

Love and Marriage in Ghanaian Hiplife Music: A Sociological Analysis of Obrafour's Pimpinaa

¹Rosemary Obeng-Hinne¹  ²Daniel Obeng Acquah² 

^{1,2}Department of Liberal Studies, University of Media, Arts and Communication, Accra, Ghana

Corresponding author: Rosemary Obeng-Hinne, Email:
robenghinneh@unimac.edu.gh

<https://doi.org/10.63772/jocmas.v11n1.2>

Abstract

Irrespective of the genre, music has long been an art of communication. Among other things, love and intimate relationships are significant themes in the lyrics of many songs. However, the dynamics of these themes differ across societies and cultures. This paper focuses on the Ghanaian hiplife song Pimpinaa. From a qualitative research perspective, we used a thematic approach to analyse the song's lyrics. Drawing on the symbolic interactionist framework, we discuss four thematic areas – marriage as a better option to concubinage, family consent and involvement as prerequisites to marriage, the Christianisation and Westernisation of marriage, and the emphasis on the chastity of Ghanaian women – all of which are social realities in Ghana. We relate these themes to relevant literature to demonstrate how they play out in the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. We conclude that, although Pimpinaa was probably intended primarily for entertainment, it is also a sociological enterprise and a symbolic archive of social norms, as it seeks to uncover aspects of social interaction patterns in Ghana. Specifically, it addresses the institutions of marriage and family, which are fundamental in society.

Keywords: *intimate partnerships; Ghanaian music; Pimpinaa; marriage; love; hiplife*

Submitted: 16th February 2026

Revised: 18th August 2026

Accepted: 16th September 2026



Introduction

Like many other art forms, music has long served as a conduit for communicating social issues and transmitting culture across societies. For example, hip hop has been a tool for political discourse, largely among African American youth, who often use it to call for social action (Akpan, 2016; Rabaka, 2012; Stapleton, 1998; Stewart, 2005). Similarly, genres such as rap and reggae have long been used to communicate social and cultural issues (Harrison, 2008; Prahlad, 2001). In Africa, people have traditionally communicated social life through folk songs (Jones, 1953). These songs range from lullabies to war, ceremonial, marriage, moral, recreational, and funeral songs. Many have argued that these songs are an important tool for education and for preserving a society's heritage (Kanu, 2019), and Ghana is no exception.

Over the years, however, new forms of music such as hiplife, highlife, and dancehall have emerged, many of which convey messages similar to those in Ghanaian traditional or folk songs. Highlife, a blend of traditional Akan rhythms and melodies, often focuses on issues such as marriage and divorce, love affairs, inheritance, witchcraft, and death (Asante-Darko & van der Geest, 2023, pp. 243-244). Love and marriage are common themes in many Ghanaian songs, irrespective of genre. These themes almost invariably relate to the social institutions of marriage and the family. This is likely because these institutions make up a large part of social life. Cultures around the world have distinct values, norms, and practices that people use to navigate these issues. While debates persist about the universality of romantic partnerships (Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006), many argue that they are widespread, though societies govern them by different social principles (Dyson-Hudson & Meekers, 1996; Karandashev, 2021; Patico, 2010).

Ampofo and Asiedu (2012) argue that Ghanaian love-themed songs, particularly highlife music, portray women negatively, often depicting them as passive lovers, manipulative, and fickle-minded. Asante-Darko and van der Geest (2023) likewise contend that highlife songs about marriage and love affairs often imply male dominance over women. Arko-Achemfuor (2017), by contrast, uses Kojo Antwi's songs to conclude that love- and marriage-themed highlife songs educate people about the challenges that come with love affairs and marriages, which couples should be aware of.

Since the hiplife genre emerged on the Ghanaian music scene, it has attracted scholarly attention (Akron, 2012; Oduro-Frimpong, 2009; Salm & Falola, 2000; Shipley, 2009). Despite the growing body of work on this Ghanaian popular music, however, limited attention has been paid to how it articulates sociological constructions of marriage and love. Unlike highlife, hiplife does not focus on projecting love and marriage. This paper's burden, therefore, is to deconstruct notions of love and marriage as they are conceptualised in Ghanaian hiplife songs, which, among other things, serve as symbolic archives of social norms. Pimpinaa was selected for this analysis.

About Pimpinaa – The Unit of Analysis

Hiplife is a music genre that combines North American rap and Ghanaian highlife, with connections to Jamaican ragga. Reggie Rockstone (known in private life as Reginald Osei), a prominent Ghanaian musician, pioneered the genre in 1995. He explained hip-hop as a combination of the 'hip' from hip-hop and 'life' from highlife (Boateng, 2009; Collins, 2005, 2007). Shipley (2009, p. 631) explains that "hiplife music in Accra, Ghana combines hip hop sampling, scratching, and rap lyricism with older forms of highlife popular music, traditional storytelling, and formal proverbial oratory". Oduro-Frimpong (2009) further adds that the hiplife concept includes adopting the mannerisms and dressing of American rap artists.

