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Empower yourself or die trying: A thematic and narrative analysis of the most famous music videos of Brazilian pop divas

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SUMMARY

This article reports how female empowerment and female sexual objectification are present in music videos and songs belonging to the Brazilian Pop Divas. From a thematic analysis of video clips and lyrics, about 70 video clips and songs present on Youtube were analyzed. Compared to male artists, female artists were more sexually objectified, held to stricter standards of appearance, and more likely to demonstrate sexually attractive behavior; moreover, female singers were subjected to secondary roles in their music videos before male participation. Therefore, the consumption of Brazilian Pop Divas' songs and music videos can influence and reinforce sexist attitudes and sexual objectification of the female figure for their consumers since these attitudes are normalized in present music videos and songs of the most acclaimed female singers in Brazil.

Keywords: music consumption; culture; sexual objectification; gender.

INTRODUCTION

Pop culture originates in the media, gains strength and consolidates within and beyond communication streams (Becko & Amaral, 2020), and has an expressive cultural dimension, as it implies an order of meanings and social positions, indicating information about whom it consumes, place it belongs to, status, social position, and identity-as well as happens in music consumption in general (Hesmondgalgh, 2013; Lonsdale, 2020, DeNora, 2017; Greenberg & Rentfrow, 2017).

Along these lines, some studies show how music videos and music genres can rectify negative values and attitudes, especially regarding female objectification and sexualization (Ey, 2014; Ey, 2016; Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, & Kervyn, 2020). Continued exposure to sexual and sexist images in the media can lead young people to overvalue physical appearance and lose their sense of identity (Stephens & Few, 2007; Ey, 2016). Frisby and Aubrey (2012) and Aubrey and Frisby (2011) found in music videos of the hip hop and pop genre of their time symbols that reify the notion of valuing black and white female performers for their bodies and appearance, a sign of their objectification. These studies suggest that more studies be conducted to check this aspect in music videos. In the work of Castillo-Villar et al. (2020), it was found how much the subculture of the „altered movement” in Mexico can propagate a discourse of sexualization and domination over the female gender, as well as to conduct harmful identity work, such as idolizing drug dealers and their lifestyle, as well as other elements of the drug world. The authors propose that further work be done on other musical genres, such as funk carioca, to verify the issue of musical narratives and lyrics leading to consumption as a signpost of identity.

The present work follows Castillo-Villar et al. (2020) guidelines, focusing on Brazilian pop divas. The criterion to define who these divas were was their popularity, measured by the number of views on Youtube. It was considered the ten most popular songs of these singers, which had to have at least one video clip with more than 100 million views - which also defines the contemporaneity of the divas belonging to the work, which emerged at the time of streaming services and grew up using these platforms to their advantage, talking in a multimedia way with this new amount of fans (Jenol & Pazil, 2020). The debate that will guide this discussion concerns female empowerment vs. female objectification. Considering the importance of music consumption for identity work and gender roles (Jennex, 2013), it is believed that what is propagated in songs and music videos can influence their audience and bring significant social consequences. Thus, this study aims to discuss the fine line between female empowerment and objectification in music videos of contemporary Brazilian pop divas.

This control is exercised by discourses and symbolic sanctions that control the body and sexuality, producing subjectivities in which power relations intertwine and shape their sexual constructions within a society (Foucault, 2020). Furthermore, thanks to this, women learn to think, feel, and act in a submissive way in a society built for male standards, meeting the requirements for manipulating and dominating the female body (dos Santos, Neves, & Reis, 2020). This proves to be a problem when they are transmitted by the media to the general public, with discourses that can promote reified and socially constructed gender roles, where without an insight a critical knowledge (Travis, Bowman, Childs, & Villanueva, 2016;

Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2019; Tanner, Asbridge, & Wortley, 2009), they can be incorporated into the consumer in a negatively (Castillo-Villar et al., 2020; Mosley, Abreu, Roderman, & Crowell, 2017). Rap songs, among other genres, have been portraying this male domination throughout musical history (Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2019), while female singers, such as Madonna, have been trying to deconstruct social standards and norms, singing about female empowerment financially, sexually, culturally, where she is free to develop who she, as a woman, is (Cano, 2017). The problem is when this empowerment is confused under the optics of patriarchy, and the woman puts herself back into a role of submission to the man (Mosley et al., 2017; Ey, 2014; Ey, 2016).

