Kidz Bop: Re-packaged Music, How "Censored" Music Teaches Children Gender Role Conformity, Race Identification, and KGOY.

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Abstract

Children in the U.S are viewed as a demographic of consumers, and to continue selling products to children means that medias need to create kid friendly material that can be sold to children. Kidz Bop is a series of musical covers that sells "age appropriate" music to children by having children sing popular songs on the radio and occasionally perform the songs in music videos. While Kidz Bop is an attempt to cover music created by adults to sell to younger individuals, the "age appropriate" idea of Kidz Bop is perpetuating the sociological phenomenon KGOY and teaching children inappropriate messages about adult situations as well as gender role conformity and race identification (Bell 2015; Kurnit 1999).

Introduction

When the artist Britney Spears is thought of, do twelve-year-old children come to mind as well? When thinking about Maroon 5's sexually suggestive music, how many children are singing along? If Iggy Azalea is singing about being a bad bitch, how many children are singing about being bad as well? When it comes to Kidz Bop, currently four children are present in all of these scenarios. The four children contracted with Kidz Bop currently are Ashlynn, Sela, Grant, and Matt (Kidz Bop LLC). Kidz Bop is taking adult music and selling it to young audiences by having their crew of performers, the four performers mentioned above, sing covers of music chosen from *Billboard Top 100* as well as create music videos for the music chosen (Kidz Bop LLC). The research conducted for this article examines the ways in which Kidz Bop music is problematic for the intended audience and how Kidz Bop cd's are a medium for teaching hegemonic ideologies to children. Kidz Bop music is perpetuating the sociological phenomena KGOY, teaching gender role conformity, and race identification by selling inappropriate music as consumable products to children.

Literature for Kidz Bop Research

The sociological term and phenomena known as KGOY (Kids Getting Older Younger) is the backbone for the research conducted in this paper (Kurnit, 1999). Kidz Bop is one small element of musical influence and a small element of media influencing children. Paul Kurnit's research concerning KGOY helps to tie in the ways that this sociological occurrence is learned behavior such as learning about power and agency or gender role conformity. KGOY is a part of public pedagogy as it is happening more and more frequently, and Kidz Bop is another element that is teaching children to ignore their childhood and to embrace adult expectations (Bell 2015, Foucault 1972-7, Kurnit 1999, et al).

Dr. Christopher Bell theorizes the ways in which individuals learn about the world, other people, and their place within the world. He describes public pedagogy as the process in which information about people and the world is not only learned, but taught. The concept of public pedagogy also theorizes the ways in which viewpoints and perspectives from past generations are taught to younger generations who absorb the information, and that information later forms into perspective and ideologies. Public pedagogy is part of why hegemonic structures persist in cultures due to the same messages being taught, and the continuation of the cycle continues oppressive means. Kidz Bop is one of many tools that is used as a medium for teaching public pedagogy, and it holds constrictive barriers on what children are learning about the world and themselves. Dr. Bell's work in theorizing public pedagogy ties into works from Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu as well.

The reason why Adorno's theories are being used in this research is due to his work concerning popular culture in *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, and he believed that popular culture would become such a powerful force it would dictate the ways in which capitalism was structured (1944). Horkeimer and Adorno's theoretical work concerning popular culture shows how culture creates demands for products, and the necessity for products is how Kidz Bop became a profitable and successful organization from its origination in 2001 to present day.

Bourdieu's capitals of power describes in detail the methodology of extrinsic interpretation and is used since the social group being examined is under analysis of how the group is affected by Kidz Bop music culturally, socially, and economically. Pierre Bourdieu theorizes what power looks like in the forms of capital and how a group achieves power or loses it in the three forms of capital. In the instance of Kidz Bop, these products do not help young adolescents gain power through capitals because the music in itself is constructive for intellectual growth due to being created for the consumption of adult audiences. Taking the music and making slight alterations does not change the music's original purpose or meaning. This is where problematic messaging about heteronormativity, gender role conformity, degrading content, and so on is brought to the attention of and is being learned by children.

