

## **WOMEN IN NIGERIAN POPULAR MUSIC: EMPOWERED OR DEBASED?**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study using Survey and Focus Group Discussion sought to determine what the increasingly hypersexualised portrayals of women in popular music portend to the young Nigerian women through a critical analysis of Flavour's musical lyrics. The result of the study shows the disparity and ambivalence in women's perceptions of gender representations in popular culture. Their perceptions were diametrically polarized along the divides of healthy sexualized self-expression resulting in empowerment and co-optation to perform resulting in exploitation and debasement. We conclude by observing that women's disposition and interpretation to popular music seems to be largely contingent upon diverse complex interacting factors hence women resentments in the face of offensive portrayals are subsumed in these ideological cultural productions thereby presenting them as accomplices in their own debasement through their relishing of the music.*

**KEYWORDS:** Nigerian Popular Music; Women's Perception; Empowerment; Debasement

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The prevalence of hypersexualised representations and negative images of women presented in popular music, which are closely linked to cultural views of masculinity seem in recent times to have become dominant and magnified in Nigerian's popular musical lyrics- the modern hip-hop afro beat, with the special blend of English and local dialect. Women in a special way have become objects of 'inspiration' for these popular Nigerian artistes' lyrics. Everything about them (women) form part of the musical lyrics- waist, butts, and boobs-as most artistes bluntly refer to. And it is common sights to see and hear the women (particularly the young women) recite and dance to these tunes in socio- cultural settings. Moreover these young women form a heavy

weight of the economic currency distribution of these musicals. What we see in Nigerian popular music is apparently a replication of common trends in popular music globally. Studies, (see Mckenna, 2006; Adams & Fuller, 2006; Chatterji, 2012; Jocelyn, 2005; Espinosa, 2010; Frazier, 2013; Brathwaite, 2013 and Glantz, 2013) have shown that, current trends in popular music include an increasingly sexualized representation of women, and the motives and consequences of this are unclear. Considering the potential powers of popular music and media as a common vehicle for the dissemination of the discursive construction of women and their importance to construction of identity in any culture, a framework for how women who are exposed to or enmeshed within these sites seem necessary, in order to understand their impact on them.

Looking at these Nigerian musical popular lyrics in particular can help detail any potential effects on young women to both their benefit and detriment. With the Nigerian young females under focus, this work seeks to, determine how young females in Nigeria understand and/or perceive representations of women in Nigerian popular music, and how these perceptions reflect, refute, or inform two prominent radical feminist theories –the radical libertarian and the radical culturalist-about popular music’s impact on women’s overall spaces for action. Representations of women emerging as of particular importance in this study are those produced by popular music artistes ‘Flavour’. Flavour’s music was selected for this study basically because of its popularity among the youths and its explicit use of sexually derogatory lyrics which seem to both glamorize and promote images of women as objects of sexuality and male possession.

### **Purpose of Study**

Nigerian popular modern hip-hop afro beat, musicals have today become highly social, shared and listened to in social, private and cultural settings, even in other African countries as a way to bolster the mood or experience escapism and construct culture. This study sought a point of intersection between theories and women’s pragmatic experiences in the face of socio-cultural constructions around gender identities by giving voice to real women. The study explores the Nigerian young women’s experiences and interpretations of gender representations in Nigerian popular music within a radical feminist frame - whether they perceive their representations in music as a means to healthy sexualized self-expression resulting in empowerment or rather coerced and co-opted into being prominent in music to further the male’s privileges and dominance.

To this end, these specific questions were guide to the study:

- i. What are the dominant ethos in Flavour’s musical lyrics?
- ii. To what extent are the Nigerian women exposed to Flavour’s music?
- iii. What are the Nigerian women’s perceptions of gender representations in the selected lyrics?
- iv. What factors, if any, influence women’s perceptions and reactions to popular music?
- v. If the women perceive these musical lyrics as demeaning to womanhood, what roles do they play to obliterate such musicals?

