

Evidence of Rape Culture in Modern Music

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Throughout every culture in the world, one can examine the important impact that music has on people immersed in that specific group. Sociologists and psychologists have been able to determine that music plays a crucial factor in one's behavior and upbringing (Clark and Giacomantonio, 2015). It helps develop the youth's beliefs, feelings, attitudes, morals, and intentions towards specific subjects. According to Forbes, in 2017 rap/hip-hop took the place of rock for the dominate genre of music in the United States for the first time (McIntyre, 2017). When comparing popular music genres within the American population, you can see a variation of themes in the music lyrics. Most importantly in rap we can assess the use of misogynistic and sexual themes expressed in the artists' lyrics.

Rape culture is "a culture where rape and other expressions of sexualized violence occur with some frequency, and where societal attitudes about gender and sexuality normalize or trivialize this

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violence” (Steibert, 2018). Misogynistic language, acceptance of objectification, and creating a normal behavior of sexual abuse and violence all perpetrates the creation of rape culture. When violence towards both women and men are normalized, it is difficult for our society to recognize it as a problem.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the evidence of rape culture and misogynistic themes in modern music, specifically, the most popular songs among the American population. By understanding the prevalence of these themes, society can bring awareness to the dangers of becoming desensitized. By examining song lyrics, differences between genres will be explored. Comparing the genders of artists, this study examines whether males have greater representation and use more misogynistic and sexual lyrics than female artists. Also explored, are the differences between subjects, in that, females are more likely to be subjects of sexually aggressive lyrics than males.

Literature Review

Music tends to have a strong impact and influences the mind, attitudes, and identity of adolescents every day (Clark & Giacomantonio, 2013). Music is easily accessible and has a presence wherever you go. From being on the radio in your car, to having unlimited access on your phones. Social sites like YouTube, Spotify and Pandora have made it quicker and easier to access thousands of archived songs with a click of a button. The evolution of music has come a long way since the beginning of time, long before it was ever recorded and sold for entertainment.

During the 1970s in New York, rap and hip-hop emerged and became a cultural phenomenon in our society (Alridge and Stewart, 2005). Several media sites have claimed that rap has become an established genre of the youth and has resulted in being a byproduct of race and status. After a while, some rap music took a turn and artists

started introducing explicit images that support rape culture and misogynic views in their music (Adams and Fuller, 2006; Oikelome, 2013). Misogyny is classified as “an ideology that reduced women to objects for men’s ownership, use, or abuse” (Adams and Fuller, 2006, p.939). When listening to the lyrics, you often hear derogatory words like “hoe” and “bitch” used to describe women. These words are said frequently in some arenas of society to the point that when we hear them, we do not take time to stop and think about the way they are being used. This shows how these offensive terms have been normalized. Furthermore, misogynistic lyrics act as a stimulus that has the potential to evoke aggressive behavior and arousal that provides the conditions for female victimization by men (Hyatt, Breke, Miller and Zeichner, 2017).

Over the years, studies have been performed to determine how exposure to rap music with misogynistic lyrics can cause a person to become sexually aggressive and violent to their significant other (Kistler and Lee, 2010). Barongan and Nagayama Hall (1995), concluded that thirty-seven percent of participants who were exposed to misogynous rap chose to engage in sexual violent behavior. Whereas, only seven percent of those who were exposed to neutral rap expressed sexual violence. This is quite alarming considering a significant amount of the American population are listening and being frequently exposed to the misogynistic themes in some of the rap genre. Rap is a genre that can depict sexual imagery and sexual degradation for both males and females alike. Americans who listen to music that glorifies these types of behaviors may influence their own behaviors by teaching them that these actions have no consequences. Repeated exposure to sexually aggressive song lyrics can influence adolescent behaviors; this can lead to the adolescent acting out in deviant ways to express their desire and need for sexual activity. Mancini (2014) found that “sexual compulsive juvenile offenders on average can be characterized as no-contact

offenders. Over time offenders may become desensitized to these non-contact acts and have the potential to escalate to contact offenses” (pg. 16).

