

“THE BLACKER THE BERRY, THE SWEETER THE JUICE”: THE POWER OF
RACE IN HIP-HOP ACTIVISM

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Abstract

Hip-hop is a genre of music that emerged among African-American communities in the 1970s, and quickly took a political form to stand against racial oppression during the 1980s. Today, hip-hop music exists as form of popular culture that transcends race, socioeconomic status, religion, along with other identities. By the choice of the artist and consumption of everyday individuals, hip-hop rhetoric could bring people together or tear people apart.

This study employs a multimethod qualitative approach to discuss the political nature of hip-hop music today as a way of understanding how artists of different racial backgrounds use their platform, the different rhetorical themes used in their political messages, and how college students consume these messages. Through content analysis, this study will examine depictions political engagement hip-hop between White artists and African-American artists. In addition, this study will employ focus group interviews to explore how college students interpret the positions of these artists in the discussion political engagement and activism.

The goal of this research is to better understand the use of hip-hop as a tool for social change. With rising political unrest across the United States, it is time to consider how some of the most influential individuals in our society, artists, are using their platforms in a productive manner. Along with this, we need to highlight the importance of White allyship and youth engagement in order to create a movement that is diverse and well-equipped for change. Different levels of society need to understand their position and power in order to create a systemic change, and this research is the first step in doing so.

Chapter II: Introduction/Overview of Study

Social change is seen through movements that allow youth and other leaders of the world, to choose with their knowledge and experience, which side of history they will end up on. This research paper examines the way in which race plays a role in the message of hip-hop artists. Hip-hop is genre of music that originated from disadvantaged African-American communities in Bronx, New York and cultivated as a form of political activism—helping artists shed light on their experiences growing up and advocate for a better future (Rose 2006). Hip-hop connected youth and community leaders through art to gain solidarity and hold promise between those hurting. The political roots of hip-hop have been less apparent over time as the genre became more popular in different communities, some more privileged than others. With this, hip-hop has shifted to a genre of music known to glamorize drugs, misogyny, and violence with little credit to its political background. In recent years there has been a rise in both racial tension and mainstream White hip-hop artists in the United States (Davis 2014). This study will look at the messages of hip-hop in the music of Black hip-hop artists and White hip-hop artists from 2013 to 2016. The time frame is focused in on years following the death of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, which pushed for recognition of historic racial inequality and progression towards Black justice in an oppressive, White-biased system.

This study explores hip-hop as a form of socialization and racialization. Everyday people consume hip-hop in countless ways, by listening to the radio, watching television, and at local outings. The way in which we learn ideas and conceptualize the African-American community that created hip-hop is vital to our progress towards racial equality and an overall equitable world. With this, we look to

the rising number of White hip-hop artists that can shape social change through the way they perform and show their hip-hop identity in alignment with the majority African-American hip-hop community. By examining how both Black and White artists tie their messages to the political lens of the hip-hop genre, we can better understand what is being communicated from artists to the everyday person. This in turn brings upon the question of how an artist can influence an individuals understanding of themselves and their place in the progress towards an equal world.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

Defining hip-hop

Hip-hop is a cultural movement that was created in South Bronx, NY as a way for young African-American and Hispanic communities to express their struggles growing up. These communities, most specifically the African-American community, used hip-hop as a way to come together against different levels of oppression in postcolonial America (Tinson and McBride 2013). Hip-hop culture includes music, dance, graffiti art, clothing, and other forms of cultural and material consumption (Tinson and McBride 2013).

Within the hip-hop culture is hip-hop music. This music includes unique rhythmic instrumentals that are commonly accompanied with rap, a form of lyrical work. Rap is also seen as a form of poetry, as it can be performed without instrumentals. One of the most iconic hip-hop artists, Tupac Shakur, is an example of this with his start being in poetry. There are many different sub-genres of hip-hop music including but not limited to gangsta rap, political hip-hop, and alternative hip-hop.

Defining popular culture

Popular culture can be defined in a multitude of ways. It is commonly understood as a form of culture that is enjoyed or consumed by many. Culture is defined as a particular aesthetic, ideals, taste, or consumption of a particular group of people. Referring back to defining hip-hop, it is understood as a culture because of the different aspects it includes-clothing, art, dance, etc.

High culture, low culture, and mass culture are all sub-distinctions of popular culture. Each holds an aspect of taste. As coined by Pierre Bourdieu, taste can play a role in popular culture through personal identity and the way in which we position

ourselves in the world (Bourdieu 1984). For example, the arts can be seen as a form of high culture because of an arbitrary prerequisite to understand the arts on an academic level. This is particularly important to the study at hand because of the shift that has been seen in hip-hop, going from low culture to what is enjoyed by more races and socioeconomic classes than ever before. The use of popular culture to get ideas across to people develops communities for better or for worse.

Defining cultural appropriation vs. cultural transfer

Cultural appropriation has been a hot topic with a rise in globalization. More and more, different cultures and ideas have been at the forefront of media platforms. With this has come the consumption of different cultures and controversy around that. Generally, people understand cultural appropriation as the overarching experience of adopting various forms of culture that were originally produced by another culture. The use of another culture in an inappropriate manner, which can include mocking, minimizing, or general misrepresentation equates to cultural appropriation. This can be seen a variety of ways, including subject appropriation, content appropriation, and object appropriation (Young 2005). Content appropriation, as defined by Young, is the experience in which an artists use the products of another culture in order to produce their own art. For instance, when White artists produce or perform hip-hop music that was created by African-American and Hispanic communities in South Bronx. Cultural appropriation in general has a negative connotation attached to it, as it allows people in positions of power and privilege to pick and choose what they appreciate and enjoy of other less privileged cultures.

On the other hand, cultural transfer is the give and take of items and ideas from one group to another (Kim 2005). Culture involves meaning, context, political framework that all come together in order to solidify the power behind the item or

idea (Kim 2005). Cultural transfer considers the different power structures the way in which they impact populations at hand and looks to create a comprisable and accepted space for the consumption of different cultures.

Defining political activism and engagement

Political activism and engagement is the work done by individuals to make a change on the institutional level of policy (Sullivan and Esmail 2007). This involves the different aspects of power, privilege, and systemic inequality. In recent years, there has been a rise in civilians working towards equality for many marginalized populations across the country. Seen through the use of different social media platforms such as Twitter, popular culture has allowed more individuals to be aware of social issues impacting thousands around the country.

In this paper, hip-hop music will be identified as a form of popular culture that could be encouraging and promoting social activism. With the use of such a vast amount of individuals involved in the production as well as the immense amount of diverse individuals consuming the music, there could be a powerful and positive use of hip-hop to shape generations of individuals towards political activism and engagement.

Chapter IV: Literature Review

Popular culture is consumed by the masses, often spreading various messages on society and ways to live. The power that artists have at such a high platform gives them the opportunity to call for social change. Noted as the symbol for change, hip-hop music has brought to light the important connection of music and politics (Alridge and Stewart 2005; Tinson and McBride 2013). Hip-hop is genre of music that originated from the Bronx in the 1960's as a way for poor youth to keep busy. It soon became a powerful outlet for racially marginalized groups in the 1970's. It grew to be a symbol of opposition against the status quo and a call for transformation among youth (Alridge and Stewart 2005; Tinson and McBride 2013).

