

*Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction 3/e*

Sample Essay for Chapter 3

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STOP and write your essay before scrolling down.

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This essay offers a great deal of flexibility because there are many guided listening examples in Chapter 3, and nearly all of them reveal cultural traditions or ideas about gender. As such, I will list a few examples here:

Mexican children's songs/games: the chapter stresses that Mexican ethnic groups express their unique traditions through children's music; not all traditional Mexican music is the same! The examples here display ideas about traditional gender roles in the world of work and marriage ("Rice Pudding"), but also the reverence for women as bringers of life, both on earth and in the afterlife ("The Skeleton's Clock")

Kwesi Brown's interview data reveal that outsiders often misunderstand the role of women as singers/dancers in his traditional culture because singing/dancing in Western/European cultures became associated with femininity and weakness. In his matrilineal culture, however, the role of singer/dancer is viewed as more powerful than that of the drummers that accompany traditional ritual. (Much more detail could be added here about life-cycle rituals, etc.).

Celia Cruz' "Black Sugar" is another good example of how an entertaining piece can carry deep meaning. Here, the upbeat tumbao rhythm perhaps suggests that the singer has swagger and confidence, but careful lyrical review reveals that Cruz was also referencing the Cuban plantation economy that prospered due to the labor of enslaved Africans. Cuban national dance styles embedded in the work add deep feeling.