Foucault theorizes the ways in which power is possessed and looks into the ways that power and agency affect social groups. Looking at power and agency is necessary for the methodology used for this study, and Foucault's theories concerning social groups is necessary to look at the ways in which children, the social group being examined, is affected through power. Foucault sees how power and agency are used as forces of coercion to uplift groups by oppressing others (1972-7). Knowledge is power, and Foucault looks at how socially constructed truths can be used to empower or strip others of power. When it comes to looking at the power children have, their power is limited to the information they are given. Giving Kidz Bop as musical information to children continues to teach the same ideologies to children that were taught to the adults who now consume the music and by the artists involved in creating the music. It is important to understand that Kidz Bop collects its music from popular songs heard on the radio. The artists mentioned are the ones who are creating the songs that are being sold to children through the lyrical changes of Kidz Bop. The messaging within the music is highly problematic, and the original narratives of the Kidz Bop music holds far more weight to its educational importance than musical covers.

The research in the article "Degrading and Nondegrading Sex in Popular Music," written by Brian A. Primack, Melanie A. Gold, Eleanor B. Schwarz, and Madeline A. Dalton, consisted of analyzing songs picked from the magazine *Billboard*, and various genres were used such as country, pop, hip-hop, rap, and R&B. Kidz Bop also chooses their music from *Billboard*, and the ways in which the songs were coded helped to organize where the research for this current study was going. The ways in which sexual degradation was coded was not necessarily the best method to use as it was far too narrow; however, the research is still relevant for seeing how children perceive the music they listen to. The researcher formatted the charts for the songs coded from Kidz Bops similarly to how the charts were formatted in the article "Degrading and Nondegrading Sex in Popular Culture."

Corin Overland and Alison Reynolds conducted research about musical education and its effects on children. The years researched were 1980-2007. The relevance of their research is due to the historical context of musical education and due to Kidz Bop originating in 2001. It is important to see how MENC affected development for children and how musical education can be compared to that of Kidz Bop. Laura Lewis Brown discusses the relevance of musical education in her article

"The Benefits of Music Education" as well as within the article "Looking Back, Looking Forward." The research conducted in this paper would not have even occurred if musical education were not an important tool used to help the mental growth and development of children. Music is a medium for teaching individuals about the world. Music is one small tool used for teaching public pedagogy. Seeing how technological advances are allowing for more media to be consumed at higher rates by more individuals means that more messaging is being absorbed by young adolescents based on high media exposure (Rideout, Foehr, Ulla, and Roberts, 2010). Music exposure is everywhere and has the power to send messages to those listening to it. This is especially true for young adolescents whose minds are malleable and absorb information at very high rates.

Method

Seventeen songs were examined from Kidz Bop CDs alongside five music videos created by Kidz Bop. The methodology used for this research was textual analysis, and the researcher for this article looked specifically at extrinsic interpretation (Foucault 1972-7, Bourdieu, 1986). Using extrinsic interpretation allowed the researcher to examine the external phenomenon of Kidz Bop and to see the social, cultural, and political influence of the musical covers as well as the music videos affecting early childhood education and development (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010; Overland, and Reynolds, 2010; et al.). Pierre Bourdieu's capitals of power explain the ways in which social groups are either aided in their power through capital power increases or how power is lost due to extrinsic forces (1989). Michel Foucault's works with power and agency detail the accounts of extrinsic interpretations through textual analysis (1972-1977).

The messages created and reinforced by Kidz Bop through a moral standpoint as well as political standpoint shows how Kidz Bop does not advance goals for the social group, which in this instance is children, and does not advance the "good" of the social group either (Bourdieu, Foucault 1986, et al).

The researcher coded songs for lyrics that were sexually explicit or suggestive and lines that suggested heterosexuality, and the music videos were coded for how many children of color were in the music videos, how many times did children of color "posture" in the music videos, and how many children danced in sexually suggestive ways and/or how many children lusted over money or the concept of money.

The codes concerning the songs were formulated from a lyrical basis without coding the acoustic, electric, and instrumental sound elements in the songs.

