Controversial Rap Themes, Gender Portrayals and Skin Tone Distortion: A Content Analysis of Rap Music Videos

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A content analysis of rap music videos aired on BET, MTV, and VH1 examined the occurrence of controversial themes, gender differences, and skin tone distortion. The results of this study found that current rap music videos have placed an emphasis on themes of materialism and misogyny. Additionally, men and women in the videos differ in their portrayal of these themes. Specifically, female characters are significantly more likely to appear as objects of sexuality. Men and women also differ in their appearance with more African American females appearing to have Eurocentric features. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Since its introduction in 1981, rap music has grown greatly in popularity. However, rap music has also been a source of controversy (Dixon & Brooks, 2002; Dixon & Linz, 1997; Hansen & Hansen, 2000; Rose, 1994). Specifically, it has been accused of promoting controversial messages dealing with violence, sex and materialism (Johnson, Jackson & Gatto, 1995; Smith, 2005). Previous research has suggested that this content promotes negative behaviors; however, there are mixed findings in prior research suggesting that rap music contains both controversial and community promoting themes (Johnson et al., 1995; Zillmann et al., 1995). Therefore, it is necessary to examine what thematic messages are prevalent in current rap music.

Artists and characters in the videos are another aspect of rap music that demand attention. Unlike other music genres, rap music is dominated by Black artists and performers (Kubrin, 2005). This aspect is important because of the colorism that

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often occurs in media. Often colorism is an issue the Black viewers face whereby individuals with lighter skin may be given advantages over those with darker skin (Kubrin, 2005; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver, 1994). However, the Afrocentric features and skin tone of individuals in rap music have never been analyzed.

Finally, recent debates on rap music have accused it of being overly sexist and degrading towards women. As a genre, rap music is often linked to Black male identity which may lead to an increase in themes of sexism and misogyny for women (hooks, 1992). Furthermore, research suggests that Afrocentric bias may occur differently for men and women (Maddox, 2004). Specifically, light skinned African American females are more likely to be associated with the White beauty standard. Alternatively, dark skinned males are often associated with criminality. The current study examines how these gender differences appear for African American men and women in rap music.

The three gaps in the rap music literature related to thematic content, Afrocentricity, and gender warrant a more current analysis of rap music videos. The goal of this study is to create a better understanding of these images in rap music by reporting on a systematic content analysis of rap music videos appearing on the annual countdowns of three music television channels in 2006. However, first it is necessary to review the rap content uncovered in previous research.

Controversial Themes in Rap Music

Rap music is a genre that was born out of slave spirituals, blues, jazz, and ''soul'' as a musical expression of African American traditions (Rose, 1994; Zillman et al., 1995). Dixon and Linz (1997) suggest that this tradition has been passed down to contemporary African American youth, and contains cultural elements such as ''toasting,'' ''signifying,'' and ''playing the dozens.'' A variety of messages have been found to exist within rap music, and there is some debate as to which messages are used most often. Some research suggests that rap music portrayals are negative and include images promoting violence, sex and materialism (Baxter, DeRiemer, Landini, Leslie & Singletary, 1985; Johnson et al., 1995; Kubrin, 2005; Smith, 2005; Zillman et al., 1995). These researchers suggest that these messages propagate a desire for wealth, while glamorizing sexual actions and violence as a means to obtain this affluence. Smith's review found an extreme amount of emphasis on violence, sexual content, and substance abuse aired on Music Television (MTV). A content analysis of ''gangsta'' rap by Kubrin found that this particular subtype of rap music focuses on creating social orders in which the use of violence is not only accepted but also seen as necessary to African American life.

Research also suggests that rap music contains more positive images. Zillman et al. (1995) suggest that rap music may be used as a vehicle to fight oppression from the dominant culture. Additionally, Kubrin (2005) found that 68% of ''gangsta'' rap focuses on the idea of respect. Kubrin found that the message of respect is exhibited as often as are the images of violence. These images conflict with the

more controversial messages by promoting community unity and expressions of African American culture. These positive messages may indicate that rap music can be used by the African American community as an incentive for social movement (Rose, 1994).

Apparently, there are competing views regarding the common themes in rap music videos. There are also some limitations with existing research. First, the majority of these analyses were conducted more than 10 years ago when music videos were first introduced to the public. Given that rap music is a part of popular culture, themes in the genre are changing with society. Therefore, an updated review of the dominant themes in the genre is necessary. Second, some of the analyses in this research used only one television channel, such as MTV, in gathering their sample (Smith, 2005), or chose to look at only one genre of rap music such as ''gangsta'' rap (Kubrin, 2005). This study will extend the existing research by investigating common themes available across several music channels, and including all genres of rap music. Rather than concentrating on certain types of rap music or specific exemplars, this review provides a more general overview of the rap music scene.

Finally, there is not a comprehensive analysis that examines both controversial and community-oriented themes within rap music. Some previous research suggests that there are several negative or controversial themes such as sex, violence, materialism and misogyny that dominate rap (Baxter et al., 1985; Johnson et al., 1995). Research has also found several positive or community-oriented messages which include expression of culture, community unity, political awareness, and disaffection toward mainstream society (hooks, 1992; Kubrin, 2005). However, up to this point, there has been much disagreement about the frequency with which these themes air. No analysis has considered that both themes may be occurring at the same time. This study extends this research by looking for a variety of messages in current rap music. Specifically, this study is designed to create a better understanding of whether controversial or community-oriented themes are more dominant in rap music videos.

