Messengers: A Content Analyses of the Billboard Rap Charts Number One Songs

from 2000 to 2017

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Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Rap music, which originated under hip hop, has become one of the most popular genres of music in the United States. From the beginnings of hip hop, the hip hop generation was named, and a movement started. There has been much research on both hip hop and rap music and the messages that this radical genre of music produced. While content analyses have been done in the past, it is necessary to continue to analyze this music, as it is incredibly prevalent and impactful in the United States. These analyses are important in terms of examining commercial success, mainstream accessibility, and the messages and themes that are present in one of the most popular genres of music. This thesis examines the content of the rap songs that reached number one on the Billboard rap chart, from the years 2000 to 2017, providing both a historical and contemporary view of this music that has reached the pinnacle of success among the genre of rap music since the turn of the century. The findings document demographics of the artists and themes that are present in the most popular rap songs; indicating consistency in messages across the sample, with popular rap songs having many references to deviant behavior, explicit word use, and negative references to women, while lacking in socially conscious themes and pro-women themes. However, rap songs have also provided some powerfully consciousness-raising about important social issues. Overall, the themes that "plague" rap music are present in the most popular rap songs, and this has been consistent with time in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1:

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

Hip hop is more than just a type of music; it is a movement (Rabaka, 2013). The hip hop movement is radical and has been gaining momentum since hip hop's creation in the 1970's and 80's (Norfleet, 2015; Rabaka, 2013). As time has progressed, hip hop has become one of the most popular and consumed types of music across the entire world. At the same time, the music and movement faced significant public backlash. Hip hop is criticized for being misogynistic, homophobic, and even, at times, racist (Clay, 2007). Simultaneously, hip hop is also labeled progressive, conscious, and critical socially. Rap, a sub section of hip hop, has been criticized for decades, while being consumed in abundance. However, what messages are being portrayed in rap songs? And what are the messages of the most popular rap songs?

Billboard is the company that documents and tracks of songs' popularity. At the end of every week, Billboard crowns one song as number one, above all others. These songs are considered the most popular at the time, and thus are being consumed the most by general audiences. Billboard has kept track of chart records for years, since 1940 as a starting point, and has kept records of each song that reached number one; including current charts, and all the way back to the year 1940. For this thesis, I conducted a content analysis of the chart-topping rap songs from 2000 to 2017 to document the demographic characteristics of the artists and the messages in their lyrics. Is the content of rap lyrics the same as it was seventeen years ago or has it changed with the times? Also, what are the social implications of such popular songs and messages?

It is important to discuss hip hop from its origins, to best display how rap fits into hip hop, and show how they are not the same, though they are often times used synonymously. Hip hop originated in New York and has 5 elements (Norfleet, 2015). The elements are: DJing, Emceeing (what is now more commonly known as "rapping", b-boying/b-girling (break dancing), graffiti, and knowledge (Norfleet, 2015). Current "hip hop" is almost used as another word for rap, but there are large differences between the two. Hip hop is the umbrella term, and rap fits within that. Rap has also just become one of the most popular branches of hip hop, but all the other elements are present within hip hop culture, and popular culture in general. The fifth element, knowledge, is widely important in both hip hop and rap as well.

Rap has become a mainstream genre of music in the United States, despite rap's various labeling. It has flourished and become one of the most popular types of music. Rap's messages are often of violent, misogynistic, and homophobic basis (Clay, 2007). But not all rap is in that category and rap was not always that way; rap has evolved over time to become what it is today. The average consumer loves raps' messages, as they fit within oppressive ideologies in the United States (Perry, 2004). However, some rap has combatted these stereotypes by speaking on socially conscious issues, such as police brutality, racism, oppression, mass incarceration, and so on. It is notable that such socially conscious issues which so strongly affect African Americans and oppressed people, is so eagerly consumed by white audiences. To understand the impact of rap, it is useful to focus on the most consumed and highly ranked songs and the characteristics of the artists who write and perform these songs and lyrics, to document the messages they are conveying to the consumers, and whether these messages are positive, negative, or somewhere in-between. In this study, the unit of analysis is the song lyrics, such as how many times explicit words are used, how often the n-word is used, how many total references there are to women

(and sub-sections for positive and negative references to women), and references to social consciousness. The analysis also includes each performer's race and gender, the number of performers per song, and the popularity of the number one artists (in terms of frequency at number one on the Billboard charts). The software package Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the content analysis data collected, documenting the most popular songs and artists, and to compare artists and songs across variables such as the artists' race and gender, and the themes and content present in the lyrics.

Theoretical Perspective

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is relatively new, established in the 1980's as a response to critical legal studies. Critical race theory was designed to stress that race does have impacts on laws and power. In addition Critical Race Theory focuses on the implications of society, culture, and how race and power interact within culture and society, specifically in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In general, critical race theory has been a collaborative effort, with scholars and lawyers collaborating over the years to continue to update critical race theory as time progresses. CRT looks to dismantle systems of racism, while also empowering people of color in systems and spaces where there has typically been lack of power (while also disproving principles such as "color blindness," etc.) In general, Critical Race Theory has built upon past legal theory, and has looked to improve them to fit the needs of all people (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical race theory looks to examine powers of whiteness, while also empowering various ethnic groups, as there are divisions for races, ethnicities, and even religion. For example, there are LGBTQ theorists, Latinx theorists, Muslim theorists (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017). These are only a small number of the total theories being subsequently built from the foundations of Critical Race Theory, which is subsequently supported by Crenshaw et al. (1995).

Critical Race Theory directly applies to the study of hip hop songs, as race is an important aspect of hip hop movement and rap music, and the implications of rap music also involve race. Dynamics of power are also crucial in hip hop and rap, as the study is examining the messages within the songs that have become the most popular. Critical Race Theory is also appropriate in an examination of hip hop and rap music, as race is key among both the performances and lyrics, thus necessary for understanding rap and its social implications. Race and representation are a vital component of rap. Therefore, a section of the content analysis codes for the rap artists' race, gender, and intersectionality (race x gender) of these number one rap song performers. Finally, Critical Race Theory is essential because of the story-telling that is rap music (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Hip hop and rap music can be directly described as telling stories, both from fictitious and non-fictitious roots.

Within CRT, there is also the importance of resistance traditions within oppressive societies. These are assimilation and nationalism, and they have to do with wider beliefs on how to use action in oppressive realms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Assimilation believes that there is the possibility for those who are oppressed to be able to merge and live amongst a racist society and fully assimilate as human beings. Nationalism believes that the racist and oppressive society does not, and will not, value those who are oppressed, and that there should be a nationalist movement to create a society where the history and sociocultural existence of oppressed people is acknowledged and important. This is shown by both Critical

Race Theory books, Delgado & Stefancic (2017), and Crenshaw et al. (1995), when addressing nationalism and integrationism/assimilation within social movements.

The Current Study

The hip hop generation is one of change and perpetual accumulation of knowledge. With the success of rap as a genre of music in the United States, this propels hip hop culture into spheres where it was not common before. However, what messages are being transmitted through streaming, radio, and media in rap music, and who are those presenting them? This study looks to examine this and see if this has changed since the beginning of the 21st Century. The themes examined in this study are the use of explicit words, the amount of times the n-word is used in a song, references to deviant behavior, total references to women, positive references to women, negative references to women, and socially conscious lyrics. The race, gender, and intersectionality of all the artists is recorded as well. This includes artists who performed solo on a track, or with a variety of featured artists, as well as rap groups with total members anywhere from two to nine different members. This will show the type of artists who find mainstream success, as well as their race, gender, and the implications of their intersectional identities, and what general themes are being presented in each song.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

  Hip hop is a relatively new genre of music, compared to rock or jazz, originating in the late 1970's in New York (Norfleet, 2015). However, Hip hop, once expected to die out as a fad, has not only survived in the mainstream, but thrived. And from hip hop there has been a new social movement, gracefully named the hip hop movement (Rabaka, 2013). Hip hop is a very interesting cultural dynamic, as it has changed with time and is rebellious in nature (Perry, 2004). Hip hop's importance and popularity have also created the study of hip hop as both a genre and a movement. There are entire college courses taught about hip hop and a plethora of articles and books about every aspect of hip hop. From this, rap as a genre of music formed and was popularized in the United States (Norfleet, 2015). Through this research, books about hip hop's social implications and rap's social implications have shown a variety of thoughts about the goals of hip hop and what it can and cannot do. Other content analyses have been conducted on hip hop and rap lyrics, but none were identified with a similar sample as this study, with the most popular hip hop songs from the turn of the century being analyzed.