## The Nigerian Artiste, Flavour at a Glance

‘Flavour N’abania’ is the stage name of the Enugu born modern day high-life (with blend of jazz) musician. His real name is Chinedum Izuchukwu Okoli. Flavour’s music because of its pervasiveness; popularity among the Nigerian youths and beyond as well as his notoriety in using vulgar language and raunchy images of women, inspired the need for a critical analysis of the lyrics to determine how young females read and are influenced by the prevalence of hypersexualised lyrical contents. Flavour N’abania was among the top ten on the charts when it debuted in 2005. The song is just everywhere. The ‘Ada Ada’ track strategically positioned the artiste in the international musical scene, and won him the greatest awards in the 2013 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Nigeria Music Video Awards (NMVA). It was accorded the 2013 best use of costume; video of the year; and the Nigerian music video award best indigenous concept. It was rated 14 on Afribiz’s top 100 music chart (Bellanaija.com, 2013).

Flavour is rated number one modern hip-hop afro beat artiste among the Igbo’s (one of the three major tribes in Nigeria) and other tribes because of his fluency in rapping with the language. All these have given the artiste both national and international recognition and by extension justifies the choice of the musical lyrics for this study. He is well known for his explicit lyrics about women’s body. It was written of him in the FreeNaijaLyrics blog thus:

It's no tale that Flavour appreciates the natural curve of the African woman's backside, and this video features a display of the African woman in various sizes, shapes, curves and will make you a believer in *Flavour and his gospel* (Emphasis mine) (2013).

How do women deconstruct what this gospel of his is-an evangelism of women as sex and voyeuristic objects for the men’s gaze or healthy sexualized empowerment for women?

## A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Music, especially popular ones have been adduced to have (or to have had) a big impact on the way gender is constructed in our culture. Railton, & Watson, (2005) clarify that:

If a song is played over and over and everybody likes it, then it becomes normal and acceptable and by extension whatever is being represented in that song becomes acceptable in turn with time. For example, if an artiste uses a derogatory term to refer to a woman in his song, chances are that other people will start using the same term to refer to women. It could also work in another way; if women are wearing a revealing outfit in a music video then young girls will think that they should be wearing the same kind of clothing.

What this implies is the considerable influence, artistic lyrics wield on the lives of the unwary media consumers most especially the young adults and adolescents. Most songs portray a particular image; usually a man with a lot of money, has girls all over him and controls them like he owns them, as if they could not think on their own (Stern, 2005). This dominant representation unfortunately seems to affect women's identity of themselves and how the society also views them-as objects for male possession and domination. The fact that a song can control a person's actions and behaviours shows us how the music industry plays a big part in gender construction.

To some, popular music is a means to self-expression and sexual autonomy. Explaining this, SPARK (2014) drew a distinction between sexualization and healthy sexuality thus: 'sexualisation uses girls' and women's bodies as a marketing tool and a ratings grabber and often leads to low-self esteem and depression while healthy sexuality allows for intimacy and is linked to positive feelings' and concludes that objectification of the women in popular culture is a healthy self expression of female sexuality. This seems to support the argument that women are empowered since they are made prominent in music. While to others, music is an end- the peak of female sexualization, objectification, oppression and subjugation-women are simply debased and exploited.

Popular music today has the power to construct the public's view of each gender. Using the musical lyrics of the popular Nigerian artiste 'Flavour' as a case in point, the women at some point were bluntly referred to as 'ashawo' (slut) in one of the tracks. Within the cultural context of Nigeria, that represents the highest form of debased name calling reserved specially for prostitutes. Yet we see it recurring in Flavour's music in reference to women (Nigerian), without distinction. Though debasing and demeaning to the status of the women, how do the women respond to it? It could be argued at the end of this study that women may have become desensitized to the derogatory lyrics of these songs, resulting in a culture of silence amongst them that appear to condone and promote young female acceptance of the prevalence of sexually explicit music contents and negative images of women therein.

Studies that have been conducted using content analyses show that music videos are becoming increasingly sexually explicit in comparison to early findings of sexual suggestiveness and innuendo (see Glantz, 2012). Research into the effects of sexually objectifying music videos has found that girls are socialized to 'internalize an observer's perspective as a primary point of view of their physical selves' (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). This can lead to frequent body monitoring causing females to think of themselves and treat themselves as sex objects. Other studies such as the content analysis of six types of media, by Pardun, L'Engle, and Brown (2005) found that music, in particular, contained substantially more sexual content than any other media outlets. Sexually explicit and derogatory lyrics were also especially apparent in rap music, which has been criticized for its graphic derogatory presentation of women using lyrics that objectify, exploit or victimize them (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009; Cobb & Boettcher, 2007). Furthermore, stereotyped gender roles emerged from lyrics containing sexual imagery that promote the

“acceptance of women as sexual objects and men as pursuers of sexual conquest,” (Martino, Collins, Elliott, Strachman, Kanouse, & Berry, 2006, p. 438). From these studies, we observe a perceptible shift by music producers from state of implicitness to a state of explicitness in sexual portrayals of women, thus, advancing an acceptance of sexual availability and objectification of women.