Song Title and Artist:	Original Lyrics:	Kidz Bop Lyrics:
"GDFR" by Flo Rida	Your girl just kissed a girl, I do bi chicks	Your girl just did a twirl, I do high kicks
	If you're a freak then you come home with me	If you can dance then you're dancing here with me
"Fancy" by Iggy Azalea	My flow retarded	My flow just started
	Be that I-G-G-Y	Be that K-I-D-Z

Songs: Lyrical Changes and Lyrical Recognition

"Sugar" by Maroon 5	One little taste	And I gotta see you in that place
	Come and put it down on me	Come and dance away with me
	Show me good loving	Show me good dancing
"Beautiful" by Sean Kingston	You'll have me suicidal when you say it's over	You'd have me in denial when you say it's over
	Oh when I went away For doing my first crime	When I went away, I was gone a long time
"Uptown Funk" by Bruno Mars	Fill my cup, put some liquor in it	Fill my cup, put some water in it
"Lazy Song" by Bruno Mars	Have some really nice sex	Send a really nice text
"Locked out of Heaven" by Bruno Mars	Spend the night	Are in sight
	Cause your sex takes me to paradise	Cause your love takes me to paradise
	Your gates	The gates
"Glamorous" by Fergie	If you ain't got no money take your broke ass home	If you ain't got no money take your broke self home
	Raw as hell	Raw yeah
	That'd be really dope	That'd be really cool
	*Lyrics about drinking taken out of the song	
"Jenny From the Block" by Jennifer Lopez	*Everything but the chorus line is cut out of the song, and minimal lyrics were kept in their original form	
"Ex's and Oh's" by Elle King	Well I had me a boy turned him into a man	I know me a boy and he was a friend
	Who's been cursing my name Cause I found me a better lover in the UK	Who's been calling my name Cause I found me a better friend in the UK

	Cause I'm the best baby that they never got to keep	Cause I'm the best friend that they never got to keep
	Always wanna come	Always wanna hang
	Heads just roll	Wheels just roll
"On My Mind" by Ellie Goulding	It's a little dirty how the whole thing started	It's a little crazy how the whole thing started
	Poured it down so I poured it down	Kept it down so I kept it down
	Next thing that I know I'm in the hotel with you	Next thing that I know I'm hanging out there with you
	But I just liked you r tattoos	But I just felt so confused
	Said I was good so I poured it down	Said things were good so I kept it down
"Love Me Like You Do" by Ellie Goulding	Color of my blood	Color of my love
Ellie Goulding	Only thing I wanna touch	Only thing that means so much
	Never been so high	Never been that shy
	Every inch of your skin	Every inch of you mind
"1985" by Bowling for Soup	Shake her ass	Shake it fast
"Party Like a Rockstar" by Shop Boyz	*Several lyrics cut out of the song for repetition of 'party like a rockstar'	(n/a)
"Oops!I Did It Again" by Britney Spears	(n/a)	(n/a)
"Toxic" by Britney Spears	(n/a)	(n/a)
"Dark Horse" by Katy Perry	Before you give it up to me	Before you give your heart to me

The limitations of this study lie in the fact there are hundreds of Kidz Bop songs that have already been created and only a minimal amount of them were examined. Kidz Bop is also still being produced, and new content will be released after this research is complete. Limitations also lie in the way this researcher decided to code the songs and music videos that were picked for analysis.

Music Videos

The five music videos analyzed were "GDFR," "Fancy, Love me Like You Do," "Uptown Funk," and "Sugar." Each video was coded for the visual aspects of "posturing" and the romanticization of wealth. The music videos chosen all feature the same four performers, which is part of the reason the videos were chosen. The videos were also chosen due to the fact they are some of the more popular videos that are frequently viewed and searched for online in Kidz Bop content.

The music videos were coded for their visual aspects only, looking at nonverbal communication from the performers in the music videos as well as the aesthetics present in the videos in the ways of clothing and props.

