

2000

Does "Gangsta Rap" Music Cross Good Judgment Lines and Decency Values?

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Does "Gangsta Rap" Music Cross Good

Judgment Lines and Decency Values?
(TITLE)

BY

Ajay Kumar Ojha

1976 -

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in Speech Communication

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2000

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Running head: GANGSTA RAP MUSIC AND DECENCY VALUES

Does "Gangsta Rap" Music Cross Good Judgment Lines and Decency Values?

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Dedication

To my peers in the Speech Communication Department at Eastern Illinois University, with the help of God, may we all have success in our future endeavors.

Disclaimer

Due to the explicit content and language in this paper, it may be offensive for some readers. Please be advised that reading this paper is at your own discretion.

Abstract

There has been much controversy associated with "gangsta rap" music over the 1990's decade. This manuscript takes a closer look at "gangsta rap" music through a descriptive analysis, exploring these topics: social construction of reality, sexism, violence, community actions, and their possible negative influences on societal values. The positive and negative implications involving "gangsta rap" music are compared using lyrics from artists whose music has been in question in the past. Using a semantic differential survey and focus group interviews, "gangsta rap" music is analyzed, examining its exposure to people, possible promotion and communication of negative societal values. The study involved one hundred-twenty students for the semantic differential survey at a medium sized mid-western university. The results indicated that African-Americans had a higher exposure rate to "gangsta rap" music after hearing fifteen-second clips than Euro-Americans. Pretests indicated significant differences between African-Americans and Euro-Americans regarding exposure to "gangsta rap" music and musical selection. It was also determined from two focus group interviews that seven variables were in common between the factor analysis test and the focus group interviews involved in the study.

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Review of Literature

With times changing constantly, today's society has become more accustomed to many unique musical genres. People listen to jazz, classical, oldies, and good old-fashioned rock n' roll. In the past twenty years, a new music emerged from the streets. This music was called rap. After approximately 10 years, a new genre connected to rap music broke off into mainstream music. It was appropriately named "gangsta rap" because most artists portray gangstas and rap about the gangsta life. Michael Eric Dyson, a Baptist Minister, accomplished author, and professor defines "gangsta rap" as music that "crudely exposes harmful beliefs and practices that are often maintained with deceptive civility in much mainstream society" (Dyson, 1996, p. 177). Dyson further states "gangsta rap's greatest 'sin' may be that it tells the truth about practices and beliefs that rappers hold in common with the mainstream and with black elites" (Dyson, 1996, p. 186). This music first started with the hard-hitting group of N.W.A. (Niggas With Attitudes) (Dyson, 1996, p. 172). Ever since, many artists have come out with similar styles involving this music because it sells to the public and generates money for the music industry. The people who often purchase this music are Euro-American suburban males between the ages 15-25 (MTV, 1992). Today's artists, such as Snoop Dogg, the late Tupac Shakur, and Dr. Dre have put out hit after hit with multi-platinum albums.

There are three different aspects involving "gangsta rap" music that are addressed in this manuscript: Sexism, Violence, and Community Action. The first issue is women and why "gangsta rap" may or may not render them as objects. Secondly, violence

as an issue deals with "gangsta rap" music and its promotion in lyrics. The last topic discusses attention to a crisis in the community by looking at the actions and the understandings involving activists.

Sexism

"Gangsta rap" artists have been associated with degrading women in their song's lyrics for quite sometime.

Pull up to a red light beside a carload of head-boppers blasting one of those new rap songs, and before the light turns green, you've heard talk of five sex acts, four murders, three rapes, two drug sales and one slap across the face of a 'ho bitch' who gets 'outta line' (Chappell, 1995, p. 25).

This in-your-face music, associated mainly with "gangsta rap," disgusts most people while it is listening pleasure for others. Critics say these X-rated artists have begun to think that "its okay to do just about anything" (Chappell, 1995, p. 25). This music, according to some activists degrades African-American women. C. Delores Tucker, National Political Congress of Black Women's chair, states "Our kids have adopted the gangsta culture as a direct result of this music" (Chappell, 1995, p. 25). She also states "We have kids killing kids, little boys raping little girls memorizing every word of these violent and pornographic songs" (Chappell, 1995, p. 25). In Dr. Dre's song "Bitches ain't Shit," from the multi-platinum 1992 release The Chronic, the chorus line starts:

Bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks, lick on deez nuts and suck the dick. Gets the fuck out and when you're done, then I hops in my ride to make a quick run. Bitches ain't shit (Young, 1992, "Bitches").

Lyrics, such as this example, have become a dominant force in the industry and have set a precedent for other "gangsta rap" artists to use in their music. Tucker organized national meetings and news conferences "to call for this 'gutter music' to be taken off record-store shelves and replaced by songs that celebrate love, respect women and brotherly love, and promote living right" (Chappell, 1995, p. 25). Tucker believes that "gangsta rap" artists "distribute the music more out of disrespect for African-Americans than respect for free speech" (Chappell, 1995, p. 25). "Tell me why are Black singers allowed to call Black women 'bitches' and 'hoes' and it's all right," she said. "But when Michael Jackson [offends White groups] he has to apologize and re-record his song?" she asked referring to a controversial song off his History album (Chappell, 1995, p. 26). Many activists and elders feel the same way as C. Delores Tucker when it comes down to degrading women.