At its core, hip-hop music presents political activism, given that the history of hip-hop cannot be detached from messaged about the disproportionate discrimination and inequity experienced by Black America. In the 1980's, there was a rise in subgenres of hip-hop music including Afrocentric, political, party, and gangsta rap (Tinson and McBride 2013). Gangsta rap became the leading subgenre of hip-hop music in the 1990's because of the simplicity found in experiencing the hip-hop trinity: the Black gangsta, pimp, and ho (Rose 2008). Although gangsta rappers such as N.W.A brought together this form of hip-hop music in order to explain and discuss how inequity leads to hustling, violence, and other actions deemed as deviant, this form of music has critics thinking otherwise (Rose 2008). This is considered a hyper-behavioral view as critics overemphasize an artists lyrical work as a point of inciting consumers behavior instead of considering the institutional inequality impact on the musical production (Rose 2008). Hip-hop music, gangsta rap especially, allows for those impacted by discrimination and social inequity to share their experiences in the rawest way. On the other side of believing that hip-hop music creates violence, it can

also be said that hip-hop music allows for youth to find their outlet without becoming violent (Rose 2008). Ultimately, the future of hip-hop and the frame of Black America is in the hands of those who consume the music the most.

Commercial hip-hop music today is mostly characterized by the hyper-gangst-ization of Black America, which impacts the way in which the consumer and producer populations are socialized over time. The development of the hip-hop trinity both impacts the way in which consumers see the communities of artists, as well as the way in which these communities understand themselves (Rose 2008). The consideration of consumers and producers becomes a discussion of privilege and power with the majority of consumers begin White youth (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015).

Increased visibility of the music has heavily engrained it into popular culture, opening it up to populations extending from African-American communities. This form of political art spread across the world, giving both disadvantaged youth and Black populations something to connect through. Although it became a well-known way of protesting against inequality across the world, there has been an increasing amount of tension around the hip-hop community in the United States when it comes to White individuals consuming the music. From the late 1990s into the 2000s, there was an exponential increase in the consumption of hip-hop music by White consumers. The disagreement around the use of African-American culture is a result of the historical racial inequality within the United States (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015). With hip-hop music focusing in on the lifestyle and struggles of marginalized groups, there is conflict behind the consumption of this music by youth. The hyper-gangsta-ization minimized the experience of those living in danger and ultimately created incorrect imagery and ideas as to what the experience of marginalized Black

America. This was created for mass media to enjoy, ultimately having mostly White youth to consume these ideas through popular culture. Hip-hop artists are finding ways to feed mass media—through commercialized gangsta rap, or masking their meanings with that of which seems to be commercialized gangsta rap (Rose 2008). When artists finally find success in the music industry, they give way to a majority White population to perpetuate stereotypes against Black populations, which allows the racial divide to persist. The way in which Black America is perceived then determines the manner in which the population is treated.

There is a common concern of consumer capitalism as a means of creating oppositional political power (Hutnyk and Sharma 2000). Youth culture is noted for their inevitable connection to the other and the popular, increasing the power of music and its words on society. Cultural tourism, the understanding of another group or culture through media, is a key factor in understanding the consumption of hip-hop music and the ways in which this could further divide racial groups during a time of political unrest (Jacobson 2015). With the rise of various genres of hip-hop music, a political focus on inequality has not always been evident in the music. Rather, gangsta rap themes of materialism, violence, and drug use, have raised popular concern as youth consume the music with no background knowledge on the artists (Jacobson 2015). Inequality has always been a systemic, underlying understanding in the African American community that experience it firsthand. That being said, there is a focus on how the consumption of hip-hop music works as a practice of racial formation theory as a way for individuals to understand groups that they are not familiar with or are not commonly social with (Young 2015). Simply, it is seen as a way for White individuals to better understand the experience of the Black community. As much as this could be a positive move, there is also the question of

how this can perpetuate stereotypes that are not true for the entire Black community, and ultimately increase the racial divide. On the other hand, this brings in the question of the impact of White hip-hop artists on the consumers, especially how this can be a form of cultural tourism through White allyship.

Some scholars say it is cultural appropriation to consume or produce hip-hop music if the individual is not a part of the African-American culture that created it, while others see it as a powerful form of cultural transfer (Schmieding 2015). The debate has been on-going for years, but the increasing racial tension in the United States has brought forth the question of how individuals can consume hip-hop and be a part of social change even outside of the African-American communities.

Cultural appropriation is the unwelcomed adoption of subjects, content, or objects from one culture by another culture (Young 2005). For example, the increased consumption of hip-hop music in mass media brought upon the use of African-American English (AAE) among White populations, including White hip-hop artists. Its marketable form brings upon the implication of identity when it comes to standing against social inequality. It is seen as linguistic appropriation can be taken as figurative form of “Blackface” as lyrics and other aspects of performance can perpetuate and symbolize racist attitudes (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015). There is very limited research on whether or not it is acceptable and, or, received well, if individuals outside of Black communities produce hip-hop music in a manner that gives credit to the group and does right by them in a political manner aligned.

Two artists that have been studied by hip-hop scholars are newly famous White Australian artist Iggy Azalea, as well as one of the most well known White artists in the hip-hop world, Eminem. Iggy Azalea has been noted as an adamant user of AAE, while Eminem has made it a point to stay away from using AAE (Eberhardt

and Freeman 2015). Eminem has been analyzed as a key player in understanding the position of a White artist in hip-hop. Eminem has been supported in his understanding of white privilege as someone who has been through their own share of struggles, growing up in a poverty-stricken neighborhood (Davis 2014). This differs from the middle-class experience of Australian artist, Iggy Azalea, who gained a large following thanks to African-American hip-hop moguls (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015). She has been looked down upon for her silence during the rise of racial political unrest in the United States. Contrary to this, Eminem's work from the 90's onward allowed him to build his rapport, express his own experiences and give credit where its due in order to gain support in the Black hip-hop community (Davis 2014). On the other hand, he has been noted to not do enough against the racial tension in the United States as a White person in the hip-hop community. There is no specific line that has been made as to what is appropriate and what is not as White artist in an environment ruled by racial minorities. The comparison of these two artists have brought to light the ambiguity of cultural appropriation versus cultural transfer as each individual had a different journey in receiving support from the hip-hop community. The continual rise in White hip-hop artists brought to light an analysis of ten White-passing artists from 2012 to 2016 and the three major hip-hop identities they create: the fighter, the activist, and the money-maker (Al-Dhahi 2016). The fighter is identified as the White-passing artist who held onto the original form of hip-hop (Al-Dhahi 2016). This identity holds to the main purpose of hip-hop at its core—empowering and healing the artist and their community. The activist is the white-passing artist who recognizes their role in progressing society in a positive manner. By embodying this identity, the white-passing artist highlights the power of hip-hop as something that truly reaches so many individuals over so many years (Al-Dhahi

2016). The money-maker can be defined as the white-passing artists who disregard struggle and live the lifestyle of fame and fortune, portraying a sense of power that perpetuates racism and a desire for mass consumption of drugs (Al-Dhahi 2016). White-passing artists both add onto the number of hip-hop artists in the game, but white-passing artists automatically act as either allies or assailants to the African-American community that created hip-hop. The way in which White hip-hop artists present themselves and the hip-hop scene determine the way in which Black communities are seen. The way in which White communities consume hip-hop can shape the discrimination that Black communities experience. A way to reshape this experience into something positive for Black communities is by discussing the use of cultural transfer.

