



Rape culture and ostentatious violence: an analysis from the artifactuality of funk


Aline Veras Morais Brilhante^(a)

<alineveras@unifor.br> 


Renata Rocha Barreto Giaxa^(b)

renatarocha@unifor.br 

July Grassiely de Oliveira Branco^(c)

<julybranco.upa@gmail.com> 

Luiza Jane Eyre de Souza Vieira^(d)

<janeeyre@unifor.br> 

^(a, d) Programa de Pós-Graduação em Saúde Coletiva, Centro de Ciências da Saúde (CCS), Universidade de Fortaleza (UNIFOR). Av. Washington Soares, 1321, Bairro Edson Queiroz, Bloco S, Sala S1. Fortaleza, CE, Brasil. 60811-905.

^(b) Curso de Medicina, CCS, UNIFOR. Fortaleza, CE, Brasil.

^(c) Pós-graduanda do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Saúde Coletiva (Doutorado), CCS, UNIFOR. Fortaleza, CE, Brasil.

The present study analyzed, from the perspective of social constructionism, funk songs with a broad media repercussion and significant sharing in streaming services, with lyrics that refer to sexual violence: *Baile de Favela and Malandramente*. The study was carried out through dialogic analysis and followed by the development of a dialogic map. The results point to the construction of the perfect victim, which trivializes sexual violence by blaming the victim. It also erotizes childhood in the construction of victims and perpetrators, whose puerility is mocked by vulgarizing sexual violence and the exaltation of collective rape, exploring possibilities of sexual relations permeated by gender violence. The findings reveal an alarming scenario. Despite the important role that funk plays as an emancipatory cultural practice, the meanings of sexual violence in the lyrics of the songs exposed the development of conflicting relationships between genders as a social norm.

Keywords: Rape. Rape culture. Gender violence.

Introduction

On May 6, 2017, a 12-year-old girl was raped by four young men in Baixada Fluminense, in Rio de Janeiro¹. This crime happened just about a year after the rape of a 16-year-old girl by 33 men in Morro do Barão - Praça Seca, also in Rio de Janeiro². Both rapes, in addition to their cruelty, have a common trait: their aggressors recorded the rapes on a video and shared it in different social media. A term starts to be coined in the Brazilian journalistic media for this phenomenon: “ostentation violence.”

“Ostentation violence” has been conceived as a paraphrase expression of “funk ostentation,” which is a musical movement featured by the cult of consumption and display of branded goods, mainly clothes and accessories³. The link between these two expressions was based on the interpretation that the violence in those videos was exposed as a power representation. “Ostentation violence” is not restricted to sexual assaults; however, it found in the rape culture a fertile ground for its increase^{4,5}.

Adopting the presupposed Butlerian understanding of gender, we start with a performative model of identity⁶. We highlight that performativity is not empirical, despite being structured as an effect of historically and culturally contingent performances⁷. It is driven and sustained by regulatory processes anchored in symbolic constructions⁶. In this perspective, the rape culture is a “set of symbolic violence that enables sexual violation legitimacy, tolerance and stimulation”⁵ (p. 13).

Thereby, if performativity is structured in language^{5,6}, the adoption of effective measures to cope with sexual violence urges a comprehensive understanding of the connections between daily life and the discourses of different social technologies⁶. This connection - and, conclusively, the reality itself - reaches us through a fictional structure, that is, in the form of artifactualities⁸.

Acting as an artifact, music is produced and “performatively interpreted by a range of hierarchising and selective procedures [...], which are always subservient to various powers and interests of which their ‘subjects’ and agents [...] are still hardly aware of themselves.”⁸ (p. 30) Despite producing discourses whose ideology goes unnoticed - or exactly for this reason -, music exerts a huge influence on the construction of subjectivities⁹. Given this premise, the following questions arise: What is the role of everyday musical practices in the construction of the rape culture? How does music act in the structuring of social gender roles among adolescents?