Pimpinaa is a hiplife song released in 2015 by Michael Elliot Kwabena Okyere Darko, one of Ghana's finest hiplife musicians, known by his stage name, Obrafour. Obrafour is an Akan word meaning executioner. Executioners have historically been part of the chieftaincy architecture in Ghanaian traditional societies, although their role has been greatly diminished in modern-day chieftaincy. He featured highlife musician Bisa Kdei in this song.

Semantically, *pimpinaa* is best described as a nonsense word, implying it has no meaning in itself (Okpewho, 1992). In his analysis of Ghanaian children's play songs as a genre of African oral literature, Addo (2022, p. 2) explains that *pimpinaa* has long been a children's oral play song in Ghana and can be understood as a corrupted rendition of Akan children imitating the call of grandparents: *Minanaa* (my grandchild), to which they respond *Nanaa* (yes, grandmother or yes, grandfather). The term *pimpinaa* is also used in traditional Ghanaian oral storytelling (Nweke et al., 2024; Kwarteng, 2025).

In the song under review, *pimpinaa* appears to be used to rhyme with *mpena* (an Akan word for lover or concubine) and *Abena* (an Akan name for females born on a Tuesday). The song's general theme is love and marriage. The artist expresses his desire to move from a mere romantic relationship to marriage, which he presents as a more socially accepted institution. In doing so, he compares the two forms of domestic partnership. The song is mostly in Twi (an Akan dialect), with some English words and phrases.

For this study, the song is treated as a cultural text, selected for in-depth analysis, not a universal claim about all hiplife songs.

Methods and Analytical Perspective

This paper relied on a single song rather than multiple songs to prioritise depth over breadth, consistent with qualitative enquiry. The analysis used a qualitative approach. Researchers adopted a thematic analysis of the text. The process began with familiarisation with the song lyrics. Both the original and translated lyrics were thoroughly studied. A professional linguist from the Linguistics Department of the University of Ghana translated the lyrics from Twi to English. Although both researchers are Twi speakers, the lyrics were professionally translated to compare our understanding and avoid misinterpretation as much as possible. The English renderings used in the analysis are derived from these expert translations.

The first level of coding was then conducted. At this stage, initial codes were generated from portions of the lyrics that we found to speak directly about marriage or romantic partnerships. The first level of coding was performed separately by the researchers. This step was taken to optimise intercoder reliability. Although some researchers argue that intercoder reliability can be skipped in qualitative enquiry, there is also evidence that it can improve the trustworthiness and overall rigour of analysis (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Researchers found this step useful, as by the end of this exercise the song lyrics had been categorised into consistent, meaningful codes.

The individual codes were then compared to generate the themes. The comparisons revealed no significant differences that needed reconciliation. At this stage, we looked for patterns in the codes. These patterned codes subsequently became the themes around which discussions and analyses were conducted.

This study is framed by Symbolic Interactionism. This micro-sociological theory is also relevant to communication studies. Its basic tenet is that social processes enter people's everyday lives and influence their behaviour through the meanings or interpretations of words, symbols, and language (Puplampu, 2024). In the context of this study, music and its lyrics are a form of interaction based on

the meanings attached to them. In other words, lyrics are communicative symbols. In interaction, symbols can be small gestures or more comprehensive forms of communication (Kotarba, 2014, p. 419). Therefore, the language of music symbolically carries messages about social life and processes. Consequently, songs mirror society and reflect patterns of social interaction.

From this perspective, Pimpinaa communicates the concepts of love and marriage in Ghanaian society. The analysis unearths the meanings attached to the words, phrases, and expressions in the song. The ensuing sections discuss the themes in relation to relevant literature.

Discussion

Marriage is a Better Option Than a Concubinage

The first subject for discussion is the comparison between marriage and concubinage, which the singer makes throughout the song. The opening verse of the song, which is also a refrain, goes as follows:

Pimpinaa mpena, mma yenntwe mpena Abena

(Pimpinaa mpenaa, let us avoid concubinage, Abena)

Maabena, mepɛsɛ me ne wo tena

(Maabena, I want to live with you)

In this refrain, the artist conveys his central message, namely that he prefers marriage to concubinage. The refrain raises the question of why the singer emphasises avoiding concubinage. Concubinage, as Stevenson (2013) explains, denotes sustained sexual contact or a relationship between two people, and takes many forms. Most are essentially sexual in nature. Others could be described as ‘living together apart’, where the couple lives separately but maintains consistent reciprocal responsibilities towards each other, similar to a married couple (Duncan et al., 2014; Levin, 2011). Cohabitation is yet another form of concubinage, involving couples living together in the same space and conducting themselves as married (Brown, 2003; Brown et al., 2017; Sassler, 2004; Obeng-Hinne, 2024). In whichever form it takes, sexual relationships before and outside marriage have historically been frowned upon in many parts of the Western world (Levin, 2011) and in most African societies (Alo & Akinde, 2010; Van der Geugten, 2013; Obeng-Hinne & Kpoor, 2022). Indeed, in many West African societies, such as Ghana, sexual intercourse before puberty rites is deemed taboo (Amponsah, 1974; Van der Geugten, 2013).