Cultural transfer is the give and take of items and ideas from one group to another. Culture involves meaning, context, and political framework that all come together in order to solidify the power behind the item or idea (Kim 2015). Hip-hop is commonly said to focus in on “keeping it real”, an idea that focuses in on the common experience of inequality that African American communities face. This creates the idea of racial authenticity: what is seen as objectively true to one race. There has been a call to counter the racial authenticity in music (Hutnyk and Sharma 2000). J. L. Jackson discusses the concept “racial sincerity as an alternative way of understanding Black identity (2005). Instead of phenotypic boundaries, this theory allows employs an interpersonal perspective of cultural identity (Davis 2014). It focuses on the personal experience of an artist and the overall story they are telling in order to better recognize their position in the power. Although culture is commonly understood as a cookie-cutter way of being for a population or group of people, the identification of culture has become more and more mixed and has allowed for the creation of a “third

space” (Kim 2015). Cultural transfer with the “third space” between point A and B of giving and taking fosters dialogue between groups. This space creates a better understanding of background, ideas, and opens opportunities for adjustment to power relations in society (Kim 2015).

The consistent rise of hip-hop music across the world brings to light questions about who and what is being performed. Hip-hop music is innately political as it originated from the discrimination and inequity the Black communities experienced and continue to experience today. The globalization of hip-hop creates a platform for Black communities because of its origin and media presence as being majority Black artists. On the other hand, it does not act a mirror for Black communities because of the mass-mediated hip-hop trinity and the influx of White artists perpetuating stereotypical ideas of the Black experience. As political unrest grows in the United States, it is important to focus in on the work being produced by hip-hop artists and the way in which they are holding onto the political solidarity that hip-hop music can provide. To be more specific, it is important to consider the work done between 2013 and 2016 to understand how both White and Black hip-hop artists to use their platforms in a socially productive manner after the death of Trayvon Martin and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. For there to be more productive and empowering uses of hip-hop, White and Black artists must use their position to come together in a useful cultural transfer that will transcend boundaries and be a catalyst for social change.

Chapter V: Methodology

In this qualitative research, both content analysis and a supplemental focus group interview are conducted in order to understand what artists are producing and how college students consume their messages. Content analysis is completed to explore the way in which White and Black hip-hop artists use their platform. This allows the best understanding of what hip-hop artists discuss in their music. The focus is on comparing the albums produced by White and Black artists as to how each community takes it upon themselves to continue the hip-hop legacy with the current political atmosphere. The two main questions being considered when conducting the content analysis are: (1) what are African-American hip-hop artists saying in their music and (2) what White hip-hop artists are saying in their music. This will be concluded in themes that hold overarching ideas of how the race of the artist impacts their message.

The content analysis creates a foundation in the research as it focuses on how racism is depicted by the two different racial groups of hip-hop artists, but it does not speak on how it is consumed. The content analysis will examine mass-mediated hip-hop today. More specifically, this study examines the lyrical content of top albums for both White and Black hip-hop artists based off of the 2013 to 2016 Best Hip-Hop Albums of the Year charts published by *The Rolling Stone*. The years between 2013 to 2016 highlight the work produced after the killing of Trayvon Martin and the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement. This puts into focus what hip-hop artists are doing as the political unrest rises throughout the country. Per year, the top Black artist and White artist are analyzed and compared. For 2013, Kanye West's "Yeezus" took the number one spot while Eminem's "Marshall Mathers LP 2" held the number four spot. Along with this, the 2014 artists and albums include number one Run the Jewels

“Run the Jewels 2” and number eighteen Mac Miller with his album “Faces.” For 2015, Kendrick Lamar’s number one “To Pimp a Butterfly” and Donnie Trimpet and the Social Experiment’s number four “Surf” will be analyzed. To finish the content analysis, the 2016 albums analyzed will be Chance the Rappers’ number one “Coloring Book” and Open Mike Eagle + Paul White’s number twenty-six “Hella Personal Film Festival.” After selecting the albums from which I would draw songs for the analysis, I collected the lyrics of each song from Genius, a website dedicated to the collection and annotation of music lyrics from a variety of genres. As a community-based production, Genius identifies itself as a miniature version of Wikipedia that allows the continuous editing of songs by community members with the supervision of community leaders. These albums will be analyzed in order to grasp the best knowledge on how political rhetoric, cultural appropriation, and cultural transfer is seen in recent years of rising political engagement. Cross-analysis is completed in order to understand the similarities and differences in themes found in the work of the artists and across years.

The collection of the sample brings up two of the three methodological limitations of this study. The three main limitations of this study include the lack of successful White hip-hop artists, accuracy of the lyrics, and genuine connection to the music produced. First, because there were not a significant amount of white-passing hip-hop artists on major music charts such as the Billboard Charts, artists were chosen off of The Rolling Stone’s charts which is more opinionated via staff members. Although this does not change the significance of the artist in with the music they make, this should be mentioned as part of the larger idea connected to socialization through mass media consumption. Two of the albums selected, one by Donnie Trimpet and the Social Experiment and the other by Open Mike Eagle + Paul White

are produced by groups with a diverse producers and artists. Along with this, some White artists have other artists of Color featured in their music. Although they are not solely White artists, it is still a consideration of how these artists work with politically focused lyrics. Secondly, many artists either have part of all of their lyrics written by other individuals in the industry. Another aspect of this limitation is the chance that the artist is actually speaking about another individual's experience. Both parts of this limitation tend to the chance of the lyrics not being genuine to the artist, but rather be a part of the business of being a musical artist and aiming to attract a large numbers of consumers. Finally, the third limitation is simply the accuracy of Genius as the provider of song lyrics. Although they are looked over closely by hundreds of contributors, there is always a chance of error in mishearing the song lyrics. Although it is important to note these limitations, I do not believe they completely skew the research at hand.

After finding my sample and doing the initial analysis of reading through the lyrics of each song, I began my coding process to create order in the common themes found. With my initial analysis, I was able to find descriptive and literal codes that gave me a general idea of key concepts within the data. Consequently, I coded my main findings into three analytical themes in order to group my data. Each analytical code created had three sub-codes that helped identified qualities that attributed to that code. With that, I was able to look for cues and in order to best understand my material. The meaning of certain colloquial phrases as well as the mention of specific individuals or experiences commonly related to cultures such as hip-hop were also considered in the coding as incredibly important aspects of overall purpose of the music. By coding and grouping my data, I was able to easily define larger ideas that are portrayed and described in a variety of ways throughout the material.

As I look for themes within the content, I will be keeping in mind a variety of aspects lyrics that could easily be overlooked in day-to-day consumption of media. This includes the depiction of race, gender, ethnicity and communities in the lyrics as creating imagery for the consumer. The way in which each artist speaks of other communities and of their own impacts the way in which their consumers understand those communities. Along with this, it is important to consider the political movements and issues of inequity that are not commonly discussed.

Furthermore, it is examining how hip-hop artists speak about their identity and the experience of marginalized populations. The distribution of power between the disadvantaged and hip-hop artist will be a key aspect to analyze. I will look to see how political hip-hop artists describe and speak about the struggle of groups they do not identify with. This will also extend to note how the hip-hop artist self-identifies as being a part of the social change and how they advocate for change.