Critical Hip Hop Studies

  This chapter reviews the extant of research on hip hop as a genre, rap music, and movements within these music forms. Tricia Rose, John McWhorter, and S.C. Watkins have all published work on hip hop and how it is functioning in the United States. While hip hop is a global genre, their focus is on hip hop as it originated in the United States, and its implications

within the United States' culture and society. McWhorter (2008), Rose (2008), and Watkins (2006) claimed in the latter 2000s that hip hop was not able to achieve its biggest goals, even though they are self-reported fans of the genre and are all African American. There is a common understanding that the problems within hip hop are holding it back, and that these problems will continually plague the genre and movement until they are addressed (McWhorter, 2008; Rose, 2008; Watkins, 2006). Watkins describes it as the soul of the movement, Rose as a war within hip hop, and McWhorter details how it is unable to save Black America (McWhorter, 2008; Rose, 2008; Watkins, 2006). They struggle to engage with hip hop's impact, as it has good intentions in its roots, but time and commercial capitalism has changed how hip hop acts within society, and hip hop culture in general has changed as well. They also have a greater focus on hip hop and African Americans. Hip hop is an African American creation, which has struggled from its creation to the present because of its problematic nature. Contemporarily, hip hop is still "stuck" in limbo, but there are examples of how hip hop has been able to achieve its goals (as well as examples where it has not been as beneficial). This also means that rap and hip hop are interacting with systems of oppression. Most of which are covert and have been institutionalized over time. Rose (2008) discusses this very early in the book, and how the newest generation has to critique society where she writes, "Members of the hip hop generation are now facing the greatest media machinery and most veiled forms of racial, economic, sexual, and gender rhetoric in modern history; they need the sharpest critical tools to survive and thrive" (Rose, 2008, p. 9). In the contemporary United States, almost all forms of oppression have been hidden within institutions.

Further, when it comes to messaging involved distinct types of oppression, and specifically patriarchy, much of hip hop and rap are reported to normalize patriarchal

perspectives. In reference to the rampant patriarchy Perry (2004, p. 119) writes, "the black male patriarch, where he exists, lives a fragile existence, mediated by his encounters with white male patriarchy." This exemplifies the fragility of patriarchy in general, but in particular, White patriarchy is documented as stronger than Black patriarchy (Perry, 2004). And within all of this is an even greater marginalization of African American women specifically, but also women, in general. There is also the fear of the African American male sexuality, and the following focus on the African American male body. But within this, some male artists are able to deconstruct these stereotypes and use them in their favor. For example, the acceptance of the anti-hero and rebel role. Another example of this is the use of the N word and turning a racial slur on its head. The African American male in Hip Hop is also able to deconstruct white masculinity and patriarchy by using and embracing the stereotypes put upon them (Perry, 2004). Hip hop in general has become hypermasculine, hypersexual, and plagued with misogyny. There is this wrongful association with femininity and being weak. This is also supported in a content analysis by Flynn, Craig, Anderson, and Holody (2016), as women are the targets of objectification, which will also be discussed in the following section.

But to disregard women in hip hop is to silence their stories and power. In reference to the "Badwoman" character seen in rap and hip hop women, "The badwoman do not simply occupy male spaces… They use their presence to call into question the masculine designation of those spaces, and to offer a feminist critique using their power in these spaces" (Perry, 2004, p. 159). This can also be related to general themes in hip hop discussed by Rose (2008), as she addressed 10 points within hip hop. Five of Rose's points are from the critics who argue hip hop "causes violence, reflects African American dysfunctional ghetto culture, hurts African American people, is destroying America's values, and demeans women"; then 5 from the

defenders arguing hip hop is "just keeping it real, is not responsible for sexism, "There are bitches and hos," we're not role models, and nobody talks about the positives in hip hop" (Rose, 2008, pp. 25-26).

Watkins (2001) also shows that hip hop and nationalism are connected in a separate article. The ideas of nationalism versus assimilation are also outlined in Critical Race Theory, and there is much debate about which is better as a resistance tradition for people of color in the United States. Watkins focuses specifically on Black Nationalism within the United States (Watkins, 2001). Watkins provides an engaging perspective; his view of Black Nationalism is examined within a politicized view of rap music, and how that has also changed along with social, economic, and technological change. Both nationalism and assimilation can be seen within hip hop and hip hop culture, as artists and followers of the movement make choices about their ideals and how they want to present themselves to the rest of the world. Forman also discusses the importance of race, and its effect on place and space, which is very important within hip hop (Forman, 2002). Within hip hop, the place you are from is significant to identity (similar to that of assimilation or nationalism). Entire conflicts within hip hop have been based on the principle of space, with the most famous being the east coast versus west coast rivalry. Forman focuses on the use of language when referencing space within the book, as the words "hood" or "ghetto" are most often associated with poorer Black and Brown communities, and analyzing how these spaces and words are used to generalize entire populations of people (Forman, 2002).

In relation to studying hip hop, there is the importance of the roots of hip hop. This includes the four major pillars of hip hop; DJing, MCing, b-boying/girling (also known as break dancing), and graffiti (Norfleet, 2006). Another pillar would be knowledge, but this was not

identified by Norfleet in 2006, but is widely accepted contemporarily. The inclusion of knowledge is something that has become more prevalent with time in the hip hop movement and culture. This also validates hip hop culture as a legitimate culture, as it has aspects of music, art, and dance.

Other Content Analyses

Hip hop is one of the most proactive and forward-thinking genres of music that has been popularized through mainstream commercialism, and this has created an abundance of songs and lyrics in which content analyses have been conducted. A study conducted on gangsta rap music, which would be slightly before the time period this study focuses on, found that 22% of a sample of 490 song classified as gangsta rap songs contain violent and misogynistic lyrics (Armstrong, 2001). This number is surprisingly low, considering the rather violent and misogynistic rapport that gangsta rap has within the idea of rap as a genre as music. Armstrong (2002) found that there are also more references to sexual violence within gangsta rap than expected. This connects to greater themes in regard to studying hip hop and rap music. First and foremost, gangsta rap told the story truthfully, and gave all the details of what was happening in lower economic communities (Quinn, 2016, p. 26). Rappers told stories of crime, drug dealing, and prostitution in great detail, like a true story teller should. This brought to light many issues that the government would have rather not discussed. This also relates back to the content analyses on gangsta rap, as they just are storytellers for their present situations, and use a specific type of imagery to portray their circumstances. The misogyny that is often found in rap also comes in the form of objectification, shown in a study using the same sample as Holody et al., that found Rap and R&B/Hip-Hop featured significantly more objectification than other genres (Flynn, Craig,

Anderson, & Holody, 2016). The study also found that objectification is something that is occurring to both women and men, and while it happens more to women, men are also objectifying themselves at the same time (Flynn et al., 2016). This was also supported in a study of songs by female rappers, that showed that female rappers had many commonalities with male rappers: braggadocio, alcohol and drug use, and "dissin" of other rappers (both male and female); but also had messages of female empowerment and agency, as well as reclamation of the word "bitch" (Oware, 2009).

Another study also examined differences between prosocial and antisocial themes within hip hop messaging and its presence online, as the songs that were shared more often on the internet were more prosocial in nature, while the songs that made the billboard charts were more antisocial (Epps & Dixon, 2017). This is a surprising finding, as the messages that are consumed most often technically are not the messages that are being shared most often via internet and social media. Similarly, the matter of representation is important within hip hop, and studies have shown both effects of colorism within hip hop, as well as gang culture's presence on social media. A study on colorism in regards to the billboard rap year end charts found that lighter skinned artists were positively correlated with charting higher, and that this questions the principle that hip hop is "authentic" Black music (Laybourn, 2018). A study on street gangs examined the use and utilization of social media and how rap videos are used to monitor and enforce gang behavior (Storrod & Densley, 2017). Both studies show the effects of representation when it comes to hip hop as both race and social status are already incredibly prominent, and increasingly becoming more prominent within society. In regards to representation in rap, a study also found that the most prominent actor mentioned in rap songs in

regards to the conditions of communities was God, and that the biggest problem was desperation; the response was hope from their sample of rap songs (Hollander & Quinn, 2016).