Against this background, marriage in Ghana has long been regarded as a socially sanctioned form of sexual relationship. Over the years, however, this value has been compromised in many ways, with some societies even abandoning puberty rites, which were often a prelude to marriage ceremonies. Nevertheless, marriage remains highly valued and is considered the most appropriate route to family formation among many Ghanaians. However, concubinage has consequences for the couple involved. These include pressures from families, religious groups, and even friends for couples to transition to marriage. Intimate partner abuse, especially against women, is another common feature of such informal sexual relationships. This is often because the women involved lack the social support of both their families and their partners to intervene in cases of domestic violence, as is often the case in marriages (Obeng-Hinne & Kpoor, 2022).

Concubinage has implications not only for couples but also for children born into it. In Ghanaian tradition, fathers name their children. However, in many patrilineal societies, being married to the child(ren)'s mother is an important prerequisite for naming them. Without marriage rites, a man may

be denied the right to name his children. This is common among the Krobo in Ghana's Eastern Region, where children born outside marriage are named by their maternal grandfather rather than their biological father (Langmagne et al., 2018).

Although concubinage may involve the couple living together, Obrafofour still uses the phrase “I want to live with you” to represent marriage. This suggests that, in Ghanaian society, the meanings attached to living with someone differ, particularly in romantic relationships. From the symbolic interactionist perspective, the contextual meanings assigned to ‘I want to live with you’ have implications for societal reactions to the domestic partnership in question. When interpreted as concubinage, it may attract social disapproval. When understood as marriage, it receives social recognition and acceptance. In this case, the singer uses the latter.

Aside from the refrain, Obrafofour espouses marriage as a better option than concubinage differently in other parts of the song. For instance, he sings:

mempɛ mpenatwe, ɛnyɛ anumuoyam hyɛ

(I dislike concubinage, for it is not honourable.)

Concubinage is considered dishonourable because there is some level of stigma attached to women in such relationships. This stems from the general assumption that such women allow themselves to be taken freely by their partners without performing marriage rites (Obeng-Hinne, 2019; Obeng-Hinne & Kpoor, 2022). According to Nukunya (2016), it is the payment of bridewealth that gives a man rights to a woman's sexual, reproductive and domestic services, and most families look forward to giving their daughters' hands in marriage under this tradition. This could explain why the singer subsequently adds that:

memma wonfiri wofie mmeda awoshia,

(I won't admit you for a sleepover)

ɛba saa a amammere manni so

(This is a contravention of our custom).

These lines reflect the reality that, irrespective of ethnic group, Ghanaian traditions and customs abhor premarital sexual unions. Marriage, the formal union between a man and a woman, is encouraged. One key argument in Meischer's (2005) study of masculinities in Ghana is that marriage, not necessarily age, is an important marker of adulthood and responsibility. Obidoa et al. (2019) reached a similar conclusion in their study of markers of emerging adulthood in Ghana and Nigeria.

Family Consent and Involvement as Prerequisites for Marriage

Wosɛ awareɛ nti fa me kɔ fie kohu w'abusua

(You deserve to be married, so take me home to meet your family)

Menyɛ wo ho adeɛ,

(Let me perform traditional marriage rites)

menhyɛ wo sika kɔkɔ petia

(and put a gold ring on your finger)

As in most parts of Africa, marriage in Ghana has always been a family and societal affair. Although marriage is primarily a union between spouses, it is also an alliance between the families of the

spouses. Of the three forms of marriage in Ghana (Customary, Ordinance, and Mohammedan), customary marriage is the oldest and most enduring. Customary marriage is a negotiation culminating in a contract between the families of the couple. Generally, a prospective bride's family tells her partner's family what they must present in exchange for their daughter's hand in marriage. Therefore, the marriage ceremony brings the two families together. Family is so important that customary marriage rites can be performed in the couple's absence, and the marriage remains valid once the families are present and accept the marriage payments.

Unlike the traditional marriage ceremony, which involves several family members, marriage by ordinance requires only two witnesses, one from each partner. Traditional marriage is not a prerequisite for an ordinance marriage, as both are legitimate forms of marriage. Notwithstanding, it is common practice in Ghana to have a traditional marriage before a white wedding, which may be held in a church or other registered places. Although particularly young middle-class people like the idea of white weddings, abandoning the traditional marriage altogether is often not an option. This has been the case since the introduction of ordinance marriage, whereby couples who chose ordinance marriage over traditional marriage were not recognised by their families as married couples (Awusabo-Asare, 1990).