In the Brazilian context, the funk is prominent for creating a sense of belonging with marginalized populations³, acting as a strategy of denunciation and catharsis regarding the neocolonial relations^{10,11}. In spite of its important role as an emancipatory cultural practice¹⁰, notably “the Black Diaspora”¹² (p. 518), some funk song lyrics converge to the “objectification”¹³ of women. Unquestionably, any movement to either criminalize or censure a cultural practice clearly hurts the basic principles of democracy. Nevertheless, questioning misogynistic practices in some funk song lyrics - and not in the funk itself - is essential for confronting the rape culture.

In this perspective, in the light of the social constructionism theoretical framework^{14,15}, this paper aims to analyze the Brazilian funk songs *Baile de Favela* (“The Favela Party”) and *Malandramente* (“Scandalous”), whose lyrics refer to sexual violence and have wide media repercussions, with sharing in streaming services.

Methodology

Selection of Brazilian Funk Songs

The selection process aimed at identifying Brazilian funk songs of far-reaching media impact, both in specific moments of huge amassment and longitudinally during the first half of 2016.

The most played Brazilian song on the night of December 31st by the Brazilian users of the streaming service Spotify was one version of *Baile de Favela* (“The Favela Party”) song, reproduced on the hills of Rio de Janeiro, known as *Proibidão* (“Strongly Forbidden”). As with other songs of the same style, this song has an alternative version with a less explicit sexual content. Its commercial version has not yet reached the same level of success: while the pasteurized version had 16,223,000 hits, the *Proibidão* version was watched 174,600,059 times on YouTube since its release, on September 16, 2015, until September 4, 2017.

Regarding its media impact in 2006, the Brazilian funk *Malandramente* (“Scandalous”) by Dennis DJ, MC Nandinho and MC Nego Bam, was the most heard song in the main streaming services in Brazil - Spotify and Apple Music -, being played more than 230 thousand times a day on Spotify in the country in that period. The second most streamed music in the same period was played around 185 thousand times a day.

The aforementioned funk song lyrics are shown below:

Baile de Favela (“The Favela Party”)
She came to me hot, and today I’m on fire
She came to me hot, and today I’m on fire
She wants to challenge me, I don’t understand
If she messes with R7, she’ll go back with her pussy burning (She will).
‘Cause Helipa is a Favela Party
‘Cause Marconi is a Favela Party
And São Rafael is a Favela Party
And the minors are prepared to fuck with her pussy (They are).
Eliza Maria is a Favela Party
Invasion is a Favela Party
And the little house is a Favela Party
And the minors are prepared to fuck with her pussy (They are).
‘Cause Hebron is a Favela Party
The great dance is a Favela Party
And on 7th Street? A Favela Party!
And the minors are prepared to fuck with her pussy (They are).



Malandrante (“Scandalous”)

Scandalously
The innocent girl
Got involved with us
Just to enjoy.

Scandalously
She made a needy face
She got involved with the group
She started to seduce us.

Scandalously
She went back home
She tells her Mom is calling
I’ll see you around.

Ah, naughty girl!
When it’s time to get the dick
The girl went back home
And sent me a short message
I’ll see you around. (4 times)

Data Analysis

We used the dialogical method proposed by Spink¹⁴⁻¹⁵, which seeks to explore the polysemy of discourse, to analyze both funk song lyrics. This process of analysis is based on the social constructionism and applies the language in use as a social practice. This implies working the

interface between the performative aspects of language (when, in what conditions, with what intention, in what way) and the conditions of language production (here understood both in social and interactional contexts and in the Foucauldian sense of historical constructions).¹⁵ (p. 26)

We read both song lyrics, listened to them and watched their videos for about 20 times each. Next, we built a dialogical map as recommended by Spink¹⁴⁻¹⁵, according to whom the map must be a table whose columns are thematically defined. The definition of the themes organizing the interview contents is not predetermined, being built as part of the interpretation process. In this process, we worked with the discursive formations, first relating them to the socio-historical context and then interpreting them from the meanings of the discourses that had been produced, imagined or that were possible.