Afrocentric Features and Rap Music

In addition to examining thematic material, this research also is interested in the portrayals of people of color, specifically the depiction of Afrocentricity and colorism. The beauty myth postulates that there is a universal beauty standard. This standard is represented by Eurocentric features such as white skin, blond hair, blue eyes, as well as youth, and low body weight (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). This has placed pressure on Blacks to associate light skin tone and Eurocentric features with beauty.

Historically, African Americans with lighter skin tone and more Eurocentric features have been privileged in United States society. This privilege has occurred since the days of slavery when slave masters abused and raped female slaves creating children with more Eurocentric features and lighter skin tones. These in-

dividuals were allowed certain privileges based on their Eurocentric appearance (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). This concession has continued to resonate over time. Even today, research has found that skin tone can be a determining factor in educational attainment, employment, and income, operating as a perpetuation of inequality (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2003). Furthermore, the pressure to appear more Eurocentric is exemplified though the continual marketing of skin-lightening and hair-straightening products (Russell et al., 1992).

Negative associations with darker skin tone and Afrocentric features also occur frequently in media (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver, Jackson, Moses & Dangerfield, 2004). Blacks with more Afrocentric features (e.g., darker skin tone, thicker lips, and larger noses) are more likely to be associated with stereotypical or negative evaluations (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver et al., 2004). This association often equates Black individuals, especially men, with criminal behavior. Maddox's (2004) model of racial phenotypicality bias suggests that individuals use phenotypes in order to categorize individuals, often along racial lines. These categories are attached to conceptual knowledge consisting of stereotypical evaluations (Blair, Judd, Sadler, & Jenkins, 2002). These evaluations can include essentialist beliefs about racial groups (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002), implicit causal theories (Medin & Ortony, 1989), and cultural standards of physical attractiveness (Wade, 1996). The perpetuation of colorism in the media is often conceptualized as internalized White supremacy whereby individuals of color begin to adopt the negative attributions made about their in-group. Rap music, as a genre, typically features Black artists. Therefore, the Afrocentricity of the individuals in the music videos can have important implications for the associations made about African American individuals (Kubrin, 2005).

Examining the Afrocentricity in rap music videos can offer a greater understanding of how colorism occurs in the media, and specifically in genre-specific images. The occurrence of colorism in rap music could have potential effects on both the in-group and out-group with reference to individuals of color. For the in-group, an emphasis on Eurocentric features could create a pressure to adhere. Individuals of color, especially females, who are unable to withstand this pressure may have a lower self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989). On the other hand, for the out-group members, associations made with more Afrocentric features could lead to negative evaluations by the majority group, more specifically the White audience members (Boehlert, 1995). However, there is currently no research that has analyzed the prevalence of Eurocentric and Afrocentric features in rap music characters, and based on the previous propositions, an analysis is necessary.

Gender Differences in Music Videos

Research has also shown that music videos often differ in their portrayals of men and women. In general, males are portrayed in a more positive light than females. Specifically, women are often depicted in positions of submission to men (Sommers-

Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis, 1993). Additionally, men are more likely to perpetuate violence, while women are more likely to be portrayed as victims (Seidman, 1992; Sherman & Dominick, 1986). In a review of common rap images on MTV, Smith (2005) found that females are more likely to be dressed in provocative clothing, especially in videos of sexual content. This dissimilarity between the portrayals of men and women suggests that it is important to consider gender differences in analyses of thematic content in music videos. Research on other genres of music reveals vastly different portrayals of male and female characters (Seidman, 1992; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993). However, little research has considered how often these differences occur in rap music.

Additionally, research suggests that the perpetuation of Afrocentricity in media differs for men and women. Specifically, African American males are often associated with darker skin tone and strong Afrocentric features which infers a connection with criminality and fear (Blair et al., 2002; Dixon & Maddox, 2005). Alternatively, mediated portrayals often depict African American females with Eurocentric features and lighter skin tone, further perpetuating the standard of beauty as White (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Maddox, 2004). Because the Afrocentricity of rap music has not been studied previously, it is important to consider the gender differences in analyzing it here.

Theory and Potential Effects

Completing a content analysis of current rap music images will fill a gap in the literature that has overlooked the possibility of the presence of both positive and negative themes in rap music. The necessary first step is to conduct a content analysis before research can consider the effect that these videos have on viewers. However, it may be useful to consider potential effects in substantiating a need to perform a content analysis on this genre specifically. Theoretical considerations related to rap music necessitate considering both White audiences and audiences of color.

Non-Black Audiences. Similar to research on thematic materials in rap music, research conducted on the influence of listening to rap music has found both positive and negative effects in individuals based on the messages in the music (Johnson et al., 1995; Zillman et al., 1995). These varied findings suggest that researchers are still not sure how rap music is affecting its audiences. Cultivation theory suggests that exposure to consistent messages over time influences individuals to perceive the world in a certain manner (Gerbner, 1969, 1973). More recent cultivation research has found that increased media exposure to specific genres can lead to stereotypical attributes for individuals of color (Vergeer, Rutten, & Scheepers, 1996; Vergeer & Scheepers, 1998).