By doing focus groups, the research ties together to truly understand how individuals consume the music and message. College students are the population that the focus group is aimed towards because of their rising political engagement as well as the importance of understanding the impact of popular culture on the future leaders of the world. The focus group interview had four students of racial minorities engage in conversation over their opinion on specific artists, songs, and the state of hip-hop today. These individuals were pulled from sociology courses taught at Texas State University. All of the individuals claimed interest in hip-hop music and race theory. This is the largest weakness in the focus group interview portion: the small sample size. This focus group interview is not of a credible size, but will be looked at as a supplemental piece that can be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions to the research. The students were given songs to listen to and current political issues to

consider. The discussion was led with semi-structured questions approved by the IRB. The purpose is to consider how the messages of artists are consumed depending on the racial background of the artist. This all comes together to understand the impact of different hip-hop artists on creating a wave of change through future world leaders.

Chapter VI: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the political lens of hip-hop today. With the increasing number of White hip-hop artists in the music industry along with the growth of political activism against the racial tension in the United States, this analysis dives in to understand how both Black and White hip-hop artists are using their platform in the subculture that was created in racial political strife. This research ties into a greater understanding of socialization through ideas presented in mass media. Through analysis of six albums ranked by nationally acclaimed magazine, The Rolling Stone, I have been able to answer the question of political rhetoric in hip-hop music today.

After collecting and analyzing the data, I was able to find six main themes presented by Black and White artists. I will first identify and explain the three main themes presented by Black artists before doing the same for their White counterparts in this research. After identifying and explaining all six themes presented by the artists analyzed, I will go into cross-analysis to compare what was found.

For Black artists, the main three themes found were the following: (1) Religion as Power, (2) Political Idols, and (3) Community Against Supremacy. Although some albums did not highlight all of these themes in each song, these themes showed up in each album as a form of push against the status quo. In more depth, I analyze the ways in which each of these themes were depicted and bring to life the ideas they choose to present to their audience.

Themes in the Albums of African-American Artists

Theme #1: Religion as Power

With hip-hop holding of being the outlet for marginalized Black communities, the use of religion is at the forefront in both giving explanation to different parts of life and finding promise in difficult times. The use of religion connects consumers of different identities, which transcends race, socioeconomic status, or any other marginalized experience. This creates an overall understanding of one's experience through a common factor that majority of people have encountered in their life.

The use of religion allows the discussion of strife to be connected to something other than an individual's decisions, but rather their journey guided by God. Run the Jewels highlights the importance of religion in finding a way out of dealing drugs as a lifestyle: "Used to walk traps in the rain with cocaine/Used to write raps in the traps as I sat in the rain and I prayed that God give me a lane/Give me a lane/Give me the fame/Give me the fame and I promise to change." As Run the Jewels looks to religion as an outlet for more opportunities, context is necessary to emphasize why drug dealing is sometimes the only option for many individuals of marginalized populations for reasons including hiring discrimination and lack of adequate education. On the other side of it, Kendrick Lamar uses religion as a point of resilience during hard times, "I done been through a whole lot/Trial, tribulation, but I know God/The Devil wanna put me in a bow tie/Pray that the holy water don't go dry". In other songs off of his album, Lamar points to God as a form of promise and strength to do better as an individual. Lamar does give credit to the individual in following God's footsteps as well as allowing religion to be the change in perspective that many individuals experiencing marginalized lifestyles need. In this sense, religion is used a point of connecting the experience of marginalized individuals to

powers that are greater than themselves, but also connect those marginalized identities to the power and positivity that religion gives others as a form of positive change.

Religion was also used to highlight the impact of misused power by religious leaders. This also plays a large role in the way individuals understand and consider the rhetoric of those seen as higher and more knowledgeable on divinity. Kanye West and Chance the Rapper both use the subject of religion to emphasize the importance of inclusivity and truth in society. In “Black Skinhead”, Kanye west exposes his experience with different Christian denominations and ties it in directly with the invalidated experience of youth in the deadliest city in the United States, Chicago: “If I don't get ran out by Catholics (black)/Here come some conservative Baptists/Claiming I'm overreactin'/Like them black kids in Chiraq bitch”. From Chicago, Kanye West is able to create a connection with the youth who are in Chicago and firsthand witnessing the rising amount of gun violence that takes the lives of more than just individuals involved in gang activity. This then goes into the discussion of how gun violence is understood, discussed, and acted against among religious leaders. When considering allyship, it is incredibly important for people of power to be well rounded in their knowledge on issues involving the loss of lives and taking into account who is involved, why their involved, and what can change that on macro and micro levels. Chance the Rapper, a devote Christian, took an interesting turn in his gospel based album by mentioning , “Jesus’ black life ain’t matter...”, drawing a parallel between Christianity and the current social movement Black Lives Matter. Chance the Rapper creates this image of Jesus as being one of the many Black individuals minimized in current fight for racial equity. This makes the Black Lives Matters movement easier to grasp for those disconnected with the racial divide, but

have a strong connection with Jesus. To connect race to Jesus brings individuals together to feel solidarity that can change the political perspective.

Religion as power is the forefront of Black artists and their push towards a societal change. By using a part of society that is understood through school, the media, and families allows for more people to consume the ideas that are being put out without having the direct experience of the marginalized population. Connecting others who do not have that experience, empowering those who do, and highlighting the importance of religious leaders all combine to enabling all in creating a systemic change.

Theme #2: Political Idols, Political Rivals

Hip-hop's political focus has been true since its beginning, but the question recently has been how it is showing up now. One theme that was prevalent among the Black artists was the use of either guidance of Black political leaders or the corrupt and complex aspects of our current political state. This, in turn, allows listeners to question policies, government actions, and their own place in creating a change.

Run the Jewels took to a Black idol to make a larger point about society by expressing, "And I love Dr. King but violence might be necessary/Cause when you live on MLK and it gets very scary/You might have to pull your AK, send one to the cemetery", highlighting both the importance of Black leaders and the lack of promise felt among communities. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most influential Black leaders of the civil rights era and his legacy lives on. To mention Dr. King's strategy of nonviolence as something that is not possible emphasizes two things: 1) the current state of our political environment is similar to that time and 2) communities do not have many options. The ironic fact that streets named after Dr. King across the country acquire some of the highest rates of homicide is a part of the

conversation and the segregation of race through historical housing policies. Along with this, the use of Dr. King created a connection for listeners to make as Run the Jewels then moved on to give more details to the experience of many disadvantaged marginalized populations: “We overworked, underpaid, and we underprivileged/They love us, they love us (why?)/Because we feed the village/You really made it or just became a prisoner of privilege?/You willing to share that information that you’ve been given?”. Run the Jewels used Dr. King as a connection and catalyst for a larger monologue, which includes points around inequity, blind nature of privilege, as well as the question of being more engaged. By doing this, listeners have no choice but to question whether or not they will spread the word and be more politically engaged because of an artist that they have a certain amount of connection with. This allows people who do not feel like they are impacted to feel an indirect impact of policies and government overall.

Another form of political rhetoric used is a form that points out the political rivals of disfranchised marginalized groups. In “Hood Politics”, Kendrick Lamar compares the political climate to be similar to the experience of major gangs in Compton, California: “Ain't nothin' new, but a flu of new Demo-Crips and Re-Blood-licans/Red state versus a blue state, which one you governin'/?/They give us guns and drugs, call us thugs”. Lamar emphasizes the divisive nature of today’s politics by comparing it to the infamous divide of Crips and Bloods. Similarly to Run the Jewels, Kendrick uses this connection as a catalyst to mention a large governmental issue: guns. It is the accessibility to guns, the use of guns, and the way in which individuals see communities that all tie together when considering the long-term impact. It is the question as to if individuals who are not directly impacted consider these points as important. Similarly, Kanye West used “Blood on the Leaves” to discuss the state of

prison privatization. By mentioning, “Meanwhile the DEA/Teamed up with the CCA/They tryna lock niggas up/They tryna make new slaves/See that's that privately owned prison”, West touches on the long standing drug wars between government officials and those in need of flowing income, and then goes onto briefly creates the imagery of private prisons initiating modern slavery. The straightforward manner in which Kanye West talks about actions taken by the American government allows individuals to get facts and an understanding of something that is experienced by many marginalized populations, but not discussed much in mass media.