Meanwhile, feminist and critical approaches to studying music television’s content have theorized the possibilities for women’s subjectivity, pleasure, and agency as viewers and performers (Railton & Watson, 2005; Stockbridge, 1990). Audience effects research mirrors these issues. Christine Hansen’s work (DATE PLEASE) suggests that sexually violent content enlisting stereotypical gender roles in music videos primes viewers to adopt more positive attitudes toward such roles and behaviours (Hansen & Krygowski, 1994). Johnson et al. (1995) found evidence that African-American teen girls’ exposure to rap music may correlate with acceptance of dating violence. Kalof (1999) reports that exposing white college women and men to popular music videos with sexual imagery increased their tolerance of adversarial sexual relationships, with women showing greater acceptance of interpersonal violence. Could this be a form of empowerment as the radical libertarian feminist theorists proposed? This study seeks to find if any form of correlation will exist between the findings elsewhere on women’s seeming positive disposition to negative portrayals.

McKenna and Golombisky (2010) in their studies also found what could be assumed to be women being accomplice in their own debasement. According to them, one of the participants in the focus group expected that women as artistes would eschew the kinds of sexual representations of women typically found in videos that men produce for men but surprisingly, the reverse was the case. They put it thus:

A participant describing one of her writing scenarios said: “She would have expected men singers to portray women as sex objects, but it was frightening that women portray themselves that way. (McKenna and Golombisky 2010)

Their study also reveals that participants while rejecting the sexual objectification of women’s bodies in the service of erotic fantasy for (heterosexual) men; did not reject women’s cultural beauty imperative or recognize it as a less explicit form of sexual objectification. This led them to question the reasoning participants used to criticize the artistes. This finding suggests that most women perhaps do not have that enlightened parametric sense for critiquing and by extension, accepting or debunking the kind of images of themselves portrayed in the media. This perhaps could be an indication of women’s unconscious internalization of society’s binary categorization of gender and gender role differentiations which have become naturalized for them over the years through several cultural practices and socialization, that they are now desensitized by these contents. These studies suggest that women’s perceptions and responses to gender representations in musical is still an ongoing discourse analysis that is evolving and is still largely unclear.

## **The Radical Libertarian Feminist and the Radical Culturalists Feminist Theories**

The Radical libertarian feminist theory, otherwise known as ‘Pro-sex’ supports the hysexualised representations of female sexuality. The radical libertarian position holds that, no matter how sexually explicit or controversial, popular music representations of sexuality must be tolerated on grounds of protecting women’s rights to sexual freedom, autonomy, and choice (Duggan, 2006; McElroy, 1997; Rubin, 1989) cited in Glantz, (2013). They support popular music representations of women’s sexuality as a means to expand their spaces for action (Duggan, 2006; Feminists Against Censorship Taskforce (FACT), 1991; Rubin, 1989; SPARK, 2014). Radical libertarians understand women as autonomous beings and believe that supporting women’s access to all representations of sexuality, no matter how explicit, expands their ‘spaces of action’ by advancing feminist dialogue and by allowing women to explore, perform, and choose as the subjects and agents of their own lives (Glantz, 2013).

The Radical culturalists on the other hand oppose libertarian support for popular music’s sexualized representation of women arguing that these images legitimize men’s domination and control of women through a rhetoric of power over, objectification of, and violence against women (Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2007). Radical culturalist feminists theorize that popular music’s representation of sexuality narrows women’s overall ‘spaces for action’ by constructing and reinforcing a system of gender inequality in which men occupy positions of power and women serve in roles of subordination.

They attest to the belief that women are harmed by sexualized representations. Their view holds that these images inevitably cast women into the role of ‘other’ and thereby work to create a patriarchal system of gender hegemony and violence (Douglas, 2010; Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2006; Katz, 2006; Jenson, 2008; MacKinnon, 1989; Meyers, 2008).

