen, 2008; Papadopoulos, 2010). It is within this larger context that young people's consumption of music takes place. Such claims, however, tend to forget that young people themselves may be aware of these contexts as well. Research on music amateurs, conducted by Gomart and Hennion (1999), has

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7538102>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7538102>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)