Female Empowerment

Female empowerment is the result of the various feminist movements of the 1980s and 1990s and can be equated with achievements by women in political participation, legal reform, economic security, and even equality of opportunities (Malhotra et al., 2002). Thus, it is safe to assume that female empowerment is the struggle, and conquest, of a more just society, where women and men are seen as equals and with the same bag of opportunities, and it is also an ideal that inspires women to assume control and responsibility for their choices and their identity. (Alcoff, 1988). Female empowerment is marked by raising awareness and engaging women in critically examining their everyday lives, their families and community, and the structures surrounding them to understand oppressive systems and engage in collective action for transformation (Silva, 2008). Empowerment is related to awakening women's consciousness in the face of their subordination and alienation (Baquero, 2006).

The media can bring female empowerment through the changing representation of women in it (Hunt & Serazio, 2017; Sharma & Bump, 2021). On the other hand, it is necessary to be careful to analyze the representations from a current feminist point of view without running the risk of slipping into a categorical classification, simply grouping them as positive or negative representations (Mozdzinski, 2015). Douglas (2010) argues that the dissemination of a supposedly more „powerful” image of women is increasingly common in music, television, cinema, magazines, and pop culture. However, according to the author, such images continue corroborating certain derogatory and stereotyped representations of the female sex.

As part of the social, the body has the potential to manifest natural creativity through its individualities, needs, and desires - and for this reason, it has always been an object of repression (Garcia & de Santana, 2020). It is natural and religious discourses that place it as sacred. Contrary to it, a movement seeks to modify these structural gender roles, where the woman fights and conquers more space in the current scenario, where she empowers herself with her body and gender (Belmiro et al., 2015). The feminist victories are praised as the woman occupied new spaces. Now they are their providers and, many times, the provider of their families, which generates changes in the family structure and social bonds (Oliveira & Traesel, 2008). On a general level, empowerment means increased power. Also, empowerment applies to the personal and collective autonomy of individuals and social groups in interpersonal and institutional relations, especially those subjected to relations of oppression, discrimination, and social domination (Kleba & Wendausen, 2009).

In music, pop divas can appropriate this empowerment in their lyrics and music videos, sub-

merging gender roles and taking control over their bodies, their sexuality, and their pleasure (Cano, 2017). At the same time, these female singers can rectify long-fought gender roles that put women back under the bonds of gender, submissive to men (Ey, 2016; Castillo-Villar et al., 2020; Mosley, Abreu, Roderman, & Crowell, 2017). The general public, when is consuming their performance and their music, they have an insight and knowledge, can extract from music the messages they need to reinforce aspects of their identity-including sexual and gender identity-and, disregard the others (Travis, Bowman, Childs, & Villanueva, 2016; Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2019; Tanner, Asbridge, & Wortley, 2009). This may not be possible, for example, for a child or adolescent audience, where these stereotypical roles may be assumed in their behavior, way of dressing, acting, and consuming what the media will provide (Ey, 2014; Ey, 2016). Thus, discussing the empowerment and objectification present in mass pop culture is essential, and this paradox will be analyzed in the following sections.

METHODOLOGY

Rescuing the study's objective to investigate the fine line between female empowerment and objectification in music videos of Brazilian pop divas. The article used qualitative research of content analysis of lyrics and narratives of music videos of the considered current Brazilian pop divas. The criteria were considered the massive popularity of divas (Soares, 2020; Medford, 2019). Thus, those pop singers who had at least one solo music video with more than 100 million views were considered, among them Anitta, Ludmilla, Luísa Sonza, Iza, Lexa, Pocah, and Guilia Be. Singers from the sertanejo or MPB genres were excluded, as well as music videos of the divas as a feat of another artist. It has analyzed the narrative and the compositions themselves, of the ten most viewed video clips on the Youtube platform, of each of the singers that compose this corpus, counting 70 video clips/compositions.

Both the compositions and the narrative of the music videos were analyzed under the two major theoretical prisms discussed: objectification and empowerment. The compositions were analyzed using thematic analysis, seeking to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in the data, and discuss them within existing broad theoretical categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006)-providing more detailed and differentiated descriptions of these specific themes. On the other hand, the narrative analysis focused on the Diva's body language throughout the music video and the roles played by them, in addition to a contextual analysis of the compositions within these narratives.

