

Music, Media and Adolescent Sexuality

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Marcia A. Forbes (2010) *Music, Media and Adolescent Sexuality in Jamaica*. Arawak Publications: Kingston, Jamaica.

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The information explosion of the late 20th century coincided with a technology revolution and heralded a new century in which the world's population is bombarded by messages of all sorts, through a variety of media. These messages are powerful because of the creative new media technologies carrying them and the appeal they have to individuals in different demographic categories based on factors such as age, gender and social class.

Marcia Forbes, in her very comprehensive investigation, has targeted messages in music videos which communicate with their audience in visual as well as auditory modes. The particular audience she has selected to explore is Jamaican adolescents of both sexes, and her focus is on the sexual feelings, opinions, attitudes and behaviour which are associated with their exposure to music videos. The research which was conducted for a doctoral degree was carried out with the necessary academic rigour, and is methodologically sound. The result is a publication which will be of value to the entire academic community and which should be required reading for students pursuing a variety of university courses, but certainly those in education, sociology and media. It should also be appealing to many audiences – the curious adolescent, the caring parent, the conscientious educator, the committed media practitioner, the dedicated social worker and the concerned citizen as well as policy makers who should find this book invaluable as a reference point in the design of educational and developmental programmes for children and youth.

The author, noting that adolescents "...voraciously consumed the messages" contained in music videos which feature expletives, partial nudity and sexual content which could be described as "soft porn", skillfully probed the views of her sample of 543 Jamaican youth, ages 10 to 18 years. She used focus groups and interviews in both urban and rural centres across Jamaica in order to determine adolescents' 'consumption' of (number of hours spent watching) music videos as well as various outcomes from this consumption. The data collected are rich and have been analyzed and presented in chapters, each of which has been carefully constructed to address the major concerns of this research investigation.

One of the most interesting chapters of the book contains the testimonies of the adolescents "In their own Words" (the author provides translations where the spoken words in Jamaican patois may be difficult to understand). It is here that the reader is able to appreciate the textured nature of the response which such music messages generate and the behavioural implications. The videos do not merely provide models of dance for the adolescents, but also dictate fashion, provide "new norms" for male/female sexual relationships, inform gender interactions and encourage the persistence of patriarchy. The chapter includes interesting opinions from the sample to the explicit sexual content and "slackness" in the lyrics and images to which they are exposed.

The investigation also explores the role of family and the church in the consumption of music

videos by adolescents. Family restrictions and the teachings of the church do seem to moderate this consumption to some extent, but the influence does not seem to be significant and is greatest in younger adolescents. This is troubling as the findings point to heavy consumption of music videos being associated with risky sexual behaviour, permissive attitudes re multiple sex partners, and an inability to effectively differentiate between reality and fantasy in what is portrayed. Of interest also is the section in which adolescents report that music videos stimulate their sexual desire, and the effects of such stimulation.

The students, on the whole, viewed music videos in a positive light. Across the social class groups there were expressions of the positive impact music videos had had on the adolescents' lives, and several respondents cited these videos as having contributed to the resilience they possess and the positive directions in which they see their lives going. A number of performers were identified as role models and the girls, in particular, identified with popular female performers. Forbes's investigation demonstrates that Jamaican adolescents are not unique in their opinions and attitudes as they are part of a globalized youth culture "consuming a culture of sex" which is linked by social networks and music videos and this makes the content of this book highly relevant to persons interacting with adolescents in any culture.

The author not only clearly and comprehensively sets out the problems and issues associated with consumption of music videos by adolescents; she also offers suggestions as to how the negative factors associated with this culture can be addressed. The book is an excellent addition to the literature on adolescents and media, and fills a gap which has existed for decades.

Elsa Leo-Rhynie is a former Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the West Indies' (UWI) Mona Campus. Her career in education has included stints as high school teacher, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in the UWI School of Education as well as Professor of Gender and Development Studies, Pro Vice Chancellor and Chair of the Board for Undergraduate Studies and Deputy Principal of the Mona Campus, UWI. She also served as Executive Director of the Institute of Management & Production (IMP) which is now part of the University College of the Caribbean. She was named Professor Emerita by the UWI following her retirement in 2007.

Professor Leo-Rhynie's academic interests centre on education and gender and she has researched and published extensively in these areas. She currently sits on a number of Boards and Foundations which advocate for and support educational initiatives. She was awarded the national honour of Officer of Distinction (Commander Class) in 2000.

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