These arguments although they seem to capture the different views regarding popular music's sexualized representation of women, are limited in a way in that they seem to project a universality of women experiences; neither embraces the possibility that music might influence some and not others. That is why this study aims to expose the ways in which young females that consume these musicals in Nigeria deconstruct them. To understand first whether regional differences arising from difference in culture exist regarding women's readings of hypersexualized musicals or whether a critical and meaningful dissemination of the readings are possible or whether they are polarized in their understanding of these musical lyrics.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to gauge young female perceptions and analysis of gender portrayal in Flavour’s musical lyrics. Hence, the survey research methodology and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were adopted. The population of this study includes all the female undergraduate students of Mass Communication in South-eastern

Nigerian Universities. This was considered in relationship with the nature and intent of this study, which was to study female undergraduate students who are familiar with and seem to have an affinity for popular music, especially Flavour's music which seems to be the rage among young adolescents in the country. The states in the South-east geo-political zone include: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. From the five states, the researchers obtained a total number of seventeen approved universities by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The stratified sampling technique was used bearing in mind that some of the universities within the sample frame do not offer mass communication course thereby making the population highly heterogeneous in that aspect. Based on this, the universities were stratified into homogenous groups and a random selection was made based on the following criteria:

- i. The university must be running mass communication or media literacy programmes;
- ii. The department must have been accredited and/or recognized by NUC as at the time of this study.

Having isolated the universities that offer mass communication programmes, five universities were randomly selected from each of the five states for survey. The universities are presented in table one below with the total population of their female mass communication undergraduate students thus:

Table 1

*Sample of Selected Universities and Their Population Distribution*

S/N	State	University	Population
1	Anambra	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	610
2	Enugu	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	615
3	Ebonyi	Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	541
4	Imo	Imo State University	552
5	Abia	Abia State University, Uturu	567
		Total	N=2,885

Table one above shows the total population of female undergraduate students from selected universities as 2,885. A sample size of 360 was derived from this population using Taro Yamene's statistical formula. Respondents from different levels in Mass Communication Departments were randomly selected from the campuses for the survey.

For the FGD, three sets of focus group interviews were carried out drawing students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The participants were gathered through the snowball technique where one contact generated further contacts. The participants comprised of four female students, each within the

age bracket of 18 to 28, giving a total of twelve participants from the three universities. The participants shared the following characteristics in common – communication background, media literate, ardent music consumers and young. The discussion for the sets lasted for about an hour and thirty minutes each. To maintain the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were used to denote their names. The group discussions were recorded with an audio midget and later transcribed into written text. The data from the FGD were thematically analysed.

### Data Presentation and Analyses

This study, a women-reception study explored women's perceptions of and experiences with Flavour's music. A high response rate of 99% was obtained from the respondents. The result on the age distribution shows that 69.5% representing over half of the sampled population fall within 18-23 age brackets, about one fifth (23.1%) are within the age bracket of 24-28 years, while a few, 7.4% of the respondents indicated being 28 years and above. This suggests that majority of the respondents fall within the age brackets of 18-28, the undergraduate age of Nigerian universities and also coincides with the intent of this study- to study young women between the ages of 18 years to 28 years.

Table 2

#### *Respondents' Exposure, Understanding of Flavour's Musical Lyrics*

Responses	Exposure to Flavour's Music	Understanding of Flavour's Music	Focus in Flavour's Music	Percent
Yes	91.6%	78.5%	Instrumental	24.1
No	8.4%	6.2%	Aspects	
Can't Say	-	15.3%	Lyrics/Message	18.1
			Both	57.8
Total	100% (n=336)	100% (n=336)	Total	100 (n=336)

Findings in this table show high level of exposure to Flavour's music by the respondents. 91.6% of the respondents agree to listening to Flavour's music, while 8.4% indicated no interest. This to a considerable extent validates the researcher's choice of respondents based on their high level of media content consumption in general and Flavour's music in particular. The respondents also indicated high level of understanding of the lyrics of Flavour's music as the table shows. 78.5% understand the lyrics, 15.3% could not say if they understood the lyrics, while 6.2% do not understand the lyrics of the music. This finding suggests that respondents stand better chances of deconstructing meanings of the lyrics since they understand them.

Data from the table also show that over half of the respondents, 57.8% pay attention to both the lyrics and the instrumental aspects of Flavour's music, 24.1% focus only on the instrumental aspects, while 18.1% pay particular attention to the lyrics/messages of Flavour's music. This



finding corroborates the high level of understanding of Flavour's music since respondents pay attention to both lyrics and beats of the music.