Results and discussion

The construction of the perfect victim

The following verses can be seen in the opening stanza of the funk song *Baile de Favela* (“The Favela Party”): “She wants to challenge me, I don’t understand. If she messes with R7, she’ll go back with her pussy burning.” In this context, it is worth asking: “What does ‘Xota’ stand for?”

The funk lyrics of *Baile de Favela* explore sexual intercourses permeated by gender violence in the context of favela dance parties. The verb used to represent a sexual intercourse - “fuck” - refers to a violent sexual activity.

It is worth underlining that a significant part of the eroticized discourses of the other implies or even depends on the asymmetries of power¹⁶. Talking about tensions between eroticism and violence demands the understanding that many of the desires which act on the level of abuse may also act on the level of pleasure and vice versa¹⁷. Nevertheless, even if we must avoid the prejudice of a reductionist morality, we must also consider the inherent risks to the rhetoric violence in the semiotic production of gender^{18,19}.

The emphasis on genitalia itself - specially on the female genitalia – represents no act of subordination. Quite the reverse, it can nurture a re-signification “that aims at the expansion of possible pleasures and the implosion of either models or traditional models or modeling of sexual behavior”¹⁶ (p. 116)

Notwithstanding, more than emphasizing genitality, what is observed in the funk song *Baile de Favela* is a reduction of the woman’s corporality to her genital organ and, basically, the elimination of her desire or pleasure, in contrast to the active subject – the one who “fucks” –, who is seen as a complete being, targeting at a fragmented part of the female body to which women have been reduced.

Furthermore, that woman is not seen on the asphalt that crosses middle-class neighborhood streets. That “pussy” is in the favela party, she is in the favela - the city space segregated by the most favored social classes, where any form of State violence is legitimized²⁰.

In this respect, it is crucial to highlight the funk role as a territory both in functional and symbolic perspectives. As a symbolic-cultural sedimentation space, funk stands as a support for individual and collective identities^{3,10,12}. Hence, the imposed restrictions on the so-called “asphalt dances” in the validity period of the Alvaro Lins Law (signed in 2008 and revoked in 2009) culminated not only in the rise of “funk music dance parties” but also in the progressive growth of the sense of belonging of the favela youth regarding this type of music, which indicates the youth’s places of origin and gives meaning to their histories^{10,12}.

The eroticism/violence relationship in the funk lyrics requires, therefore, a more thoughtful understanding of its intersectionality with issues of sex/gender, race/ethnicity and class²¹. It is imperative to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more subordination axes to understand that this woman is not only the target of gender violence, but also deprived of the social guardianship that would provide her the status of victim^{21,22}. In this perspective, it is worth discussing the way in which racism, patriarchalism, class oppression and other inter-

secting discriminatory systems create basic inequalities that potentiate the most varied forms of violence²¹.

The analysis of the funk lyrics also exposes blaming women as part of the artifactual construction process of the perfect victim²². In the opening stanza of the funk song *Baile de Favela*, we can see the verses “She wants to challenge me, I don’t understand. If she messes with R7, she’ll go back with her pussy burning.” From the next stanza of this funk song, sexual violence and female body fragmentation are naturalized, while the verses of the first stanza bring to the surface the legitimation of rape by victim blaming. By using the verb “to challenge,” the song writer attributes to the victim responsibility for the act endured, and this information is backed up by the first verse of the first stanza of the funk song: “She came to me hot.”

The entry “challenge”, as stated in the Aurélio²³ Dictionary, means “to incite; to invite (someone) to engage in a challenge; to provoke someone (to say or do something); to make (someone) lose the temper; to make (someone) lose the thread; to confront.” She “challenged” the man. The hegemonic masculinity model, however, places on men the obligation both to cope with challenges and to demonstrate their virility²⁴. At the other end of the spectrum, women are expected to play a passive role²².