Another way activists have viewed sexism in "gangsta rap" music is that more misogynistic acts occur because gender equality is hindered by a sexist society and rappers contribute to this abuse (Krohn, 1995, p. 145). Activists say these artists refer to their partners, as "bitches" and "whores" and they appear to take pride in describing their abuse involving power in sexual situations (Krohn, 1995, p. 145). Sexually explicit titles are also frequent in Dr. Dre's "Let Me Ride." The title is a double definition; "Ride" is also a term for sexual encounter. Other groups, such as Dr. Dre's N.W.A. have explicit lyrics which may or may not degrade women as follows:

This is the bitch that did the whole crew/She did it so much we made bets on who the ho would love to go through.../And she lets you videotape her/And if you got a gang of niggas the bitch'll let you rape her (Krohn, 1995, p. 145).

This controversy was at a highpoint in 1991 when the rap group 2 Live Crew, a group from Miami who are still known for their hard-core sexual discourse, were taken to court for misogynistic expressions in their music. 2 Live Crew won the case under the First Amendment rights, "Freedom of Speech" (Holland, 1992, p. 6). According to other activists such as Tricia Rose, "Black women occupy the step under black males because they are the product of two handicaps their gender and their race" (Krohn, 1995, p. 150). Also according to Rose, "The stories narrated rejection; tales of sexual domination falsely relieve the lack of self-worth and limited access to economic and social markers for heterosexual masculine power" (Krohn, 1995, p. 152). Rose further states that "Many critics are likely to attribute the growing misogyny to rap music, when their feelings have prevailed for a number of years, intensifying through sexual harassment incidents and hindrance of power achievement by females" (Krohn, 1995, p. 154).

There are women rap artists such as Queen Latifah, who do not use "gangsta rap" lyrics in their music. Queen Latifah's video "Ladies First" is a video that details an analysis exploring women's experiences (Roberts, 1994). "Ladies First," is a strong connection that African-Americans need to be aware of their Africa roots" (Roberts, 1994, p. 245). "This video focuses on promoting women's importance, that demands equal treatment for women, and the need for women to support each other" (Roberts, 1994, p. 246).

C. Delores Tucker has also stated in the past that National Political Congress of Black Women members are in “direct action in order to make our concerns heard about "gangsta rap" and misogynistic lyrics that degrade and degenerate women” (Holland, 1994, p. 5).

Many "gangsta rap" artists use sex and degrade women in their lyrics to make their music. These misogynistic lyrics can be interpreted by many as entertainment or interpreted as sexism and humiliation pertaining to women. Organizations headed by and affiliated with C. Delores Tucker have expressed that the albums and songs from "gangsta rap" music depict women as degraded individuals who are treated unfairly.

Violence

Society in recent years has evolved in a way where more things are being accepted and tolerated than in previous times. Along with these ever-changing times, violence in music such as "gangsta rap" has been extremely prevalent. In the 1990's, some people thought the lyrics in "gangsta rap" encouraged a climate where violence was acceptable. The industry has asked in the past

whether gangsta rap is going too far in its glorification of gang violence and drugs. The outcry comes in the whole of the shooting murder of Christopher Wallace, a.k.a. Notorious B.I.G., a promising artist whose death similarities are ultimately close to the demise of Shakur (Farley, 1997, p. 44).

Tupac Shakur was also an artist who died at the hands of another man in 1996 (Farley, 1996, p. 70). It seems that Notorious B.I.G. and Shakur became victims concerning their

own music. Others have called for an end to "gangsta rap" because it is connected to violence (Farley, 1997; Samuels & Leland, 1996). After Shakur's 1996 murder, Minister Conrad Muhammad of the Nation of Islam held a hip-hop summit in Harlem, NY to encourage non-violence. Minister Muhammad states:

There needs to be one more murder. Gangsta rap needs to be murdered. [It] is absolutely genocidal. [It] holds out of hope. The lyrics can become like drugs, almost like a narcotic in a young person's life. We need rap. It's a critical vehicle for youth to express themselves. But the negativity is destroying what these young rappers have built (Farley, 1997, p. 46).

It seems that violence has been feeding itself. Tupac Shakur was involved in an incident in 1994 when he was shot outside a New York City recording studio ("Rapper, actor," 1994, p. 27). Shakur "thought he was set up by a rival rapper, and did all he could to stir the bad blood with East Coast rappers, even rapping on one record, You claim to be a player, but I f--ed your wife" (Samuels & Leland, 1996, p. 66). Later on, when Shakur signed with Death Row records, he released that record as a single that "threatened the Bad Boy rappers with violent retaliation and bragged that he had slept with Wallace's wife, the singer Faith Evans (something she denies)" (Farley, 1997, p. 47). The song states:

First off, fuck your bitch and the clique you claim, West Side when we ride
coming quick with game. You claim to be a player, but I fucked your wife.
We bust on Bad Boy niggas, you fucked for life. We Bad Boy Killas! (Makaveli,
Hussein, Kadafi, & E.D.I, 1996, "Hit").