Table 3

*Dominant Themes of the Music and Gender Sensitivity to Sexually Explicit Themes*

	Central Theme of Flavour's Music	Sensitivity to Sexually Explicit Music
Men	-	6.6%
Women	81%	46.4%
Both Equally	19%	47%
Total	100% (n=336)	100% (n=336)

Findings here, illustrate that more than two thirds 81% of the respondents believe that women form the central theme of Flavour's music, while 19% maintain that Flavour's music focus on both men and women equally. 47% constituting almost half of the respondents indicate that sexually explicit music are offensive to both men and women equally, 46.4% believed it is more offensive to women while 6.6% alleged it is more offensive to men. The reading from the table seems to indicate explicit sexual lyrics as distasteful in taste.

Table 4

*Women's Perception of the Portrayal of Women in Flavour's and 'Naija' Hip-hop Music as a Whole*

	Women's Perception of the Portrayal of Women in Flavour's Music	Women's Perception of the Portrayal of Women in 'Naija' Hip-hop Music
Positively	31.2%	19.8%
Neutrally	-	32.7%
Negatively	46.3%	47.5%
No Idea	22.5%	-
Total	100% (n=336)	100% (n=336)

46.3% of the respondents perceived Flavour's music as portraying women negatively, 31.2% indicate positive portrayal, while 22.5% have no idea of whether women are negatively or positively portrayed. On the portrayal of women in 'Naija' musical lyrics, slightly over one-third, 47.5% of the respondents indicated negative portrayal of women in the music, 19.8% stated positive portrayal in the music while 32.7% were neutral on the issue. Women's opinions appear to be slightly divided along the dual axis or binary oppositions of positivity and negativity of representations, at first glance. Conversely, substantial percentage remains undecided.

Taken together, these findings become not only indicative of the ambivalent dispositions and none uniformity in perception of what the women population considers negative or positive representations, but points to possible low level of feminist consciousness amongst the women in this regard .

Table 5

*Words Respondents' Consider Debasing to Women and Respondents' Opinion on the Portrayal of Women in Flavour's Lyrics*

Respondents' Opinion on the Portrayal of Women	Percent	Words Respondents' Consider Debasing to Women	Percent
Empowering to Women	14.6%	Ashawo (slut)	38.8%
Debasing to Women	50.2%	Baby Oku	2.5%
Of no Consequence to Women	10.6%	Tomato Baby	0.6%
Don't Know	24.6%	Ukwu Nwanyi Owerri (butt)	4.3%
		All of the above	47.8%
		None of the above	5.9%
Total	100% (n=336)	Total	100% (n=336)

Results from this table indicate women's perception on the impact of portrayal of women in Flavour's music. 50.2% constituting the majority of the respondents believe that Flavour's lyrics are debasing to women, 14.6% maintain that the lyrics are empowering to women, 10.6% indicate that the lyrics are of no consequence to women, while 24.6% remain uncertain. About what women consider debasing in the musical lyrics, 47.8% of the respondents consider all the words listed as debasing to women, 38.8% saw 'ashawo' as the debasing word in the music, 4.3% and 3.2% consider 'Ukwu Nwanyi Owerri' and 'Baby Oku' respectively as the debasing words, while 5.9% consider none of words listed as debasing to women. This finding is particularly significant because as insignificant as the 5.9% of the respondents (that saw none of the words listed above as being offensive) may seem, it is suggestive that such minute figure has been perhaps culturally groomed and conditioned to read no meaning in sexist and objectifying texts.

Table 6

*Flavour's Music Portrayals and Impacts of Portrayals on Women's Space for Action*

	Flavour's Music Promoting Negative Attitudes Towards Women	Women Countering Perceived Negative Portrayals	Impact of Music on Women's Space for Action
Yes	53.2%	18.2%	42%
No	29.2%	56.4%	26%
Can't Say	17.5%	25.4%	32%
Total	100% (n=336)	100% (n=336)	100% (n=336)

From the table above, 53.2% of the respondents indicate that Flavour's representation of women in his music encourage negative attitudes towards women. 29.2% disagree, while 17.5% were unsure. Majority(56.4%) of the respondents indicated that even though sexually explicit music are more offensive to women, women do not make effort to counter such negative portrayals. 18.2% believed women counter negative portrayals while 25.4% remained uncertain. On whether negative portrayals influence women's actions, majority of the respondent, representing 41.9% think negative portrayal of women in music impact on women's space for actions. 26.6% stated otherwise, while 31.6% have no idea. The 31.6% that was uncertain of the influence of negative portrayals on women's space for action, further substantiates previous findings on the existence of low level sense of feminist consciousness and indifference to female experiences with dominant images.