In the above stanza, the singer alludes to traditional marriage rites as the first and most important form of marriage. This ties in with the earlier point about the need to uphold traditional marriage rites and principles.

In symbolic interactionist terms, 'take me home to meet your family' is a symbolic performance of legitimacy and honour. Here, the respective families are officially involved in the union and recognise it as legitimate. Legitimacy and honour are also symbolised by 'putting a gold ring on your finger'. While rings generally symbolise marital commitment, a gold ring also connotes a deep sense of value and honour placed not only on the bride but also on the marriage.

The Christianisation and Westernisation of Marriage in Ghana

Closely related to the discussion of the importance of traditional marriage is the Christianisation and Westernisation of marriage in Ghana. While the song projects traditional marriage, it also brings to the fore the ways in which marriage in Ghana has been Christianised and Westernised. Immediately after singing about the need to see his lover's family to perform traditional marriage rites, he adds the following:

Mede kawa si so a,

(When I put a ring on it)

yekɔ sen-sign na me din da wo so a,

(and we go to sign a marriage certificate, and you take my name)

Menya ɔsɔfo pɔn bi behyira so a,

(and I get a renowned reverend minister to bless our marriage)

eno ansa na mehunu se wo do no abɔ ntoa,

(Then I would realise that your love has become a complete reality)

There is much to unpack here. The first point concerns the inclusion of a ring. Historically, items presented by a groom to his bride's family for customary marriage in Ghana did not include a ring. A ring has not been a status symbol for engagement or marriage, as it is in many Western societies. Among the Akan, for example, a groom could choose to include a gold ring in the marriage items,

depending on his financial capacity. However, this was often not a requirement and was not a significant item (Kyei, 1992). If a ring was included in the marriage items, the bride wore it not as a symbol of marriage but simply as an accessory.

In contemporary Ghana, however, rings have become central to marriage, both traditional and ordinance (Frost & Dodoo, 2010). This is a Western practice. While modern-day traditional marriage lists given to grooms by their partners' families would most likely include a ring, ministers officiating weddings also often ask the couple for their rings, which are described as the seal of the marriage. Thus, it has become commonplace for Ghanaian married women to wear two rings: one during traditional marriage ceremonies and the other at a 'white' wedding. Worae et al. (2019) studied the perspectives of female students at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology on 'white' weddings. They found that participants considered wearing a ring significant. This shows how the socio-cultural symbolism of rings has evolved in Ghana over the years. They have become a way of communicating marital status and legitimacy in intimate relationships.

There is also mention of signing a marriage certificate and having a priest bless the union. Before contact with the West, specifically Christian missionaries and colonial authorities, there were no marriage certificates, as there was no formal education. The presence of family and friends at traditional marriage ceremonies served as witnesses to the marriage contract. Marriage in present-day Ghana is governed by the Acts. The Marriage Act 1884-1985, first introduced by the colonial authorities, stipulates the three forms of marriage in Ghana. Ordinance marriage is regulated by the Marriage Ordinance (CAP 127), Customary Marriage by the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law 1985 (PNDCL 112), and Mohammedan Marriage by the Marriage of Mohammedans (CAP 129). These laws provide an avenue for couples to register their marriages by signing a marriage certificate. Although registration is expected, many who enter into customary marriages do not go through the process. Registering and signing marriage certificates is more common with ordinance marriages, which, until recent times, typically took place at the Registrar-General's or in registered churches and were officiated by a priest. Nowadays, other venues such as gardens and beaches have become the preference for middle-class people (Obeng-Hinne, 2024). Here again, the symbolism of the marriage certificate is demonstrated. A marriage relationship may be poor, but once there is a certificate, the implication is that the marriage exists and is valid.

The combination of traditional marriage rites and 'white' weddings has become a norm in Ghana. Unfortunately, many believe that the latter, which some describe as a 'blessing', is necessary for a marriage to be complete. This situation partly stems from the beliefs and teachings of many Christian denominations. Many of these churches do not consider traditional marriage complete or sufficient. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church, marriage is considered a sacrament. Marriage here means the church ceremony. Other Pentecostal and charismatic churches hold similar views. In these churches, a couple who lives together as married after the traditional marriage may be considered to be indulging in concubinage (Amanor, 2012). The complexities of our socio-cultural realities, shaped by social change and factors like religion, have created this situation. Thus, when the singer talks about signing a marriage certificate and having a priest bless the union, he is confirming this reality. When he concludes the verse by saying, "... that is when I would realise that your love has become a complete reality", he again emphasises the belief that, after seeing his lover's family perform customary rites to satisfy tradition, things would only be complete when a 'blessing' takes place.