Political idols, political rivals as a theme across albums shows the raw political rhetoric that artists are willing to use. Their ability to connect listeners to something before diving into more specific policies, experiences, and inequity that many may not experience truly shows strategy in rhetoric. By using their platform, these artists are able to directly connect their listener to the political state of the country.

Theme #3: Community Against Supremacy

A form of solidarity that is seen across these selected albums is the call for community against supremacy. This theme highlights the importance of keeping individuals well aware of their surroundings and the different parts of society in understanding their identity. More specifically, the corrupt nature of capitalism and beating racial stereotypes are both heavily discussed.

One of the prominent forms of calling upon the community to come together is the emphasis on issues with in the music industry. Known for his unprecedented success as an independent artist, Chance the Rapper uses his platform to call labels out in his song “No Problem.” After using satire to describe a circumstance in which he counts his stacks of money while label professionals try to sign him as an artist,

Chance goes on to say “Fuck wrong with you? What you were thinkin’?/Fuck you thought it was?/You talk that talk that make a lame ass nigga fall in love/Not me, though, bitch you can keep those”, emphasizing the minimization of his intelligence in the hands of label recruiters. Similarly, Kanye West discusses the issues around music labels, capitalism, and racist attitudes. In “New Slaves”, West touches on two sides of this issue: the common struggle of money and the intellectual expectations. He begins by mentioning how quiet and mischievous these labels can be with their actions, but goes on to explain how exactly this impacts the African-American community particularly. First, Kanye West highlights the stereotypical ideals around the African-American community by saying, “You see it's broke nigga racism/That's that ‘Don't touch anything in the store’/And it's rich nigga racism/That's that ‘Come in, please buy more’/’What you want, a Bentley? Fur coat? A diamond chain?/All you blacks want all the same things’”. Kanye West bluntly shows the way in which industry members consider the focus of artists of African-American descent, focusing on the perks of money rather than the achieving personal goals of being a great artist. Along with this, there is a disregard for the importance of money and “making it” for individuals who have been disenfranchised throughout their entire life. Kanye West goes on to describe more of the African-American experience working with music labels by highlighting education as another major issue within the African-American community: “Y'all throwin' contracts at me/You know that niggas can't read/Throw 'em some Maybach keys/Fuck it, c'est la vie/I know that we the new slaves.” West pushes against the industry and their manipulative ways by mentioning the unequal power within different levels of society, specifically the lack of adequate education found within the most vulnerable populations.

Along the lines of stereotypes, other African-American artists analyzed threw their identity into the light in order to challenge the status quo and show solidarity for their communities. In “The Blacker the Berry”, Kendrick Lamar emphasizes his vulnerability in the world based because of his skin color and the stereotypes that have be spoken of before by calling himself a “proud monkey” and going on to say more about white supremacy. He goes on to say he is “black as the heart of a fuckin' Aryan” and curses out racists by saying, ““That's as blunt as it gets, I know you hate me, don't you?/You hate my people, I can tell cause it's threats when I see you.”

Along with Kendrick Lamar making outright calls against the racist views that create the idea of the lesser African-American individual, Run the Jewels shows their own pushback by highlighting police brutality. In “Lie, Cheat, Steal”, Run the Jewels uses the symbol of the eagle to talk about American control through the police:

“Authorities have spoken, demanded your pure devotion/Get magnetized to the ground while the falcons of murder close in.” This rhetoric continues as Run the Jewels describes a commonly heard circumstance of an African-American man being searched and wrongly arrested in front of his family. This anecdote, although familiar, touches on multiple aspects of life for African-American families. From growing up without a father to the stereotype of drugs being solely of consumption rather than income in the African-American community, different parts of institutionalized inequality are shown and can be a point of understanding how stereotypes are perpetuated. Another aspect of this anecdote calls to authority as a point of importance rather than strife by saying, “Man, I ain't got a gun or a knife/You do this and you ruin my life/And I apologize if it seems like I got out of line, sir/'cause I respect the badge and the gun”, as a form of having diplomatic conversation in a

situation that is against the African-American man as usual. Although there is a push against the authority, there is recognition for their part in society as well.

What can be seen through the theme of Community Against Supremacy is the call for solidarity and change. It is apparent that all of these artists are tired of what they are experiencing as individuals and within their community. With their outright rhetoric against both music labels and white supremacy, it is clear that nothing is being held back in order to make a change. With using such direct rhetoric, these artists call on their consumers to recognize different levels of inequality and to act immediately in order to dismantle the institutional inequality experienced by so many marginalized populations.

Themes in the Albums of White Artists

For White artists, the main three themes found were the following: (1) Minimization of Others, (2) I Hurt, and (3) Me, Myself, and I. Similar to the African-American artists, these themes were not found in every song, but was found overall in the albums of White artists. Analysis of each theme gives greater depth in understanding that the artist is presenting and the connections to greater societal messages.

Theme #1: Minimization of Others

One of the most common things seen in the work of White hip-hop artists is the calling out of other cultures and/or marginalized groups. The use of cultures or marginalized groups when discusses activities or experiences heightens the privilege of the White individual, which in turn minimizes the marginalized population. This can be seen throughout the albums of White hip-hop artists as they use discriminatory profanities and use different cultures as a point of exploitation.

The minimization of others is first seen in the stereotyping of other cultures. Although this is a theme seen within all albums, this is heavily seen specifically in the album “Faces” by Mac Miller. His reference of other cultures is seen within the context of enjoying life through the use of other cultural experiences. For example, in his song “It Just Doesn’t Matter”, Mac Miller discusses his interest in having sex with Samoans in Hawaii and enjoying the scenery. The blatant disregard for the historic cultural genocide experienced by Samoans when colonizers took control of the Hawaiian territory in 1898. Along with this, there is the exploitation of Samoan identity and land as something of exotic nature and consumption. This is something that has been seen over the years as Hawaii seen as a tourist destination rather than a place of within a historical context. Tied to the consumption that is observed in the example of having sex with Samoans, there is a minimization of experience by

indulging in different hairstyles not made for White individuals. For example, Mac Miller discusses his respect for his mother for allowing him to get cornrows when he was a child. He explains that he wanted them because of his desire to be a Puerto Rican. This just hits the spot of a very controversial issue in society today. The amount of discrimination seen by various ethnicities because of their hair is something of continuous debate. It has been an experience of many where their hair was seen as unacceptable in workspaces and even seen as undesirable in mass media. What can be said of Mac Miller wanting cornrows is the not only unaware nature of the discrimination seen against others for their hair, but the lack of growth since that experience. He speaks of the experience as something that was sentimental for him and his mother, rather than discusses the recognition of his unconscious cultural appropriation.