Music Video:	Posturing, and who:	Romanticizing wealth: What it looked like/sounded like within the video
"Fancy"	Matt: 6 occurrences Ashlynn: 1 Grant: 3 Sela: 1 *Posturing is coded by an attempt to look intimidating through nonverbal cues	Clothing looks new Jewelry Accessories Room with Chandeliers Kids are singing "Can't you taste this gold" and about being "in the fast lane". Pretty hard to argue this song is not about romanticizing wealth.
"GDFR"	Matt: 5 Ashlynn: 3 Grant: 1 Sela: 3	Expensive clothing Owning several accessories like bikes, boom box, sunglasses, lounge chairs and umbrellas, skateboards Partying on the beach Everyone present has money for the party as seen in their clothes and accessories.
"Sugar"	Matt: 0 Ashlynn: 0 Grant: 0 Sela: 0	The Kidz Bop Kids have an entire kitchen to themselves, and all the kitchen utensils are new and new aprons. Not striking evidence, but still appears that the children have money and are very well off.
"Love Me Like You Do"	Matt: 0	(n/a)

	Ashlynn: 0 Grant: 0 Sela: 0	This videos is just a lyrical video but was coded for the purpose of narrating the desire of romance even at young ages.
"Uptown Funk"	Matt: 3 Ashlynn: 0 Grant: 5 Sela: 0	Hosting a huge house party At a night-club exclusively, new outfits At another venue, new outfits All kids had money for the parties and had the ability to go out to venues that look expensive as well as exclusive

Rejecting Empiricism

The researcher of this article is an undergraduate at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs and is studying Communication with a focus in Strategic and Organizational Communication. The researcher's minor at UCCS is Women and Ethnic Studies, which is a program at UCCS heavily focused on feminist theory as well as privilege and oppression. The researcher is a 22-year-old, cisgender female who is Caucasian, working middle class, and homosexual. These social identities have given the researcher specific perspectives for conducting the research involved in this paper. The researcher was limited to the amount of songs and videos that could be analyzed from Kidz Bop as well.

Lyrical Recognition: Creating inappropriate content as 'appropriate' through Kidz Bop musical covers

The whole reason this research was conducted was to see how music affects early childhood education. When looking at a corporation that has its entire career built on the foundation of making music for children, Kidz Bop is a name that is well known throughout the United States. Kidz Bop chooses songs to cover based on the songs that make it to *Billboard Top 100*, and this is where the problem of Kidz Bop begins.

When inappropriate content that was made by adults and for adult audiences is claimed and re-made for children, the intention of that text does not change even if the content is supposedly changed and created in a new fashion. Changing the audience of music by claiming that the music has been made "clean" for this new audience does not mean that the original music is not thought of or that it is not a lingering thought in the mind of a child.

Adaptations often are successful when it comes to something's original creation being changed in such a way it is sold to new audiences. Even so, changing music slightly for the intention of changing audiences does not mean that the original text has been replaced or forgotten. Lyrical recognition is the ability to think of a song's original lyrics even if covered, censored out, or altered by a different voice, word, beat, etc. Though "Kidz Bop: Sung by Kids for Kids" uses children to cover music made for adult audiences, the original intent of the song is not lost within the re-writes (Kidz Bop LLC).

Having children sing adult songs does not make those songs age appropriate. If children were to recreate R-rated films just by having children be the actors and actresses, it would not be agreed upon that that film is now age appropriate because it features children. Kidz Bop changes lyrics and features children, and supposedly that makes everything all better. The original songs cannot be wiped out, and through lyrical recognition, children can occasionally remember the original lyrics, which wipes out the purpose of Kidz Bop. If the original lyrics are not known by the children or families listening and they only know the Kidz Bop version, there are still highly problematic messages within the songs being sold to children and families because those songs were made by adults for adults. The songs picked by Kidz Bop from Billboard are originally songs typically about sex, drugs, money, heteronormativity, and in some songs such as Sean Kingston's "Beautiful Girls," the "friend zone" and suicide (Kidz Bop LLC). Many of the songs covered by Kidz Bop may be perceived as perfectly acceptable songs such as "All Star," "Let it Go," "Best Day of My Life," and "Happy," but the evidence of problematic songs outweighing the good is easily quantified (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). Songs that are covered without any lyrical changes typically hold narratives about heteronormativity or the pursuit of money. Rather than creating music for children, Kidz Bop covers music that adult audiences listen to. This is teaching children that childhood is not necessary and that adult expectations need to be embraced as narrated in the music industry today. Sociologists have created an acronym to describe the phenomenon of maturing among children. This sociological movement and behavioral habit being examined is called Kids Getting Older Younger (KGOY) (Kurnit, 1999).