Other content analyses have been conducted on the most popular music within Billboards general charts, which often times included hip hop, but it was not the main focus of the study. Within a study of the content analysis of tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use, it was found that 33.3%, or 93 of the 279 song sample portrayed substance use (Primack, Dalton, Carroll, Agarwal, & Fine, 2008). This study also distinguished two groups when analyzing rap songs and R&B/Hip-hop songs. From the R&B/Hip-hop songs, only 11 of 55 songs referenced drug use, while a striking 48 of 62 rap songs referenced substance use (Primack, Dalton, et al., 2008). This was the highest percentage by far within popular music when referencing substance use. Another study was conducted on references to degrading and non-degrading sex, and that study showed that rap was the most likely genre to have degrading sex lyrics (Primack, Gold, Schwarz, & Dalton, 2008). This study also found that songs with degrading lyrics were more likely to reference substance use (Primack, Dalton, et al., 2008; Primack, Gold, et al., 2008). These studies in particular show that while these references are not exclusive to hip hop, as they are found in essentially all genres of music, they are the most prevalent in hip hop songs. To further this, from a sample of lyrics to all songs from 2009 to 2013 in the following Billboard chart genres: rap, country, adult contemporary, rock, R&B/hip-hop, and pop, it was found that sex and alcohol were the most frequently mentioned risk behaviors, mentioned predominantly in the rap and R&B/hip-hop categories (Holody, Anderson, Craig, & Flynn, 2016). Alcohol and drugs were most often associated with intoxication and partying/socializing; alcohol, drug use, and sex were most often associated with positive emotions; and sex was most often described within casual relationships (Holody et al., 2016). From this study, the most referenced risky behavior was sex,

followed by alcohol use, and rap music contained the most references to alcohol, marijuana, and nonmarijuana drugs (Holody et al., 2016). Also, in reference to alcohol prevalence in rap songs, this is not a new trend, as it was found that references to alcohol increased in rap lyrics from 8% to 44%, as well as general positive attitudes toward alcohol and name brand mentions (Herd, 2005).

The effects of hip hop's messaging have not been widely studied, but there has been research conducted on the topic, some of which is similar to the content of the current study. Krohn and Suazo (1995), examined the messages from hip hop and rap lyrics with an emphasis on the dichotomy of expression of frustration with poverty, drug dependence, and sexual harassment, but also looked at how it is expressed through the use of explicit words, and references to violence, both physical and sexual. This violence was shown in a study of rap billboard toppers from 1989 to 2000; illustrates there was an increase in references to violent homicide, from 29% to 42%, and how this begins to normalize this type of behavior (Hunnicutt & Andrews, 2009, pg. 9). This can be seen as somewhat counterproductive.

The messages being shown are often the true experiences that people of color and the impoverished are living, but these messages also perpetuate the ideas of difference among people. It perpetuates the idea that rappers are "ghetto" or dangerous, and therefore rap and hip hop is also dangerous. A potential problem for this source, though, is that it is a bit dated, as it was published in 1995. Since then, rap and hip hop have only become more commercial (which has come with positive and negative effects), and society has changed overall. However, some of the themes presented in this paper are still true for contemporary rap music, especially the references to violence, sex, and explicit word use. This dichotomy was also addressed by the article:

"Rap music is a confusing and noisy element of contemporary American popular culture that continues to draw a great deal of attention to itself. On the one hand, music and cultural critics praise rap's role as an educational tool, point out that black women rappers are rare examples of aggressive pro-women lyricists in popular music, and defend rap's ghetto stories as real-life reflections that should draw attention to the burning problems of racism and economic oppression, rather than to questions of obscenity. On the other hand, news media attention on rap seems fixated on instances of violence at rap concerts, rap producers' illegal use of musical samples, gangsta raps' lurid fantasies of cop killing and female dismemberment, and black nationalist rappers' suggestions that white people are the devil's disciples…" (Krohn & Suazo, 1995)

These differences between the elements of hip hop also show wider truths when examining how the media portrays people, but also how this media is commercialized and capitalized. This also relates to the study done by Primack, Dalton, et. al. (2008), as these messages continue to perpetuate stereotypes of Black and Brown communities and rap in general. These lyrics described above have become a mainstream form of music, consumed by massive amounts of people every day.

Rap and hip hop as a genre of popular U.S. music

Part of what also makes rap and hip hop such an intricate genre is that it has wide social implications and connections in the United States. This has also changed with time, as rap has evolved from a subgenre of music that was expected to be a fad into what it is now, a truly dominant genre of music in the United States. Within the past 30 years, many rap recording

labels such as Death Row Records and Bad Boy records were taken over by various mainstream music labels (Myer & Kleck, 2007). This changed the way that rap music was presented, as the smaller, independent labels were bought by larger labels and companies, this began to commercialize the product that is rap music (Myer & Kleck, 2007). There is also the possibility that once a rap label had become a corporate rather and in independent entity, the way the music is created and distributed begins to change, "The danger of big firms having control over independent music labels is that it leads to decrease in diversity, or, worse, multiplicity (i.e. the variety of the genres of music being produced and artists producing it" (Myer & Kleck, 2007, 146). This would change the way that hip hop culture and rap are viewed in a variety of ways. On one hand, it begins to legitimize rap as a true genre of music and propel the ideas of hip hop culture to greater heights, as was the case with NWA, and SoundScan's new effect on the Billboard charts in general (McCourt & Rothenbuhler, 1997, pg. 207). On the other hand, this can dilute the messages of rap music due to capitalization and what makes the most money for the corporation. This is further proven in a study that shows that rap songs, when put out by an independent label, are more socially conscious, while songs put out by major labels often times fit the narrative of hustler and the street protagonist (Lena, 2006). This is an amusing finding in relation to popular music, and subsequently rap music as well. The major labels and companies that promote the music, and thus this genre, are the same companies that often time have artists at the top of the billboard charts. That is due to the massive amounts of clout that these labels have when it comes to the music business and promotion.

  This classifying of rap into two categories, one from independent sources and the other from a commercial sense, also leads back to the ideas of authenticity, which are significant within rap and hip hop culture. The major record labels wanted to capitalize on a thriving

product, so "They felt pressure to craft an identity suitable (and saleable) in the mainstream recording industry while 'keepin' it real,' remaining congruent with an older value system" (Lena, 2006, 489). Major labels have exploited this aspect of hip hop culture, and it is evident in the messages that popular rap songs portray. Hip hop's media is a bit different that those of past liberation movements, as commercialization has been a huge outlet for hip hop, but also social media has helped propel the hip hop movement and politics. Bakari Kitwana discusses how the hip hop movement and culture have been impacted by the use media, including social media and mass media in particular (Kitwana, 2012, p. 452). Wright also discusses this, stating, "We must not only examine the content of popular culture and media representations, we must also examine the media industry's role in the creation process to better understand its influence" (Wright, 2012, p. 522).

The history of hip hop can be seen in contemporary hip hop, but this also shows a wider history of race, culture, and music in the United States. Some of the consciousness and socially aware lyrics shown within rap music could even be compared back to the teachings and wisdom of Malcolm X, a progenitor of Black Consciousness in the United States. For example, one of rap's first popular groups was Public Enemy, of which the members were part of the Nation of Islam under Farrakhan (Teachout, 1990, 2). Some of the nationalistic themes can still be seen in modern rap, and this also relates back to critical race theories discussion of the two different resistance traditions, assimilation or nationalism. The rap group also looked to release an album on the 25th anniversary of Malcolm X's death (Teachout, 1990, 3). This shows an intertwined history when it comes to African American culture and music in the United States. If Malcolm X was a forefather of Black conscious thought in the United States, then hip hop must continue to promote this knowledge, even if it is viewed as radical in a society that oppresses the professor

of such knowledge. The origin of hip hop as Black American music, outlined by Perry (2004), and in the context of United States history, is also shown in the way that Billboard initially reacted to hip hop and rap. This is outlined by Harrison and Arthur (2011), as Billboard initially did not respond well to rap, as it was "too black" (pg. 314). Also, Billboard had the power to change the commercialization of music, based on the way that it presented specific types of music, and this then has impacts culturally in the United States (Kwame Harrison & Arthur, 2011).