Mac Miller continues to show this kind of stereotyping and minimization in his song “Friends”, in which he ensues that an individual with an accent must be an undocumented immigrant. Although this assumption might be one of a friendly joke, it does create an idea that people will assume as true to some extent. It perpetuates the idea of what it means to be an American and an accepted piece of the country. Along with this, Mac Miller minimizes the experience of Black individuals through his rhetoric and metaphors. For example, he uses the phrase “Slave to the W...” as a way of mentioning his success. The use of the letter W in this context is as a abbreviation of “win”, which in turn diminishes the experience of those of African descent whom have been impacted by slavery and the systemic inequality seen till this day. In the same song, Mac Miller goes on to say he is in the suburbs “doing drive-by's on Razor scooters”. This creates a completely contrasting image of those in primarily Black and Latino communities where gang violence insight drive by shootings regularly. This

shows a consistent lack of recognition when it comes to one's power and position in the world. Rather, it is clear that there is a lack of progress towards creating a space for understanding the experience of others.

Theme #2: I Hurt

One of the most critical parts of hip-hop as well as social justice is tying the message back to the individual. What is seen in the work of White hip-hop artists is the focus of their message on getting across their personal hurt rather than how it relates to their part in society or other individuals. The focus of the White artist is making their pain clear throughout their music in order to get across their own challenges and feelings of hurt.

In Mac Miller's album, he discusses different parts of his lavish lifestyle as points of concern as well as used his race as a point of disadvantage. In a couple of instances, Mac Miller makes it clear that there is a level of his own identity that he does not fully understand. Mac Miller initially begins talking about the success of his career by highlighting the material aspects of his position, but continues on to say "Broke and crazy, rich and famous doesn't last long/Spent all my cash on a broken dream", which brings to focus what matters to those in the hip-hop industry. An interesting idea is considering whether or not the experience is this way because of Mac Miller's upbringing in a financially stable and supportive home where he was not subject to the amount of homelessness and arrests his Black counterparts experience. There is a lack of celebration when that success is achieved because there is a missing piece of the individual, for example the sense of community and other intangible values. With this, there is a consideration of the experience of Black hip-hop artists, including the question of whether or not the presence of a community created an impact on what an artist holds as value and why that is.

Similarly, the theme of emotional hurt is seen throughout Eminem's album where he focuses in the difficulty of his personal relationships and the impact that makes on him. Throughout his album, Eminem highlights the difficulty he experienced within his romantic relationship as well as his own mental health. Specifically, Eminem highlights how he relates to young adults in America today through his difficulty in relating to his family: "When their fucking parents were unaware of their troubles." Eminem uses the issue of a lack of relationship with parents as somewhat of a blanket topic that relates to many individuals, then continues on to describe symptoms of anxiety and mental illness including self-harm. The discussion of mental illness in hip-hop is discreet with most artists not outright saying that they experience it, but rather symptoms that can equate to different mental illnesses. The discussion of mental illness in Eminem's album highlights the experience of hurt and reaches to many different individual across races, religions, and other identifying pieces. This seems to be a promising piece in trying to connect to many different young individuals.

Another piece largely seen in the theme of "I Hurt" is the recognition of how the race of the artist does impact the way they see themselves in the world. Specifically, it is apparent that the artists view of self is heavily tied to their place in society and their success. Throughout his album, Mac Miller emphasizes his privilege in what seems like arrogant manner. Though, Mac Miller does speak to his experience of marginalization in both "Here We Go" and "San Francisco". In "Here We Go", Mac Miller blatantly says, "I'm underrated, don't fit on nobody's playlist/If I ain't in your top 10 then you're a racist", commenting on the hip-hop industry and rankings that is dominated by Black artists. To highlight the lack of fans or recognition in an industry that was not created on the experience of White people highlights the amount

of privilege, again, that Mac Miller has had throughout his life. Similarly to this, Mac Miller goes on to state that he feels like a foreigner in his song “San Francisco,” commenting on his insecurity around following the laws. His discussion around not being the correct representation of an American is backed by his mention of his worry of law officials. Within this song, he does not mention his addiction to cocaine or why exactly law is something that concerns him. This brings concern to the fact that connecting his concern about breaking the law with his drug use to his feeling of being a foreigner creates the assumptions that individuals who are not American are somehow breaking the law. This is something to consider in the way it is presented and the way in which Mac Miller did not talk out against that, but rather generally talks against laws.

Overall, the theme of “I Hurt” shows the connection that White hip-hop artists aim to make with their Black counterparts. It is apparent that the experiences of these artists are more focused on their own personal issues, which include addiction, personal relationships, and mental illness. When White hip-hop artists do dive into more socially focused issues, the message results in more of a highlight of their privilege rather than a true stand against systemic inequality that is experienced. White hip-hop artists use their vulnerability to connect to their listeners, but some attempts result in a larger rift in cultures and experience in the world.

Theme #3: Me, Myself, and I

To fully encompass the experience the White artists create for listeners, there needs to be an understanding of the mentally that these artists create in overcoming conflict. What is seen of these White hip-hop artists is the idea that they made it on their own and will continue to overcome challenges by themselves. This is contrary to importance of community and family that is seen throughout the work of Black hip-hop artists and within the Black community overall. This brings together the discussion of how change is understood by different communities, depending on what is seen as an individual or a community conflict. To this, it is apparent that the focus of White hip-hop artists is taking in their surroundings and conquering their issues on their own.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Eminem uses his platform to discuss his mental illness. Overall, mental illness is a topic that is taboo within many communities, but heavily stigmatized in minority communities. The way in which he highlights mental illness in his music does give a connection for many individuals who do not have the ability to feel at peace with their recognition of being different from others. Eminem speaks of his experience with his family pushing for help, “And I don't need no goddamn psychologist/Tryin' to diagnose why I have all these underlying problems/Thinking he can try and solve 'em”, changing the entire message and experience for listeners. The discussion does not draw any connections between mental illness and the experience of individuals marginalized by other parts of their identity, but rather focuses on the issue as something of the individual. Eminem minimizes the help that he is receiving and only focuses on his health as something that he can never work on. For instance, the deeper level of difficulty seen by individuals in the Black community who experience the impact of mental illness with

both the taboo nature of it in the Black community. As well, there needs to be recognition of the lack of representation and access to affordable mental healthcare for those in minority and low-income communities. Similarly, Mac Miller discusses his drug addiction in his song “What Do You Do” by setting up the idea that he will never be able to stop: “The drug absorbent, endorphin addict/The evil follow me, I got a devil magnet.” The discussion of addiction crosses all lines of identity including race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Mac Miller does not consider or give recognition to the different elements in his life or society that drive people to addiction. This can dive into different causes for different identities and leads to the question of how this came about for Mac Miller. This question can dive into another aspects of society when considering whether his addiction was through a need for an outlet or a recreational activity turning into a poisonous habit. His consumption highlights the common theme of the White individual being a drug user while Black individuals are more commonly selling the drugs for income. This can then bring to light the discussion of mass incarceration of racial minorities because of non-violent drug offenses. There are many levels to the discussion of drug use, but Mac Miller highlights his addiction specifically as something he cannot take control of, rather than diving into the discussion of how this can be understood in the grand scheme of society, privilege, and power.