The funk song *Malandramente* (“Scandalous”) follows a similar discursive line by converting men into victims of someone who had acted in bad faith. Authorization for violence is reinforced by the motivation of using the adjective “naughty.” However, the “naughty” girl’s supposed mischief was not in the act of seduction itself, but in avoiding sexual intercourse, as it is stated in the opening stanza of this funk song: “When it’s time to get the dick, the girl went back home.” The feminine denial is disqualified inasmuch as the funk lyrics interpret it as a transgression of the implicit social norms that rule women, according to which a woman, after having started contact with a possible partner, must submit herself to the sexual intercourse. Popularly, this belief can be summarized into the popular saying “If you kneel, you must pray.”

The “ritualization of femininity”²⁵ (p. 188), as clarified by Goffman, claims for the punishment of any and all female behaviors that do not fit into the standardized and normalized forms. This normative ritualization is not dependent on attitudes, but rather on passivity. Women’s social subordination implies suppressing their sexual autonomy both to experience it freely and to reject behaviors for men to advance them²². In view of this, the woman of the funk song *Baile de Favela* is punished for ignoring her subordinate role and defying men^{26,27}, while the girl in the song *Malandramente* is considered “naughty” for refusing to have sexual intercourse.

Childhood erotization in the construction of victims and aggressors

It should be noted the stimulus to child sexual abuse that is implicit in the funk song *Malandramente*. The woman in that song is actually a girl whose childishness is ironically handled. In portraying that “Scandalously, she made a needy face,” the song places the youth as an artifice used by the girl to “enjoy” at the expense of the male “group”. The song lyrics are reinforced by the music video released, whose pictures portray a girl dressed in a school uniform and who gradually turns into a sensual and seductive woman. Both the song and its audiovisual representation naturalize sexual

violence against the vulnerable, considering that it disseminates an image of girls as adult women with full experience of their sexuality.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that this type of artifact produces no boasting among the leaders of the “anti-pedophile crusade”²⁸ (p. 39), because their discourses aim to protect the childhood idealized representations rather than the children themselves^{28,29}. Child sexual abuse is not a recent phenomenon, but the social construction of the idea of child sexual abuse is, to the point of turning it into a socio-political problem³⁰. The social construction of the childhood category³¹ has enabled the development of the idea of child sexual abuse as a crime in the social and legal spheres. What is fundamental in this definition of abuse is that the child’s sexual consent is not contemplated as legitimate.

The boundaries between what is acceptable and unacceptable in such circumstances, however, are quite frail and defined in a situational and relational manner²⁸. When portraying a girl with traits of sensuality, the funk song *Malandramente* pulls her out of her imagetic space of childhood. This phenomenon is further strained by racial issues. The exploitation of the periphery girl’s body - often black, as portrayed in the video *Malandramente* - indicates the exploitation system of slavery that vehemently built the prominent Brazilian miscegenation³².

The funk song *Baile de Favela* also places childhood at the center of sexual violence, but at the other end of the spectrum. It stimulates the precocious sexualization of boys, inserting them prematurely in the experience of a hegemonic masculinity, whose stereotype is fully tied to violence. The music video exposes this association by showing adolescents carrying firearms in attitudes of strong aggressiveness exaltation.

The song also exposes one of the paradoxes of the idea of sexual consent: its specificity regarding the female gender³³. In this manner, it is overlooked that the hegemonic masculinity model calls upon an undeniable male sexual desire²². In the social construction of this stereotyped masculinity, the “male” pursues mastery over those whose performativities are built as the weakest; therefore, they should be subjugated to his will³⁴ - that is, women, children, and men whose masculinities escape the matrix of intelligibility⁶. In this context, the funk song *Baile de Favela* excludes the subordination status of those boys, assigning them power within a society ruled by heteronormative principles. On the other hand, this power is reinforced by the violent deconstruction of the subjectivity of another person³⁴. Consequently, these musical practices, constituting an artifact that requires these children and adolescents to show strength and virility, build the cultural framework of a scenario where the death tragedy of poor and black boys is daily performed.