Scholars have looked at how the exposure of misogynistic lyrics plays a significant role in male and female adolescent attitudes and behaviors (Kristler and Lee, 2010; Hyatt, Berke, Miller, and Zeichner, 2017; Treat, Farris, Viken and Smith, 2014) yet, misogyny is prevalent in some music. In the music industry, producers encourage artists to become what they consider provocative and to have explicit lyrics in order to sell more records; further, if an artist goes against what the industry wants, the industry may reject the artist (Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009). Mark Anthony Neal, a hip-hop scholar, states “the industry thrives on sexism, and asking artists to promote a feminist vision would be asking them to drop their contracts and start selling fewer records” (Oikelome, 2013, p. 87). Some argue that the use of sexism in artists’ music lyrics rewards the artists with “masculinity” (Oware, 2010). To do this, artists constantly tear other artists apart by placing them at a lower level of status. This can be accomplished in several ways, especially in what artists call “battles”. Rap artist Eminem is well known for battling other artists in his lyrics. He uses words like “bitch” and “faggot” when mentioning other rappers, this provides him with a sense of power over the other person. “The lowest degrading thing you can say to a man when you’re battling him is to call him a faggot an try to take away his manhood. Call him a sissy, call him a punk. ‘Faggot’ to me doesn’t necessarily mean gay people. ‘Faggot’ to me just means taking away your manhood” (Kimmel, 2008, p.49).

In truth, masculinity is a social construct, a list of characteristics that society has deemed that the male specimen must conform to in order to be seen as “manly” or “normal” (Kivel, 1984, p.15). For centuries, progressive people have been going against normativity by expressing gender in their own way, however, society still has a hard

time accepting people who go against traditional values. This is especially true when men show signs of gender nonconformity (Kane, 2006; Pascoe, 2011). Traditional values have been implanted into individual's minds as if they were blue prints to live life successfully and without social repercussions. These traditional values make up what society refers to as gender roles. These roles were "conceptualized in a biological framework to be either automatic response to innate personality characteristics and/or biological characteristics" (Spade and Valentine, 2017, p.xvii). Men and women alike are assumed by society to follow and conform with these specified gender roles. Although the "sex roles" model of a few decades ago is not supported by biological, psychological, historical, sociological, or anthropological research, it still plays an important part when defining what Western society refers to as "masculine/men" and "feminine/women" (Spade and Valentine, 2017, p.xvii-xviii).

Raewyn Connell (1987) performed an analysis and found that there is one masculinity, referred to as hegemonic masculinity, which dominates all others (Spade and Valentine, 2017). Hegemonic masculinity is the most desired form of masculinity, and it "drives understanding and expectations of what it means to be a man" (Hunter, Riggs, and Augoustinos, 2017, p.2). Many researchers claim to hold this type of masculinity as an honor (Hunter, Riggs, and Augoustinos, 2017; Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009). In Western society, young boys are put into a metaphorical box. Paul Kivel (1984) defines this box as the "Act Like A Man" box. In this box is a set of characteristics that both boys and men are expected to conform to. A few characteristics placed into this box includes the following: tough, aggressive, competitive, taking charge, have sex with women, intimidate, take it, and in control. He states, "the key to staying in the box is control. Boys are taught to control their bodies, control their feelings, control their relationships" (Kivel, 1984, p.15). This idea of control further contributes to the notion that when

men go against any of these values they are automatically seen as weak by the rest of society. The “box” establishes the same values as the definition of hegemonic masculinity.

In the rap genre, musicians convey ideas of masculinity and femininity in their lyrics and videos. Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) found that in rap, “music can be seen as part of a larger ideological process of persuading the population that heterosexual male supremacy is natural and normal” (p.6). It is not uncommon in rap to find lyrics that degrade women into merely objects or tools to be used for sex and to find lyrics that provide justification for engaging in acts that are violent or sexual against women (Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009). In the documentary, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, Bryan Hurt asks aspiring rap artists about the frequent concepts of misogynistic views in rap lyrics. One rapper in particular was quick to point fingers at the music industry, explaining that the industry only signs when artists are willing to produce what the industry demands (Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009, p.6). The industry wants what sells, and in today’s society sex and drugs is the demand of consumers.

