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Pathways to an Empowering Song: Marrying Research and Advocacy

In this paper we map the multiple methods used to bring scholar-activists, music producers and music consumers together in a conversation that culminated in the creation of three winning “empowering songs” from the “Changing Representations of Women in Popular Music” project. This project explores the gendered stereotypes of women in popular music, and seeks to contribute to reflection on, and creation of alternative (empowering) narratives about women through song. The methods in this scholarly-activist project have included the collection of over 250 songs; analyses of song texts; a workshop with diverse persons from the music industry; discussions with consumers of music (Taxi drivers and students); a song competition; a launch of the winning songs; and discussion and reflections in the print and electronic media. The paper will focus on the methods and outcomes from the ‘corporate’ reflection and feedback spaces – the workshop, discussions with consumers – all of which generated a lot of passion about the tensions and possibilities around women’s representations and roles. We link these outcomes to a discussion of the songs submitted for the competition focusing on the three winning songs and their reception in the public space. As researchers we were reminded that for research findings to have practical and policy value and legitimacy, what, how, when and where we communicate our messages is extremely important.