

RAPPING GENDER AND VIOLENCE? ADDRESSING VIOLENCE  
AND GENDER WITH A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF RAP LYRICS

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RAPPING GENDER AND VIOLENCE? ADDRESSING VIOLENCE  
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine violence in contemporary rap music and to address if the violence is gender specific. Utilizing the Billboard Top Ten Rap Singles from 1997-2007 this study analyzed 100 songs using content analysis. Findings indicate that male violence against other males is the most common theme throughout the sample. In addition, the use of misogynistic terms was present throughout the sample as well.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Rapping Gender and Violence? Addressing Violence and Gender with a Content Analysis of Rap Lyrics,” presented by Misty Campbell, candidate for the Master of Science degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Gender, according to feminist and social construction theorists, is a socially constructed concept. Although there are biological differences between males and females, it is the socialization process that teaches what behaviors, emotions, activities, and fears girls and boys are allowed to express. Our family, and society at large, label what is acceptable and punish those who do not follow the 'norm'. Even our speech, according to social construction theory, is socially constructed and socially enforced (Hollander, 2001; Lorber, 2005; Lorber, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Wharton, 2005). It should follow then that our speech about violence is socially constructed. Social constructionism and cultural criminology are similar in that both seek to address the ways in which social behavior is influenced directly by our social spheres: including class, gender and race. Criminologists who subscribe to social constructionism argue that indeed, our perceptions, fears, and discussions of violence are shaped by our social world. In particular, cultural criminology has focused on the ways in which these parts of culture affect perceptions of crime and crime control (Ferrell, 1999). One particular form of culture that has been linked to crime perceptions is rap music. Rap is derived from hip-hop culture and consists of speaking lyrics over a beat (Wheeler, 1991).

Full of political debate and energy, rap music soon gained popularity and became commercialized. Once becoming commercialized we see the emergence of 'gangsta rap' in the early 1990s (Kubrin, 2005). With its high popularity there have been various critiques over the amount of (or perceived amount of) violence, misogyny, and drug usage in rap music (Gladney, 1995; hooks, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Kubrin, 2005; Martinez, 1997; Moore-

Foster, 2005; Ogbar, 1999; Rich et al., 1998; Richardson, J. & Scott, K., 2002; Rose, 1994).

Theories about rap and the role it plays in helping to construct ideas on race, gender, and violence is varied. There are arguments that rap music is attacked because it is the cultural expression of African American youth. In addition, some theorists argue that rap music increases racial acceptance by showcasing the difficulties of disenfranchised African American youth. Other theories argue that rap music is a modern day minstrel show that is detrimental to race relations. In addition, rap music is often discussed in regards to the misogyny and violence that some theorists argue increases negative attitudes towards women and may lead to increased use of violence (Rose, 1991; Rose, 1994; Kubrin, 2005; Wheeler, 1991). These theories and the ensuing debates over the theories have created a field of knowledge around race, gender, class, and violence.

However, despite the enormous contributions of the discourse on rap music, a gap exists in the literature. Specifically, little is known about mainstream rap music as it relates to violence and the construction of gender (and gender specific crimes). My research addresses this gap in the literature by examining violence and gender in mainstream rap music. The current study considers the following research questions: (1) how is violence described and interpreted in rap music and (2) are discussions of violence gender specific in rap music?

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social construction theory suggests that gender, race, class, and violence are all socially constructed (West & Zimmerman, 1987). To fully grasp how this may affect the development and interpretation of rap music, it is important to understand how social constructionism explains each of these categories. Therefore, an overview of gender construction, race and class construction, the construction of violence, and how these all interplay in rap music is provided.

#### **The Social Construction of Gender, Race, Class & Violence**

##### **Gender Construction**

###### **Femininity.**

Lorber (2005) states “social construction feminism looks at the structure of the gendered social order as a whole and at the processes that construct and maintain it” (p. 242). Social constructionists argue that gender is not about biological differences. Sex (being male or female) is biological. However, in American society we tend to equate sex with gender. Thus, the toys we enjoy as children, the colors we like, the professions we choose, are all related to what is deemed acceptable for males or females. These roles are based on gender expectations and the social pressure to fit into ‘normal’ male and female roles; but are frequently equated with biological differences (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Eckert, 2003). These roles are shown through gender markers such as the color and style of clothing, behaviors, and speech (Eckert & McConnell, 2003; Ginwohner, Hollander & Olson, 2000; Lorber, 2005; Wharton, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) coined the term “doing gender”; which means that gender is not only a part of our identity in

American culture, but something we act out in the presence of others. In organizations, gender construction can be found in the ways in which organizations achieve their goals. This construction can be seen in a variety of ways such as the markers for bathrooms, color systems (blue for boys versus pink for girls), and even gender-specific fundraising (such as bake sales) (Ginwohner et al., 2000). Thus, gender becomes a “system of social practices” (Wharton, 2005, p. 7). It is so ingrained in society that the gender order seems natural, or biological (Lorber, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Those who do not fit into gender norms are targeted as odd or immoral because the lack of gender identity challenges our notion of biological gender differences (Lorber, 2005). However, much of what may be deemed as natural biological differences, such as males’ physical strength in comparison with females, can be explained through socialization. Males and females early in life look to society (and the adults in their lives) and mimic gender roles in order to be accepted (Messerschmidt, 1993). Thus, males are taught to be strong, aggressive, and protective. Due to this, many males are more likely to practice bravado, take risks, and participate in sports. Females are taught to be passive, attractive and sexual and are more likely to avoid physical contact sports and may diet. Although there are exceptions, this social construction of gender is the norm (Lorber, 2005).