Hypotheses

I hypothesize that rape culture is evident in today’s music choices. It is also hypothesized that the music genre, rap/hip-hop, will contain lyrics that convey messages of violent and sexually aggressive behavior towards the female and male populations more than other music genres among the most popular songs. Also, I hypothesis male artists will have greater representation in music genres compared to female music artists, and male artists will use more sexual and misogynistic themes in their lyrics compared to female artists. Finally, females are more likely to be subjects of sexually aggressive lyrics than males.

Method

This is a content analysis study, which allows the comparison of song lyrics to determine what music genres have established a theme of sexual or misogynistic behaviors and attitudes. For this study, I used a systematic method to select the music choices and lyrics. First, I chose a list of the top 100 most listened to songs. I used the website Billboard.com to select my sample size from the "Hot 100" list. This website is a database that compiles multiple lists of the top listened to songs for each genre as well as a collective of genres. It compiles a fresh dataset for each list every week to reflect the music preferences for that time period. For my data set I used the "Hot 100" list for the week of September 29, 2018. The compiled list included these genres: rap/hip-hop, R&B, pop, rock, and country. Due to time constraints, my original sample size included a total of the top 80 songs out of the 100. While systematically selecting the songs, I eliminated one song having lyrics in a different language, thus reduced my sample size to 79 songs.

I used three different independent variables for this study: genre of music, gender of artists, and gender of subjects. Genre was defined as the different types of music the American population listens to on a day to day basis. I used the Google play store to break down the different genres into categories, which gave me the final seven genres of music under study. The gender of artists was defined as being either male or female. The gender of subjects was also defined as being either male or female.

For each song I analyzed the song lyrics line by line and coded for five independent variables: sexual slurs, explicit, manipulation, objectification, and aggressive. When a derogatory word, such as "bitch" and "hoe" was used to describe women or men in the lyrics I marked it down as the variable "sexual slurs." When the lyrics painted an image of graphic sexual content I marked it down as the variable

“explicit.” If the artist used manipulation tactics to get women or men to have sex with them I counted it and used the variable “manipulation.” If a lyric stated that women or men were being paid with money or objects for keeping the artist satisfied with sex I counted it as “objectification.” I also counted it as “objectification” if the artists were referring to themselves as using women or men simply for sex. When the artists used lyrics to describe themselves as having sexually aggressive behavior I used the variable “aggressive.”

For each song I recorded how many times a song referenced a misogynistic variable in the lyric content. Frequency was collected, in that, every occurrence of a variable was counted. For example, if a song included two words used to degrade women to a lower status, I coded it as “2” sexual slurs. If a song contained one example of a sexual slur and one example of explicit content in the lyrics, I marked down “1” for each individual variable.

Results

In table 1, the analysis showed that the top music genre listened to by the American population is rap/hip-hop. The results indicate approximately 43% of the top 79 songs from the billboards made up the genre of rap/hip-hop, while 22% were pop, 17% were country, 9% were R&B, 5% were rock music, 3% were dance/electric and the Christian genre only made up 1% of the sample size. A comparison of misogynistic themes in each genre of music indicate that rap/hip-hop have the highest rate of misogynistic themes. Of the 34 rap/hip-hop songs, there were 19 songs that contained misogynistic lyrics. Of the 79 songs in the sample, rap/hip-hop contained the largest percentage of songs with misogynistic lyrics at 76%. For each category R&B, pop and country in the sample, 8% contained some theme that contributed to the ideal support or expression of rape culture. Rock and Christian had no songs with misogynistic lyrics. When comparing rap/hip-hop to the

other genres observed, results show from this sample, rap/hip-hop is the most listened to genre, and also has the most misogynistic themes expressed in the lyrics.

When comparing the categories of misogynistic lyrics in each genre, rap/hip-hop had the highest frequencies in each category: sexual slurs 95 times (93%), objectification 37 times (90%), aggressive behavior 22 times (85%), explicit imagery 39 times (85%), and manipulative behaviors 8 times (57%) for a total of 201 occurrences within the 34 songs that contained misogynistic lyrics. All other genres combined had a total of 28 occurrences of misogynistic lyrics. R&B had 9, pop had 16 and country had 3 occurrences of misogynistic themes in the song lyrics. Rock, Christian and dance/electric had no occurrences of misogynistic lyrics in any category. Sexual slurs accounted for 45% of misogynistic expression in lyrics (102 times), whereas objectification accounted for 18% (41 times), aggressive behavior 11% (26 times), explicit content 20% (46 times) and manipulation 6% (14 times).