Personal attacks such as this illustration are incidents that occur when rappers have hatred for someone else in the industry. Some might think that these incidents are serious, while others may think that it is only a promotion to sell albums. In the last three years, both camps' representatives have come forward to say there is no bad blood between them (Chappell, 1995, p. 27). The camps specify that the media has portrayed something that was never an issue (Chappell, 1995, p. 27). Most artists rap about what they know. Many "gangsta rap" artists are basing musical themes on "intrigue, gangland camaraderie, killer's lying in wait" (Farley, 1997, p. 47). Notorious B.I.G. once told Peter Spirer, director of the hip-hop documentary Rhyme and Reason, "the hardest thing I ever had to overcome is really making the transition from being a street hustling nigger to, like, a star" (Farley, March 1997, p. 47). "Friends say Wallace only rapped about what he knew to make enough to leave it all behind said Lance 'Un' Rivera, a close of friend of Wallace's" (Farley, 1997, p. 47). He said he wanted to move his family down to Atlanta and build them a house and write a book (Farley, 1997, p. 47). "A variety of social problems are conveyed in rap lyrics narrating daily events in cities, but which may be irrelevant to those who are not affected" (Krohn, 1995, p. 146).

"Gangsta rap" artists have also rapped about the police and how they have influenced the lyrics in "gangsta rap." "In 1989, two years before the Rodney King incident, N.W.A. wrote a song about the perceived relations between blacks and police officers" (Krohn, 1995, p. 148). It was called "Fuck the Police." The lyrics include:

Some police think/ they have the authority to kill the minority/
taking out a police will make my day (Krohn, 1995, p. 148).

“The King beating was considered by many to be a tragic and outrageous event. However, many blacks claim that there are numerous Rodney Kings whose pain and sufferings no one shares or acknowledges” (Krohn, 1995, p. 148). Cypress Hills’ song "Pigs," (which refers to the police) starts with a reporter’s voice saying:

Climbing out of both windows is a male Hispanic and a possible male black.

They have vehicles parked... and the music starts abruptly, ending with the sound of the police officer phoning and sending a signal (Krohn, 1995, p. 151).

B-Real, Cypress Hills’ lead singer, said the song was inspired when an LAPD officer pushed him into a parked car, but was caught because the incident was videotaped. The incident helped Cypress Hill make a song for an album that sold two million copies (Holland, 1996, p. 8). The police, who actually promoted the violence, contributed to the group’s success in "gangsta rap" music (Holland, 1996, p. 8). With Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G.’s deaths, the rap industry and its critics have looked at the lyrics to determine the violence amount that is allegedly spoken, and how it communicates and promotes violence in the community.

Community Actions

Many controversial topics related to "gangsta rap" have been associated with opposing views including famous activists, lobbyists, and prominent people who explain the issues that concern them and the community. These people call attention to a crisis in communities and have become active getting messages across from both sides involving "gangsta rap" lyrics.

In the mid 1990's, C. Delores Tucker was working on stopping Time Warner Incorporation from releasing "gangsta rap" albums that she said promoted violence and women's sexual abuse. They made television ads against Time Warner and sued Death Row records and its distributor, Interscope (Dunham, 1995, p. 41). Interscope Records filed a counter suit in accordance with the Los Angeles Federal Court that made allegations that Tucker tried to steal the label, Death Row Records, away from Interscope for a new Time Warner Incorporation backed distribution company that she would have controlled (Morris, 1995, p. 8). At the time, Death Row's attorney David Kenner said

it is Death Row's position that Delores Tucker has demeaned both Suge Knight and the company, that she has misrepresented herself... and it's our view, based upon what we've seen and heard, that her publicly stated motives are not aligned with private intentions (Morris, 1995, p. 8).

Tucker and the National Political Congress of Black Women took more actions during this time. They protested and demonstrated at Sam Goody's, a chain where music can be purchased (Holland, 1994, p. 5). William Bennett, EMPOWER America director, and Tucker have "angrily accused the heads of Time Warner of moral irresponsibility from publishing violent, hateful and misogynistic recordings" ("Fighting," 1995, p. 35).

Others who have joined forces with Bennett and Tucker have been castigating what they said is "the industry's lack of conscience in selling children's records that glorify murder and drug use and celebrate the beating and raping of women" (Holland, 1996, p. 8). At a news conference in May 1996, this coalition announced a radio and ad campaign to alert

parents to the problem and “encourage them to target Time Warner, BMG, Polygram, Thorn-EMI, and Sony Music” (Holland, 1996, p. 8).