### **Masculinity.**

Males, at times, become hyper-masculine, meaning that they tend act out in extreme ways to prove their masculinity (Miedzian, 2005). Kimmel (2005) provides insight into this by describing the four rules of masculinity. His rules are: males must do nothing feminine, must have power, wealth, and success, must deprive themselves of emotion, and must be daring and aggressive (Kimmel, 2005, p. 142). Males do these things to maintain the social

order that allows them to, overall, have more power than females (Kimmel, 2005; Wallis, 1995). This power differential has important implications. Wallis (1995, p. 145) defines these power differences as ‘male privilege’. Male privileges include the use of all pronouns in the “he” form when discussing males and females, males being the assumed decision maker in a relationship, being allowed to control a conversation, and for males to be the ‘norm’, while females are the ‘other’. This power difference can be found in the workplace as well as in any place in which females may be degraded as sexual objects even when they are working on the same level as males; establishing their place as subordinates (Kimmel, 2005).

Kimmel (2005) also argues that males act out their gender because of fear of other males. Males do not want to be seen as ‘feminine’ or ‘unmanly’ because other males may see them as weak. Quoting an interview with rap artist Eminem he points out that calling a man a faggot is not about sexuality, but about taking away ‘manhood’ (Kimmel, 2005, p. 146). In a society where self-identity is determined in large part by gender, losing your ‘manhood’ may be viewed as a loss of self (Lorber, 2005).

### **Gender, Class, and Race Constructions**

The social construction of gender is further complicated by the social construction of class and race (Lorber, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; Wharton, 2005). Eckert (2003) argues that gender, race, and class are part of our speech patterns. For example, profanity may be seen as a ‘male’ form of speech given that males may use profanity to show aggressiveness or as participation in bonding. Another particular gendered aspect of speech would be the metaphors for sex and sexuality that are commonly used by males. Males that act out of hyper-masculinity may use more profanity and misogynistic metaphors (Eckert, 2003). Each person has a “community of practice” in which they learn language, dialect, and the social

rules of talk. A particular race (or region) may develop a variety of speech that is ‘owned’ by the group (Eckert, 2003). The African American Vernacular English, or Ebonics, is ‘owned’ by African Americans. Another type of linguistics is ‘playing the dozens’ in which African American males may insult each other with the threat of real violence, which may actually occur, though not the goal (Eckert, 2003). The linguistic patterns and varieties used (such as Ebonics) also pose challenges in that they may become stereotyped. Stereotyping takes away from the linguistic market (or ability to gain materialistically based on linguistic usage). This is because the bonding that typically occurs with the use of a cultural pattern and variety is diminished by the negative association of the stereotype (Eckert, 2003).

The above example showcases the ways in which gender and race are both socially constructed and how people of different genders and races may find themselves limited by socially constructed expectations. Gender differences intersect with racial differences as well. This leads to one’s perceived view of gender being defined by one’s perceived view of race, and class, and vice versa (DeCoster & Heimer, 2006; hooks, 1994). Thus, race, gender, and class work together in creating power differences. The intersection of race and gender lead to differences among genders. A white woman may occupy a lower power level than a white male, yet she has more social power than an African American woman (Lorber, 1994). The intersection of gender, race, class, and sexuality are all socially constructed together leading to multiple ways that one can create self-identity (Zinn & Dill, 1996). In addition to the social construction of gender intersecting with race and class, it also affects our construction of violence.

## **Social Construction of Violence**

Social construction theory and cultural criminology are both useful in examining how violence is constructed in society. While social construction provides the framework for understanding that our beliefs, actions, and even language are shaped by our society, cultural criminology seeks to address the ways in which violence is perceived, influenced, and shaped by gender, race, socio-economic status, and the media (Ferrell, 1999). For example, discussions of violence are based on the idea that vulnerability is a biological difference. These discussions are presented not only by the social groups surrounding people but are also reinforced by the media. Thus, females are more likely to view themselves as vulnerable and in need of protection—even in groups. Males are more likely to see themselves as protectors (Hollander, 2001).

In regards to violence, Messerschmidt (1993) and Adler (1975) point out that with males being seen as the ‘norm’ and females the ‘other’, the gendered nature of crime is often ignored. Males’ privilege led to males holding high positions in work environments (sometimes completely dominating a particular type of employment), and thus creating a division of labor. This division of labor provided, and continues to provide, males with more legitimate opportunities, and more illegitimate ones (Adler, 1975). Messerschmidt (1993) argues that the increased illegitimate opportunities for males lead to a social construction of violence as masculine. Along with gender, race and class are part of this social construction in which people choose to act out the existing social order, recreating it in the process. There are different alternatives to masculinity/femininity in regard to class and race, because race and class affect the division of labor, and thus power differences (Messerschmidt, 1993).

## **Violence and Masculinity**

Moore-Foster (2005) states “male supremacy cannot be established without violence” (p. 351). Both Moore-Foster (2005) and Miedzian (2005) argue that rape is especially part of this violence, and is used to systematically keep females unequal by controlling their access to public space through fear of sexual violence. Walby and colleagues (1983) add that beyond fear of violence, female use of space is also controlled through fear of being blamed for the violence. Moore-Foster (2005) points out that language used by some males in regards to sexuality contain numerous references to violence, even in regards to consensual sex. Sexual acts are described in a crude manner such as “banging” and “ripping open” (Moore-Foster, 2005, p. 354). Males may not always be aware of the ways in which sexual violence (and even language) harms females. As Wallis (1995) suggests, males may acknowledge that extreme forms of violence towards females is wrong without acknowledging (or recognizing) the more indirect forms of oppression.

Gender, race, and class affect the “accommodating masculinity” (that which fits into societal standards) and “oppositional masculinity” (rebellion to standards) (Messerschmidt, 1993). Masculine forms of criminality, and more over criminal oppositional masculinity, are more likely to occur when ways to express masculinity are limited. This may explain why lower class and minorities may engage in more violence because the ability to showcase masculinity is limited due to classism and racism (DeCoster & Heimer, 2006; Messerschmidt, 1993).

