Effects of Gender and Gender Role Self-Perceptions on Affective Reactions to Rock Music Videos

Gregory T. Toney and James B. Weaver, III
Auburn University

To evaluate the mediating impact of gender and gender role self-perceptions on affective responses to rock music videos, female and male undergraduates recruited from the predominantly Caucasian population of a southeastern university completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory and then watched and evaluated nine short music video segments. Consistent with previous research, the results highlight the critical importance of gender as a determinant of affective reactions to popular music. Males, in general, showed the strongest positive reactions (i.e., greatest enjoyment, least disturbance) toward hard-rock music videos while females reported the strongest positive reactions toward soft-rock music videos. Furthermore, both genders reported significant misestimations of other-gender peers' reactions. On the other hand, the influence of gender role self-perceptions proved minimal. Some implications of these findings are discussed.

Although numerous audience characteristics are thought to mediate preferences for and the enjoyment of contemporary music (cf. Eastman, Head, & Klein, 1989; Beville, 1988), the role of consumer gender (i.e., biological sex) has proven particularly important. Indeed, it has been argued that gender is at the very core of popular music appreciation (Christenson & Peterson, 1988).

Consistent with this idea, substantial differences in preferences for popular music as a function of gender have been observed in a variety of

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2To whom correspondence should be addressed at Behavioral Research Laboratory, Department of Communication, 6030 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849-5211.
research settings. For example, Fox and Wince (1975), in a survey of a
large number of undergraduates, found that women reported significantly
stronger preferences for "popular hits" and "folk" music than did men.3
Males, on the other hand, preferred "country and western" music more
than their female counterparts. Similarly, Skipper (1973) found that, al-
though there were few differences in the percentage of male and female
undergraduates reporting preferences for popular and rock music, the per-
centage of males preferring "hard rock," "rhythm and blues," and "jazz"
was over twice that of females. At the same time, a significantly higher
percentage of females listed "classical" music as their first choice and over
three times more women preferred folk music than did men.

More recently, Roe (1985), in a study of Swedish youths, found that
young men preferred rock and jazz music while young women preferred
"mainstream pop," classical, and folk music. And working with American
young adults, Christenson and Peterson (1988) found that males enjoyed
"heavy metal" and "American hard rock" most. Females, on the other
hand, enjoyed folk and mainstream pop music most.

Viewed together, a consistent pattern of the impact of gender on af-
fective reactions to popular music emerges from this research. Generally,
females expressed a greater preference than males for "softer" styles of
music especially themes with overtones of romance and tenderness. Males,
on the other hand, generally prefer "harder" forms of music that often
involve masculine and rebellious themes. Although this pattern has proven
quite prevalent, only limited research has focused on developing an under-
standing of the origins of gender differences in preferences for and the
enjoyment of contemporary music.

One valuable framework for developing our understanding of the me-
diating impact of gender on affective reactions to popular music is provided
by the theory of gender role socialization of affect (Zillmann & Weaver,
in press; Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf, & Aust, 1986). This theory proposes
that both the use and appreciation of mass media content have social ori-
gins. Specifically, it is argued that gender-specific rules of social con-
duct—which result from the fact that most young men and women in our
society are socialized according to "traditional" cultural gender roles—in-
clude gender-specific proscriptions concerning the expression and exhibi-
tion of affect (cf. Basow, 1986; Lott, 1987; Williams & Best, 1984). Young
women, research shows, are typically "encouraged to behave in ways our
culture describes as 'feminine'—to be observant and considerate of others,

3The nomenclature for categories of popular music has changed over time. Consequently,
investigators have used a variety of labels to distinguish between types of music. In order to
reflect this diversity, the labels used in previous research have been maintained in this
discussion.