Consideration of the cultivation effect is especially important because while rap music has been rooted in African American culture, there is a large White consumer

base of the genre (Rose, 1994; Samuels, 1991). Therefore, the images that dominate rap music videos may cultivate specific attributions White consumers make about Black individuals. When radio personality Don Imus recently referred to the Rutgers University women's basketball team as ''nappy-headed hos,'' his comments were credited to the proliferation of these attributions made in rap music (Sanneh, 2007). This recent controversy demonstrates a need to examine the specific genre of rap music and the messages it may be cultivating. However, because research has not yet considered the occurrence of both positive and negative themes in a content analysis, research cannot suggest at this point whether rap music is cultivating stereotypical or non-stereotypical portrayals of African Americans. The content analysis performed here will assist in clarifying this issue.

Audiences of Color. Alternatively, it is important to consider the influence that rap music has on audiences of color. Previous research on media effects and African American audiences suggest that negative portrayals do not lower self-esteem (Allen, 2001; Crocker & Major, 1989). Crocker and Major suggested that African American individuals use several self-protecting properties in curbing the influence of negative stereotypes in the media. These properties include: 1) attributing negative feedback to the prejudiced attitudes of the media; 2) the viewers choosing whether or not they want to associate with the character based on their values; and 3) using in-group rather than out-group comparisons. However, the prominence of Black performers in rap music may be having a different, and perhaps more negative, influence on African American viewers than other dominantly White media representations.

Specifically, although rap music is often produced by White individuals, the prevalence of Black performers may make it difficult to attribute prejudice to the media. Additionally, the Black audiences are more likely to identify with the Black individuals in the videos making it more difficult to disassociate themselves from the stereotypical images. Furthermore, the viewers may compare themselves to the individuals in the videos because they are seen as members of their in-group. If rap music contains more positive and community-promoting images, the identification that Black viewers have with the portrayals can have a positive impact on self-concept. However, if the research here suggests that the images are more likely to be negative, then the impact on self-concept may also be negative. A necessary first step is to examine the associations made with African American individuals in rap music through a content analysis before studying the influence these images have on both White and Black audiences.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Before research on effects can be conducted, there is a need to better understand the images currently found in rap music videos. Therefore, this research is focused

on three main depictions in rap music: 1) thematic content, 2) colorism, and 3) gender differences. In order to examine these three areas, the following research questions were proposed.

RQ$_1$: What themes dominate rap music videos?

Past research is unclear as to what themes occur overall in current rap music videos. Additionally, very little research has examined both positive and negative themes that may occur. It is important to examine all possible themes in order to find out whether positive or negative themes dominate rap music videos.

H$_1$: These themes will differ for men and women such that men are more likely to be associated with positive themes while women are more likely to be associated with negative themes.

Past research suggests that women in rap music are portrayed more negatively than men. More specifically, females are more likely to be portrayed in positions of submission, sexuality, and provocative clothing (Smith, 2005; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993). No research has looked at the possibility of both positive and negative themes; therefore, there is no conclusive evidence as to how men and women are associated with these themes. However, if rap music is similar to other music video genres, then men will be portrayed in a more positive manner than women overall.

H$_2$: Female characters in rap music videos are more likely to have Eurocentric features, while male characters are more likely to have Afrocentric features.

Previous research suggests that there is a dominance of Eurocentric features in the mass media (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver et al., 2004). However, Black male and female characters differ in their likelihood to appear Afrocentric; specifically, male characters in media are more likely to be associated with Afrocentric features, while female characters are more likely to be associated with Eurocentric features. This issue is especially relevant to rap music because of the proliferation of Black artists and performers. Gender differences associated with Afrocentric features in rap music videos have never been examined; however, we expect this genre to mimic other portrayals of colorism in the media.

Methods

Sample

The sample for this analysis included current and popular rap music videos. These videos featured the artist(s) performing their song while placing themselves in a

variety of settings, ranging from concert formats to videos of political news coverage. The sample was drawn from the three main music video outlets on television: Music Television (MTV), Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Video Hits 1 (VH1). The sample was taken from the end-of-year countdown available on each of these outlets (aired in the beginning of 2006). This sample was chosen because the purpose of the study was to analyze current music videos, and in order to avoid repetition from previous analyses that used only contemporary videos. Furthermore, the countdown lists were based on requests made from the audience during the year. Therefore, they were likely representative of the most popular and commonly consumed videos because the music outlets allowed reviewer requests to dominate the broadcasts of videos. Finally, the use of the countdowns from each music television channel allowed the study to standardize across the three channels' different programming schedules and formats.

There are some obvious limitations with the chosen sample. For instance, the use of only one year's countdowns precludes the inclusion of classic videos not premiered during the year, as well as privileging the videos shown later in the year because they are more readily available in the viewer's memory. However, these videos were seen as most representative of the current state of rap music videos in order to fulfill the purpose of this specific study. It is necessary to use this sample to assess the current state of rap music images, and those videos that are likely to be viewed most often.