Another activist against "gangsta rap" was former presidential candidate Bob Dole. In his running for presidency in 1996, Dole “singled out Time Warner and denounced it for mainstreaming deviancy” (Sandler, 1995, p. 1). According to Dole, the problem is that “record executives who know how profitable some music is but have no idea as to its lyrical content” (Sandler, 1995, p. 1). Furthermore, organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) also condemned "gangsta rap" lyrics' popularity because it utilizes sexism, racism, and violence. Their protest against the people and companies involved in the promotion involving violent music resulted in several radio stations discriminating against "gangsta rap" broadcasts (Alston, 1994, p. 1). According to Dyson,

one important discussion of gangsta rap has been overlooked, perhaps because it is hidden in plain sight. Rappers like Notorious B.I.G., Tupac Shakur, Snoop Doggy Dogg and Bone Thugs-n-Harmony have all grappled with one of the oldest, most vexing theological issues: the problem of evil (Dyson, 1997, p. 34).

Dyson further states that these rappers have to deal with the contradictions pertaining to police brutality, white racism, and economic inequality (Dyson, 1997, p. 34).

“Paradoxically, the fact that rappers are struggling with the subjects of suffering and evil proves that in fact they are connected to moral tradition they have seemingly rejected” (Dyson, 1997, p. 34). According to Dyson, Master P (another gangsta rapper) confronted with evil and that lead him to conclude that life, or “faith in God” has become

meaningless (1997, p. 34). Master P states in the article “I guess life is real, but I know deep inside that I was dealt a bad deal/but life has no meaning’/ We was born dreamin’ but I was born schemin’” (Dyson, 1997, p. 34). According to KRS-1, an artist in the industry from New York, “Gangsta rap remains controversial because it explicates the continuing struggle between the wealthiest and poorest citizens” (McLaren, 1995, p. 47). Some lyrics demonstrate the struggle that the lower class has to go through and the treatment they receive by the public. An example is lyrics from Ice Cube’s single, “Growing Up in da Hood,” from the Boyz-n-the Hood soundtrack. The song states:

Growin up in da hood, life wasn’t always good cause people looked at us if we didn’t understand, what’s goin on in the world today. Jus’ cause we from another place doesn’t mean we need to be disgraced. They don’t know nothin’ because we a part tryin’ to make a difference jus’ like you (Cube, 1991, “Boyz”).

The song illustrates that the person in this situation is like most, trying to make a difference, but being looked upon as if he is an ignorant person that has no clue to what is going on in the world.

Based on the research reviewed, the following research question is offered:

RQ: Is "gangsta rap" music perceived to communicate negative societal values?

Theory

"Gangsta rap" is a genre of rap music that deals with harsh realities in a cruel world. While other forms of rap music may discuss happier situations, which may or may not involve sexism, violence, and community actions, "gangsta rap" music discusses one's reality. There are several theories in communication that offers critical analyses of cultural reality. One theory that was first expressed by Alfred Schultz is the social construction of reality (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 179). Robyn Penman has defined social construction of reality, commonly known by Kenneth Gergen as the social constructionist movement, in five sets of assumptions (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). The first assumption is *Communication action is voluntary* (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman describe this in The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in Sociology of Knowledge as "the reality of everyday life is organized around the 'here' of my body and the 'now' of my present" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 22).

The second assumption is *Knowledge is a social product* (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). Berger and Luckman describe this as "the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 3). The authors also state "the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 3). The third assumption is *Knowledge is contextual* (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). It is described by Berger and Luckman as dealing with "not only with the empirical values of 'knowledge' in human societies, but also with the process by which any body of 'knowledge' comes to be

socially established as 'reality'" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 3). The fourth assumption is that *Theories create worlds* (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). Berger and Luckman state:

The world of everyday life is structured both spatially and temporally. The spatial structure is quite peripheral to our present considerations. Suffice it to point out that it, too, has a social dimension by virtue of the fact that my manipulatory zone intersects with that of others. More important for our present purpose is the temporal structure of everyday life (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 26).

The fifth and final analysis is *Scholarship is value laden* (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). Penman describes this as "what we 'see' in an investigation, or what we explain in a theory of communication, is always affected by the values embedded in the approach used" (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). The basic values and assumptions of social construction of reality can be used to examine "gangsta rap" music.

"Gangsta rap" music follows four qualities of communication as defined by Penman. It is constitutive for some listeners who perceive it as their social world. Furthermore, it is contextual for those who understand "gangsta rap" to be during particular places and times (ex. Nightclubs, hanging out with friends, parties) (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 180). Third, "gangsta rap" is a diverse communication form and dynamic genre. It has changed over time since its public inception in 1988. There are some commonalties between its beginnings and where "gangsta rap" is today. However, "gangsta rap" artists dress differently and rap about different things as opposed to previous years. Finally, "gangsta rap" is dynamic. It is constantly changing and adapting to the music industry and societal culture.

