Hip Hop and Rap: The Not So Silent Approach to Political Protest in Senegal

Research on Music, Politics, and Colorism

Cece Calametti, Reed Hoffmann, Ellie Masias, Caleb Nunn, Elijah Vanderpoel
Faculty mentors Dr. Dandrielle Lewis, Mathematics, and Dr. Frank A. Watkins, Music and Theatre Arts

Introduction
In the summer of 2017, five students and two professors embarked on a three week, immersive research trip to three regions of Senegal.

The Purpose
This research sought to examine the use of hip-hop and rap music as a form of non-violent political protest in Senegal. We examined music through the intersectionalized lens of music, colorism, and political protest.

General Findings
- Senegalese music is powerful and socially conscious.
- The government is corrupt, yet quite stable.
- Colorism and the use of skin bleaching products are prevalent in rural and urban areas.

Research Methods
Researchers facilitated focus groups, interviewed musicians, activists and community leaders, and immersed themselves in the culture.

We asked 324 focus group participants the following questions:

Focus Group Questions
- What do you like/dislike about hip-hop music in Senegal?
- What are your views on the political climate of Senegal?
- What is the role of music at this time in Senegal?
- Have you ever used skin bleaching products?
- Why, in your opinion, do Senegalese use skin bleaching products?
- Is the use of these materials common in other areas of the country?
- Is skin bleaching addressed in hip-hop? Should it be addressed?
- Why do women use skin bleaching products more often?
- Do men find lighter skin more attractive? Do you find lighter skin more attractive?

Focus Group Demographics

- Our focus groups were almost evenly split between men and women, with most individuals being under the age of 40.
- Senegal has an overall young population; our graph above is a good representation of the population.

Subject 1: Music
Positive vs Negative Responses to Q1 by Gender

- Participants responded favorably when asked “What do you like/dislike about hip-hop music in Senegal?”

Individuals were allowed to provide both positive and negative responses; the top responses are shown in Subject 1.

Politics
Out of 324 citizens, three stated that they liked the politics in Senegal, due to its stability. In Subject 2, we present the main reasons why people dislike politics, cross-referenced by gender and location.

Colorism
Colorism is “prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.”

Colorism is common around the world, including in the United States. In Senegal, it affects women with dark complexions and creates an inferiority complex.

Next Steps
During this research, we witnessed the negative impact on women using skin bleaching products, not only physically, but also mentally. Faculty mentors Drs. Lewis and Watkins have decided to take a new team to Senegal in the summer of 2018.

Their goal will be to collaborate with local artists and vendors to campaign against debilitating beauty standards, using the phrase “My Black is My Beautiful.”

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