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages for Variables Used by Music Genres

Variable	Genre															
	Rap/Hip-Hop		R&B		Pop		Country		Rock		Christian		Dance/Elec		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Number of songs	34	43	7	9	17	22	14	17	4	5	1	1	2	3	79	100
Number of songs with misogynistic lyrics	19	76	2	8	2	8	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	100
Frequency and type of misogynistic theme:																
Sexual slurs	95	93	2	2	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	102	100
Objectification	37	90	0	0	3	7	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	41	100
Aggressive behavior	22	85	0	0	2	8	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	101
Explicit content	39	85	3	7	4	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	46	101
Manipulation	8	57	4	29	2	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	100
N	201		9		16		3		0		0		0		229	

*Note the total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding error

As our findings show in Table 2, men dominate almost every genre category that was observed in the research study. The only genre

that displayed a greater percentage of female artists was Christian. Male music artists dominate in the rap/hip-hop genre, 94%, compared to female artists in rap/hip-hop, 6%, (32 songs versus 2 songs respectively). Male artists also dominated in country music making up 93% of the genre and female artists representing 7% of the genre (13 songs versus 1 song respectively). Pop and R&B had a similar distribution between female and male music artists. Male artists made up 57% of the R&B genre and 59% of the pop genre. In rock male artists represented 75% of the genre, whereas female artists represented 25%. In the Christian genre, female artists had 100% representation, whereas in the dance/electric genre, males had 100% representation. However, we cannot conclude that this is true for the Christian and dance/electric genre, because of the small sample sizes.

Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages for Variables Used by Gender

Variable	Gender													
	Artist						Subjects							
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		No specified gender		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Songs by genre (n=79)														
Rap/hip-hop	2	6	32	94	34	100	25	74	6	18	3	9	34	101
R&B	3	43	4	57	7	100	3	43	3	43	1	14	7	100
Pop	7	41	10	59	17	100	9	53	8	47	0	0	17	100
Country	1	7	13	96	14	100	13	93	1	7	0	0	14	100
Rock	1	25	3	75	4	100	2	50	0	0	2	50	4	100
Christian	1	100	0	0	1	100	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	100
Dance/Elec	0	0	2	100	2	100	2	100	0	0	0	0	2	100
Misogynistic themes (n=229)														
Sexual slurs	5	5	97	95	102	100	95	93	7	7	0	0	102	100
Objectification	12	29	29	71	41	100	29	71	12	29	0	0	41	100
Aggressive	0	0	26	100	26	100	26	100	0	0	0	0	26	100
Explicit content	7	15	39	85	46	100	35	76	11	24	0	0	46	100
Manipulation	6	43	8	57	14	100	10	71	4	29	0	0	14	100

*Note the total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding error

In every category, male music artists are more likely to express misogynistic ideals in their lyrics than female artists. It is important to note that only male artists used themes of sexual aggression as female artists did not describe any sexually aggressive behavior in their lyrics. When comparing the dependent variable, gender of subjects to the different music genres, the findings indicate that the rap/hip-hop genre is more likely to have female subjects (74%) than male subjects (18%). Similar findings can be shown for the genres pop and country. Out of the total country songs (14), 93% were about a female counterpart. For the pop genre we see 53% who were about a female.

When looking at the different types of misogynistic themes and gender of subjects, the highest frequencies of misogynistic themes are geared towards female subjects: sexual slurs 95 counts (93%), objectification 29 counts (71%), aggressive behavior 26 counts (100%), explicit content 35 counts (76%), and manipulative behavior 10 counts (6%) for a total of 195 counts, compared to a total of 34 counts directed at men. When looking at the misogynistic themes expressed against men, the highest frequencies were in the two categories, objectification 12 counts (29%) and explicit content 11 counts (24%).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings in this study support the hypothesis that rape culture is evident in the choice of music by the American population. This is further explained by our second hypothesis which was partially supported by our findings. Rap/hip-hop does contain lyrics of a sexual and aggressive nature towards female subjects more than any other genre observed, however pop music had just one more count of an antagonistic theme toward men. The third hypothesis that male artists would have a greater representation in music genres compared to female artists was partially supported. As our findings indicate, male artists had a more dominate presence in all music genres besides one,