To further elaborate on the social construction of reality via "gangsta rap" music, we can take a look at *capta* and *data* through a phenomenological standpoint. According to Mark Orbe, author of Constructing Co-Cultural Theory: An Explication of Culture, Power, and Communication, "capta refers to what is taken from experiences and allows people to assign meanings to themselves" (Orbe, 1998, p. 38). For example, if I listen to "gangsta rap" music and immerse myself into the culture that goes with it (ex. swearing and cursing, dressing a certain way), then I have assigned meaning to the music and its way of life. This is the true "capta" experience.

"Data, on the other hand, refers to what is given and the collection process involves gathering information from participants by which interviewers find meaning via a preset agenda" (Orbe, 1998, p. 38). For example, a focus group helps to gather data. I further elaborate on this later in this manuscript by giving instances from two focus group interviews on "gangsta rap" music.

Although "gangsta rap" music was analyzed through a descriptive analysis utilizing specific incidents and events, people, actions, and lyrics, it was also analyzed through social construction theory. There are several other methods that can help to interpret "gangsta rap" music. One such method utilized for this manuscript was a semantic differential survey consisting of one hundred-twenty students at a medium sized university. Another method was two focus group interviews, which supported data collected from the review of literature and semantic differential survey.

Based on the research reviewed, the following hypotheses are offered:

H1: People with exposure to "gangsta rap" rate it higher than people who have less exposure to "gangsta rap."

H2: "Gangsta rap" promotes negative societal values.

Method (Surveys and Focus Group Interviews)

Sample

Subjects for the surveys were students at a medium sized mid-western university in the United States. One hundred-twenty subjects were selected from seven classes. Two surveys were discarded due to contamination. The subjects were taken from an introductory course in Speech Communication. The subjects varied in age from eighteen to thirty-three. One hundred-one students were Euro-American (87%), fourteen students were African-American (12%), and one student was Other (1%). Two people chose not to answer the question regarding race.

Subjects were approached by the author, who requested their participation in a "study about gangsta rap music," and were told that participation would require no more than ten minutes of their time. One hundred-twenty subjects completed the rating instrument.

Subjects for the focus group interviews were students at a medium sized mid-western university in the United States. Eleven subjects were selected from two classrooms. Four subjects participated in the first focus group interview. Seven subjects participated in the second focus group interview. The subjects were taken from an

introductory course in Speech Communication. The subjects varied in age from eighteen to twenty-one. Nine subjects were Euro-American (81.8%) and two students were African-American (18.1%). Subjects were approached individually by the author, who requested their participation in a “study about gangsta rap music.”

Procedure

The research for the surveys was conducted by the author who used seven classes that were taught during Summer and Fall 2000. Subjects filled out an information sheet requesting age, race, and their perspective on "gangsta rap," rock, classical, and country music (See Appendix A). Subjects proceeded to fill out a semantic differential pretest on country music and then a pretest on "gangsta rap" music (See Appendix A). The pretests were alike for reliability (See Appendix A). For validity, the results showed differences between pretests and posttests (See Results). The author then played four fifteen-second clips of country music followed by four-fifteen second clips of "gangsta rap" music (See Appendix B). The author followed up by asking the students to fill out a posttest on "gangsta rap" music. The pretest and posttest were the same (See Appendix A). Upon completion of the posttest, subjects were thanked by the researcher and allowed to wait for “class time” to begin.

Research for the focus group interviews were conducted by the author who used subjects from two classes taught during Fall 2000. Subjects were asked to participate in a focus group interview about “gangsta rap music.” The subjects were also

asked to fill out a permission slip so the author could tape record the discussion. Subjects were also told that they would remain anonymous participants (See Appendix C).

The interview protocol used for the focus groups was developed from the survey (See Appendix A). The following questions were incorporated into the interviews: (1) Do you tend to listen to gangsta rap music? (2) Can you describe gangsta rap music? (3) What does gangsta rap music promote? (4) What do you believe is the most influential term associated with gangsta rap music? The audiotape regarding the four main questions was transcribed at a later date (See Appendix D). Upon completion of the focus group interview, subjects were thanked by the researcher and allowed to leave.

Instrumentation

Independent variable. The word “exposure” was operationalized by The American Heritage Dictionary as “the act or an instance of exposing or the condition of being exposed” (1994). Furthermore, the word “expose” was defined as “to make visible or known; reveal” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1994).

The word “promote” was operationalized by The American Heritage Dictionary “to raise in promotion or rank; to contribute to the progress or growth of; further” (1994). Furthermore, the word “promote” was defined as “to advocate” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1994).

Dependent Variable. The word “value” was operationalized by The American Heritage Dictionary as “worth as measured in usefulness or importance; merit” (1994).

Furthermore, the word “value” was defined as “a principle, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1994).

Definition. The term “focus group interview” was operationalized by Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods as a relatively open discussion about a specific product or program among a small group of people (usually five to seven) led by a facilitator, who introduces topic, encourages participation, and probes for information in a flexible, interactive way to elicit subjects’ views (Frey et al, 1991, p. 350).