From this history, there is also the inspiration of a form of music that is completely born from the United States, similar to the creation of hip hop. More specifically, this is the creation of the minstrel act, or Black face. This started in 1830 when T.D. Rice, a white man, was walking past some land owned by another white man, whose name was Crow (Morris, 2019). He heard a man working in the stables singing a song, and this song captivated Rice; he came up with an idea in relation to what he had heard and seen in the stable (Morris, 2019). He then goes to the theatre, paints his face black by melting some cork down; and goes on stage to perform a version of the song that the Black man was singing in the stable; he aptly names himself and the horse groomer in the song as Jim Crow (Morris, 2019). This name, Jim Crow, was the foundation of the minstrel act and generations of oppression and violence toward African Americans in the south. There would also be an entire era defined after this character, in which Jim Crow laws were used to oppress U.S. Southern African Americans. Another part of the minstrel show is that the people performing these acts would make up what they were doing in their depictions, and were also widely popular in the North (Morris, 2019). This also inspired Stephen Foster, who is often times credited as the father of American music; beyond this, after the Civil War, free African Americans also began to perform in minstrel acts, so you had newly

freed Black people, "Blacking up" (wearing Black face), and performing as "Black people" for white audiences (Morris, 2019).

This originates from the *New York Time's 1619* series and shows the ways that history in the United States and music have often moved together. Morris, the narrator of this podcast, explains at the end:

> "It might not even be aware that it's even there. It's so thoroughly atomized into American culture. It's going to show up in a way that even people making the art can't quite put their finger on. What you're hearing in black music that's so appealing to so many people of all races across time is possibility, struggle. It is strife. It is humor. It is sex. It is confidence. And that's ironic. Because this is the sound of a people who, for decades and centuries, have been denied freedom. And yet what you respond to in black music is the ultimate expression of a belief in that freedom, the belief that the struggle is worth it, that the pain begets joy, and that that joy you're experiencing is not only contagious, it's necessary and urgent and irresistible. Black music is American music. Because as Americans, we say we believe in freedom. And that's what we tell the world. And the power of black music is that it's the ultimate expression of that belief in American freedom" (Morris, 2019).

This is an accurate description of U.S. music, and it can be related to all music in the United States today. This is especially true in mainstream hip hop and rap music, as the performers are a majority African American and male. Another important contribution of rap is the notion of authenticity and being authentic to one's self and the culture. It is important to identify this in regard to white performers in rap, as well as the messages conveyed by both sets of rappers to

predominately white audiences. In regards to whiteness' impact in hip hop, "…refusal to ignore whiteness and its privilege exposes whiteness to potentially create racial identities moving beyond domination and toward liberation" (Fraley, 2009, p. 40). For example, it was shown that artists with lighter skin were more successful on rap billboard charts than darker skinned artists, and that within rap, there is oppressive othering that is furthering the oppressive ideologies of dominant society, and this is propelled by rap's commercialization (Laybourn, 2018, pg. 2090). The performance of women in rap, and how rap is not a place where women are often seen, is also notable. For women in hip hop and rap, "While it is apparent that hip hop music has flourished exponentially in popular culture and has maintained a competitive edge in the music industry, female representation remains disproportionate to that of male artists of this genre" (Keyes, 2016, p. 306). While hip hop and rap are forms of U.S. music in which anyone can participate; they are still a space dominated by African American men (Fraley, 2009; Keyes, 2016).

This male-dominance in hip hop and rap is a topic that has been touched on by various scholars, in a variety of ways. For example, rap and hip hop as music have been qualified as African American U.S. music (Perry, 2004). To further this, it is explained that it is African American music because of four main themes: 1) its primary language is African American Vernacular English (AAVE, also called "Ebonics"), 2) it has a political location that is ascribed to black people, music, and cultural forms, 3) It is derived from Black American oral culture, and 4) it is derived from Black American musical traditions (Perry, 2004, p.10). This connects to what Morris explained in the 1619 podcast, even if the podcast did not mention rap and hip hop. The literal origins of hip hop can be traced back to New York in the Bronx, marking its creation in the United States.

This can also be related to wider social implications about music, both when it comes to society and culture, whether it be hip hop culture or popular culture. As an example, "Thus, as Lewis explains, whereas a genre such as country may be perceived as broadly supportive of the dominant power structure, punk and rap can be seen as assuming an oppositional stance" (Bennett, 2008, 428). Country, rap, and punk have all been seen as popular genres of music, but country music has been legitimized; while rap and punk were often seen as alternative and disruptive within the United States as a society (Bennett, 2008). A response to rap music was also to place a label on albums that would show people that it was "explicit," which was another way of showing that rap is "oppositional." Overall, popular music in the United States has changed through time, and "nevertheless endeavor to illustrate the highly nuanced, localized and subjective ways in which music and cultural practice align in everyday contexts" (Bennett, 2008, 429). Music is integral to the hip hop movement, the hip hop generation, and U.S. culture in general. So, it follows that this is something that has wide social implications when it comes to capitalism, socialization, and overall culture. These shifts have also caused music, especially mainstream music, to change with time. Rap, in and of itself, is a significant aspect of U.S. culture.

Conclusion

Rap music and hip hop culture are still a relatively new movement and phenomena in regard to mainstream media and cultural movements. Rap's importance, however, cannot be understated. As seen through the variety of sources, the way that hip hop and rap have been consumed, produced, marketed, and generally created have changed with time. This may be due to technological increases and cultural shifts within the United States, or to changes within the

music industry at large. What is for certain is that more research needs to be done within the hip hop movement and about rap music specifically as it continues to progress as a mainstream art form.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research question

Rap is undeniably one of the most popular musical genres and has helped to make "hip hop" the "beast" in the mainstream that it is today. However, it is important to note what the language and messages are in rap songs. What is being said and discussed across the United States in popular music must be examined, and rap is no different. Like other genres of music, Billboard has a chart that reports the most popular rap songs for each week. This study analyzes the songs that reached the top of the rap Billboard chart, which gives a song a number one spot until eventually taken over by another song, all based on the success of that song weekly. By being the number one song, this means that this song was the most popular rap song in the country and was consumed by potentially millions of people through various forms of media, much beyond just the range of sales for that specific song. This study examines the overall content of songs since the year 2000, and what are the themes of these songs. There has been a lot of change across the country in the past 18 years, technologically, politically, and socially, and it is probable that the messages of the most popular rap songs have also changed with time.

Sample

My sample for this study is every song that reached number one on the Billboard rap charts from the year 2000 to 2017. The population of interest, then, is songs that charted on the Billboard rap charts. My unit of analysis is rap song lyrics, artists, and years. The sampling method was quite simple, as Billboard's website has separate websites for each year's rap charts and they show every song that reached number one. The sample size for this study is 145 songs

over a span of 18 years. There were 11 songs that carried over from one year to the next, and these were counted a single time when conducting the statistics for the study.

Hypothesis

The hypotheses for this study are as follows. The first hypothesis is: the rap lyrics of the songs that reach number one on the Billboard charts will be very similar across time. It could be predicted that the songs that become the most popular have very similar themes and messages, and that is why they become the most popular and top the charts. The second hypothesis is: rap lyrics will have fewer problematic themes over time. They will have less reference to deviant behavior, negative references to women, and explicit lyrics, and will thus be more socially conscious in general. With the changing times, a lot of other things change as well. It is predicted that these songs may have negative messages, but the amount may have decreased due to higher levels of consciousness to the lyrics. Both of the hypotheses focus on the lyrics and direct content of the songs among these most popular rap songs.

Variables

This content analysis study coded for many variables, described in this section. They are as follows: references to deviant behavior, women (both positive and negative), socially conscious issues, explicit words, use of the n-word, and the performers' demographic characteristics. The dependent variable is the content of the songs, looking at these specific themes mentioned. The variables are operationalized by distinguishing all the independent variables into categories, for which lyrics can meet specific standards, but not exclusively. For

example, if a lyric references violence toward women, this would meet the requirements for two variables, but still counts singularly towards both, as well.