Castillo-Villar et al. (2020) used a similar approach to analyze lyrics and music of the 'altered movement' genre in YouTube videos. Hunter (2011) used a similar approach to analyze hip-hop lyrics and music videos. Following Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) recommendations, the data were analyzed multiple times to understand them while capturing key concepts. After developing a coding scheme, each code was classified into categories or clusters to organize and give meaning to the data. Finally, the categories were labeled with specific concepts, which, in turn, generated a comprehensive view of the research topic.

RESULTS

Feat and machism

The analysis of the video clips and selected lyrics showed that, even though the figure of the Diva is linked to female independence, some video clips suggest an objectification of

women, especially in those with male feats. Passages like „I can't lie, I want to see you naked" and „give it to me right here" are examples in Anitta's compositions that refer to the objectification of her body. The feat of Anitta with other women, as is the case of „combatchy", focuses on the body and ass of the singers, but to have fun and dancing, using her body for pleasure, without being submissive to men. Other examples of feats with drag queen, such as „Provocar" by Lexa feat Gloria Groove, „Garupa" by Luísa Sonza feat Pablló Vittar, or in the partnership between Pocah and MC Mirella in „Quer Mais?" the attention is again turned to the independent woman, owner of herself, of her own body, who does not care about men and is the owner of her pleasure and her sex. „She doesn't care about men, she owns her own body, she doesn't care about men, and she owns her pleasure and her sex. This chart shows the sexist speeches emitted by other men that are present in the songs of the singers that were analyzed.

Chart - Songs, feats, and machism

Songs with <i>feats</i>	Male chauvinist verses	Songs with <i>feats</i>	Male chauvinist verses
Downtown	"Enredarte en mis piernas es lo que quieres"	Clock Bomb	"Grab you rough, the dick is in your thigh" "If you give me permission I can come in, baby."
Go Ratchet	"See my zipper, put that ass on it" "I can't lie I'm tryna see you naked." "Anitta, baby, I'm tryna spank it"	Take	"I like to see you sit don't forget to warm up just won't get hurt When to start going down " "First, pin your hair back, flex your knee."
Earthquake	"This girl is shameless." "And she entered my mind in an indecent way"	All Yours	"Look at the power of the brunette's ass." "Dancing with that cleavage"
Sim ou Não	"Lo que el niño necesita, baby" "Y aquí mismo dártelo"	Naughty	"Get your ass to hit, hit, hit with pressure."
This shawty is crazy	"Even crazy like that, it's much more than I deserve"		

Source: Research data (2022).

Overall, in the narrative of the music videos, all Brazilian pop singers suffer from the objectification of their bodies, only changing how their bodies are used in different scenarios. Music has an essential and dialectical role in influencing (and being influenced) by the culture from which it originates. Therefore, one detects in the music videos and compositions cultural footprints of a country that still lives the values of patriarchy, bringing the macho culture rooted and accepted by society (dos Santos et al., 2020). Burges and Burpo (2012) found in their work on the sexualization of artists in music videos a direct relationship in how male college students decreased their judgments of guilt and empathy toward rape victims. Furthermore, women in the sexualized/objectified condition were more likely to be classified as responsible for the act of experiencing sexual harassment (Burges & Burpo, 2012). Snippets such as „Anitta, baby, I'm trying to hit [your butt]" and „First pin your hair back, bend your knee" can support the previous arguments.

The verses considered sexist were sung by male singers who put women in a passive or submissive position in front of the male figure, especially during sexual intercourse. This submission was also found by Ey (2016) and Ey (2014) when analyzing the influence of songs and music videos that propagate negative stereotypes related to gender roles for children.

Finally, it is noticeable that in feats with black pop divas such as Ludmilla and IZA no sexist verses were found, and these singers were also not sexualized or objectified in their music videos by other men in songs with participation, which can be related to a rise and dissemination of feminism and black empowerment in Brazil.