Statistical Analysis

A t-test was conducted to determine the mean value, t-value, and probability level for the first two questions of the pretest / posttest between African-Americans and Euro-Americans: 1) Race and 2) Residence.

A factor analysis was conducted to determine the factors for those rating "gangsta rap" "low" and those rating "gangsta rap" "high." This was operationalized by the number indicated on the survey when rating "gangsta rap" music on a scale from 1 to 10. If the number indicated was between 1-5, then they were grouped into “low” (1). If the number indicated was 6-10, they were grouped into “high” (2). Sixty-four (54.2%) surveys were grouped into “high” and fifty-four (45.7%) into “low.”

Analysis

The audiotape and written transcriptions of each interview provided data for the final analysis. Both interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. The focus group interviews were informal and conversational in order to allow the participants to describe their experiences regarding "gangsta rap" music. Data from each interview were then transcribed.

Results

Results of t-test

There was no significant difference between the pretests and posttests. The t-value for the first question regarding race was significant because the value was .0001, less than .05. There were one hundred-one Euro-American students (87%) and fourteen African-American students (12%).

This study also proved that African-American students who took the "gangsta rap" music posttest after the subjects heard the fifteen-second clips actually rated "gangsta rap" music higher than Euro-Americans at .02.

The pretest differences between the African-Americans and Euro-Americans were not significantly different. However, the pretests in general were significant at .001. The predisposition influenced the first hypothesis: People with exposure to "gangsta rap" rated it higher than people who have less exposure to "gangsta rap."

The second question on the survey, City Currently Living In, was not significant because the t-value was .058, higher than .05. One hundred-four students (88.8%) were living in rural areas, while thirteen students (11.1%) were residing in urban areas.

Results of factor analysis

The following variables were loaded together for the "low" group with factor one: *Sexist, Violent, Racist, Aggressive*; termed as Negative reaction. Factor two variables were *good and pleasant*; termed as Positive reactions. Factor three variables for the "low" group were *shallow and dishonest*. The Factor four variable for the "low" group was *discriminate*. The criteria for independence were .60 and .40 (See Table One). The following variables were loaded for the "high" group for factor one: *Biased, Racist, Violent, Aggressive, Insensitive, Disrespectful*; termed as Negative reactions. The following variables were loaded together for factor 2 in the "high" group: *Boring, Bad, Unnecessary*. The factor three loaded variable was *dishonest*. There were no variables loaded for factor four. The criteria for independence were .60 and .40 (See Table Two).

Results of focus group interviews

There were seven common variables between the two groups of "low" and "high": *Sexist, Biased, Violent, Racist, Aggressive, Insensitive, and Disrespectful* (See Table Three). The predisposition influenced the second hypothesis: "Gangsta rap" promotes negative societal values. The results indicated that the questions asked to both groups had common factor variables from the factor analysis of the semantic differential.

The subjects in the first focus group were categorized as subjects who feel medium to strong that "gangsta rap" music promotes negative societal values. The results for the first question were that two people listened to "gangsta rap" music, while two people did not listen to the music. Answers to the second question were vivid descriptions of "gangsta rap." Some examples by the various participants were as follows:

"Just basically trying to tell a story"

"True gangstas talk about what happened"

"They talk about drugs, rape, stuff that's going on"

"People getting beat down"

Although these answers were across the board, they definitely relate to sexism, violence, and community actions. The third question brought out more in-depth answers from the subjects:

"Like I said earlier, it promotes violence, drug use"

"It depends on the rapper and who is listening to it"

"Money is all good"

"All it has is killing and stuff"

Some more positive answers were also discussed by the subjects:

"It promotes values and church, family."

"God, friendship"

"It's the music you are listening to, not the person"

While the discussion was turning positive at points, it came back to the negativity relating to sexism, violence, and community actions in the last question:

"The word "nigga" is a term of rap"

"Bitches, hoes, and chicken heads every other word"

"Money"

Other terms and a summary of expressions by the various subjects can be seen in Table Four.

The second group of subjects in the second focus group interview can be categorized as subjects who feel strongly that "gangsta rap" music promotes negative societal values. Three people listened to "gangsta rap" music, while four did not. The second question asked about a description of "gangsta rap" music. Some of the answers given were also across the board:

"Can't understand the words"

"Fun to dance to"

"I just don't like it"

"I don't like the bad messages"

"A whole lot of bumpin"

"Jibberish mixed with the f-word every 3 words"

"It's like bad, it's different"

"Some of it is depressing"

"Poem with melody"

"It sucks"

"It doesn't sound good because it's bad"

"It's not really music, words with a sound board and screaming"

Although the majority of quotes are negative, a few were positive which led to mixed reviews. Some of the subjects who expressed positive expressions, also felt negative about "gangsta rap" music in question three. Some of the answers are as follows:

"Nothing, bad messages"

"Violence"

"It promotes where they are from"