Deviant behavior is defined as something that would include illegal or illicit behavior, such as: violence, murder, substance abuse/use, gang involvement, and pervasive sexual references. Deviance was referred to as, "The traditional (normative) definition of deviance focuses on violations of social norms that are widely shared in society" (Coomber, Donnermeyer, McElrath, & Scott, 2015). Essentially things that violate these norms or laws were coded as deviant. References to women include any reference to women, with negative references including calling women "bitch/es" and "ho/es" or other derogatory terms or language toward a woman, as well as violence toward them, and general sexist objectification lyrics and remarks. Positive references to women include words that promote woman in a positive manner. The socially conscious lyrics are those that can be seen as socially relevant, promote social justice, equity or equality, or bring to light the specific struggles or lives of African Americans, people living in poverty, gender inequity and sexism, those who are oppressed, etc. in the United States. An academic definition is, "Social consciousness, or awareness of society, is inseparable from self-consciousness, because we can hardly think of ourselves excepting with reference to a social group of some sort, nor of the group except with reference to ourselves" (Cooley, 1907, p. 676). Every explicit word, with another variable examining the use of the n-word, is being coded for the study. Finally, each performer's name, as well as race and gender are being recorded to determine the overall demographics for the sample, and their intersectional identity, using the two groups as well. If a rap group made the charts at number one, the group members are coded together as a total of their race and genders. For example, a singular performer that was Black and female would have a B and a F in the coding. A group of three Black males was coded as

BBB and MMM. This will show the differences between rap groups, singular acts, and singular acts with features for the sample as well. To address race-gender intersections of the artists, the coding would use, for example, BF BF for songs with 2 African American women artists.

Measurement Instruments

I designed the measurement instrument (codebook) and transferred it to Excel (and later uploaded the Excel data into SPSS to conduct the analyses). The variables in the codebook began with the artists' demographic characteristics (i.e., race, gender), the number of artists in a song, and the year the song was number one. The bulk of the data were variables coded from the lyrics, regarding themes and the presence of concepts such as deviant behavior, social justice, women, and so on. Content analysis codes social artifacts in these number one rap songs and their performers into numbers so that they can be quantitatively analyzed, first documenting the presence of artists' characteristics, and second characteristics of the lyrics, and ideally, how these change over time and by the demographic characteristics of the artists. The lyrics were identified using the online database for song lyrics and music reporting, *Genius*.

Limitations

There are various limitations for this study. A first limitation is that there is only a single person conducting the story, and thus there is only a single coder for all 145 songs of the sample. This means that the final results are all based on what the coder believed, and there is not a second coder to compare codebook entries. Another limitation is that others might believe content I did not code is relevant. The study's data was also examined over a long amount of time, and this could impact the way that the coder was coding due to breaks between work.

Another limitation is that it would be useful to compare the songs that reached number one on the Billboard charts with those that did not, but that was beyond the scope of the current study. Another limitation is that two songs had to be removed from the sample. The first, *Dancin' wit Wolvez* by Strik 9ine was removed because there was no way to access the lyrics. The second song removed was *Gangnam Style* by Psy, because this song was in Korean.

Another important limitation is the researcher's personal identity and positionality in regard to coding. It is entirely possible that if another person were to do the coding, that s/he would have different results than what was found. The descriptions used in order to do the content analysis would be a guide to what would be coded, but in instances of obscure lyrics or lyrics that may border being counted or not, that would lead to differences in interpretation at the level of the coder. The coders identity as a white male, who is part of the audience that popular rap attracts and attains, is impacted by these messages from songs in different ways compared to people with different identities. The coder has experience with a lot of rap songs in the past, and this directly impacts the coding process. Even with the coder being diligent to examine the songs objectively, there are implicit biases present. This is something that is very difficult to avoid as a single coder for this study. Another limitation is that there was an artist whose racial identity was obscure, so that was marked with a "U" for unknown when coding.

Conclusion

This third chapter outlines the methods that were used for this content analysis study, and how these data were coded, collected, and analyzed for the thesis. The limitations were also identified. The next chapter will examine the findings from the coded data.

<center>**Chapter 4: Findings**</center>

Introduction

  The content analysis conducted on the data collected for this thesis provided many

engaging results in terms of rap artists and the lyrics and messages among the most popular rap

songs from 2000 to 2017. Over time, and this was noticed while coding was occurring as well,

many songs were very similar in their messaging and themes. There is an abundance of

references to drugs, partying, violence, and negative references to women throughout the years

of songs examined. The same is to be said for explicit language. This does not mean that there

were not outliers or songs that did not talk about these themes; the number of these songs was

limited in comparison to the overall sample. This chapter will outline the findings from the

statistics for each of the variables.

Frequency of song per year and Number of performing artist

  The number of songs that were examined in this study was 145 (16 songs overlapped

from one year to the next and thus were only coded once). The least amount of songs in one year

was in 2015, in which there were only 5 songs that reached number one on the rap billboard

charts. The most number one songs in a given year was 11 songs, which occurred in the years

2000 and 2003. The rate of number one songs for the remaining years ranged from 7 to 9. The

number of performing artists ranged from 1 to 11. The song with 11 artists was from 2016,

Sucker For Pain, and featured 4 rappers (Lil Wayne, Wiz Khalifa, Logic, and Ty Dolla $ign),

and then 2 bands (Imagine Dragons and X Ambassadors) for a collaborative song from a movie

soundtrack. The number of artists that was most common however was 2, with 43.4% of the

songs having 2 artists. This usually included a rapper and a featured artist that is on the song, or it could be based off a rap group with 2 people. The average number of performing artists in songs was 2.32. The median was exactly 2, as well as the mode. The high percentage of songs that involved more than one artist shows that if there is more than a single artist, the likelihood of it being more popular is present.

Demographics of primary artist and primary artist by number of songs (and race x gender)

The general demographics for the sample also show an overwhelming race-gender pattern of artists dominating the top of the rap billboard chart: African American men. Of all the primary artists race from the sample of songs, 82.1% were African American. Nine-tenths (89.0%) of all the primary artists songs were men. Four-fifths (80.4%) were solely African American men (solo or with other African American men). The next most prevalent race was white rappers, with only 6.4%. Women also made up a very small amount of the sample, only 8.3%. An overwhelming majority of the artists are African American men, and while there have been times where artists have not identified this way, the numbers in comparison are small. Also, if there were more multiple artists, they would likely be the same gender or race.

As expected, some specific artists were far more prevalent than others. The artist with the most number one songs was Drake, with a total of 10 songs, 6.9% of the total number one songs. The next most prevalent was Nelly, with 6 songs (4.1%). Examining the list of artists with multiple songs that made the number one spot, there were 3 white artists on the list, Iggy Azalea, and Macklemore & Ryan Lewis each had 2 songs, but it is also primarily African American artists. Similarly, number one rap artists are primarily men. There were 3 women with multiple songs: Nicki Minaj with 4, Iggy Azalea with 2, and Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott with 2.

Explicit words

Through the entire samples, explicit words were common. The range of explicit words per song ranged from 0 to 86. The song with 86 explicit words was *I Don't F**k With You*, by Big Sean (featuring E-40). Here is a sample of the lyrics from the song's pre-chorus, which was repeated a few times throughout the song.

> *I don't fuck with you*
>
> *You lil' stupid ass bitch, I ain't fuckin' with you*
>
> *You lil', you lil' dumb ass bitch, I ain't fuckin' with you*
>
> *I got a million trillion things I'd rather fuckin' do*
>
> *Than to be fuckin' with you, lil' stupid ass*

This pre-chorus, which is repeated another three times through the song, is only a small example for the whole song, as it is replete with explicit word choices that the artist is using to explain that he and the woman who he was in a relationship with in the past do not associate, and he does not like her. However, while this was an example of a song with the most explicit words, a majority of the songs had explicit language, as only 8.3% (n =12) songs in the entire sample had no explicit words. The percentages for categories in Table 5 of explicit words indicate that the use of explicit words is common and fairly evenly distributed. The percent of explicit words that ranged from 1 to 4 is almost equal the percent that ranged from to 10 to 19; with 5 to 9, and 20 and over explicit words not far behind. The mean for explicit words was 12.87. The median was 8.0. Interestingly, the mode was 0, which means that there were more songs with 0 explicit words than any other number, but the overall majority of songs had explicit language which explains the mean of 12.87.