Along with this, it is apparent that White hip-hop artists look to prove themselves by referring to success Black hip-hop artists. This is seen in two forms: (1) citing Black artists as influential on the product of the White artist or (2) citing Black artists as individuals that the White artist did not need the help of when aiming to produce success albums. First off, the reference of Black artists as a point of influence is seen heavily by Eminem where he specifically calls himself “a product of Rakim

Lakim Shabazz, 2Pac, N.W.A., Cube...” and goes on to thank these artists for inspiring him. This brings a level of credibility to the Black hip-hop icons, but still takes the challenge of making it in the hands of the White artist. On the contrary, Mac Miller makes the point of making it without current hip-hop top rated artists including Drake and Jay-Z. The discussion of current top hip-hop artists in the context of not being a part of another successful artist speaks to the rift between current hip-hop artists. This could be the result of various things, but the difference in the positive recognition by an artist like Eminem versus the competition put up by Mac Miller shows the difference in mentality of hip-hop artists today. Eminem was the successful introduction of White hip-hop artists into the industry, paving the way for artists such as Mac Miller to gain their way to fame. Mac Miller does not touch on those artists that have influenced him or allowed him into that space, but rather uses the reference of Black artists in making a point that he did it without the help of them. This creates an interesting power dynamic in which he stands on the foundation of Black artists and points to them to highlight their lack of necessity in the success of the industry.

Findings in Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interview, including two Black students, one biracial student, and one Hispanic student, discussed a variety of topics. From the different understandings of the hip-hop culture to the use of sex in making a point, from race as an important piece of creating a message to discussing lavish lifestyles, the focus group dove heavily into a discussion that had a critical lens on hip-hop music as a form of socialization. In consideration of the weaknesses of the focus group interview including sample size, amount of interview time, and diversity of the group, only one overarching theme will be discussed. This is to keep the creditability of the focus group interviews as a supplemental piece to the content analysis of music lyrics and to consider for further research. That being said, the major theme seen throughout the focus group interview was the importance of reality in hip-hop, or the idea that Truth Matters. The theme “Truth Matters” encompasses various points that were made by the participants that all result in the idea that the message of the artist drives their impact in society. Two main points that will be highlighted is: (1) the intersectionality of misogyny and race in female hip-hop artists and (2) race as a piece of an artists message. These two points all come together to better understand the way in which college students today see artists being a part of our society’s progression towards a more equitable world through honesty.

Misogyny in the media is something that has been a historic issue with our patriarchal society, which emphasizes a women’s body and minimizes her intelligence. The idea that sex sells continued to be seen in everyday media and held a large part of the discussion on female hip-hop artists today. Participants praised artists such as Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj for their powerful work as Black females who are at the forefront of the music industry. When going into discussion about Nicki Minaj’s

work, there was a consideration of the way she initially showed up in the music industry. Nicki Minaj's initial ditsy, party-like artist identity brought attention to her along with her body. Over recent years, Minaj has been seen holding strong messages when it comes to a women's independence and taking control of situations rather than showing off her body in what seems as a piece of pleasure for men in a heteronormative world. A parallel was drawn between both Black artists, Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj, in having to use their body and feminine nature when finding a hook into the platform of the music industry. Noted was the growth of Beyoncé from her work with Destiny's Child and her first solo album where discussion on serving men and being in love was primarily the focus, to her work now where she states her independence and strength in who she is. This discussion brought in another level of misogyny and women in the music industry when we consider the work of White female hip-hop artists. As mentioned before, the discussion of women needing to use their body and feminine image to create a hook into the music industry leads to further considerations including the work of infamous Iggy Azalea. Azalea, a White hip-hop artist who originates from Australia, is a point of criticism because of her often and blatant cultural appropriation of Black culture. Although this criticism is widespread and has been a point of discussion throughout her time in the spotlight, Iggy Azalea was given an interesting leeway in the focus group interview. Due to the necessity for women to use their bodies and feminine image in a way that gives them respect and a strong platform in the music industry, Azalea is seen as needing to do that before allowing her to claim a stronger message as Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj have: "And she might not be the best model for a White female rapper, but she's present, she's there. And to say that nothing won't come from there... It goes from there. You just need to put your foot in the door." The consideration of White artists

such as Lady Gaga and her impactful pro-queer messages were also mentioned as an example of a White female artist using her platform in a positive manner. The reference of Lady Gaga shows the similar experience of a White woman in the music industry who builds herself a fan base from sexualized songs to being able to speak out against homophobia and sexual assault. That being said, there was a hope within the group that Iggy Azalea would step up with time and fame coming her way. This does highlight the overall frustration that misogyny is something that women still face today. With all of this being said, there is an apparent issue with the of the levels of respect and recognition female artists need to receive before being able to speak their truth and do as they please with their platform. Along with this is the aspect of how a White female artist is given more of a chance to overcome the unequal treatment of women in the music industry and give forth messages of power, equality, and independence.

In contrary to the experience of White female hip-hop artists is the experience of the White male hip-hop artists who have more of a responsibility in a man's world while also working in an industry led by minority populations. When considering the impact of race on a hip-hop artists lyrics and overall message, the participants brought upon the discussion of historic racial inequality, Black success, and being able to connect words to a deeper level of one's identity. After listening to "New Slaves" by Kanye West and "San Francisco" by Mac Miller, the group went into discussion about their feelings and understanding of the messages at hand. Mac Miller's song was immediately bashed and seen as a useless piece of music. His continuous mention of drugs and questionable activities were taken as pointless pieces of information within a song that had no specific goal. Mac Miller's struggle with mental illness and drug addiction were not completely clear points. The participants experience in

listening to Mac Miller's music was focused on how as a White artist he did not talk about anything seen as important or relating to creating a positive change. In some ways, it was seen as a let down for an artist who could have so much power from the start of his career. Contrary to that song, it was apparent from the start what Kanye West was aiming to do: identify and explore the way in which racial inequality exists today, with the most critical rhetoric. This immediately tied participants into discussing their experience with racial inequality and how they have seen it play out in today's society: "Just being so upfront about the shit Black people go through all the time and not beating around the bush [...] You're constantly dealing with this denial. People still deny the things Black people go through, or any minority group." West's song was able to build a connection with the participant because of West's race and upfront rhetoric about racial discrimination.

Along with this also came the point that success of a Black artist should not be criticized whether it is seen through a lavish lifestyle of cars and jewelry or financially taking care of their community. There is recognition that the experience of Black Americans has been historically and to this day, one of difficulty no matter what socioeconomic background Black individuals come from. The life of Black Americans is under a microscope as individuals wait to see the stereotypes that our media has created and perpetuated over decades. What was understood through the focus group interview participants is the recognition of fame and money as a form of Black success and something that should continue to be praised: "[...]there is this man that is talking about why rappers wear diamonds and gold chains. He says its because we descend from kings and queens from Africa, and that was mind blowing to me. I think it plays a lot into the flashiness in hip-hop, the whole 'You know, I'm going to celebrate myself. I'm going to be hot shit today', because you get shitted on

every other day.” The use of race in hip-hop and getting a message across is incredibly critical to our listeners today. The truth of an artist needs to be clear, especially if it is of a White artist, in which listeners can already hold assumptions of power and privilege over their Black counterparts. As seen through the participants, listeners are looking for the hip-hop artists purpose in their music and platform. The importance of hip-hop in a historical context and the way in which it pushes society today matters to those who are coming up as our country’s next leaders in a world where racial discrimination is no longer understood as only the experience that is of the past.