After the list of videos was collected, they were sorted according to type of music to determine which videos were considered rap and/or rhythm and blues (R & B). This sorting was done using the Apple music website for iTunes. Each video title as listed in the video was retrieved from a comprehensive catalog of music genres in iTunes. Only those videos identified as rap music were coded, non-rap videos were removed from the sample. Any overlap of videos was accounted for, leaving a total of 108 unique videos used for the final analysis.

Descriptive Variables

There were two levels of analysis used in coding the music videos, video level and character level. Identifying information was obtained about each video which included video name, the name of the main artist, whether or not there was a supporting artist, and the name of the supporting artist if there was one. This information allowed the primary researcher to organize the videos and assure that the multiple coders analyzed the same videos during reliability testing.

In addition to the video level of analysis, coding was also done at the character level for each video. Both main and supporting characters were coded. Main characters were identified as individuals performing the song identified by the name in the title of the video which referred to individuals who would be singing or performing in the video. Supporting characters were identified as individuals in the video who appear in more than five scenes with the main character, or who appear

in more than 10 scenes throughout the video, regardless of whether or not they are with the main characters.

Scenes are considered segments within the video between swipes on the screen. Swipes refer to a change in focus on the screen, for instance, changing from a scene in a night club to one in a car. This does not include zooming in and out of one scene, but rather only when the focus of the shot changes. Characters that appeared with the main character had to be within one foot of the main character, be interacting with the main character, or performing/dancing with the main character. These definitions allowed coders to differentiate the important individuals in the video.

At the character level, the descriptive variables coded for included whether the character was main or supporting, as well as age, race, sex, and whether or not the character was shown carrying a weapon. Examples of weapons included guns, knives, sticks, or any other material used to harm another.

Thematic Variables

At both the video and character level of analysis, the videos were coded for their use of common themes found in rap and hip-hop videos as suggested by the existing body of literature (Kubrin, 2005; Smith, 2005). At the video level, most of these variables were coded using a frequency scale that allowed coders to choose the amount of occurrence of the themes from (0) *no occurrence* to (10) *high occurrence*. At the character level, the thematic variables were all collected at the nominal level as *absent* (0) or *present* (1). Each of the following themes was coded for each variable and character, therefore the videos and characters could be representative of a number of themes. The themes are described below.

Materialism. Materialism was defined as the expression of one's wealth. This theme was developed from work conducted by Englis, Solomon, and Olofosson (1993) who found that rap music was more likely than other genres to contain images of consumption and reinforcement of consumption. Coders recorded high occurrence of materialism when characters were shown purchasing and consuming expensive clothing, jewelry, and cars, as well as living a lavish lifestyle continually throughout the video. For example, one video showing an artist driving an expensive convertible and shopping for diamond jewelry was coded as high in materialism.

Misogyny. Misogyny was defined as sexualizing women and the dominance of men over women. This definition came from Sommers-Flanagan et al.'s (1993) finding of a prevalence of domination of men over women. Coders recorded high occurrence of misogyny when there were numerous beautiful and highly sexualized women dancing provocatively, often wearing revealing clothing and acting submissively to the men. This included women being reduced to body parts rather

than a whole person, or used as props in the video. For example, one video which portrayed scantily clad women as pieces of ''candy'' behind shop windows available for men, was coded as highly misogynistic.

Violence. Violence was defined using a conservative definition set forth by the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) (Wilson et al., 1998). It was described as the depiction of the threat or use of physical force with the intentions of harming another. Violence was also defined here as the use of criminal threat or action, the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings. High occurrence of violence was recorded as characters attempting to, or harming other characters in the video by hitting or shoving. This was also coded when characters were shown being successful criminals, outwitting the police and defeating their competitors, and the appearance of a weapon. An example of a violent video would include repetitive brandishing of weapons, and a physical altercation between two characters.

Love. Love was defined as romantic relationship scenarios. This theme was proposed by one of the first content analyses of music videos (Baxter et al., 1985), and was reiterated by initial viewings of current videos by the researchers. Coders recorded high occurrence of love when the video made reference to relationships in both the visual and lyrics of the song, including courting individuals, marriage, and relational disagreements. This theme was coded at the video level only. An example includes a video featuring a male character serenading a female character.

Political Awareness. Political awareness was defined as advocating a political position. This definition, as well as the following three variables, was based on Kubrin's (2005) findings that these themes represent rap music as a vehicle against oppression. High occurrence of political awareness was coded when scenes depicted the artist advocating support for specific issues, such as poverty, homelessness, or urban development. The video often contained victims of social injustice, or crusaders against it. This did not have to include only the actions of the character but also the objects they were next to, or settings in which they were featured. An example of this theme would be Kanye West's video ''Diamonds'' which features depictions of the diamond mining occurring in Sierra Leone and the resulting political turmoil.

Expression of Culture. This variable was defined as the engagement in characteristics of African American culture. It was coded when the videos contained actions representing the culture including toasting, verbal boasting, or playing the dozens. It was also represented by the use of gestures in order to send a message, or signifying a location. An example would be the use of ''yo mama'' jokes, or one artist insulting another in the video.

Disaffection Toward Mainstream Society. This was defined as contempt for the dominant White ideology. Coders recorded high occurrence of disaffection when the video contained images that are disapproving of ideals represented in the dominant ideology including capitalism and conservatism. An example would include characters appearing next to symbols such as anti-Bush signs that show disaffection.