The verse under review also mentions the woman taking on the man's (sur)name. According to Erickson (2014), the titles 'Mrs.' and 'Miss', which are widely used to address women, are both abbreviated forms of 'mistress'. He further explains that 'Mrs.' came to be used to address married women in the nineteenth century, after it had been used to refer to women of high socio-economic

standing. Today, married women in many parts of the world, including Ghana, use the title ‘Mrs.’ as a prefix to their husband’s name, symbolising their marital status. This ‘importation’ has influenced how we interpret marriage and married people in Korea.

This practice is foreign to traditional Ghanaian culture. Historically, women have never taken their husbands’ names as an indication of marriage. This practice began with the introduction of the Ordinance Marriage. Hardly any Ghanaian women married under customary law take their husbands’ names, although no law restricts them from doing so. By contrast, those married under the Ordinance often do so, and many Christian denominations insist on it, even though it lacks a clear biblical basis. At best, the name change after marriage could be described as a Western concept that Ghanaians have adopted.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates a clear case of social change and transformation in meaning within Ghana’s naming practices. The institution of marriage has changed not only in form but also in content, including the symbolic meanings attached to marriage items. Rings and certificates, imported symbols of marriage, have reshaped local understandings of a complete marriage. A marriage ceremony, whether traditional or an ordinance, without a ring may be seen as incomplete. Similarly, the absence of a signed marriage certificate could cast doubt on the legitimacy of a marriage. Thus, Westernisation and religion continue to shape how marriage is understood in Ghana.

Emphasis on the Ghanaian Woman’s Chastity

Brand new car with a trial number dee

(for a brand-new car with a trial number)

Me license ansaana matwi

(I will license it before I drive in it)

From a general understanding of Ghanaian society and a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, the lines above suggest that the singer figuratively uses the concept of a brand-new car to represent a virgin woman. While ‘licencing it’ means performing the marriage rites, ‘to drive in it’ also implies having sexual relations with the person. Thus, the message is that a woman who has kept her virginity until her marriageable age needs to be properly married before any sexual relations with her can commence. Inherent in this is the belief that women who remain chaste are the ones deserving the ‘glory’ that marriage brings to women, as the singer asserts elsewhere in the song. Other symbolic terms often used to describe virgin girls and women in Africa are ‘tear rubber’ and ‘brand-new’ (Olamijuwon & Odimegwu, 2022).

This seemingly short verse has much to say about gender relations and expectations. Social norms and expectations for men and women in Ghana differ on several levels. One of these concerns virginity and sexual purity. Both genders are expected to be as morally upright as possible, yet evidence suggests that much higher standards are demanded of women and girls than of men. A study of University of Ghana students examining their views on virginity found that the prevailing notion among students was that virginity is about women. It is understood as a stereotype associated with adolescent girls and women (Ababio & Yendork, 2017). Similarly, Olamijuwon and Odimegwu (2022) reported that some members of a public, peer-led Facebook group for sexual health promotion among young African adults argued that because men lack vaginas, virginity belongs to girls, not boys. Unsurprisingly, when virgin clubs were introduced as a strategy to fight HIV/AIDS in parts of Accra and Kumasi, they were largely targeted at young women (Darkwah & Arthur, 2006).

In many African societies, including Ghana, female respectability, dignity, purity, and self-worth are closely linked to virginity, and women are expected to remain virgins until marriage (Bhana, 2016; Mensah et al., 2023; Remi, 2019). For example, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, a woman's virginity is key to negotiating higher bridewealth (Hunter, 2010; Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Virgin females (aged 8 to 25 years) are therefore encouraged to participate in an annual cultural practice called umhlanga, a celebration honouring virgins (Bhana, 2016). This supports Kang and Chen's (2014) argument that young women who lose their virginity before marriage may become less valuable in the heterosexual marriage market, while those who retain their virginity are of higher value (p. 205).

Valenti (2009) argues that this is a system of patriarchal control over female sexuality, whereas Hoffman (2018) argues that in a society that emphasises female virginity, it could be an economic resource for women. By contrast, male virginity is associated by many young people across African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and Benin with naivety, inexperience, and deficiency in sexual prowess (Olamijuwon & Odimegwu, 2021).

van der Geugten et al. (2013), in an attempt to understand premarital sexual behaviour among the youth of Bolgatanga in the Upper East region of Ghana, found that female virginity was regarded as a 'treasure'. This view was grounded not only in cultural values but also in the values of Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religions in the municipality. Some female participants in this study believed that remaining a virgin increased their chances of finding a good husband, which ultimately brought them honour.