"Kind of gang violence, Eastside, Westside and killing"

"Drugs, sex, weed, pimping"

"All kinds of bad drugs"

"Suicide"

"It's depressing"

"Sometimes they talk about loving their mother"

"Life experiences"

"It might have something to do with violence"

"They all talk about bitches and hoes, maybe not every song"

"To get their point across, experience emotions"

The final question from the second group was influential terms associated with "gangsta rap" music. Almost all of the quotes given were strongly negative. Some of the answers are as follows:

"Homie"

"Drugs"

"2 of America's Most Wanted"

"Tupac"

"Thug"

"Money"

"Murder"

"Guns"

"Los Angeles"

"Compton"

"Ghettos"

"Gangs"

"Explicit lyrics"

"Hoes"

"Drugs"

"Ghetto booty"

"Artistic expression"

Many of the influential terms are specifically related to *Sexism, Biased, Violence, Racist, Aggressive, Insensitive, and Disrespectful*. These terms directly relate to how the second focus group interview feels on the promotion of negative societal values. For a summary of terms and quotes, please see Table Five.

Table One

Results of Factor Analysis - Low Group

Factor One - Negative Reactions	Sexist Violent Racist Aggressive
Factor Two - Positive Reactions	Good Pleasant
Factor Three - Shallow and Dishonest	Shallow Dishonest
Factor Four - Discriminate	Discriminate

Table Two

Results of Factor Analysis - High Group

Factor One - Negative Reactions	Biased Violent Racist Aggressive Insensitive Disrespectful
Factor Two - Negative (2) Reactions	Boring Bad Unnecessary
Factor Three - Dishonest	Dishonest
Factor Four - None	None

Table Three

Results of Factor Analysis - Common Variables

"Low" and "High" Group Variables	Sexist Biased Violent Racist Aggressive Insensitive Disrespectful
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Table Four

Results of Focus Group Interview – Group One

Question One - Listen	Two people listen Two people do not listen
Question Two - Describe	"Real vs. False" "Descriptions of childhood and what happened" "Beats and Words"
Question Three - Promote	"Depends on the person who listening to it" "How you were raised by parenting" "Violence" "Drugs" "Drug Use" "Rape" "Disrespect"
Question Four – Influential Term	"Bitches and hoes" "Money" "Big houses" "Nigga"

Table Five

Results of Focus Group Interview- Group Two

Question One - Listen	Three people listen Four people do not listen
Question Two - Describe	"Can't understand the words" "Fun to dance to" "Good music" "Bad messages"
Question Three - Promote	"Bumpin" "Gibberish mixed with the 'f' word" "Depression" "Nothing" "Violence" "Gang violence" "Killings" "Drugs" "Sex" "Weed" "Pimpin" "Suicide" "Why not to be in a gang" "Life experiences" "Support community" "Love and your mother"
Question Four – Influential Term	"Gangs" "Tupac" "Money" "Murder" "Guns" "Los Angeles" "Hoes," "Drugs," "Compton," "Ghetto" "Explicit Lyrics"

Discussion

This study addressed the research question: Is "gangsta rap" music perceived to communicate negative societal values? This study also addressed the hypotheses of whether people with exposure to "gangsta rap" rate it higher than people who have less exposure to "gangsta rap" and does "gangsta rap" music promote negative societal values. Results supported in answering the research question and indicated that there was no significant difference between the pretests and posttests. Results also indicated that race and exposure to "gangsta rap" music is a significant factor between African-Americans and Euro-Americans. Results also indicate that "gangsta rap" music clearly communicates and promotes negative societal values as well as positive reactions. The positive reaction factors were good and pleasant. This may be a result of people judging it as music that is good and pleasant "to the ears." Results indicated that the pretest differences between African-Americans and Euro-Americans were significantly not different, however the pretests in general were significant. Results from the findings preliminary indicate that the hypotheses are supported.

In addition, many terms discussed in the two focus group interviews were negative and supported the common factor variables: *Sexism, Biased, Violence, Racist, Aggressive, Insensitive, and Disrespectful*. Although the first focus group was categorized as medium to strong that "gangsta rap" music promotes negative societal values, some words used were "violence," "drugs," "rape," "disrespect," "bitches and hoes," "nigga," and "bad." The second focus group was categorized as strong that "gangsta rap" music promotes negative societal values. Words used by the second focus

group interview were “bad messages,” “gibberish,” “violence,” “drugs,” “sex,” “gangs,” “hoes,” and “murder.” Three positive terms supported good and pleasant from the factor analysis of the low group: “good music,” “support community,” “love and your mother.”

Limitations

There were two limitations involved with this study. The first limitation was the number of subjects. The results indicate that this study was a random sample of college students at a mid-western university. To get a broader sense of college students and their feelings on "gangsta rap," another researcher would have to sample more subjects.

The second limitation involved with study is that the results cannot be generalized to various organizations or groups of people. For example, this study involved college students. There would have to be another study conducted to find out the results from other groups. For example, senior citizens, high-school students, and the middle-aged working class may have similar results that support this study.