Creating Community Unity. This variable was defined as characters uniting a group of people. This variable was coded when characters participate in the gathering of families, communities, or neighborhoods. Examples would include civic meetings, barbecues, or calling out for an entire group to mobilize. Coders recorded this variable when characters were hanging out together, or mobilizing for some reason. An example would be a neighborhood shot featuring a group gathering with one another, the individuals having fun and sharing with one another.

Afrocentric Features Coded at Character Level

In addition to the thematic variables coded at the character level, characters were also coded for the appearance of Afrocentric features. The following variables were used to represent the appearance of Afrocentricity.

Hair Texture. This variable referred to the texture of the characters' hair. The natural texture of some Black people's hair is different than many other people of the world. Many times, the hair is thick and curled tightly in its natural state. If the hair appeared to be in its natural state, then coders recorded it as thick. If the hair is straight or had been straightened in some way, it was coded as thin.

Eye Color. This variable referred to the eye color of the character. Many Black people have brown, dark brown or even black eyes. If the characters had any of these colors, then the coders recorded the eye color as dark. If the color is any other lighter shade, the eye color was coded as light.

Thickness of Lips. This was defined as the amount of fullness in the individual character's lips. Eurocentric lips are often considered to be thinner than those of Afrocentric people. Coders recorded lips as thick if the character had lips that protruded from the surface area of the face and curled. If the lips did not do this, but appeared to be more in line with the surface area of the face, they were coded as thin.

Width of Nose. This variable referred to how wide the individual's nose is. In many cases, the noses of Eurocentric people are different than those of many Afrocentric people. Quite often the nostrils of Eurocentric people are thinner, and the bridge of the nose is more pointed and defined, whereas the nostrils of many Afrocentric people are wider and the nose is less pointed. Coders recorded the width of the nose as thin, medium or thick.

Skin Tone. This variable referred to the tone of individual's skin, varying from light to dark. Skin color from white to a light caramel brown was coded as light. Skin color from a darker caramel to the medium brown of milk chocolate was coded as medium. All darker skin tones from ebony to black were coded as dark.

Coding and Reliability

Four graduate students, three female and one male, from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, conducted all the coding of the videos. The four coders represented diverse racial groups including Caucasian, Puerto Rican, and Asian, and all four coded equal amounts of the sample. In addition to the four main coders, a male African American scholar assisted in overseeing the development of the codebook and the coder training. Although he was unable to participate in any coding, he was included in weekly discussions of the variables, and helped to provide an additional diverse viewpoint on refining the variables. Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) suggest that a diverse set of coders enhances the validity of content analysis studies. Therefore, a variety of individuals were included in discussions about, and development of the codebook. However, the inability to obtain an African American coder was recognized as a limitation, and will be further addressed in the discussion section.

All coders participated in extensive 30-hour training over an 8-week period which involved development and revision of the codebook. During this period, coders became familiar with relevant literature related to the variables. Diagnostics were run in order to determine when coders were prepared to begin coding individually. After agreement was reached on the variables and descriptions, the coders began coding the entire sample of videos. All of the videos used in the diagnosis were reassigned within the sample to assure they were coded after final revisions to the codebook. Although discussions were held during the coding period in order to assist with clarity for all definitions and variables, no new variables or significant changes were made to the codebook after the diagnostic period. The final coding took place over the course of several months, with weekly checks on coder fatigue.

Reliability was established using 25 videos from the sample of 108 videos. Intra-class correlation coefficients as opposed to a Pearson moment co-efficient or Cronbach's alpha were computed for the continuous theme variables collected at the

video level (Bartko, 1966; Krippendorf, 2004; McGraw & Wong, 1996). In this test, each individual's coding of each thematic video variable is compared with the other judgments made by the other coders of this same variable during the same video to check if the judgments correlate with one another. At the video level, all the variables had an intra-class correlation of .64 or higher (*range* = .64–.95, *median* = .90, *mean* = .86). This sample yielded a total of 181 characters that were coded and used in determining reliability at the character level. Cohen's Kappa (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000,) was used to compute reliability for the dichotomous variables formed at the video level as well as the character level. The nominal data had a raw agreement of 71% or above, and a Cohen's Kappa of .70 and above (*range* = .70–1.0, *median* = .91, *average* = .90). All of the variables' coefficients are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Reliabilities

	Intraclass Correlation	Cohen's Kappa
Video Level (Continuous)		
Materialism	.91	
Misogyny	.95	
Violence	.89	
Love	.85	
Political awareness	.95	
Expression of culture	.76	
Dis. mainstream society	.90	
Community unity	.64	
Character Level (Nominal)		
Materialism		.77
Misogyny		.80
Violence		.97
Political awareness		.97
Expression of culture		.87
Dis. mainstream society		.99
Community unity		.96
Hair length		.84
Hair texture		.87
Eye color		.97
Thickness of lips		.70
Width of nose		.70
Skin tone		.80

Results

The final analysis was computed on a sample of 108 videos containing 549 characters. The majority of characters in the videos were male (53%, $n = 291$), African American (89.3%, $n = 490$), adults (96.2%, $n = 528$), and coded as supporting characters (58.1%, $n = 319$). Closer analysis of the descriptive data of main and supporting characters found that the majority of main characters were male (79.1%, $n = 182$), while the majority of supporting characters were female (65.8%, $n = 210$).