Oppositional masculinity for white, middle class Americans may be playing music loud or being disruptive. However, members of the lower class and/or minorities may use gun violence. A distinct difference in masculinities between the lower class and lower class



minorities is that white, lower class youth may engage in racism and homophobia as a way to express masculinity when resources are scarce (DeCoster & Heimer, 2006; Hollander, 2001; Messerschmidt, 1993).

Anderson (1995) adds that where resources are limited there may be increases in violence as a means of expressing masculinity. Beyond oppositional masculinity, he defines “oppositional culture” in which an entire subculture is created due to lack of quality employment, racism, use of drugs, and lack of hope (Anderson, 1995, p. 81). This oppositional culture has its own rules that are not part of the ‘general’ culture. These rules include formation of a street code on how to gain and keep respect. This code is “actually a cultural adaptation to a profound lack of faith in the police and judicial system” (Anderson, 1995, p. 82). The rules of mainstream society are therefore ignored. In fact, prison is not a deterrent for those following the code because it increases respect on the street.

Noteworthy is that some youth may not completely ignore mainstream versions of masculinity—balancing anger at racism and desire to express ‘blackness’ with desire to achieve mainstream goals. For example, this can be seen in a youth who understands and participates, at a certain level, with street culture while striving to go to college (Anderson, 1995). In addition, the oppositional culture engages in parenting that is severally corporal (teaching children to solve problems with violence) and parents may, at times, leave children to take care of themselves (Anderson, 1995). Wilson (1996) points out, however, that mainstream culture (middle class culture) typically are provided sick leave to use for themselves and their children, and have the ability to raise children without needing to engage—at least at some level—in the informal economy of street life. In fact, parents who

may not adhere to the ‘code of the streets’ may encourage their children to fight as a way to gain respect and safety (Anderson, 1995).

Patterson (1993) explains this phenomenon by arguing that African American male youth are punished more severely than their female counterparts while growing up. He further asserts that daughters are seen as helpful and friends, while male youth are seen as problematic (Patterson, 1993). He contends that although African American males and females have been oppressed, African American males were demoralized at a deeper level (Patterson, 1993). African American females, he adds, have always worked closer to white culture giving them “cultural capital” that they may pass on to their daughters (Patterson, 1993, p. 10). These disparities, argues Patterson (1993), explain why lower income African American males act out misogyny. Misogyny, in particular, is important because it is linked to increased sexual and domestic violence (hooks, 1994; Miedzain, 2005).

It is argued that this code was started because of an inability to access employment that would allow for the African American male to be a provider to his family—a requirement of mainstream American masculinity. Thus, the code creates a masculinity that places emphasis on sexuality (Anderson, 1999). The code also places emphasis on clothing and jewelry because material things need to be protected. Therefore, one can assume that someone wearing a great deal of jewelry is willing and able to protect it. Stealing someone’s material wealth can help someone gain more status and respect (Anderson, 1995). Anderson (1995) notes that stealing another’s girlfriend can also be a status enhancer which would indicate that at some level girlfriends are considered possessions as well. If valued possessions are taken, it is a direct blow to the self esteem of the individual. The individual must attack or risk losing respect and becoming an easy target (Anderson, 1995). The status

and respect one has is tied directly to their masculinity, for which some males would prefer death over being dishonored (Anderson, 1995).

Anderson (1995) notes that while females may engage in the code, they often call upon males to commit any necessary acts of violence. Even though this may be changing, it is important to note that when females do engage in violence it typically does not include guns (Anderson, 1995). hooks (1994, p. 295) argues that for African American males, who are “disenfranchised in almost every arena of life in the US, [they] often find that the assertion of sexist domination is their only expressive access to the patriarchal powers that they are told all males should possess”. She suggests that misogyny in African American communities is not only reflective of misogyny in the broader culture, but may also be due to the lack of opportunity one has to act out masculinity in other ways (also see Rose, 1994).

It is important to note that misogyny by African Americans is vilified, while white male misogyny is seen as a staple of American manhood, and thus glorified. In Western and mafia-related movies, women are subjected to sub-human standards and are seen as the downfall of males (Hinds, 1997; Dyson, 2007). Thus machismo is glorified by American males; but seen as reckless violence in African American males (West, 2001). This leads to a culture in which white males (i.e. *The Godfather*, *Scar Face*, and *Goodfellas*) are representative of American masculinity, while African American males are criticized (Keyes, 2002). Misogyny, and sexual aggression, in the African American community has a historical context that combines with current social constructions of race, class, and gender. To understand the role that stereotypes play, it is important to understand what these stereotypes are.

The Black-rapist stereotype was created during slavery to justify brutality against Black males and “manipulate the fears of the white population” (Moore-Foster, 2005, p. 348). King (1997) points out that 89 percent of those executed for rape between 1930 and 1988 were African American males. This historical sexualized criminalization of African American male sexuality still exists (West, 2001). African American males are more likely than white males to be convicted of rape. In fact, around 29 percent of men in prison for rape are African American; yet African American males make up 69 percent of those exonerated for the crime (Hattery & Smith, 2007). Thus, the historical and current context leads to allegations of sexual aggression to be viewed as racial oppression, instead of sexual violence (Crenshaw, 1994; Moore-Foster, 2005).