It should be highlighted here that the term used to describe these boys - “the minors” - carries with it strong symbolic violence. Derived from the legal expression “minor infractor” (“young offender”), the term “the minors” underpins dangerous social discourses that criminalize youngsters/adolescents living in the poor peripheries of Brazilian cities. Hence, in spite of the fact that the transversality of the rape culture often provides the young offender’s social acquittal⁵, the endorsement of impunity is not uniform for all men. If, on the one hand, not every woman gets victim protection, on the other hand “the minors” are judged by the social norm as being preliminarily guilty. In this dispute between the violence of organized and standardized power and the reactive counter-violence, the term “the minors” starts to be part of the compo-

sition of the identity construction of these youngsters/adolescents. In this process, children and adolescents of the favela take for granted the pride they feel by using this term, which implies their moral disqualification. If people of the wealthier classes terrify “the minors,” it is this identity that will be assumed in response to the State violence²⁰.

Nevertheless, from the rape culture perspective, this construction is fallacious and problematic. It is fallacious because it complies with the social norms that stereotype the aggressors and ignore that rapists are found in all places and economic-social classes, including among people without apparent social risk⁵; and it is problematic for hiding the real issue, which involves the trivialization of violence stemming from the inefficiency to reflect upon it³⁵. We must bear in mind that society is not divided into a dual system of procedures of violence and civility³⁶. Quite the contrary, the prominent forms of violence are the public face of daily relationships intertwined on the private and microsocial levels³⁷⁻⁴⁰. Consequently, the violence is not something impressive in itself, but rather ordinary, coming from the lack of reflection upon acts and behaviors that are legitimized in the social fabric⁴¹. The acts of rapists are anchored to sexist discourses that are transmitted to them and by them in many and varied forms⁵, including through songs such as the ones reported in this study. Thereby, the discourses that regulate gender social roles are the same ones that legitimize daily violence against women²⁴. By stigmatizing this violence, we reduce drastically the subject’s interfaces with his/her local moral world⁴², ignoring that gender-based injuries are produced as part of a culturally sustained binary oppositional trend²⁴⁻⁴³. From this perspective, in addition to constructing perfect victims, the analyzed artifacts build the image of the “perfect aggressors.”

Collective rape ostentation

Another important item in our data analysis concerning the funk song *Baile de Favela* refers to how singular number and plural number were used in nouns composing the sentence “And the minors are prepared to fuck with her pussy.” By making this lexical choice, the song makes a clear reference to a violent sexual intercourse of several youngsters/teens (“the minors”) with a single “pussy”, stimulating this criminal act to be experienced and celebrated in favela parties.

As for the funk song *Malandramente*, it portrays more subtly a girl who “got involved with the group,” tacitly authorizing violence to be perpetrated by the youngsters/adolescents who were supposedly harmed by her.

It is not possible to draw a direct causal relationship nor is this our intention in this study. Nevertheless, we argue that we must not overlook the role of music in the consolidation of gender performances and of the discourses that shape social reality⁴⁴⁻⁵².

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, we underline the temporal coexistence of that music with the significant increase in collective rapes, which were recorded and shared on social networks by the aggressors themselves as a form of power ostentation. In relation to that increase, besides the previously mentioned collective rape in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro¹, other gang rapes occurred in the country in the same period and were broadcast by the Brazilian media: three in different cities in the countryside of Piauí State⁵³ and another one in Rio de Janeiro, in October 2016⁵⁴. In the latter, a

34-year-old woman was raped by five minors in a community in São Gonçalo. According to SINAN, collective rape in Brazil increased sharply from 1,570 in 2011 to 3,526 in 2016⁵⁵. On average, there are about ten cases of collective rape per day in the country.