The researchers went on to ascertain what factors the women consider responsible for Flavour's portrayal of women in a particular way in his music. The majority (56.4%) believe socio-cultural factor is responsible, 8% mentioned economical factor, 3.4% said political factor, while 17% maintain that none of the factors listed is responsible for any perceived negative portrayals in Flavour's music. About factors that are responsible for women's particular disposition to gendered music, 67.2% said socio-cultural factors, 20.8 said economic factors, 1.8% said political and 10.2% said all the other factors mentioned are responsible for women's particular disposition to gendered music.

Having examined women's perceptions and factors responsible for such, the women expressed ways in which any form of negative portrayals could be obliterated. Majority of the women constituting 63.2% believe that enlightening the women to develop feminist consciousness is one of the surest ways to curb negative portrayals, 20.7% suggested encouraging women to boycott offensive musical albums, and 8.1% indicated staging a protest as the best way to challenge negative portrayals while 8.1% endorsed all the options listed above.

### **Analysis of the Focus Group Discussion**

As stated earlier, the FGD was to further explore the trends and determine the dominant ethos in Flavour's music from the various interpretations and readings the women gave to the lyrics under study. The researchers made every possible effort to weave the discussion within the feminist theoretical frameworks to determine how the women perceive the portrayal and/or representation of women in the music. The FGD participants showed a remarkable enthusiasm and willingness to discuss about women in Flavour's music because according to them 'Flavour is a unique guy that stands out among the Nigerian popular musicians and his lyrics make his music exceptional'. The following themes emerged in the course of the researchers' interaction with the young women and they buttressed the quantitative data presented above. These emerging themes are closely analyzed and intermittently laced with the young women's exact words.

### **Idolization and Eulogies of Femininity and Womanhood**

This is one of the dominant themes that emerged in the group discussion. The participants seem to have a common take on this as they maintain that Flavour's musical lyrics centre around the women with particular reference to all the observable features or attributes that make a woman a woman-butts, boobs, waist and so on. Two of the discussants say:

*Okpala: I love the way he sings...sometimes he appreciates women....he just likes 'their' bodies, he just likes everything, the shape, and everything...*

*Amaka: well Flavour always talks about women. At some points he is glorifying a woman, at other points he is talking about their waist..., and stuffs like that, those parts that make a woman a woman...*

From the women's point of view, it is obvious that Flavour only played out the feeling of deep intense admiration and fantasies that dwelt in a man's mind, which arguably applies to other men. Women become the objects of 'worship' as a bait to 'take these women home' as the one of the participants pointed out. Hear her:

#### **Flavour's songs: 'praise in damnation...'**

Closely related to the theme discussed above is what one of the women discussants termed 'praise in damnation'. This is very significant considering how women feel about the seeming surface eulogies that dominate most of Flavour's music. The women pointed out that although most of Flavour's songs tend to adore, praise and make women prominent; it only creates false pretence of empowerment that only serves to secure the woman for the man's satisfaction and fulfillment. Again, they expressed strong dislike for most of the words that Flavour uses most times in talking about women; such words as 'Ashawo'-slut, 'Ara dara ada adago'-flaccid breast cannot be made firm again-and so on. They consider these insulting, derogatory, distasteful and debasing thus:

*Kindness: he appreciates women ...But most times this what we call 'praise in damnation' because at the end of the day..., you look deep into the lyrics you just discover he just wants to take these women home, he just likes their bodies, he just likes everything, the shape, and everything...*

*Vera: for me, I strongly believe that Flavour only pretends to eulogize and idolize women simply to woo them for sex. he is a naughty dude and he loves saying a lot of trash.*

*Ada: This guy showers praises of admiration on women but in a very distasteful manner. It is just ironical that you call someone your adorable and still tag that person 'ihe ntinye'-(sex object)*

### **Eroticization of Women for Men's Sexual Gratifications**

As many scholars have also found, Flavour used several words that the women considered vulgar, raunchy and sexually explicit to talk about women. Most of the participants pointed out that Flavour uses these vulgar words to wet the men's appetite to secure the women for sex stressing that it is a common practice with men.