N-word use

Like explicit word use, the use of the n-word is often associated with rap lyrics. While there was a range of only 0 to 24 uses of the n-word in the songs, a total of 40% (58 songs) did not use the n-word at all. While 24 single uses of the n-word is many, considering it is also an explicit word that holds a lot of power, that song was released in 2000, and was *(Hot S**t) Country Grammar*, by Nelly. To follow this though, the next closest song in regard to use of the n-word was in 2014, 14 years later. This song was *Only*, by Nicki Minaj (featuring Drake, Lil Wayne, and Chris Brown). The next most amount of uses of the n-word was from 1 to 4, with 33.8% (49 songs) of all the songs. The use of the n-word has been described as a way for African Americans, and rappers in this case, to take back a word that is used as a slur and make it something that they have power over, instead of the inverse. However, in regard to these popular songs, the use of the n-word may be limited by the conventions of mainstream rap and companies that are releasing the new music. The mean number of uses of the n-word was 3.25. The median was 1.00. The mode was again 0, similar to explicit words.

Deviant Behavior

In regard to what was classified as deviant behavior for this study, there were many factors that would count as deviant behavior. However, the use of deviance as a theme was very prevalent across the entire sample. Only 2.8% of the entire sample (4 songs), had no references to deviant behavior of any kind, and 9.7% fit within the category of 1 to 4 references (14 songs). So, that means that 87.5% of all the songs had 5 or above references to deviant behavior. The highest category was 10 to 19, with 31.0% of the songs meeting this category (45 songs). But

overall, this means that there is a lot of deviance that is being presented in the most popular rap songs. Whether it is violence, substance use (and abuse), sexual pervasiveness, or sometimes all of the above, there are many songs that show this theme in particular. The range was from 0 to 71. The song with 71 deviant behavior references identified was *Bad and Boujee*, by Migos (featuring Lil Uzi Vert). Here is an example from the song's chorus that shows the references to deviance.

> *Smokin' on cookie in the hotbox (Cookie)*
>
> *Fuckin' on your bitch, she a thot, thot (Thot)*
>
> *Cookin' up dope in the crockpot (Pot)*
>
> *We came from nothin' to somethin', nigga (Hey)*
>
> *I don't trust nobody, greet the trigger (Nobody)*
>
> *Call up the gang and they come and get ya (Gang)*

In that section of the chorus, there is reference to violence, drugs, use of guns, gang affiliation, and sexual intent with an enemy's woman. This is a piece of the total song, which is full of these references. But the entire sample has songs with these types of messages. While the highest category was the 10 to 19 range, the 30+ category is also extremely high percentage, which 21.4% of the total sample (31 songs), having 30 or more deviant lyrics. To further this, the year with the most references to deviant behavior was the last year of the sample, with an average of 27.25 references. These references to deviance are common through the years, as the average for the sample was 19.27, with a median of 17.00, and a mode of 5[a].

References to women

The references to women section of the data was split into three total parts; total references to women, positive references to women, and negative references to women. This

way, more information could be found about how women are regarded in the rap songs in this sample. The beginning of this section will examine the total number of references to women in the songs. The mean for the total references was 15.43, with a median of 12.00 and a mode of 0. Categorically, many of the songs had more than 20 references to women total, with 27.6% (n = 40 songs) having met this number. The next highest percentage was 5 to 9, where 21.4% (n = 31 songs) met this category. Thus, the total amount of times women are referenced through the sample is very large, and as stated, these references fit into the two following categories, positive and negative.

Regarding the positive references to women, there are not many rap songs in this sample that positively reference women. They range was from 0 to 34. The mean was 3.10, the median was .00, and mode was also 0. These songs that became the most popular songs are not portraying women in positive and empowering ways. The song that had 34 positive references was *Make Me Better*, by Fabolous (featuring Ne-Yo). The messages within this song show that Fabolous is very appreciative of the woman in his life, and how she has positively impacted him. This is a very different message than other rap songs, in which women are portrayed as sexual objects for men to acquire and use, and often times "bitches" to the performers of the songs. More than half of the songs, 51.0% (n = 74) songs, had zero positive references to women. The next highest percentage was for songs with 1 to 4 positive references, and that was 29.0% of the sample. This leads to the references that were regarded as negative.

Negative references to women were pervasive and abundant though the sample. While 10.3% of the sample had no negative references to women, every other category of number of references was at least 13% or higher. The highest section was 5 to 9 negative references, with 25.5% within this range (n = 37). Further, the range was from 0 to 60 negative references. The

song with the most negative references to women was *Whistle While You Twurk*, by the Ying Yang Twins. This song was a song that is very provocative, as the main focus was on the way that the women were dancing at a strip club. The language used is degrading, as seen in this sample of lyrics from the song.

> *I know some shake a booty hoes, no teasers*
>
> *She ain't no skeeze when you're off at Pleasers*
>
> *Now, where them bitches that be quick to show them titties?*
>
> *I thank they all dance at the Magic City*
>
> *I know some hoes that be quick to take over*
>
> *You got the green, you on the scene at Strokers*

This is a sample of lyrics from the song, but overall this theme is evident through the song. The year with the highest average of negative references to women was in 2008 as well. The average number of negative references to women through the sample was 12.12. The median was 9.00. The mode was 0. Examining these numbers also shows that overall, the majority of the references to women in popular rap songs are negatively based, and that positive references are limited, and have been limited over time. Very few songs actually continually regard women in positive ways, and even then, the use of the words "bitch" or "ho" are still often used to describe women in general.

Socially conscious references

Examining socially conscious lyrics was important for this study, in order to see the ways that these musical artists and performers are able to use their platforms and music to raise consciousness in special and specific ways. However, the content analysis of the songs showed

that many songs did not have lyrics or any references to socially conscious issues or problems. 44.8%, 65 songs, had 0 socially conscious references in their songs. Beyond this, the range was from 0 to 50. The overwhelming majority of songs largely ignore touching on issues of social justice and inequity in one way or another. 22.8% of the songs only had a single socially conscious reference, and 19.3% had 2 to 4. The next category was 5 or more, which 13.1% met this standard. The overall mean was 2.24. The median was 1.00. The mode was 0. This is another area where popular rap can improve. The most that is mentioned is how prisons impact communities, or references to police brutality. This may be limited because of what the companies believe is okay and is pushing through to radios and advertising when it comes to rap and rappers. The song that showed the most socially conscious references was from rap group City High, titled *What Would You Do?*. This song was very different than other songs in the sample, as the premise of the song was highlighting societal problems and placing them in the context of; what would you do in that situation. An example from the song:

> *What would you do if your son was at home*
>
> *Crying all alone on the bedroom floor*
>
> *Cause he's hungry*
>
> *And the only way to feed him is to, sleep with a man for a little bit of money*
>
> *And his daddy's gone*
>
> *Somewhere smokin ' rock now, in and out of lockdown*
>
> *I ain't got a job now*
>
> *So for you this is just a good time, but for me this is what I call life*

This song does an exceptional job of presenting issues in a way that was widely accepted and popular in 2001. More songs should strive for this type of content, but that is not what is

profitable or seen as desirable in popular media in the United States. While coding the songs, it was found that most refrained from any type of social criticism or consciousness.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Significance and Implications of the Findings

This study confirms very specific trends within rap songs, and that they have been present for years. The themes of deviance, negative references to women, and explicit word choice were constant through the years. These messages were seen from 2000 to 2017, and it could be predicted that these same types of messages and themes are present contemporarily. This is likely because these types of messages are what sell commercially in the United States, but also what the companies and corporations are comfortable with releasing. This is also seen in other forms of media such as television, and film. There is difference in aspects of the actual musicality of the songs, but regarding lyrical content, many of these songs have very similar themes. While this study only examined songs from the turn of the century to 2017, it is probable that these same messages were present in popular rap before the sample as well. To follow, examining rap as a product of the society in which it is created, it is no surprise that these themes are present. The United States thrives on the oppression of people who do not fit the dominant norm and identity (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this case, these are many of the oppressed identities that are present and presented by rap music. However, this also fits into the duality of what rap and hip hop are in the United States, as rap thrives in commercial spaces that are dominated by white people, industries, and audiences (Krohn & Suazo, 1995; Perry, 2004). Rap and hip hop praise their ability to be authentic, but that does not mean that everything that is being rapped about is going to be pretty or positive (Lena, 2006). Rap music in the United States is a looking glass into what are some of the problems in the United States: poverty, oppression, marginalization, and capitalization.