Empowerment x Objectification

A music video is generated from a particular song, essentially constructed by the idea that materializes and communicates its concept, the plastic structure of the mentioned song, and the specificity of the genre and specific trajectory of the artists who appear in the music videos (Soares, 2008). The mainstream language is used to reach the general public precisely because of its popular significance and its cultural stability of entertainment (Soares, 2008). Evaluating Anitta's career, one observes this strong commercial appeal around mass culture, shaping her name into a high-reaching brand (Geraldo & Estevam, 2020). The singer proposes a free lifestyle, without shame, without taboos, and without fear of being criticized for morally irresponsible attitudes, detracting from her personality's free side (Leal, 2014). This image aligns with other pop divas, who extol a consumptive and performative lifestyle, directly linked to the ideals of authenticity and self-esteem present in contemporary society (Leal, 2014). Therein lies an example of where the fine line between objectification and empowerment lies. Pop singers seeking to explore this persona free from the moral constraints and ties that are embedded by power discourses and religious and biological (Foucault, 2020; Bourdieu, 2010), among others, but at the same time, portray themselves through their compositions and narratives in a way to reify stigmatized gender roles, where again the woman assumes a secondary role, or submissive to the male gender (Ey, 2014; Ey, 2016).

Vandyke (2011) points out that women in music videos are portrayed as one-dimensional characters, sexualized, without agency, with little to offer beyond their bodies. One example is the narrative of the music video „downtown,” where J Balvin, Anitta's guest singer, acts as a casino scammer. The singer Anitta, supposedly helping to create the plans or choose the targets, uses her body to seduce them and acts as a controlled and submissive piece of the male gender. These images send a confusing message that to be a woman is to be attractive but passive, sexy, and submissive. One of how women and girls learn about femininity in music videos is through how the characters are filmed, their framing and positions, often emphasizing their submission or framing and zooming in on parts of their bodies, necklines, and curves (Jhally, 2007). In „downtown” this also resonates, with several frames focusing on Anitta's curves and ass and the singer's sensual dance with another dancer. At the same time, J Balvin's character is much more developed, suggesting that women in leadership positions would behave more submissively than men (Wallis, 2011).

A female artist who portrays herself as a sexual object in her music video sends a different

message than a male artist who sexually objectifies women in their videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). It was quantitatively proven that female artists were more sexually objectified than male artists in music videos, measured by focusing on visual elements that serve to train viewers' eyes on bodies: the exposure of sexual body parts and the use of gaze. Thus, in keeping with objectification theory, contemporary music videos reinforce the cultural notion that women are valued first and foremost for their bodies and appearance (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Further, the authors analyzed how male and female characters were placed in purely decorative roles or instrumental roles that contributed to the plot or music, finding that it was more common in male music videos to use women in decorative roles. However, this happens in many music videos of Brazilian pop divas, as in Anitta's „vai malandra,” Pocah's „toda sua,” Luísa Sonza's „toma,” and Lexa's „sapequinha”-they are sexualized, occupy stereotypical characters, wear minimal clothing, and are often portrayed as submissive, victims, or objects of the male gaze or observer (Vandyke, 2011).

This standardization of pop divas in the background before men or male figures in music videos was mainly found in songs that featured partnerships with another male singer. However, it was also found as part of the plot of solo music videos, such as Lexa's „bandit love”, in which the singer plays the woman of a couple of thieves. However, her character has the duty only to drive the car, while the man plans and performs the whole criminal act. Also, in the solo music video for „toma” by singer Luísa Sonza, the singer plays a fetishized female character with collegiate clothes, aiming only to please her musical partner with her body movements, while the man enjoys the performance.

Female characters are also more likely to appear in the music videos in provocative clothing and consequently be sexualized by their clothing. Women's bodies here exist for viewers' consumption and pleasure, and even if they are merely stylistic choices, it can be interpreted as reified norms of negative gender role stereotypes, placing women in a submissive role to men and spreading misogynistic values (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Ey, 2016; Ey, 2014).