Still and all, we underline that it would be superficial and reductionist if we attributed these collective rape episodes to the funk songs analyzed in this study, or even to the funk itself, since there are countless artifactualities whose discourses build the basis of support for the rape culture. However, it should be noted that, even though there is no direct causal relationship, the funk lyrics presented in this study are part of a complex system that, although fictitious, reveals the violence against women as *habitus*⁴⁵. Bourdieu⁴⁵ clarifies that the *habitus* of the social field is embodied in the culture and in the social environment of the individual. In this context, beliefs and preferences that nurture different “markets,” such as economic, bodily or corporeal, cultural, educational, social and symbolic, are consolidated. It is within the symbolic capital that arbitrary relations are legitimized. Gender social roles, which are culturally established, are of great importance for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that regulate violence against women.

It should be noted that this *habitus* is connected with a broad culture that integrates the existing practices of violence in the distinct musical styles, in the various artistic manifestations, as well as that they are transversal to the discourses and daily practices^{9,46-52}. Thereby, the problem will not be mitigated if an isolated cultural practice - whether funk or any other - is criminalized, for it would be sheer superficiality. Consequently, it is fundamental to face all discourses that promote social inequities and violence, considering that this is a culturally rooted system.

The rape culture concept is built from the understanding that numerous current discursive practices not only accept sexual violence against women but encourage and endorse it as well⁵. This phenomenon is straight connected with the construction of genres themselves, provided that it is based on socially produced hierarchical cultural values^{24,43}. It is no coincidence that one of the characteristics of violence against women is its invisibility²⁶, either because the aggressor is a family member or a close acquaintance^{27,56} or due to fearing institutional violence at the time the victim files the complaint⁵⁷ or even for shame or for other cultural aspects⁵. The fact is that most episodes of sexual violence against women neither lead to care nor are registered by the information systems, thus resulting in underreporting of occurrences⁵⁵. It should be noted that, even when regulated, it is frequent not acknowledging this kind of violence as such both by victims and aggressors²⁴.

It is of great relevance a discussion on the issue of sexual violence against women in the contemporary world because it is a historical period with striking ostentation of violence, given that media discourses represent an important symbolic system. Bourdieu⁴⁵ argues that the symbolic systems allow the consensus regarding the meanings of the social world and contribute to the social order reproduction. This structure, which is simultaneously made invisible and supported by the discourses in the relations of communication and knowledge, establishes power relations. Although the ostentation of these relations that associate power, virility and violence is not recent⁴⁹, these relations have their symbolism exponentially expanded in their contemporaneity due to social networks. Applying violence by violence, jointly with the destructive ecstasy of

a self-referential basis, nurtures a discourse of violence with performative dimensions that encourage its ostentation as a symbol of power⁴.

Final remarks

The present paper aimed to analyze two funk songs whose lyrics refer to sexual violence and have wide media repercussions, with sharing in streaming services, using the social constructionism theoretical framework. Our findings showed a disturbing picture. The meanings of sexual violence in the funk lyrics researched in this study disclosed the construction of conflicting relations between genders as a social norm. In this process, the researched funk songs and performances contribute to the construction of a cultural context that regulates sexual violence against women.

Finally, we would like to highlight that our purpose in this study was not to criticize the funk music, as we do recognize its important role both as representative of popular culture and a political and social movement. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the discussion related to the considerable violence and the potential for harm in an extensive part of funk lyrics and performances contributes to the establishment of fairer and less violent gender relations.

Authors' contributions

The author Aline Veras Morais Brilhante planned the research and selected its material, categorized and analyzed the findings, and participated actively in the discussion, paper drafting, manuscript revision and approval of the final revised version. The authors Renata Rocha Barreto Giaxa, July Grassiely de Oliveira Branco and Luiza Jane Eyre de Souza Vieira participated actively in the discussion, manuscript revision and approval of the final revised version.

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