The results of this content analysis study are also similar to some of the other findings in past content analyses. One example of this is from the study on gangsta rap, and the way that gangsta rap is riddled with violent messages and misogyny (Armstrong, 2001). The themes present in this sample of the most popular rap songs show these same themes, through the lens of deviance and negative comments toward women. These themes were very strong and present in a majority of the songs of this sample. Also, along these lines, is the antisocial themes found by Epps & Dixon (2017). Their study on antisocial themes found that songs that made the billboard chart had more antisocial themes (Epps & Dixon, 2017). This was presented in the sample in the way that rappers used violence as a means to intimidate or attack opponents. The same could be related to the words used to describe women common among these rap songs. Yet another comparison can be made to the use of lyrics regarding substance use in hip-hop, as well as references to degrading sex lyrics, and the combination of both as well (Primack, Dalton, et al., 2008; Primack, Gold, et al., 2008). These types of lyrics were present in the sample as well and fit into the variable of deviance for the sample.

This does not diminish the importance of rap though, as it is a widely inspirational and important genre of music and will continue to be moving forward. It just depends on what is being said, and who is listening. There are artists who have found mainstream success while also touching on social issues and hoping to promote social change with their music. One of these is Kendrick Lamar, who only had a single song on the top of the rap billboard chart, but has found overall commercial success, while also speaking about very serious social justice issues and systemic problems in the United States. For example, in the sample, there were only 5 songs that had more than 10 references to socially conscious issues. This is a very small part of the sample,

but there are at least times when serious issues are being brought up, in spite of all the other messages that seem the opposite.

Another fascinating take away is how the consumption of music has changed, much in favor of the artists. This has then affected the way that songs become and stay popular. It is much easier for artists to distribute their music contemporarily, due to the internet. Also, the introduction of streaming services such as Tidal, Apple Music, and Spotify, have made it easier than ever for people to listen to music. This expansion of streaming services increased audience's selection of music, which then opened different types of music to new audiences. This comes after the introduction of iTunes as a way of purchasing and playing music in the mid to late 2000's. The introduction of streaming services allows for people to access almost any song that is released in a matter of seconds. The accessibility of music will only continue to grow as the steaming industry also grows.

Many of the rap songs in this sample fit into a specific type of rap. Many fit into the term of "Braggadocios Rap.", which is also explained by Oware (2004, pg. 791). This type of rap focuses on the themes that were most present in this study. The performers in braggadocios rap mainly rap about their status, and how they are better than others in various ways. While this is not something that was actively examined in the study, a majority of these songs have themes of braggadocio. Whether it is rapping about all the material items one has, or that one is not afraid to use violence as a means of intimidating or eliminating opponents, many popular rappers boast their skills and say what is on their mind. Braggadocios rap can be seen from the beginnings of rap to now but was heavily used in the gangsta rap era. The point is to show that the artist is tough, wealthy, has social status, and is willing to do anything to maintain that status and ideal, where you are from, and maintaining a fictional status as better than anyone else.

This is harmful to the hip hop movement. This is in part because these messages are then directly associated with the hip hop movement, instead of viewing them through a lens of capitalism and commercialization that perpetuates these ideals. The hip hop movement is a generational movement of progressivism and radical thinking, and while rap is a part of that movement as a genre of music, it is not the sum of the whole movement (Rabaka, 2013). To minimalize the hip hop movement to just the content of popular rap is to marginalize its importance. This is what the point of these arguments against the hip hop movement is, though, to discredit a movement that challenges the hegemonic norms in the United States. In this instance, rap works as a way of resistance to ideals in the United States. This resistance has been labeled as dangerous and disruptive in the past, but that is also the point of rap, and overall the hip hop generation. But with time, and the popularization of rap music, the messages from rap songs has changed as well. While the messages may have started as a way to challenge the institutionalized and concrete racism in the United States, instead of potentially ignoring it, it does not mean that it has stayed that way. This also follows the themes found by Krohn and Suazo (1995), when examining the dichotomy that is rap and messages in regard to societal frustration, and the occurrence of violence, both physical and sexual, in lyrics. Rap's radical side is confronting the oppression and ideologies that marginalize people in the United States, but the danger of this is that it may perpetuate those ideal and stereotypes to larger audiences, creating a cyclical problem. This study also shows that was evident before 2000, in which the first songs for this sample were released, that this dichotomy was present and being examined. Another example, Drake had the most songs that reached number 1 in the sample, and this would fit into what Laybourn (2018) found about lighter skinned artists. Drake has found much commercial success and has not often talked about serious and systemic issues in his music.

Further, one style of rap is widely accepted and popular, while another type is not as popular contemporarily. The differences between these two are when it comes to directly saying that there are social issues. Given the themes of authenticity and presenting issues about what it is like to live in poor communities, what is the audience supposed to do with this information? With the larger audiences that number one songs receive, much more could be done in the realm of raising consciousness and awareness of specific issues. Instead, the messages are all diverted away from the societal problems, and toward escapes that people take, such as drugs, alcohol, sex, or even violence. These are all in response to the situations that people are living in or with; and at times are coping mechanisms for harsh realities.

Following this thought, these messages that occur in rap music help perpetuate a narrative in the United States. These songs, shown in the study to be incredibly violent, misogynistic, and deviant, can solidify the stereotypes and ideologies about African American people, and specifically African American men. Regardless of the audiences beliefs or not, they are internalizing the messages that are conveyed by popular rap, and this impacts them implicitly and possibly explicitly. The stereotype of the hypersexual, hyperviolent Black male is prevalent through this sample, and popular rap music. There are also systems that only strengthen this cycle of stereotyping, and they involve capitalism, racism, and sexism, as power and privilege interact. For example, because these songs are the songs that become the most popular, it is in the best interest of record label executives to continue to promote and put out these types of songs. Which is a possible explanation for why this sample produced such results. The record label executives then make money from these messages, while rappers are portraying marginalized groups in specific ways. They are depicted in ways that continually stereotype and oppress marginalized people, and then these messages are consumed and internalized by large

audiences. This then plays out in society, as people are socialized to believe specific things about different identities. It is a cycle of stereotyping, and then solidifying the stereotypes by promoting these messages by marginalized identities.

There has been some contemporary change when it comes to popular rap in recent years. While this occurred outside the timeline of the sample, it is still important to note contemporarily. One instance of this happened in 2019, when Lil Nas X broke the record for longest running number one hit on the overall billboard chart, and is one of the first, if not the first, openly homosexual rapper to achieve such a feat. He is not the first artist to express his sexuality, as other artist such as Frank Ocean and Tyler, The Creator have also come out and expressed their sexuality and still found commercial success. This is something that is new to rap, as there have been times when rap has been riddled with homophobia (Clay, 2007). Moving forward, it can be predicted that these artists will set a precedent for other artists in expressing their true identities and be accepted within rap and also general society. However, while coding the sample, there were not many outward references of homophobia. This can also be compared to hyper masculinity and sexism that is also often seen in rap. It is harder for women to find success in rap, and this is also evident looking at the identities of the artists in the sample. When women do make it into these popular spheres, they are often hyper-sexualized and used in order to promote men. The success of Nicki Minaj, and Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott, have been significant in the inclusion of women in rap, and the acceptance of women rappers in mainstream media and consumption.