Video Thematic Content

Research Question 1 asked about the thematic content of rap music videos. One of the contentions in the literature has been the extent to which positive or negative themes appear to dominate rap music (hooks, 1992; Kubrin, 2005). In order to reduce the number of statistical tests and redundant themes examined in this analysis, and to determine the relationships between the themes, a principal components analysis was undertaken. This analysis examined the relationships between the continuous thematic variables measured at the video level. This method created a components matrix which extracted four possible components that represented commonality among the variables. Principal components analysis is an exploratory method and therefore useful here because this research is the first of its kind to examine both positive and negative themes and how they relate to one another.

Based on this matrix, two clear components emerged: controversial and community-oriented themes. The variables materialism and misogyny loaded high onto one of the four components termed the controversial component. While this component only consisted of two themes, the high loadings (materialism, .80; misogyny, .83) represented a strong communality among these variables. A second component was also found with high loadings of the community-oriented themes. This component consisted of the variables political awareness, expression of culture, disaffection toward mainstream society, and community unity.

The final two variables, love and violence, did not reliably create a third component. This is most likely because these themes had low occurrence. The fourth component represented all of the variables, none of which loaded high onto this component. Based on these results, scales were created representing both controversial themes ($\alpha = .63$), and community-oriented ($\alpha = .70$) themes. These scales were created by summing across the separate continuous themes and then dividing by the number of themes in the scale. For instance, to create the controversial theme component, each video's score for misogyny (0–10) was added to the score of materialism (0–10), and then this total was divided by 2 to create the final representation of a controversial theme. A similar method was used in creating the community-orientated scale.

A paired samples *t* test was run in order to compare the frequency of each theme and address Research Question 1 which asked about the thematic content of rap music videos. A paired samples *t* test was chosen because each of the thematic scales was measured for each video; therefore, the variables compared came from the same group. In addition, this single test cuts down on the total number of possible tests one could undertake with individual themes thereby reducing the potential for inflated Type I error. This test computes the differences between values of the two variables for each case, and tests whether the average differs from 0. The results found that the controversial themes ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 2.23$) occurred significantly more often than the community-oriented themes ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 2.28$) ($t = 2.68$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that although both community-oriented and controversial themes exist, the more contentious messages are much more frequent in rap music.

Gender Differences and Themes at Character Level

Hypothesis 1 asked how the themes in rap music were perpetuated differently by men and women. In order to determine how men and women are related to the controversial and community-oriented scales created at the video level, a bi-variate correlation was run. In this analysis, the sex of characters (i.e., presence of males or females) within videos was correlated from the continuously measured scales derived from the multiple themes in the videos. This helped assess whether the appearance of male or female characters in a video was associated with the dominance of controversial or community oriented themes. The results of this test found that there is a significant, although somewhat small, relationship between sex of character and the thematic content such that male characters were more likely to appear in videos containing strong community-oriented themes, $r (549) = .11$, $p < .05$, and female characters were more likely to appear in videos in which controversial themes dominated, $r (549) = .11$, $p < .05$.

In order to investigate this relationship further, a logistic regression was run which tested how likely male and female characters in the videos were to be associated with various themes that dominated the videos. The regression included the seven thematic variables coded at the character level: materialism, misogyny, violence, political awareness, expression of culture, disaffection toward mainstream society, and community unity. Results of the analysis, shown in Table 2a, found that male characters (coded as 0) were significantly more likely to be associated with videos containing themes of materialism, expression of culture, and disaffection toward mainstream society ($p < .05$). Alternatively, as shown in Table 2b, female characters (coded as 1) were only significantly more likely to appear in videos emphasizing misogyny ($p > .001$). This regression equation found that 69% of the themes could be reclassified as being associated with either males or females.

As suggested above, there was some apparent disparity between the number of males and females appearing as main characters and supporting characters. In order to assure that the gender differences found among the video themes was

Table 2a
Results of Logistic Regression Analysis for Significant Thematic Predictors
Associated With the Appearance of Male Characters

Variables in the equation	B	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Materialism	−.570	15.616	1	.000	.566
Exp of culture	−.676	6.071	1	.014	.509
Dis. towards mainstream	−1.311	5.949	1	.015	.270

Note. *Male characters coded as 0, negative B correspond to male.

Table 2b
Results of Logistic Regression Analysis for Significant Thematic Predictors
Associated With the Appearance of Female Characters

Variables in the equation	B	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Misogynistic actions	.654	25.746	1	.000	1.924

Note. *Female characters coded as 1, positive B correspond to female characters.

not dependent upon the differences in main and supporting characters, additional analyses were performed. These examined gender differences among video themes when just the main or supporting characters were considered. The findings of these analyses both mirrored and supported the significant findings when all characters were considered. This suggests that any gender differences found were not dependent upon the type of character.