### **Violence and Femininity**

Differences in female use of violence can be explained through differences in gender, race, and class as well. Accommodating femininity is the supplement to normative or hegemonic masculinity. It is typically enacted by white and middle class females and allows them power and status over lower income whites and minority females. Accommodating femininity is centered on marriage, child care, sexual discretion, sociability, heterosexuality, whiteness, and submission (DeCoster & Heimer, 2006, p. 145). Lower income and minority females, in contrast, are more likely to construct femininity around independence and self reliance given the fewer opportunities for their male counterparts to provide economic and social support. They have little, if anything, to gain by engaging in accommodating femininity. Therefore, lower class minority females may engage in violence as a particular way of protecting one’s reputation (particularly sexual reputation) and/or to gain respect. If the violence is used as a way to gain respect then the females may be accommodating

marginalized masculinity. For example, studies of gang-involved girls often demonstrate that girls work very hard to prove to male gang members their toughness and willingness to fight; thus, that they are “one of the guys”. However, others studies suggest the opposite – that violence among lower class, minority females is rooted in femininity. These works posit that their violence is restricted to acts of self-protection (and especially protection of one’s sexual reputation). Consequently, their actions may be a form of resistance to marginalized masculinity (DeCoster & Heimer, 2006). Therefore, it is vital to understand that violence is defined not only through constructions of gender, but race and class as well.

In addition, victimization is constructed differently for various groups based upon their race. Historically, the rape of African American females has been treated differently than the rape of white females. The rape of African American females has historically not even been considered a crime and the prosecution rate in these incidents is still lower than that for rapes of White women (Crenshaw, 1994; Matthews, 1994; White, 1999). This disparity has a continuing legacy that West (2006, p. 2) defines as a “historical trauma that is intergenerational and continues to live in the collective memories of contemporary African American females”. West (2001, p. 83) posits that for African American females their gender is limited to three types: the seductive (“Jezebel”), the bitch (“Sapphire”), and the nurturer (“Aunt Jemima”). These stereotypes affect the way in which sexual violence is social constructed for African American females. Importantly, the Jezebel or seductress stereotype was used to justify the raping of Black females in the 1800s (West, 2006, p. 2). This typology may explain the current disproportionate rates of violent victimization of African American females compared to other females. Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) show that 18.8 percent of Black females have been raped in their lifetime (Tjaden

&Thoennes, 2006). Similarly, the National Violence Against Women Survey shows that African American females are at a higher risk for intimate homicide than any other race (Puzone, Saltzman, Krensnow, Thompson, & Mercy, 2000). Research has also indicated that adolescent African American females are at a higher risk for violent victimization than their white counterparts (Lauritsen, 2003) and are often the victims of various forms of sexual aggression ranging from sexual harassment to sexual assault (Like & Miller, 2006). Therefore, even though race and gender are socially constructed, their implications have real social power (Lorber, 1994).

### **The Social Construction of Violence in Rap Music**

The social construction of violence, gender, and race is done through various avenues. One of these avenues is rap music. These constructions can be found in the lyrics and the demographics of the rappers and listeners.

#### **History of Rap**

The complex interweaving of gender, class, and race combine in a fierce debate on rap music. Rap derives from hip-hop. Although rap and hip-hop may at times be used interchangeably, hip-hop is considered cultural and musical, while rap is simply a music genre (Krims, 2000). When looking at rap it is important to remember that it consists of the speaker (rapper), the listener (crowd), and a broader audience (society at large). This distinction is important because it suggests that the crowd and society may be able to interpret rap differently. Thus, while the violence in rap may be understood as a reflection of growing up in a violent environment, for the broader audience it may seem an encouragement of violence (Wheeler, 1991). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, American society was still working through the changes brought on by the Civil Rights Movement and

the current racial changes in America. Due to the changing social times, rap music was highly political—addressing issues such as racism, poverty, and civil rights (Dyson, 2007; Wheeler, 1991). Interestingly, the first rap song that was recorded - “Rappers Delight” by the Sugarhill Gang – was actually an upbeat party song that showcased rap music’s ability to play with words in a fresh way (Quinn, 1996; Tanz, 2007; Toop, 2000). Not until 1986, with Run DMCs and Aerosmith’s “Walk This Way”, was rap actually released to a broader audience. Because the song was recorded with Aerosmith (a rock band with a broad white audience), it became the first rap song to be played on MTV and thus widely released to mainstream America. These two songs lead the way for the introduction of rap music to a broad audience and presented rap music as an alternative party music; without a focus on its initial political tone (Toop, 2000).

Although this is when rap music is considered to have “crossed over”, the commercialization effect did not take place until the mid-1990s. Prior to commercialization, rap music was a cultural expression that was virtually exclusive to the African American community. However, commercialization meant its movement (and availability) to mainstream America. It is argued that the political nature of rap changed after commercialization (Gladney, 1995; Keyes, 2002; Tanz, 2007; Toop, 2000; Wheeler, 1991). It not only increased exposure of white youth to rap music, but it is also considered to be when white record labels became the prominent signing labels for this genre of music (Keyes, 2002; Toop, 2000; Wheeler, 1991). During this time, rap music shifted into what is considered “gangsta rap.” Mass appeal lead to artists engaging in gangsta lyrics to compete in the changing market for rap brought on by the commercialization effect (Keyes, 2002, Krims 2000, Ogbar, 2007).

Krims (2000) states that commercialization must be talked about in the context of African American history, music genres, gender, class, and urban life to fully understand rap. Therefore, a quick history of how gangsta rap emerged is needed. Gangsta rap emerged as part of 'reality rap' that discussed inner city life for African Americans. Four parts define it: "dramatic first person accounts, reliance on self, social/political comments, and humor" (Quinn, 2005, p. 6). Gangsta rap, until around 1993, was about urban and gang life that included political overtones in regards to racism, police brutality, and government neglect of inner cities. Gangsta rap's emergence can be seen as inner city jobs decreased, and the ability to provide for a family in legitimate ways decreased. For example, in 1981 the unemployment rate for African Americans was 14.2 percent; almost double the 1948 rate of 5.9 percent (Wilson, 1987).