According to Mensah et al. (2023, p. 193), some of the reasons for the emphasis on female virginity before marriage in rural Nigeria are that "... first, such a wife who has resisted biological urges and social pressure to compromise her virginity is believed to be potentially faithful in the course of her marriage. She will always see her husband as her only frame of reference and lifelong partner. She is also said to act as a great role model with a lot of character for her children and will always be free from STIs." However, it is worth noting that in rural Nigeria, young boys have cited, among other factors, self-control, imposition, and fear of danger as reasons for abstaining from sex until marriage (Izugbara, 2007). This shows that efforts to preserve virginity go both ways, although, as shown in the previous discussion, the emphasis has been on females.

Over the years, education, urbanisation, and later first marriage have eroded the cultural emphasis on virginity (Molla et al., 2008). Other factors include popular culture, social media, and gender fluidity (Mensah et al., 2023). On average, Ghanaian girls first have sex at 15 years (Agyei et al., 2000), which does not align with the age at first marriage, which is 20.9 years for females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). This suggests that females have sex before marriage. Nevertheless, several men would prefer to marry virgins, and many girls continue to try to save themselves for marriage.

Overall, this emphasis on a woman's chastity, in both African and Ghanaian contexts, which Obrafour conveys through interesting symbolism, points to gender power asymmetries, double standards, and their implications for women's agency. Compared with men, women are given much less control over their bodies in Ghanaian society. While men face less societal judgement for premarital sexual escapades, the same cannot be said for women. Ironically, men engage in sexual activities largely with women, revealing society's double standards. If men can engage in unrestricted sex but women cannot, whom are the men engaging sexually with? Women's agency in relation to sex is curtailed and controlled through these power dynamics and double standards, as societal expectations hush their choices and voices about sex.

Conclusion

This study uses Ghanaian hiplife musician Obrafour's Pimpinaa as a case study to demonstrate how music serves as a conduit for communicating knowledge about socio-cultural practices related to marriage and love affairs in Ghana. Through a Symbolic Interactionist lens, thematic analysis of the song produced four main themes, which are discussed in relation to the relevant literature. These were the preference for marriage over concubinage, the need for family involvement in the marriage process, the Westernisation and Christianisation of marriage in Ghana, and the emphasis on the moral uprightness (virginity, purity) of Ghanaian women. Overall, the most recurring theme was that marriage was rated higher than concubinage or other permutations of the marriage institution. The song, therefore, reflects aspects of Ghanaian socio-cultural life. Like many other societies, contemporary Ghanaian society is characterised by both change and persistence. This suggests that Ghanaian society may be undergoing social change, but some traditions remain. On the one hand, in this song, we see the Christianisation and Westernisation of marriage ceremonies, together with their imported symbols of marriage, because of the activities of missionaries and colonial authorities, as well as globalisation. These are clear examples of social change. On the other hand, the song emphasises marriage as a socially sanctioned institution for family formation. This reflects reverence for tradition.

The symbolic interactionist perspective used in the song analysis enhances understanding of popular music as a form of social interaction. This perspective not only demonstrates how music functions as a form of communication but also reveals the symbolism of Ghanaian expressions, which carry deeper, context-dependent meanings than they suggest on the surface.

A limitation of this study is that the analysis is based on a single song; thus, the findings are not generalisable to the Ghanaian hiplife genre. Arguably, the lyrics of this song may lend themselves to other interpretations within the Ghanaian or African context. Such an analysis would highlight the complexities of social life and how songs can communicate them in diverse ways. Media studies, cultural sociology, and African popular culture research all have much to reveal if they focus on music as a symbolically relevant tool for social interaction.

Acknowledgment

We thank Mr. Apenteng Sackey of the Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, for his expert service in translating the lyrics of Pimpinaa, from Twi to English.

References

- Ababio, P., & Yendork, S. J. (2017). "When you talk about virginity It's about females": Views on virginity among University of Ghana students. *Sexuality & Culture*, 21(2), 549-568.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9404-8>
- Addo, E. N. (2022). *Pimpinaa: An analysis of Ghanaian children's play-songs as a genre of African Literature* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa].
- Agyei, W. K. A., Biritwum, R. B., Ashitey, A. G. & Hill, R. B. (2000). Sexual behaviour and contraception among unmarried adolescents and young adults in Greater Accra and Eastern regions of Ghana. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 32(4), 495-512.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932000004958>