Afrocentric Features at the Character Level

Hypothesis 2 asked whether the individuals in rap music were more likely to have Eurocentric or Afrocentric features, and how these features differed by gender. Analyses for these questions were done using only the Black characters in the data set. Initial descriptive statistics found that there were variations in the Afrocentricity of male and female characters. For instance, 25% of the male characters had dark skin tones while only 13% of the female characters had darker skin tone. Alternatively, 17% of male characters as opposed to 34% of female characters had lighter skin tones. In order to investigate these gender differences further, a logistic regression was run using the six variables measuring Afrocentricity: hair length, hair texture, eye color, skin tone, width of nose, and thickness of lips. The results from the analysis, as seen in Tables 3a and 3b, found that male characters (coded as 0) had more natural hair, wider noses and darker skin tone while female characters (coded as 1) had straighter hair with thinner noses and lighter skin color ($x^2 = $

Table 3a
Results of Logistic Regression Analysis for Afrocentric Predictors of
Male Characters

Variables in equation	B	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Hair texture	−2.818	53.444	1	.000	.060
Width of nose	−.941	8.071	1	.004	.390

Note. *Male characters coded as 0, negative B correspond to being male.

Table 3b
Results of Logistic Regression Analysis for Afrocentric Predictors of
Female Characters

Variables in equation	B	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Skin tone	.555	4.758	1	.029	1.742

Note. *Female characters coded as 1, positive B correspond to being female.

404.95, $df = 6$, $p < .001$). On the basis of this regression equation, 89% of the Afrocentric variables could be correctly reclassified as pertaining to either men or women. Again, these were the same results obtained when supporting and main characters were analyzed separately.

Discussion

The results of this study have implications for better understanding the images in rap music videos. First, the analysis of controversial themes found that current rap music videos have placed an emphasis on more controversial themes, materialism and misogyny. Additionally, these themes are being perpetuated differently by men and women. While male characters are significantly more likely to be associated with a variety of themes, female characters are more likely to be placed in positions of objectification. Finally, the results of this study have shown that Black females in rap music videos are more likely than Black males to have Eurocentric features. Below, the results are discussed further, and implications for future research suggested.

Video Level Themes

At the video level, these results suggest that the themes occurring in rap music today differ from themes found in past analyses. In the past, research has focused on violence as a common deleterious theme in rap music. However, this analysis found

that this theme is less likely to occur than themes such as materialism and misogyny. For instance, one video entitled ''Nasty Girl'' featuring several popular rap artists featured the male characters in tuxedos and diamonds entertaining a number of women dressed in scant clothing and lounging in hot tubs. The prevalence of these images in the videos suggests that there has been a shift from violent portrayals to more misogynistic ones.

Additionally, the results here found that there was a low occurrence of the community-oriented themes that may have existed in the past (Baxter et al., 1985; Kubrin, 2005; Zillmann et al., 1995). Specifically, themes expressing culture, political awareness, expression of culture, and disaffection toward mainstream society are unlikely to occur. The results imply that more negative themes such as materialism and misogyny are more likely to occur. Therefore, it is important to consider what these messages may cultivate in viewers (Gerbner, 1969, 1973). Although past research has disagreed on whether rap music had positive or negative effects, a test of the messages found here would suggest that rap music is propagating more controversial themes, especially for individuals of color and women (Johnson et al., 1995; Zillmann et al., 1995). The largest demographic consumer of rap music includes teenage, White, and suburban males, while the majority of the characters are African American (Boehlert, 1995; Samuels, 1991). These images may provide schemas for White viewers that can be used in forming attitudes about Blacks in society. If the images are consistently more controversial, it may create a negative attitude toward Blacks in these viewers.

Character Level Gender Differences

The results show that male characters are more likely than female characters to be featured in videos containing a variety of themes, both controversial and community-oriented. Females, alternatively, are more likely than males to perpetuate only misogyny. This finding has two specific implications.

First, this suggests that male characters are able to perpetuate a wider variety of themes in their music videos than female characters. Male artists may use this freedom to express more community-oriented themes and use rap music as a vehicle to fight oppression. Female characters and artists, however, are confined to expressions of misogyny. This finding may reflect a pressure on female characters to put themselves in positions of submission to male characters (Dixon & Brooks, 2002; hooks, 1992). One example of this is the popular female artist Lil' Kim. Although a solo female artist, she often places herself in positions of submission in her own videos. She is often portrayed as a sexual object in her videos (Paul, 2001).

The gender differences found here may also have implications for the effects of rap music. Rap music videos' portrayals of male and female characters promote more stereotypical gender attitudes (Ward, Hansbrough & Walker, 2005); specifically, females in the videos appear to be placed in positions of sexual submission to their male counterparts. For example, one video by rapper 50 Cent entitled ''Candy

Shop'' featured depictions of a mansion, containing rooms full of women in lingerie, making themselves available for ''purchase'' to the rap artist.

It is important to consider the effects that a proliferation of these images can have on male, as well as female viewers. One study found that the perpetuation of misogyny in rap music videos can lead to the degradation of Black women, but not necessarily White women by White audiences (Gan, Zillmann, & Mitrook, 1997). The fact that rap music is largely consumed by White individuals suggests that these images can be especially detrimental to attributions made about African American women (Boehlert, 1995; Samuels, 1991). The images of misogyny that surround women in the videos may assist in the cultivation of women as sexual objects, and research should be conducted with individuals who are heavy viewers of this genre.

Character Level Afrocentric Features

The results of this study suggest that there are gender differences in the prominence of Afrocentric features. Male characters are more likely than female characters to have Afrocentric features. Female characters are more likely to have Eurocentric features including thinner noses and lips, and straighter and longer hair. This finding propagates the ideal image of beauty as Eurocentric. Male characters, however, do not face this same pressure and tend to vary more in their appearance (Maddox & Gray, 2002).