Middle class African Americans also moved out of the inner city, lending to a continuing poverty stricken inner city. Between 1970 and 1980 the poverty population increased by 22 percent, although general population rates only increased by 9 percent (Wilson, 1987). Arrests and incarcerations for violent crime also increased among the African American community. Although only 1 in 9 Americans were African American in the 1980s, they accounted for almost half of all arrests for murder and non-negligent manslaughter (Wilson, 1987). Although Wilson (1987) contends that the movement of factory work and blue-collar work from the inner city is what led to increased poverty, the role that incarceration plays cannot be overlooked. African American men make up a disproportionate number of those incarcerated. This reality leads to an inability to compete in the labor market, and those released from prison are denied political power (Hattery & Smith, 2007).



## **Rap and Violence**

During this time period of high unemployment and increasing incarcerations, rap moved from simply political to angry political music that seemingly promoted a variety of anti-social behaviors. NWA (Niggas With Attitude) is notoriously described as being the first rap group associated with “gangsta rap”. Their song “Fuck The Police” released in the 1980s brought media attention to rap, particularly gangsta rap. The cop-killer lyrics drew attention from police organizations that picketed and called for a boycott of rap music. This song brought mainstream media and academic attention to rap (Keyes, 2002; Ogbar, 2007; Quinn, 2005; Toop, 2000). NWA also added a higher level of machismo in gangsta rap with “Straight Outta Compton”. This song was filled with “murder, mayhem, and misogyny” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 44). In the mid-1990s gangsta rap evolved to include glorification of violence and acceptance of misogyny (Krimms, 2000; Ogbar, 2007; Tanz, 2007; Toop, 2000). However, past and current gangsta rap must be addressed in regards to the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersect within it (Quinn, 1996).

Gangsta rap is considered the most controversial, sexist, homophobic, and violent component of rap music (Hooks, 1994; Krimms, 2000; Rose, 2001; Wheeler, 1991). Opponents of the criticism argue that violence in gangsta rap is metaphoric and part of expressing the ‘keep it real’ mentality of being a minority in the inner city (Krimms, 2000, Keyes, 2002). This includes using terms such as ‘bitch’ and ‘ho’, not to demean women, but to showcase a lack of respect for those not involved in the street life (and thus are not seen as truly misogynistic by rappers) (Krimms, 2000). However, many African American youth may use rap to help shape their social identity (Krimms, 2000). Thus, a deep debate in rap critiques is whether violent and misogynistic ideologies will become part of the identities of the

listeners. Regardless of the debate, gangsta rap is a very popular genre (Wheeler, 1991). In 1999, Americans bought over 1.5 billion dollars worth of music in the rap genre (Yeoman, 2001). By 2000 that number had increased to 1.8 billion (Rose, 2001).

However, as mentioned previously, the controversy over rap music was present from the start. In 1994 (just a few years after gangsta rap took off in sales) the Senate held a Juvenile Justice Subcommittee titled “Shaping Our Response to Violent and Demeaning Images in Popular Music”. Although it was to target popular music in general almost all the testimony was on rap music (Keyes, 2002; Richardson, J. & Scott, K., 2002). The harshest critique was that youth would see artists (particularly gangsta rap artists) as role models and become delinquent to act out the violence glorified in the music (Richardson, J. & Scott, K., 2002; Anderson & Cavalloro, 2002). However, youth were buying the most violent forms of gangsta rap in the mid-1990s. Violent crime peaked around 1991. Thus, the explosion of rap music was taking place after violent crime rates started to fall. Thus, if this form of rap music was increasing youth’s desire to act out delinquency, crime rates should have risen during the mid- and late-1990s. Instead, we see that although rap music may have been reflecting on the realities of crime in urban America, it was not increasing crime (Ogbar, 2007). Ferrell (1999) argues that this is “culture as crime” in which a part of culture is deemed to be the cause of crime. However, it is argued that rap is a reflection of violence in America and this form of music is simply another way that violence in America is turned into commodity (King, 1997).

This debate forces the question as to why violent music, particularly gangsta rap, is so popular, and thus marketable. Part of answering this demands critical assessment of the decision-making process of record label executives. The division of labor and power in

America creates a space in which becoming mainstream (commercialization) requires signing with major labels that are typically ran by white males. Noteworthy is that while gangsta rap may be pushed because it sells well, the label owners and CEOs (who are typically white males) are not criticized at the same level as artists (who are typically African American) (Hooks, 1994; Kitwana, 2005; Krims, 2000; Wheeler, 1991).

Thus, it is argued that mainstream America can attack rap without looking at why it is gangsta rap sells so well: it showcases the violence and capitalism that are glorified in mainstream American culture (hooks, 1994; Henderson, 1996). The sexism in dominant culture is valued so highly that artists who do not use sexist imagery and/or language are simply not picked up by the corporations (hooks, 1994). Ginwohner et al. (2000) point out that social activists who do not comply with traditional gender ideology are marginalized from mainstream. Thus, when seen as a form of civil activism, rappers who wish to change the broader society must still comply with traditional gender ideology or they will not be successful. However, this may lead the broader audience (mainstream) to view Black culture are “male, hard, sexual, and violent” because of the machismo showcased in gangsta rap (Roedigger, 1995, p. 663). So, contemporary gangsta rap may actually lead to acceptance (or continued acceptance) of the African American male as hypersexual and dangerous (Gladney, 1995; Ogbur, 2007; Watkins, 2005; West, 2001).