Music is not the end all be all of perpetuating KGOY but is one of several tools used to teach children gender roles, race identification, and how to stop being a kid. Lyrical recognition is a large factor in why Kidz Bop is encouraging KGOY.

Money Is the Root of All Kidz Bop Music Videos: How the concept of romanticizing wealth correlates to racial identity, and gender role conformity

What seems to be a consistent theme throughout the songs covered by Kidz Bop when they are turned into music videos is the romanticization of wealth. The music videos for Kidz Bop consistently feature dancing, displays of 'clean, safe fun', and romanticizing wealth. The children performing in the music videos are often wearing what would be considered appropriate clothing, and yet the very attire they are wearing narrates the possession of wealth. Romanticization is the act of creating appeal on a large social scale by using cultural power to create and sustain a viewpoint (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944). The music videos are using imagery to narrate how lusting over money, having it or wanting it, is acceptable behavior for replacing something more problematic such as hypersexualization in music videos (Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, Fox, 2006; Frazier, 2013).

The music videos analyzed show how musical messages implanted in malleable minds through subtle narratives such as heteronormative behavior and gender role conformity perpetuate KGOY. The ways in which Kidz Bop music videos are portraying racial identification holds problematic messaging as well. Several music videos that were created by Kidz Bop are hip-hop or rap songs, and the children who rap within the music videos are posturing in such a way that narrates the desire to emulate hip-hop artists as well as rappers (Frazier 2013, Rayvin 2014). While the children performing in the music videos are dressed appropriately, some of the choreography suggests sexual expression, and the posturing of children rapping within the music videos suggests the learning habit called mirroring. Mirroring, or imitation learning, is commonly seen from children as their way of learning behaviors. These behaviors can be good or bad behaviors, and it happens through imitation. If children are posturing within Kidz Bop music videos, either they learned these behaviors from observation or were taught it. Either way, the presence of posturing in these music videos is learned behavior that will teach others the behavior as well, which is narrating the desire to emulate hip-hop and rap artists.

Creating Consumers: Strategic advertising for Kidz Bop, and the effects of child consumer behavior

Consumer population consists mostly of women and children. Consumerist behavior is necessary into upholding the structure of capitalism. Capitalism cannot maintain or gain power without the creation and maintenance of consumerist behavior (Horkeimer and Adorno).

Kidz Bop focuses on profiting from families and aims to market their products towards parents who can buy their CD's for their children. The effect of child consumer behavior is that children are being taught how to fit into molds of consumerism that will translate as habit as they grow intellectually. Malleable minds need to be influenced in just the right ways to add to a system that benefits those that are already in power (Foucault 1972-7). When looking at those that profit from capitalism, the institution, and its inhabitants that are being examined, it is that of wealth and the wealthy. (Adorno 1944, Foucault 19). Not to be too sidetracked with consumerism and capitalism, the intent of this section of research is still to look at child consumer behavior and how Kidz Bop as an organization profits from that. The benefit of selling music cannot be examined without acknowledging the system of capitalism as a whole and consumer behavior. When looking at the products of music from the organization Kidz Bop, it is necessary to see that it is a unique element in its own due to being a product for consumption by children and families alike. Kidz Bop is listened to by the families who purchased the CDs, and this means the internal messaging of Kidz Bop is being learned by the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child or children as well. Knowing that the ideologies of subliminal messaging is being consumed by families as a whole rather than just children is how problematic ideologies continue to strengthen hegemonic structures of society.

If families want to give their children age appropriate music, a washed down version of top 40 hits is not the way to go. Musical education is a vital component for intellectual growth, and Kidz Bop should not be used as an educational tool with evidence of negative messaging within the songs outweighing positive messaging (Lewis- Brown, Overland, C., and Reynolds, 2010). The children listening to Kidz Bop typically know the original songs, and the covers do not make them appropriate for consumption. If there are songs that families want their children to hear, then the originals would be just as effective a teaching tool as would the covers. On this note, however, musical covers can never cover the original intent of a text's creation. Kidz Bop markets itself as music for children when they never have made music for younger audiences. The organization simply has young performers who are contracted under Kidz Bop perform the songs. Just like the television series *Glee*, performers do not change the content of the songs they perform; they simply perform them.