The third limitation involved with this study was the survey group was not diverse enough. The sample included 87% Euro-Americans, 12% African-Americans, and 1% Other. Although the study was a random sample, the results are more representative of the Euro-American race, more so than other races that are not represented in greater numbers.

The fourth limitation involved with study was the focus group interviews were not diverse enough. The sample included 81.8% Euro-Americans and 18.1% African-Americans. Although the study was a random sample, the results are more representative

of the Euro-American race, more so than other races that are not represented in greater number.

Conclusion

This study has laid the foundation for other qualitative and quantitative studies regarding "gangsta rap" music. According to the research, "gangsta rap" music is perceived to communicate negative societal values. Some community members have had problems with "gangsta rap" music, while other members in the community think that it is entertainment. The industry has taken a beating from legal battles to deaths involving stars, but this music is still around with more fans than ever before. Wyclef Jean, a successful solo artist and a member of the socially conscious hip-hop band The Fugees, states "we all need to chill out for a second and step back. Its just entertainment, after all" (Farley, 1997, p. 47). "Gangsta rap" music's lyrics are a form of entertainment for many music enthusiasts. There are others who think it is degradation and bad judgment. In my opinion, it is up to one's own discretion on how they view lyrics in "gangsta rap" music, either as entertainment or societally negative. Some artists have come on record to state that "sexism was not born with rap music; it has been deeply rooted in American value since its' beginning" (Krohn, 1995, p. 154).

I strongly feel that it is entertainment as well as informative on what people think, how they feel, and how they act. Although "gangsta rap" is a very lucrative business, the bottom line as paraphrased in Wyclef Jean's words is that it is entertainment (Farley, 1997, p. 47). Many gangsta rappers are rapping about their lives. I understand why

gangsta rappers have been under fire in the past for expressing their feelings and lives on recordings because everyone has a right to their own opinion, but this is the United States and the First Amendment is "Freedom of Speech." I also understand that "Freedom of Speech" can go both ways in that people have the right to expression involving opinions and beliefs. Many gangsta rappers are rapping about circumstances that could not have been helped while growing up. The bottom line is that "gangsta rap" music is entertainment and education for audiences who may or may not have experienced these stories.

Research indicates many activists and anti-rap campaigners are traditional Republicans who are against something that they do not consider as "the norm." "The norm" is totally off base with "gangsta rap" music, but it would not matter because this music is an art form that these traditional Americans would not listen to anyway. "Gangsta rap" is representative of entertainment and is considered by many, including me to be a form of music just as jazz, opera, adult contemporary, or rock n' roll. This is a musical genre that has been around for years, and it is a genre pertaining to rap music that will probably be under scrutiny as long as it is popular. In the end, it is music and music is entertainment. "Gangsta rap" music is not dying, but an entertainment genre that is growing into the future.

Future studies in this area need more subjects and more diverse groups in order to get a better idea of how "gangsta rap" is rated. Future recommendations for this project would be to look at how socio-economic status affects the subjects and why they may or may not purchase "gangsta rap" music. Another recommendation for this project would

be a rhetorical criticism of "gangsta rap" music and the consequences that words and lyrics bring about when heard by or misinterpreted by individuals and groups of people. In addition, these recommendations may or may not support the findings from this particular study.

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost I want to thank God. I want to also thank Dr. Norman Greer, who was my thesis committee chair. Not only did he make this project possible, but also helped me out at various points throughout my academic year. In addition, I wish to thank two other professors who I also hold in the highest regard, Dr. Doug Bock and Dr. Floyd Merritt. These two professors have also inspired me and have taught me a great deal about a field that I truly enjoy. Other professors who made this project possible: Dr. Borzi, Dr. Hogg, and Dr. Oseguera. I also wish to thank the Eastern Illinois University library for their help and contributions to this manuscript. Last but certainly not least, I wish to thank everyone else who has helped me in contributing to this manuscript as well as my academic year in higher education.

Appendix A

Age:

Race: (please circle one)

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Other Asian / Pacific Islander

Asian Indian

Puerto Rican

Black / African-American

White (Non-Hispanic)

Chinese

Other (please specify)

Hispanic / Latino

Japanese

Korean

Mexican-American

City Currently Living In: _____

Rate the following items from **1 –10** with **1** being the Lowest and **10** being the *Highest*:

Gangsta Rap Music

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Rock Music

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Classical Music

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Country Music

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix B

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Appendix C

This is a focus group interview pertaining to the topic of “gangsta rap” music. By signing this permission slip, you are authorizing AJAY OJHA to tape record this focus group interview for his thesis. Your identity will remain anonymous when the information is used in his thesis.

X _____

DATE _____

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Do you tend to listen to gangsta rap music?
2. Can you describe gangsta rap music?
3. What does gangsta rap music promote?
4. What do you believe is the most influential term associated with gangsta rap music?