Consequently, some scholars suggest the attacks on music are qualitatively different depending on the genre of music and therefore the race of the artists. It is argued that rock music is attacked for its misogyny and violence, but it is not attacked in the same way as rap. For instance, bans on the sales of rap music and limitations on where rap concerts can be held are common (Rose, 1991). Even less common are attacks of folk and country music although

these genres have violent content as well (Richardson, J. & Scott, K., 2002). For instance, the country music song “Ol Red” released in 2001 by Blake Shelton contains the following lyrics: “Well, I caught my wife with another man and it cost me a ninety nine on a prison farm” (Bohan, 2001). This song is widely popular, spending 26 weeks on the Billboard Country Songs chart and is one of the most widely requested songs at Blake Shelton’s concerts (Billboard, 2002; CMT News, 2010). The ability to find violence in various genres, even those not typically discussed as violent, showcases that rap music is treated differently. This fact adds support to the theory that debates on gangsta rap is present because rap music is viewed as an attack on the culture of the white middle class. In addition, it showcases the perceived dangerousness of African American males (Rose, 1991; Rose, 1994). Ferrell (1999, p. 406) strengthens this position by arguing that marginalized cultures are charged with “cultural criminalization” for pointing out their marginalized status. This criminalization, however, ends up marginalizing the culture further (Ferrell, 1999). Thus, some theories on gangsta rap focus on the need for a public space to discuss the inequalities of current society (Rose, 1994; Ogbar, 1999; Wheeler, 1991).

The violence that rappers describe can be seen as part of a social order that was formed in response to a lack of ability to gain social status in the dominant society (Henderson, 1996; Keyes, 2002; Kitwana, 1994; Krims, 2000; Kubrin, 2005; Ogbar, 2007). Ogbar (2007, p. 39) suggests “oppositional culture was woven into the tapestry of hip hop from its inception”. Gangsta rap, itself, then is political in that it takes on a form of oppositional culture (Martinez, 1997; Quinn, 1996). Part of this oppositional culture would be the prison references in rap that started in the late 1980s (Ogbar, 2007). Although rap may at times glorify prison to increase street credibility—it is also judged as part of the racialized

mainstream culture (Ogbar, 2007). Because so many African American males are incarcerated, it can become part of African American masculinity according to some scholars (Dyson, 2007). In addition, this presence also provides explanation in regards to the prison references in rap music; the music reflects what may be considered part of 'normal' African American male life (Watkins, 2005). The stereotype of African American males as criminal and violent is furthered by the gun violence referenced in rap music. Again, scholars suggest that gun violence is discussed because it is part of masculinity in American society (Dyson, 2007).

It is argued that the domination, discussion, and material wealth found in rap (particularly gangsta rap) displays what becomes in the urban core the only way to gain social status (Kubrin, 2005; Quinn, 1996; Rose, 1994). Since the mid-1990s there has been a dramatic increase in the connection between crime, money, and objectification of females in rap (Ogbar, 1999). However, in the inner city violence is seen as a way of gaining higher status as well as preventing future violence and that this is why it is seen in rap music (Kubrin, 2005). Therefore, displays of wealth show status because material things need protecting. In addition, objectification of females allows for sex to be a way of gaining status as well (Kubrin, 2005). Misogyny in rap may be Black males way of gaining self worth through gendering: acting out masculinity (Gray, 1995; Hooks, 1994; Rose, 1994; Ogbar, 2007). Black masculinity in rap is defined as the ability to inflict harm, have sex with many females, and to have access to material wealth (Ogbar, 2007). Rap reflects the culture that creates it. Gangsta rap reflects the street code that dominates inner city minority life. However, by doing this, gangsta rap also validates the street code (Kubrin, 2005). Thus,

lyrics have “situational and situated meaning” (Kubrin, 2005, p. 366). The listeners get to interpret their own reality from the lyrics.

Watkins (2005) adds that in this discussion of inner city life, what gets left out is the way in which females understand and express their life. Although some female rappers have permeated the rap genre, it is often in terms of patriarchal values—such as being ‘down’ for a male or overtly sexual (Keyes, 2002). Some female rappers have managed to break into mainstream without playing into stereotypes such as Queen Latifah or Lauryn Hill and have been able to address the inner city life from the female perspective (Keyes, 2002). Dyson (2007) adds that females who do question the misogyny in rap music are seen as adding to racial tensions. They are placed second to the racial aspect of rap, instead of the gendered nature that may add to stereotypes of African American females. Rap is deemed as anti-dominant culture even though it reflects the dominant culture’s patriarchy, as well as the ill effects of this on females (Watkins, 2005).

Rap may also hold positive potential for decreasing racial tensions. Although there are stereotypes present, rap (even gangsta rap) provides insight into the lives of impoverished African Americans. It also provides a mutual space for impoverished white and Black youth to discuss racism and classism. This discussion could lead to decreased institutionalized racism as white youth reach adulthood and enter in the labor market (Kitwana, 2005; Quinn, 1996; Roedigger, 1995; Tanz, 2007; West, 2001). It is noteworthy that along with the commercialization of rap music, unemployment was increasing for both white youth and Black youth (Kitwana, 2005; Wilson, 1996). This change could be why racism, poverty, and police brutality made its way back into mainstream rap around 2002 (Ogbar, 2007). Thus, the role of public space for discussion is brought up again as an important component of the

debate over rap (Hooks, 1994; Kitwana, 2005; Ogbar, 1999; Richardson, J. & Scott, K., 2002; Rose, 1991; Rose, 1994; Wheeler, 1991).

### **Research on Rap and Violence**

Critiques of rap music are varied. The negativity in rap music has been discussed from academia, to the senate, to the New York Times (Hoch, 1999; Leeds, 2007). Academia has attacked rap music as being misogynistic, a modern day minstrel show, and simply music that has no particular ability to ease racial tensions (Gladney, 1995; McWhorter, 2008; Ogbar, 1999; Tanz, 2007). Artists in the hip-hop community have also criticized the commercialization effect and movement away from political forms of rap music (Ogbar, 1999). However, it is important to note that even when popular culture is being used as a culture piece (and as part of opposition) that it is still created within the dominant culture and that dominant culture may affect the overall creation. For example, rap music may include misogyny but so does the greater society from which its reflection is drawn from (Martinez, 1997, Quinn, 1996).