Christian. In the study there was no male representation in the Christian genre due to the small sample size. The hypothesis, males will express more sexual and misogynistic themes in their lyrics compared to females, is supported by this study. Male artists expressed each category of misogynistic themes more frequently than female artists. My last hypothesis was fully supported by the study, females are more likely to be subjects of misogynistic and sexual themes compared to males. It is important to note that in the R&B and pop genres, there was equal representation of themes directed to female subjects as male subjects. However, men were likely targets of objectification and explicit content (albeit less often than women) whereas women were targets of sexual slurs, objectification, explicit content, and manipulation. While aggression was used the least, women were the only targets of aggression.

The findings show that rap/hip-hop music does provide the audience with more misogynistic views against women than any other genre of music. This contributes to the idea of rape culture. Because rap/hip-hop is the most popular music genre, misogynistic lyrics are being heard more frequently. This can be especially problematic for adolescents because of their own behaviors and attitudes are greatly impacted and influenced by media sources, like music choices (Kistler et al, 2010). When they constantly hear these ideas of degrading women and men in music, over time those behaviors appear to be normal. As a society we need to address that sexually aggressive and objectification of both males and females is not something that should be tolerated. Toleration leads to having acts of violence (Groth, 1977). When people do not know something is wrong or unethical they will continue to do it without having consequences (Mancini, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to analyze the prevalence of rape culture and misogynistic themes in the music choices of the American population. When lyrics contain these ideals it further supports the

notion that these behaviors and attitudes towards both women and men are accepted by our society. This is dangerous considering that music is one of the several outlets of media that is influential on one's own beliefs. By continuing the usage of misogynistic themes in artists lyrics, not only is the music industry silently supporting rape culture, but they are reinforcing these ideals repeatedly.

By conducting a content analysis study on music genres and analyzing the five misogynistic themes: sexual slurs, objectification, aggressive behavior, explicit content, and manipulation; my findings indicate that rape culture is evident in most genres of music, though rap/hip-hop contained the highest frequencies of misogynistic themes. The findings indicated that not only do male artists dominate in the rap/hip-hop genre, but in almost all popular music genres observed. Misogynistic themes are more likely to be used to target female subjects in lyrics.

My research was conducted during a span of eight weeks which limited the number of songs I was able to code for in the small timeframe. Because of this, my sample size only included a total of 80 songs out of the full 100 from the "Hot 100" list. Another limitation I had was the small sample size for the three genres: rock, Christian, and dance/electric. The "Hot 100" list only provided the top 100 songs listened to by the American population during that week. If there was a bigger sample size of the rock, Christian, and dance/electric genres, it is possible that the findings would be more similar to those findings observed in the rap/hip-hop, R&B, pop and country genres.

Despite our limitations, the analyses show that male artists overall dominate in the music industry. By dominating over the industry their music is heard more often than the works of female artists. This is extremely important when male artists are more likely to express misogynistic themes in their music compared to female artists. Not only are their songs being heard more, but their misogynistic views

are being listened to more frequently by the American population. When these lyrics are heard at such a high frequency, it doesn't take long for people to think of these ideas as normal behaviors. This has a possibility to lead to increased violence towards women. Considering artists use antagonistic themes in their lyrics towards men, this can also create a normalization of violence against men by other men.

Ways we could create a more positive atmosphere through music by not normalizing rape culture, would be to address these ideas in a different perspective. Future research should be conducted to analyze the music industry and how it perpetuates a rape culture as an institution, as well as individually. In Western society all men are under immense pressure to conform to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which includes traits like dominance, aggression, competition, strength and emotional detachment (Eastman, 2012). If male artists dominate the companies of the music industry, and are the individuals who earn the money by creating and distributing music, then we can expect to see more ideals of hegemonic masculinity contained in themes that represent rape culture phenomenon. By comparing lyrics across time periods, we may be able to determine if there has been an increase in misogynistic and antagonistic themes as a result of a public backlash against the move towards gender equality.

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