Future Directions

For future research on the content of popular rap songs, there is much to be said about other themes that are present within the music. This study examined only a small number of variables, and was missing variables that could examine homophobia, or reference to status and wealth, as a few examples. Another missing piece from this study is the actual composition of the music. This would require an understanding of both musical composition and musical theory, to examine if there are specific types of musical nuances that make songs either more or less popular. A content and musical analysis to examine popular songs and themes would be intriguing, as it would show if musical composition of songs or lyrics are more impactful in one way or the other. More research should also be done on the content of songs before this sample and after it as well. As rap continues to grow, more artists and types of songs will continually be placed as billboard number one songs. Also, this could be examined for rap and hip hop worldwide, as there are popular rap genres across the planet. Another potential study that could examine a different qualification of popular rap would be to examine winners from the Grammy's hip hop and rap categories. Finally, all these potential directions that research could take could continue to examine the content of these popular songs, in a variety of ways. Rap and hip hop have grown so much since its creation, and this trend does not seem to be slowing. By examining the music that is most popular, we can begin to understand what messages are being conveyed most often.

Conclusion

Overall, comparing the results of this study to the past literature, both in terms of content and theory regarding hip hop and rap, there are many conversations to be had when it comes to this sample of popular rap and the messages it conveys. As rap is an art form that originated in

the United States, it follows that it would be plagued by so many of the issues that are happening today and will continue to be problems. That is where criticism and analysis play an important part. Research such as this, which critically analyzes the lyrics of popular music, can show us new ways of interacting with media in the United States. This is for both good and bad. These trends are not new, and they are present outside of hip hop and rap and are problems with media across the United States. While rap can be a resistance to this, what good is it doing if it fits and follows the mold of oppressive ideology seen in the United States? While the future looks bright for rap in terms of popularity and mainstream success, it can only be hoped that artists continue to push the boundaries when it comes to what is deemed acceptable for audiences in the United States. This is especially true for these artists, many of whom have found continual success and thus have gained a platform to both influence and make change. Societally, in the United States, these cycles of oppression have evolved with time, and change can only come from the masses. The masses are the people listening to rap and hip hop music. Contemporarily, the same messages are being pushed to the forefront of mainstream music. For the future, it is up to the next generation of musical artists to challenge this status quo and make the change that music can. Music has the power to move people's bodies, but more importantly, their minds.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Frequency of Songs
       by Year
       (N = 145[a])

Year	%	(n)
2000	7.6%	(11)
2001	6.2%	(9)
2002	6.2%	(9)
2003	7.6%	(11)
2004	4.8%	(7)
2005	6.2%	(9)
2006	5.5%	(8)
2007	6.2%	(9)
2008	4.8%	(7)
2009	5.5%	(8)
2010	6.9%	(10)
2011	4.8%	(7)
2012	4.8%	(7)
2013	4.1%	(6)
2014	4.8%	(7)
2015	3.4%	(5)
2016	5.5%	(8)
2017	4.8%	(7)

[a]The 16 songs that
overlapped from one year
to the next were only listed
once.

Table 2: Number of Performing Artists
Per Song (N = 145)[a]

Number of Performing Artists	%	(n)
1	29.7%	(43)
2	43.4%	(63)

3		12.4%	(18)
4+		14.5%	(21)

[a]The number of primary artists ranged from 1 to 11.

The mean number was 2.32, the median was 2,0. and the mode was 2.

Table 3: Demographics of Primary Artists

Primary Artist(s) [a]	N	%	(n)
Race	144		
All or Solely African American		82.1%	(128)
All or Solely White		6.4%	(10)
All or Solely Latinx		1.9%	(3)
Interracial (2 or more Primary Artists)		1.9%	(3)
Gender	145		
All or Solely Men		89.0%	(129)
All or Solely Women		8.3%	(12)
Men/Man and Woman/Women (2 or more Primary Artists)		2.6%	(4)
Race x Gender x Number of Primary Artists	143		
Solely African American Man/Men		80.4%	(115)
Solely African American Woman/Women		7.0%	(10)
Solely White Man/Men		2.1%	(8)
Solely Lantinx Man/Men		1.9%	(3)
Solely White Woman/Women		1.3%	(2)
All Men and More than One Race		1.3%	(2)
Man/Men and Woman/Women and More than One Race		0.6%	(1)

[a]Listed in order to most of least frequent.

Table 4: Primary Artist by Number of Songs in XXX and Race and Gender

Artist	Cumulative %	% of Songs	Number of Songs	Race	Gender/ Sex	Race x Gender
Drake	6.9	6.9	10	Black	Man	BM
Nelly	11.0	4.1	6	Black	Man	BM
50 Cent	14.5	3.4	5	Black	Man	BM
Eminem	17.2	3.4	4	White	Man	WM
Jay-Z	19.3	3.4	4	Black	Man	BM
Kanye West	22.1	3.4	4	Black	Man	BM
Lil' Wayne	24.8	3.4	4	Black	Man	BM
Nicki Minaj	27.6	3.4	4	Black	Woman	BW
T.I.	30.3	3.4	4	Black	Man	BM
Bow Wow`	32.4	2.1	3	Black	Man	BM
Chingy	34.5	2.1	3	Black	Man	BM
Ludacris	36.6	2.1	3	Black	Man	BM
Big Sean	38.0	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM
Dem Franchize Boyz	39.4	1.4	2	Black x4	Man x4	BM x4
Dj Khaled	40.8	1.4	2	Unknown	Man	UM
Flo Rida	42.2	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM
Iggy Azalea	43.6	1.4	2	White	Woman	WW
Lil Bow Wow	45.0	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM
Lil Jon & the East Side Boyz	46.4	1.4	2	Black x3	Man x3	BM x3
Macklemore & Ryan Lewis	47.8	1.4	2	White x2	Man x2	WM x2
Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott	49.2	1.4	2	Black	Woman	BW
Outkast	50.6	1.4	2	Black x2	Man x2	BM x2
Pitbull	52.0	1.4	2	Latinx	Man	LM
Soulja Boy Tell 'em	53.4	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM
Twista	54.8	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM
Wiz Khalifa	56.2	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM
Young Jeezy	57.6	1.4	2	Black	Man	BM

Table 5: Number of Explicit Words Per Song[a]
(N = 145)

Number of Explicit Words	%	(n)
0	8.3%	(12)
1-4	25.5%	(37)
5-9	20.7%	(30)
10-19	23.4%	(34)
20+	22.1%	(32)

[a]Explicit words ranged from 0 to 86. The mean was 12.87. The median was 8.00. The mode was 0

Table 6: Number of N- Words Per Song[a]
(N = 145)

Number of Explicit Words	%	(n)
0	40.0%	(58)
1-4	33.8%	(49)
5-9	18.6%	(27)
10+	7.6%	(11)

[a]N-words ranged from 0 to 24. The mean was 3.25. The median was 1.00. The mode was 0.

Table 7: Number of Times Deviant Behavior Mentioned[a]
(N = 145)

Number of Explicit Words	%	(n)
0	2.8%	(4)
1-4	9.7%	(14)
5-9	15.9%	(23)
10-19	31.0%	(45)
20-29	19.3%	(28)
30+	21.4%	(31)

[a]Deviant behavior references ranged from 0 to 71. The mean was 19.27. The median was 17.00. The mode was 5[a].

Table 8: References to Women Per Song[a]

Number of References	Total References %	(n)	Positive References %	(n)	Negative References %	(n)
0	7.6%	11	51.0%	74	10.3%	15
1-4	13.1%	19	29.0%	42	18.6%	27
5-9	21.4%	31	11.0%	16	25.5%	37
10-14	17.9%	26	3.4%	5	13.1%	19
15-19	12.4%	18	.7%	1	13.8%	20
20+	27.6%	40	4.8%	7	18.6%	27

[a]Total references to women ranged from 0 to 64. The mean was 15.43. The median was 12.00. The mode was 0.

Positive references to women ranged from 0 to 34. The mean was 3.10. The median was .00. The mode was 0.

Negative references to women ranged from 0 to 60. The mean was 12.14. The median was 9.00. The mode was 0.

Table 9: Socially Conscious references Per Song[a]

Number of References	%	(n)
0	44.8%	(65)
1	22.8%	(33)
2-4	19.3%	(28)
5+	13.1%	(19)

[a]Socially conscious references ranged from 0 to 50. The mean was 2.24. The median was 1.00. The mode was 0.