It is the various theories regarding violence, misogyny, and race within rap music that make the genre so vital to study. Rap music highlights how race, sexuality, and cultural identity are sustained in America—this includes the intersectionality of these social constructs within cultural criminology. (Quinn, 1996). Thus, studies have focused on whether rap music has more violence than other music genres, on the types of violence found in rap music, and if rap affects perceptions of misogyny and violence.

### **Rap Versus Other Genres**

The research comparing rap to other genres has found that little difference exist between violence in rap music and other genres. Binder (1993) studied the ways in which

media discusses rock music and rap music. Her study compared media references and writings about rock music, and its harm to general society, to the media references and writings about rap music and its harm to see if differences emerged—and if they did, causes for those differences. Using a sample taken from nationally distributed mainstream publications (i.e., *The New York Times* and *Reader's Digest*) and African American publications (i.e., *Ebony* and *Jet*) from 1985 to 1990 she found that rock music was most often labeled as being a danger to children, while rap was most often labeled as being a danger to society at large. Overall, her content analysis showed that rock music was more likely to question older authority, while rap questioned police and white authority. She argues that this could be why rap was treated as a danger to society at large. In addition, she notes that much of the discussion over rock and rap had racial undertones (Binder, 1993).

### **Rap, Violence, and Misogyny**

Lastly, research on rap music has examined rap's affect on perceptions of violence and misogyny among listeners. As mentioned before, misogynistic terms in rap music have been debated in regards to the way in which it shapes listeners ideologies of gender and sexuality. Stephens and Few (2007) studied the extent to which African American youth adopted female sexual scripts that are purported to be common in rap music such as the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama. Using purposeful sampling 7 African American males and 8 African American females were engaged in focus groups and written feedback (Stephens and Few, 2007). Stephens and Few (2007) found that such sexual scripts were prevalent among the youth and commonly used to define their perceptions of their sexual selves and the sexual selves of others. These scripts served as a mechanism by which youth understood the gender roles for



males and females (Stephens & Few, 2007). Similarly, Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto (1995) studied the effects of rap music on the belief systems of young African American youth in regards to dating violence and their educational aspirations. The study consisted of 46 African American boys: a control group that were shown no rap videos, a violent group that were shown violent rap videos, and a non-violent group that were shown non-violent rap videos. The groups were then provided with a scenario of friends who had different academic goals and a dating violence scenario. Findings indicated that those in the violent group were more likely to accept dating violence, and that those in both rap groups were more likely to want to be like the friend who did not go to college (Johnson, et al., 1995).

Studies examining rap music have also shown that certain forms of rap music increase the likelihood of permissive attitudes towards sexual aggression. For example, Johnson (1995) studied the effects of rap music on the acceptance of teen dating violence. This study looked at a group of 60 youth and their perceptions on dating violence. The control group did not listen to any rap music, while the experimental group was divided into two groups: those exposed to non violent rap music and those exposed to violent rap music. Then, the youth were asked to answer questions about dating violence. Her findings suggest that those exposed to both forms of rap music were more accepting of teen dating violence than those not exposed to rap. Likewise, Barongan and Hall (1995) studied whether listening to misogynistic rap music affected sexual aggression. Fifty-four males were exposed to either misogynistic rap or non-misogynistic rap and then asked to show a scene from a film to a female in a controlled setting. The scenes the males chose from were neutral, sexually violent, or assaultive. The findings showed that those in the non-misogynistic group showed the neutral scene more often than did those in the misogynistic rap group.

Studies have also looked at how rap music affects perceptions on sexual stereotypes. Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harington, and Davis (2007) studied the effects that perceived sexual stereotypes in rap videos had on the health of female African American teenagers. Twenty-two young African American females were asked to fill out a survey about their rap viewing and listening habits, sexual habits, perception of sexual stereotypes in rap music (and videos), and health habits. Peterson et al. (2007) found that females who were more likely to perceive sexual stereotyping in rap music were also more likely to binge drinking, use marijuana, have multiple sex partners, and possess a negative body image. This finding remained even after controlling for time spent watching videos and socio-demographic characteristics (Peterson et al., 2007).

Others have specifically examined the content of rap lyrics and the extent of violence and misogyny found in such. Kubrin (2005) studied whether rap music contained the ‘street code’. The purpose was to see if the street code was present, and if this helped recreate a social self that was violent. The sample was a content analysis of songs albums that went platinum between 1992 and 2000 (Kubrin, 2005). Findings indicated that the street code was present, with respect being the element of the code most often referred to in rap music. This was followed by the use of violence and glorification of material wealth. Kubrin (2005) found little objectification of women in the music and that the use of violence was related to masculinity through gendered terms such as “gangsta, thug, and soldier” (Kubrin, 2005, p. 372). Similarly, Armstrong (2001) studied rap music examining the presence (and extent) of misogyny in rap music. The study examined 13 artists who produced 490 gangsta rap songs between 1987 and 1993. The study found that 22 % of gangsta rap songs had violent and

misogynistic lyrics. Armstrong (2001) notes that in 2000, with the emergence of Eminem, violent and misogynistic lyrics (including a new focus on drowning women) increased.

### **Gaps in the Research**

What the current research suggests is that social construction theory may become a guide for understanding and establishing the order of violence. In particular, social constructionism may help to further understand how violence in rap music is constructed and interpreted. Although research has focused on lyrical analysis and the effects this has on perceived acceptance of violence, actual violence, and effects on gendered violence, there are still gaps in the research. In particular, looking at how rap music describes, defines, and to whom the violence is focused on is important. Given the controversy surrounding rap music, and the broader culture's understanding of/construction of violence, there are important questions that need to be addressed. The first is how is violence described and interpreted in rap music? In addition, are discussions of violence gender specific in rap music?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

Two objectives are central to the current research: (1) Discovering how violence is described or interpreted in rap music, especially after commercialization, and (2) Determining if discussions of violence are gender specific in rap music. The first objective will be achieved through an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What forms of violence are commonly discussed in rap music?
- (2) What forms of violence are least discussed in rap music?
- (3) What is the social context surrounding the expression of acts of violence?