*Vicky: I think Flavour just prepares the guys' mind for sex or at the first sound of Flavour's music, you just want to see a woman to talk into sleeping with. The endline for Flavour's music is someone to sleep with. He stresses all these other parts where you have to sleep with the ladies, the breast, the waist, and all that, so for him I just think that he wants the guys to have something to say to the ladies they want to sleep with. That's just it.*

*All :In fact Flavour just sings this way because that is how guy's out there use such words to entice women so what he's singing is what happens. They use such words to seduce women. That's all.*

We could infer from their responses that Flavour acts out the dominant male enticement of women that seems natural way of luring women which is acceptable in the society. In this case, the woman's body becomes a 'performance site', objects of attainment, desire and pleasure for men.

### **Naming and Shaming: The 'Otherness' in 'Others' Even Among the Women**

When the participants were confronted with the question of how they feel about the use of such words as 'Ashawo' (slut) 'waka waka baby'(prostitute) and so on to address the women in the album, they did not hesitate in labeling the 'others'-women- and shaming them with the derogatory statement 'the ashawos know themselves'. For them, the women who are supposedly the 'ashawos' deserve Flavour's aspersions. The researchers observed how the participants constantly distanced or detached themselves from the fold of women being referred to, as they will always use the third person pronoun 'their' or 'them' instead of 'our' or 'us' to refer to the class of women the participants assumed are being portrayed in the musicals.

However, they were also fast to point to the fact that different kinds of women exist even though women are not atomized but treated as a collective unit. For them that is what Flavour may be referring to; hence the need to recognize the variations in women's population.

*Amaka: there are kinds of women. It's just your kind. It could be from where you are coming from that shaped you... Just know it that the upbringing matters... That is just what I think it is the other women who will say such things not really the women themselves.*

*Vera: Do we really have to expose our butts to dance? But anyway,...it depends shaa, just like what you said, it depends on the woman, the kind of person and where you come from.*

**Vicky:** *Flavour is not talking about all women the people he is talking about know themselves.*

Obviously, the participants maintained this position because according to them the women in that category are not decent and well trained and that is what Flavour is pointing out not really attributing these debasements to all women. Thus, ruling out the fact that most women as they also acknowledged pattern their lives after a given orientation from the media. Describing this scenario, Katz (2006) states that ‘the artistes convey contradictory messages to women about their sexuality, first by teaching them that social validation comes from sexuality and then holding them in contempt for behaving sexually’.

### **Reality Conflict: Discord Between Music World and the Woman’s World**

When the question of whether portrayal of women in music shape their attitudes and why the women still dance to the tune of the music that are, even at surface value, sexually explicit and derogatory, they opined that ‘it is just music’ and that the artistes are just using such words to sell their albums and make money. To them, most people do not pay close attention to the lyrics/message of the music they dance to; rather they simply dance to the beats. Consequently, do not read meaning into what they echo.

**Kindness:** *I think it’s music, you know most times people just go for the beats not the lyrics. So, I think it’s music.*

**M:** *in other words. It is just the beats that pull you to the dance floor most times, you don’t consider the lyrics when the beat is hot and interesting?*

**All:** *Yes*

### **Flavour’s Music: Sexual Empowerment?**

The participants when enlightened on the two line of arguments concerning the portrayal of women in cultural productions, they were polarized in their opinions with none taking a strong stand on either of the two theoretical seams-radical libertarian and the radical culturalists. The researcher posed the question ‘As a woman in Nigeria, do you think that such portrayals actually empower women, give them more freedom to express themselves or do you think from the culturalists point of view, that it is debasing and a form of exploitation of the women generally?’ and the following responses were given:

**Kindness:** *...Flavour’s music actually helps because we are still in Nigeria where there is male chauvinism, there is this patriarchal culture, women are actually under the men..., women were just house wives, and objects for sexual gratification and that is all, I think Flavour’s music tries to give a woman place in the society because a woman who knows her power will know her strength over the men, I think women are actually stronger than the men because it just takes a woman’s sense and then this feminine touch to get a man down on his knees . so if a woman actually knows her place, knows her power which is the message Flavor is trying to pass, she will actually rise above the*