The gender differences found concerning Afrocentric features may be influencing viewers. The perpetuation of Eurocentric features may have a negative effect on Black female viewers. Research suggests that negative associations made with Black individuals in media do not lower their self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989). Typically this occurs because of attributional ambiguity and self-protecting properties used in curbing the influence of negative stereotypes in the media. However, the prominence of Black performers in rap music may have a different, and perhaps more negative, influence on African American viewers than other dominantly White media representations. This theory suggests that Blacks can guard against the influence of negative associations by attributing them to racism in media perpetuated by White media moguls. These same attributions can not be made when the media are created by Black individuals. However, because rap music is often produced by Black individuals, it is more difficult for viewers to do this with this specific musical genre. Therefore, the rap video images may have the potential to have negative effects on Black viewers.

As for the propagation of Eurocentric features, the characters in the videos may have a negative effect on female Black viewers and their self esteem because they glorify the White beauty standard. Furthermore, it may be that the phenomena of colorism is being perpetuated and reinforced by Black viewers and artists. For instance, two female artists, Alicia Keys and Indie Arie, produced records at similar times; however, Keys has been much more successful at entering the mainstream

music scene. Although not yet conclusively shown, one reason for Keys' success over Arie may be her more Eurocentric appearance.

When music videos produced by Black people support this definition of beauty, Black individuals may be negatively impacted because they are unable to employ self-protective properties (Crocker & Major, 1989). Furthermore, Baughman (1971) has concluded that the comparisons African Americans draw with others in the Black community is a crucial factor in developing self-identity. If African American audience members compare themselves to the African Americans with Eurocentric features found in the music videos, they may experience a decrease in self-esteem, especially for female viewers. For male viewers, identification with these images may persuade African American males to seek out women with more Eurocentric features as potential mates. Furthermore, male prevalence of Afrocentric features and especially darker skin tones offers a stark contrast with the Eurocentric features of the females. These images may reinforce the association of African American males as criminals.

In contrast, African American viewers overcome Eurocentric beauty standards set forth in other types of media so they may be able to do so in rap music as well. It may be that Black individuals view the perpetuation of Eurocentric features as imposed by White culture allowing them to dis-identify with these representations. Now that this study has shown that there is a prominence of Eurocentric features in rap music videos, future research needs to examine whether or not these images have a negative impact.

Limitations and Future Research

This analysis has examined the content of rap music videos. However, further research is necessary in order to understand whether these depictions affect viewers. Specifically, future research should concentrate on examining individuals who are heavy viewers of rap music. The images found here may provide negative representations of African Americans to White viewers. Research should examine whether or not these individuals hold certain schemas about women, specifically African American women, as sexual objects. Additionally, research could be conducted with Black viewers to test the tenets of attributional ambiguity. Specifically, whether female Black viewers of rap music hold a more Eurocentric standard of beauty, and whether or not this is affecting their self-esteem.

In addition to researching the effects of consuming rap music, future research should also consider why specific themes are more prevalent than others. It could be that artists choose the thematic material in the videos; however, it may be that producers are making the decision as to what should be prominent in the videos. Furthermore, although producers and performers in rap music are often Black, the industry overall is still largely controlled and consumed by Whites (Boehlert, 1995). In the case of female artists and characters, for example, it is important for future research to consider the amount of agency these women feel in placing themselves

in objectifying positions. It may be that they feel pressured by producers to use these images even though they personally disagree with them.

There are also important limitations related to the study that need to be addressed. First, as described previously, although the set of coders who participated in this study did come from varying backgrounds, there were no African American coders. The study attempted to correct for this by having an African American scholar participate in the creation of the codebook; however, having an African American assist with coding would have provided a more representative set of coders. It is believed that the findings of the coders are still representative of many viewers, especially the substantial White audience of rap music videos (Rose, 1994; Samuels, 1991).

An additional limitation was related to the sample, which consisted of videos from one specific year, and only included the most popular videos. This sample is representative of current ''popular'' rap videos; however, it does not draw from the entire population of rap music videos available. It is possible that this specific sample may not include more obscure or classical videos that influence listeners. Future research should consider this and test for differences that may occur between these videos and the current popular videos analyzed here. Additionally, technological advances have encouraged the use of alternative outlets for music videos including on-line and podcast videos. The sample used here included only those videos aired on television. There may be some differences between videos on television and those appearing online or in podcasts. Reports show that of the 4.5 million individuals with Apple video iPods, about 16% have used them to watch videos (Wallenstein, 2006). Research suggests that these findings indicate a growth in this method for viewing videos.

Conclusion

The results of this study help to offer a more comprehensive view of what is occurring in rap music videos. In the past, there was much debate over what was actually being seen in these videos. This analysis helps to clarify this debate showing that the common themes found in videos of the past are shifting, and it is important to understand how shifts in society reflect those found in music videos. Additionally, this research suggests that there are important gender differences occurring that prefer men over women. Finally, the results here reiterate the fact that there is an emphasis on Eurocentric beauty in our society. All these findings provide the opportunity for future research, specifically the effect that rap music videos may have on its young viewers.

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