- Akpan, W. (2016). And the beat goes on? Message music, political repression and the power of Hip-Hop in Nigeria. In M. Drewett (Ed.), *Popular music censorship in Africa* (pp. 91-106). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315601427>
- Akrong, I. (2012). *Hip life music: re-defining Ghanaian culture (1990-2012)*. [Doctoral thesis, University of York].
- Alo, O. A., & Akinde, I. S. (2010). Premarital sexual activities in an urban society of Southwest-Nigeria. *Journal of Medical Humanities and Social Studies of Science and Technology*, 2(116), 0970-0218.
- Amanor, K. D. J. (2012). *Customary marriage rites: Biblical or Pagan?* SonLife Press.
- Ampofo, A. A., & Asiedu, A. M. (2012). Changing representations of women in Ghanaian popular music: Marrying research and advocacy. *Current Sociology*, 60(2), 258-279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392111429229>
- Amponsah, K. (1974). *Topics on West African Traditional Religions*. McGraw-Hill FEP.
- Arko-Achemfuor, A. (2017). Three and a half decades of Kojo Antwi in educating adults and the youth about marriage and love through highlife music in Ghana. *Muziki*, 14(2), 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2016.1249161>
- Asante-Darko, N., & van der Geest, S. (2023). Male chauvinism: Men and women in Ghanaian highlife songs. In C. Oppong (Ed.), *Female and male in West Africa* (pp. 242–255). Allen and Unwin.
- Awusabo-Asare, K. (1990). Matriliney and the new intestate succession law of Ghana. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue Canadienne des études Africaines*, 24(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.1990.10803849>
- Bhana, D. (2016). Virginity and virtue: African masculinities and femininities in the making of teenage sexual cultures. *Sexualities*, 19(4), 465-481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715613298>
- Boateng, K. (2009). Ghanaian hip-life rap music as a popular or political rap, and a mixed cultural bag of Ghanaian highlife and North American rap music. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 18(2), 202-213.
- Brown, S. L. (2003). Relationship quality dynamics of cohabiting unions. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24(5), 583-601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X03252671>
- Brown, S. L., Manning, W. D., & Payne, K. K. (2017). Relationship quality among cohabiting versus married couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(12), 1730-1753. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X15622236>
- Collins, J. (2005). A social history of Ghanaian popular entertainment since independence. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 9, 17-40.
- Collins, J. (2007). Popular performance and culture in Ghana: The past 50 years. *Ghana Studies*, 10(1), 9-64. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ghs.2007.0001>
- Darkwah, A. K., & Arthur, A. (2006). (A) Sexualizing Ghanaian youth? A case study of virgin clubs in Accra and Kumasi. *Ghana Studies*, 9(1), 123-149. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ghs.2006.0000>
- Duncan, S., Phillips, M., Carter, J., Roseneil, S., & Stoilova, M. (2014). Practices and perceptions of living apart together. *Family Science*, 5(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620.2014.927382>



- Dyson-Hudson, R., & Meekers, D. (1996). The universality of African marriage reconsidered: evidence from Turkana males. *Ethnology*, 35(4), 301-320. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773872>
- Erickson, A. L. (2014). Mistresses and Marriage: Or, a Short History of the Mrs. *History Workshop Journal*, 78(1), 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbt002>
- Frost, A. E., & Doodoo, F. N. A. (2010). "The man comes to marry the woman": Exploring adolescent boys' gendered expectations for bridewealth and marriage among the Akwapim of Southern Ghana. *Marriage & Family Review*, 46(1-2), 41-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494921003648563>
- Ghana Statistical Service (2014). *2014 Demographic and Health Survey*. Ghana Statistical Service.
- Gottschall, J., & Nordlund, M. (2006). Romantic love: A literary universal? *Philosophy and Literature*, 30(2), 450-470. <https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.2006.0030>
- Harrison, A. K. (2008). Racial authenticity in rap music and hip hop. *Sociology Compass*, 2(6), 1783-1800. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00171.x>
- Hunter, M. (2010). *Love in the time of AIDS: Inequality, gender and rights in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Izugbara, C. O. (2007). Representations of sexual abstinence among rural Nigerian adolescent males. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 4(2), 74-87.
- Jones, A. M. (1953). Folk music in Africa. *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 5(1), 36-40.
- Kang, M. A. & Chen, K. H. (2014). Stance-taking and the Hong Kong girl in a shifting heterosexual marketplace. *Discourse and Society*, 25(2), 205-220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513515587>
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). African folk songs as traditional instruments for education and entertainment. *Jos Journal of Religion and Philosophy*, 1(1), 172-183.
- Karandashev, V. (2021). Cultural diversity of romantic love experience. In C. H. Mayer & E. Vanderheiden (Eds.), *International handbook of love: Transcultural and transdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 59-79). Springer International Publishing.
- Kotarba, J. A. (2014). Symbolic interaction and applied social research: A focus on translational science. *Symbolic Interaction*, 37(3), 412-425. <https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.111>
- Kwarteng, A. A. A. (2025). Gauging the influence of new media on African narrative forms and storytelling: The case of Assase Podcast, Flash Fiction Ghana, and Jalada Africa. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 7(6), 557-568. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i6.2432>
- Kyei, T. E. (1992). *Marriage and divorce among the Asante: A study undertaken in the course of the Ashanti Social Survey (1945)*. Cambridge African Studies Centre.
- Langmagne, S., Tenkorang, E. Y., Asampong, E., Osafo, J., & Bingenheimer, J. B. (2018). Approaches to regulating adolescent sexual behaviour in Ghana: Qualitative evidence from Somanya and Adidome. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 47(6), 1779-1790. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1161-3>
- Miescher, S. (2005). *Making men in Ghana*. Indiana University Press.
- Mensah, E., Nsebot, U., Mensah, E., Ushuple, L., & Aboh, R. (2023). 'It's not all about spreading one's legs': The discourse of virginity loss among female adolescents in rural Nigeria. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 17(1-3), 181-203. <https://doi.org/10.1558/sols.24048>