*men and equalize with men in the society because I think we live in a society where men are trying to overturn everything, over ride the women.... (emphasis ours)*

**Chinenye:** *some of Flavour's songs actually give women sense of belonging. There are some other songs where he really praised women like the 'ada ada' song which was like a hit for him because a lot of people like the song at a large extent but on the contrary, he just wants to make women feel very cheap, like it's that easy to get a woman that is just it.*

These responses by implication suggest that Flavour's music has an empowerment undertone and that is why women find it easier to act out the part sung by Flavour thereby breaking free from the clout of cultural inhibitions and limitations. However, the expression '*it actually takes a woman who knows her place a little sense of feminine touch to bring a man down on his knees*, seem to connote what Jhally (2007) noted in the paradox of music television's 'dreamworld' that positions women as 'independent and in control' only when they are 'passive and submissive' to the sexual desires of men. Their responses are also suggestive of what is regarded as 'enlightened sexism' which by extension, results in sexual empowerment. Perhaps, this is what informed the respondent's statement above.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study expanded upon previous research in this area by incorporating perception of young females from developing country on the ongoing discourse on women reception studies, to determine how college students' perspectives on issues of hypersexuality in popular music refute or uphold radical libertarian and the radical culturalist's theories. This paper's findings show the audience of the study to be polarized in their view of both theories. This ambivalence played out in two distinct ways. First in the survey majority (50%) of the women found the musical lyrics debasing. In contrast, the Focus group which probed beyond the surface to extract hidden meanings yielded a different finding-empowerment. Although the Focus group is smaller, their answers provided deeper insight regarding their opinion on the hypersexualised nature of the lyrics. Though they showed strong dislike for words such as 'slut' which was repetitively used in the lyrics and perceive such as debasing yet they see the musical lyrics as a form of sexual empowerment for the women. These contrasting views are in line with the reception theories as espoused by scholars (eg. Stuart Hall) which posits that audiences read media messages differently probably due to individual differences and other intervening variables. That is why we argue that with regards to the two theories, their disposition is at best polarized.

Furthermore, findings from the study show high audience exposure to and understanding of Flavour's music and similar hip-hop songs. The study's survey and FGD data demonstrate that majority of the young female college students studied, although they listen and enjoy these musicals; see the musicals as depicting women negatively which they believe encourage negative attitude towards women in the society. Of significance perhaps is the finding from the study which indicates that majority (56%) feel no need to counter these negatives portrayals pointing that women may have been conditioned to accept these portrayals as normal. This is so since 56.4% feel that socio-cultural factor is responsible for this depiction while 67% feel that

women's disposition to gendered music also is as a result of socio cultural underpinnings. Nigeria is a patriarchal society where women from childhood are exposed to and indoctrinated with female subjugation and sexual objectification in the society and as such come to accept the sexual objectification and exploitation within the lyrics as reflective of narratives and ideologies of the Nigerian dominant cultures.

The study also shows that most Nigerian women readily recognize offensive portrayals in popular culture (music) but remain indifferent to the same. From the findings, it was apparent that Nigerian women seem not to have developed requisite feminist consciousness and disposition to counteract negative representations of womanhood. The portrayal of women and women's perceptions to same have increasingly shown greater diversity, more complexity, and dramatically mixed messages about the individual female persona and women's roles in society (Cooper 1999, 355, in Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009) which to a large extent played out in this study. Therefore, the complexities of the study findings is in line with Meyers', (2008) observation stand as a testimony to popular media's function as an important "ideological battleground" over which meanings, values, and identities are driven, constrained, and contested. The findings derived from this study support previous research findings by adding Nigerian women's perspective to the already existing 'sex war debate' and 'ideological debates' on gender portrayals/representations in popular culture (see Mavin, 2009; Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009; Abiola, 2013; Mckenna, 2006; Mckenna, 2010; Railton & Watson, 2005 and Glantz, 2013).

However, we conclude by observing that women's disposition and interpretation to popular music seems to be largely contingent upon diverse complex interacting factors such as: the appreciation of the aesthetics of the music, its general appeal, the melodic structure, including dominant socio-cultural context where it is produced. The findings here seem to infer the likelihood of a mutual relationship between music, culture and the realities in which it is produced, performed and consumed. Therefore, even when the lyrics depict imagery that comes across as offensive and antithetical to women's empowerment, they continue to be accomplices in their own debasement through their relishing of the music.

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