Overall, listeners understand the way in which music can impact the socialization of individuals and they are critical of what is being put out there, but recognize that it is in the hands of the artists to create the positive experience. The recognition of the struggle of female hip-hop artists emphasizes the still apparent misogyny in mass media. The work of Black female artists is applauded, by those who understand from a critical lens, what it took for those artists to be able to speak out against societal issues. This struggle allows White female artists to have more of a chance to use their bodies and culturally inappropriate actions to get the attention of consumers and build a platform that allows them to finally speak their truth. On the other hand, there is more of a pressure on White male hip-hop artists to speak up in a straightforward manner that shows value in a specific message. What is seen is the lack of understanding behind the music of White male hip-hop artists. The experience of the Black male is understood because of the historical racial divide in the country and the movement towards an equitable world. The focus group interview calls for artists to provide more honesty, more provocative rhetoric, and a way to elevate the platform for women in the music industry. The listeners heavily considered the impact

of hip-hop artists on socialization and how individuals experience the world. When speaking on the impact of artists on society, the impact of Tupac Shakur led as the example of what artists can do in their communities. When discussing Tupac, the acknowledgement of his work being as powerful as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in Black communities specifically was brought forth. The impact that these three individuals made on the Black community is incredibly notable, but the lack of recognition for Tupac's impact seen by those outside of the Black community is not fully understood: "And then you'll see certain shirts or certain signs with Tupac on it and they don't understand why have these super intelligent men next to Tupac. Because Tupac made a difference that size. His music and his influence on the Black community really changed time, honestly." The work of artists can be incredibly influential to the growth of a community and to the shift of mentality in on society. Although the impact of music may not be understood by all listeners, the consumption of rhetoric and perpetuating ideas of communities does create the world we live in and will continue to evolve into. As we continue to discuss and consider the ways in which artists show up as leaders through their music, we can put a stronger focus on how this impacts our society and growing into a more equitable world. This all ties into the focus of hip-hop music in creating a progressive, aligning to the origins of the musical genre.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Hip-hop matters. Truth matters. This paper aims to explore the way in which hip-hop shows up today in the wake of rising political unrest across the United States. The two parts of this paper, content analysis and focus group interviews, gave an understanding of the rhetoric and messages understood being produced by both White and African-American artists. By analyzing the top hip-hop albums ranked by famous *The Rolling Stone* brought the credibility of what is seen as the most success or powerful albums from 2013 to 2016. The context of this time, after the killing of Trayvon Martin and the rise of racial divide, puts pressure on the work of top hip-hop artists in the musical genre that originated on the hardships of African-Americans. With a supplemental focus group interview, it is apparent that college students recognize the importance of hip-hop as a tool of social understanding and change. This all comes together to highlight the importance of truth by the artist, no matter race.

As we breakdown the kind of messages being produced and released by these artists, there is an apparent divide in the focus of White artists and African-American artists. The themes found in the albums of African-American artists include Religion as Power, Political Idols, and Community Against Supremacy. It is clear that these themes conclude a large main idea: the Black community is tied to each other and their journey of success. The consistent consideration of family, friends, and other community members in understanding their inequality and rising to their greatest potential was the key point in the work of African-American artists. These artists, including Kanye West, Run the Jewels, Kendrick Lamar, and Chance the Rapper referenced religion, political issues, and pulling their loved ones up as they rise to fame. The outright nature of the lyrics shows the lack of patience in getting their point

across, but instead needing for people to understand their experience and the world in a different light in order to ignite change. This aligns heavily with the origins of hip-hop, focusing on the difficulty of the African-American experience and pushing towards progressive change.

On the other hand, White hip-hop artists show a different focus in their music. The themes seen in the albums of White hip-hop artists include Minimization of Others, I Hurt, and Me, Myself, and I. What can be seen through the albums of these artists is the experience of the individual and the focus of overcoming challenges without the help of others. This ties heavily into the American focus of independence and self-achievement rather than succeeding as a collective. The work of White hip-hop artists emphasizes personal issues including addiction and difficult relationships as an individual issues to work through. This brings into consideration the contrasting messages of African-American artists, highlighting the way in which marginalized populations do not connect to the experience of White Americans. Instead, many marginalized populations stay closer together because of various oppressive forces separating them from the common journey of success experienced by White Americans. From the content analysis we can see a large contrast between focusing on the community versus the individual and how that contributes to the messages that artists are producing for mass consumption.

When considering how college students are consuming these messages, the supplemental focus group interview is analyzed. With a stronger sample size, there is hope to further this research and stronger conclusions drawn. From what has been analyzed, it is clear that truth matters to the listeners. It is clear that the experience of Black Americans has been and still continues to be unequal to their White counterparts, which gives more room for discussing lavish lifestyles as a form of

Black success rather than arrogance or disregard for others experience. What is yet to be uncovered is the purpose of White hip-hop artists who discuss their personal issues. Though, this could be seen as a good way of building solidarity between individuals if the experience of these artists were told in a more outright, vulnerable manner. It was noted that the work of female artists, both African-American and White, is something that has been incredibly impactful for many across communities. With this is the consideration that women were disadvantage in their own manner where their body and sexualized image was first used in order to build a platform strong enough for them to speak up against social inequality. In this manner, the experience of female artists can be explored as a separate marginalized group in the media industry. Overall, what can be understood as the most important part of music for the listener is their ability to connect an artists' truth to the world around them. This pushes for White hip-hop artists to stand up in being outspoken about their privilege, power, and position in the world when it comes to the injustices their Black counterparts experience.

Overall, there is a need for White hip-hop artists to stand stronger against social inequalities, there is a need for women to receive the respect they deserve as individuals giving to the development of society, and there is a need for individuals to listen in more to the music they consume on a day-to-day basis. The artists analyzed include Eminem, Mac Miller, Donnie Trumpet and the Social Experiment, and Open Mike Eagle + Paul White. What can be understood is the impact of an artist is much greater than we understand when it comes to building community, breaking down stereotypes, and accumulating knowledge on things we are not well versed in. Hip-hop can be used as a form of cultural tourism appropriately if artists of different races use their platform in a positive manner where stereotypes are broken down and the

identity of the individual is clear for listeners. Hip-hop can be a powerful tool of social change, just as it began, if artists use their truth to allow their listeners to find their own truth in their power and privilege in the world. This could create incredible waves of knowledge around inequality throughout various marginalized experiences and allow more people to be prepared to work for a more equitable world.

With further research, these ideas can be developed into action steps to create a change from the bottom up. What this truly means is finding ways to encourage listeners to be critical consumers by holding their favorite artists to a higher standard as they hold social responsibility with their powerful platform. Although we see college students of racial minorities and sociological background truly caring about the work of hip-hop artists today, other populations could be analyzed to better understand how various people consume today's music. By expanding on focus group interviews with high school students, individuals of various racial backgrounds, or individuals of lesser knowledge on sociological theories, this research can yield a greater understanding of how even younger and less knowledgeable individuals are being socialized by the music they are consuming. This includes in what way race is an aspect considered by consumers; how the music perpetuates stereotypes of various communities; and how artists impact the way consumers see the importance of social inequality. Along with this, further research can be done on other hip-hop artists to gain a more well-rounded understanding of how artists throughout the industry are showing up during one of the most politically divided times in United State history.

All in all, this research found that hip-hop's original focus of truth and social progression still thrives in the work of African-American artists. The importance of making a difference is still at the forefront of many Black artists, but is lacking in the work of White hip-hop artists. It is clear that well versed college students are waiting

for White hip-hop artists to take a stronger stand, but their voice needs to be louder and heard by many more. By spreading this knowledge and this passion, we can properly use hip-hop as a tool of social change. More individuals need to be aware of what they are consuming and more artists need to be aware of their social responsibility. With continuous work towards a more knowledgeable world, we can look to have a more equitable world where the race of the artist fuels them to use their platform in a way that elevates all and leaves no one behind.

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