Focusing now on the compositions, we find a movement of empowerment that cultivates the image of the woman who has financial independence, achieved through struggle and determination, wearing designer labels and signing contracts, as in the songs „Verdinha” by Ludmilla and „evapora” by Iza feat Major Lazer and Ciara. In the same way, we notice that these singers intone the freedom to be whomever they want to be. Not to be in silence, to disturb and not be quiet, not to care what society says and imposes, which can be found, for example, in the songs „Dona de mim” by IZA, „downtown” by Anitta, and „boa menina” by Luísa Sonza. In turn, gender roles and stereotypes are subverted, where the woman is the boss in the relationship when there is such a relationship because this woman can very well follow a bohemian lifestyle and go out to have fun with her friends, as in the songs „ninguém manda nessa raba” by Pocah and „só depois do carnaval” by Lexa. Still, within this prism, the woman also takes control over her body and her pleasure, taking the initiative, looking for who she wants, subverting romantic roles and those linked to virility and conquest previously linked to the male figure, as in the songs „Din din din din” by Ludmilla feat MC Pupio and MC Doguinha and „Te pegar” by IZA.

Again, it is noted that Ludmilla and Iza managed to challenge the stereotypical sexual image

of black women in the Brazilian pop music scene through their fashionable and performative aesthetics, being those less sexualized and who demonstrated more empowerment in their music videos. In „pesadão”, for example, Iza shows herself as an „empress”, commanding her „bonde”, being the Diva in her music video and revered by Marcelo Falcão, her musical guest. In „verdinha”, Ludmilla commands her plantation and positions herself as a businesswoman, commanding a „lettuce” plantation, exercising a role that would fall into the hand of male protagonists in music videos in the mainstream. These women of African descent redefined their sexuality, took control of their images, and wrote their scripts.

Taking into account the relationship between artists, platforms, and media genres is crucial for the empowerment performances of Brazilian Pop Divas. Moreover, without forgetting the problem of the market’s appropriation of the term ‚empowerment’ these days, it has been used to simultaneously delineate the visibility strategy of Brazilian pop divas as artists, as well as the empowerment of the most marginalized populations of Brazilian society who consume the pop music made by these divas. In other words, empowerment issues are about culture, cultural resilience, sociopolitical development, and the desire to act on behalf of justice and equity. In the case of Ludmilla, IZA, Anitta, Pocah, Lexa, Giulia Be, and Luísa Sonza, this performative dimension is built both from the valorization of their self-esteem and the defense of body diversity and from the construction of empathy created through their fans with the analyzed music videos.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study made it possible to understand how female artists in current Brazilian pop music are represented in their music videos. To understand the context, two specific analysis objectives were defined. The first was to identify if the Brazilian pop divas suffered sexual objectification of their bodies in music videos of their authorship, which demanded a narrative analysis of the selected music videos. It was noticed that all pop divas had their bodies sexually objectified, especially when other male artists were present in their songs. When the objectification was not through lyrics, it appeared through images in the music videos. It was also observed that a particular direction of the female artists in their clips to adopt secondary roles before the presence of a male figure, i.e., the artists analyzed, besides being objectified in their clips, were also left in the background in most of their music videos when a musical partnership was made with a male artist. In other words, the female figure is constantly oppressed by the male figure, which reflects the gender relations in our contemporary society. This analysis, however, was based on the narrative of the music videos but did not analyze their actual effects on those who consume them and the construction of their sexual and gender identity. Future research can take advantage of this analysis based on the musical consumer.

In turn, a thematic analysis points to a movement of female empowerment in dissonance with the narratives of music videos. The pop divas sing about their financial independence, control over their actions, their bodies, and their pleasure, using roles that once belonged to the male singer, such as going to parties, having fun with friends, using men as a toy, a prop for their sex and their pleasure. These lyrics, however, conflict with the image that can be captured from their visual narratives under the lens of objectification theories.

Feminism and Popular Culture not only consider how contemporary media represents feminism it also raises vital questions about what this means for the future of feminism. Audience fragmentation, the proliferation of user-generated content, the multiple platforms through which media content is consumed, and the ongoing war between feminism and anti-feminism present challenges and opportunities for further elaboration of feminist media analysis of ongoing changes in the digital environment and how it is also shaping gender identity and the still elusive hope of gender equality.

For future research, it is suggested that other Brazilian music genres be analyzed, such as „sertanejo universitário” by the most outstanding female singers, or focused on independent music or Brazilian MPB. In addition, other platforms can be used, such as Spotify, and analyze the entire artistic career of these pop divas in a longitudinal approach in order to understand how female empowerment and objectification are built throughout their career - not only focusing on the singles as this article proposed to do.

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