How to Make a Boy a Man, and a Girl a Woman

Kids' brains are not hardwired to handle and understand the adult expectations that are placed upon them. Kidz Bop is being used as a tool to teach children about their place in the world including their understanding of it. This teaching of the world and one's place in it is called public pedagogy (Bell, 2015). Public pedagogy is used to teach ideologies to children, and one extreme influence in U.S culture is that of gender identity and gender role conformity. Teaching gender roles is a part of public pedagogy, meaning it is one of the largest ideologies that is taught to children who develop understanding of themselves as well as others because of the expectations of what gender looks like, what gender does, and how genders supposedly form personalities. Kidz Bop is a medium that is teaching hegemonic structures to young audiences, and the vast publics that Kidz Bop reaches could be a product of technological advancement as well as increased child consumer behavior (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005, Rideout, Foehr, Ulla, and Roberts 2010). Having children occupy such a large majority of the consumer population means that messages about the world are being consumed at high rates as well. Kidz Bop as a medium is selling adult music to young audiences, and that means that adult messaging within music is being sold to children as well.

Kidz Bop is teaching gender in the same way that adults view and understand gender. Degrading content is present in so many songs that are top 40 hits on the radio and *Billboard's* top 100 songs that the same ideologies of gender that adult audiences are learning, children are learning from Kidz Bop.

Results

Britney Spears' "Oops!...I Did It Again" had no lyrical changes, and the children covering the song also covered the original dialogue in the music video. Britney Spears' "Toxic" also had no lyrical changes in the Kidz Bop version but a chorus of children singing along. Katy Perry's "Dark Horse" only had one lyrical change in the Kidz Bop version of the song and took out the word Aphrodite to repeat the phrase 'make me your one and only'. Bowling for Soup's "1985" had one lyric change and still sung about Debbie popping Prozac and wanting to dance in a snakeskin mini skirt. The reason why these songs were still analyzed without having lyrical changes or too many lyrical changes is due to the narratives these songs have in both their original and covered forms. All of these songs are in no way appropriate for children to listen to or sing along with. If there is another song out in the world like the Kidz Bop "Toxic" that has children ages 7 and up singing "I'm not that innocent," then the world's views of childhood and culture just got worse than its current state. The music covered by Kidz Bop is more often than not very sexually suggestive, hyper-heteronormative, suggestive about substance use, and completely inappropriate for child consumption. The research conducted shows that Kidz Bop is problematic and teaching children to devalue their youth, to embrace adult expectations, conform to gender roles, and identify in narrow ways racially. The results of the study, while limited to seventeen songs, five music videos, and the researcher's own limitations, does show negative effects of this type of musical exposure on youth.

Conclusion

Kidz Bop is another element used to define and reinforce the sociological phenomenon KGOY (Kids Getting Older Younger). The music alongside the music videos and advertisements of Kidz Bop perpetuate gender roles that strengthen the sociological movement KGOY through marginalizing children and how they develop and grow into young adults. Kidz Bop is one of many tools used to teach public pedagogy and does help to perpetuate the continuation of hegemonic structures in society. The original songs that have been covered by Kidz Bop hold problematic entities as is, and then to repackage these songs and sell those children does not help children culturally, socially, or morally.

Society holds itself to the responsibility of teaching younger generations as they grow to adulthood. If society wishes to claim responsibility, then it should act in socially responsible ways by knowing the realities of the current world and taking action for the changes wished upon the world by educating younger generations with messages of positivity and self-empowerment. Gaining tools for critically analyzing medias is essential for great change to occur. Kidz Bop is not a tool for great change but rather constricts young minds in how they can view the world. No child should be equipped to take on the world with only messages about sex, heterosexuality, gender role conformity, and restrictive race identification. Music is powerful and can be used to teach empowerment, love for others, and how to see the beauty of the world instead. Society can do better for younger generations, and Kidz Bop is absolutely not one of those ways.

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