- Molla, M., Berhane, Y., & Lindtjørn, B. (2008). Traditional values of virginity and sexual behaviour in rural Ethiopian youth: results from a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 8, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-8-9>
- Nukunya, G. K. (2003). *Tradition and change in Ghana: An introduction to sociology* (2nd ed.). Woeli Publishers.
- Nweke, O. C., Zibo, B. S., Appiah, E. K. A., Towuru, B., & Agbo, C. F. (2024). Traditional Ghanaian oral storytelling in the modern communication landscape. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 7(3), 90-100. <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.07.03.506>
- Obeng-Hinne, R. (2019). Negotiating entry into marriage: Strategies of Ghanaian women in 'marriage-like' partnerships. *Ghana Social Science Journal*, 16(1), 54-71.
- Obeng-Hinne, R., & Kpoor, A. (2022). Cohabitation and its consequences in Ghana. *Journal of Family Issues*, 43(2), 283-305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X21994155>
- Obeng-Hinne, R. (2024). A sociological study of the Ghanaian family. In A. K. Darkwah & K. P. Pupilampu (Eds.), *Social change in a global era: Introduction to sociology in Ghana* (pp. 302-337). Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Obidoa, C. A., Dodor, B. A., Tackie-Ofosu, V., Obidoa, M. A., Kalisch, H. R., & Nelson, L. J. (2019). Perspectives on markers of adulthood among emerging adults in Ghana and Nigeria. *Emerging Adulthood*, 7(4), 270-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818778906>
- Oduro-Frimpong, J. (2009). Glocalization trends: The case of hiplife music in contemporary Ghana. *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 1085-1106.
- Okpewho, I. (1992). *African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity* (Vol. 710). Indiana University Press.
- Olamijuwon, E., & Odimegwu, C. (2022). Saving sex for marriage: An analysis of lay attitudes towards virginity and its perceived benefit for marriage. *Sexuality & Culture*, 26(2), 568-594. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09909-7>
- Patico, J. (2010). From modern loves to universal passions: Ethnographies of love, marriage, and globalization. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 17(4), 372-386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2010.492306>
- Prahlad, A. (2001). *Reggae wisdom: Proverbs in Jamaican music*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Pupilampu, K. P. (2024). From classical to contemporary sociological theories: Thinking and applying sociological theories in Ghana. In A. K. Darkwah & K. P. Pupilampu (Eds.), *Social change in a global era: Introduction to sociology in Ghana* (pp. 28-64). Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Rabaka, R. (2012). *Hip hop's amnesia: From blues and the black women's club movement to rap and the hip-hop movement*. Lexington Books.
- Remi, A. E. (2019). Sexuality in marriage and African culture: A socio-ethical analysis. *Religions' educator*, 18(1), 83-95.
- Rudwick, S., & Posel, D. (2014). Contemporary functions of ilobolo (bridewealth) in urban South African Zulu society. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 32(1), 118-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2014.900310>
- Salm, S. J., & Falola, T. (2000). *Culture and Customs of Ghana*. Greenwood Press.

- Sassler, S. (2004). The process of entering into cohabiting unions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 491-505. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2004.00033.x>
- Shipley, J. W. (2009). Aesthetic of the entrepreneur: Afro-Cosmopolitan rap and moral circulation in Accra, Ghana. *Anthropology Quarterly*, 82(3), 631-668. <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.0.0074>
- Stapleton, K. R. (1998). From the margins to mainstream: the political power of hip-hop. *Media, Culture & Society*, 20(2), 219-234.
- Stevenson, B. E. (2013). What's love got to do with it? Concubinage and enslaved women and girls in the antebellum South. *The Journal of African American History*, 98(1), 99-125.
- Stewart, J. B. (2005). Message in the music: Political commentary in Black popular music from rhythm and blues to early hip-hop. *The Journal of African American History*, 90(3), 196-225.
- Valenti, J. (2009). *The purity myth: How America's obsession with virginity is hurting young women*. Seal Press.
- Van der Geugten, J., Van Meijel, B., De Vries, N. K., & Den Uyl, M. H. (2013). Virginity, sex, money and desire: Premarital sexual behaviour of youths in Bolgatanga municipality, Ghana. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 17(4), 93-106. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC145431>
- Worae, J., Anastasia, B. A., & Akolly, M. M. (2019). Are women obsessed with 'white' weddings? A case study at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(2), 59-68.