The second objective will be addressed through an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- (4) Are discussions of violence in rap music gender specific? Specifically, are gender specific terms used in artists discussions of violence (i.e., ho, bitch, freak, fag)?
- (5) Are certain types of violence associated only with males?
- (6) Are certain types of violence associated only with females?

#### **Sample Collection**

In order to execute the objectives outlined above and their corresponding research questions, a content analysis of rap music will be conducted. The content analysis will focus on the “Top Ten Rap Singles” from 1997 to 2007. The Billboard Charts can be found online and in Billboard magazine. Billboard magazine was first published in 1894, although it did not focus explicitly on music until the 1920s. In 1940 Billboard started releasing the “Best Selling Retail Records” which is similar to the “Hot 100 Singles” of today’s Billboard. Songs

are placed on the charts if they rank in sales as recorded by Nielsen Sound Scan (an independent agent that has worked with Billboard since 1991), and based on top radio station airplay (as determined by Broadcast Data Systems). Thus, the Billboard charts will add validity by ensuring that songs chosen for analysis are top selling, and representative of the listening preferences of a mainstream audience. As stated above a ten-year period will be examined. This time period allows for control of fluctuation in yearly content production. This way, if content differentiates year-to-year (such as one year being more violent than others), the overall research findings will not be dramatically affected. The time frame will also allow for an examination of rap music during the period of increasing commercialization, which theories suggest corresponds with an increase in the violent content of rap music (Anderson, 2001; hooks, 1994; Kubrin, 2005).

### **Analytical Strategy**

Content analysis will be used to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the extent of violence in rap music and whether portrayals of violence are gender-specific. Content analysis is often used as a way of analyzing information on a topic that is controversial. Content analysis can be used to find and/or define meanings in media, as well as to explain communicative patterns of various individuals and groups (Berelson, 1952; Hesser, 2004). The way in which language is created and used reflects the view of reality specific to the person using and listening (Richardson, 1991). Viewing rap lyrics as a cultural text allows for a determination of how rap music is a reflection of society and how (or if) rap music contributes to the social construction of reality. The lyrics of rap songs will be examined to discover whether concepts or themes emerge regarding violence and gender. This will allow

for analysis of how often a phrase or concept is used, and the detection of meaning in the broader spectrum of the song. (Berelson, 1952).

The first part of the content analysis will involve quantitative analyses. Songs will be examined for key phrases and terms that are used to portray violence. Violence will be categorized as emotional violence, non-lethal forms of physical violence, and lethal violence. Emotional violence includes verbal assaults and terms such as gay, fag, ho' and bitch. Physical violence includes hitting, punching, kicking, sexual assault, and rape. Lethal violence includes any of the aforementioned acts that that can result in death but will also include gunfire or threat of gunfire. These key phrases and terms will be counted and used to enhance the qualitative analyses.

The purpose of the qualitative assessment is to understand the context within which violence is described or discussed. While the quantitative aspect of this study allows for a numerical count of terms, phrases, or concepts associated with violence, the qualitative aspect of this study allows for an assessment of the meanings associated with the use of these terms, phrases, or concepts. The qualitative analysis will have three parts: (1) an examination of the lyrics line-by-line, (2) an examination of the lyrics paragraph-by-paragraph, and finally, (3) an examination of the lyrics as a whole.

The qualitative portion of the content analysis will utilize grounded theory and open coding. Grounded theory will be used to determine if patterns emerge in the lyrics. Grounded theory is utilized when working qualitatively with a subject that either lacks theory, or that has multiple theoretical backgrounds. Grounded theory starts with open ended questions that allow for exploration of a specific topic or area of interest. The sample data is then used to determine if there are concepts, patterns, or themes that emerge that provide explanation for

the original research questions. These themes can then be compared to see if one theme is more prevalent than another (Charmaz, 1983). For the purpose of this research, the sample data will be examined to determine if themes emerge around the descriptions of violence in contemporary rap music. For instance, in looking at the sample data, the following open ended questions will be used: Is violence prevalent? (If yes) What forms of violence are found and in what context? Is violence in rap music gender specific? If themes emerge, then those themes will be examined to look for specific usage and context in which those initial themes are prevalent. Additionally, an open coding method will be utilized when examining the lyrics. Open coding allows for the “breaking down, examining, comparing, and conceptualizing” the terms, phrases, and concepts in a particular text (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, the data is examined starting at the most primitive level to look for terms, phrases, and/or concept that occur frequently. These terms, phrases, and/or concepts are then placed into broad categories based upon their frequency and the context under which they are used. These categories are continually developed and expanded upon as the data is examined at various levels (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the purpose of this study, open coding will include looking at the lyrics in various degrees to see if any particular terms and/or phrases emerge that describe violence. Further, those terms and/or phrases will be examined to see how often they occur, the context around their usage, and if they are gender specific.

Using open coding, the lyrics will be examined line by line to see if particular terms, phrases, and/or concepts emerge. Looking at the lyrics line by line will allow for examination of the context under which phrases or key terms are used in the lyrics; along with allowing for the breadth of terminology used in rap music to be included. The second part of the

analysis will examine the lyrics at the paragraph (or stanza) level to see if the terms, phrases, and/or concepts found at the line-by-line level are present at the paragraph level as well. Looking at the lyrics at the paragraph level will capture any terms and/or phrases that may be developed; or altered due to rhyming scheme. Examining the lyrics as paragraphs will also allow for phrases (and terms) that may be about violence to be examined in the context of the stanza. Further, if the phrase or term changes meaning throughout the stanza this will be addressed as well. In addition, if during the open coding process, patterns emerge regarding the various terms, phrases, and/or concepts then those patterns will be examined not only for context but for prevalence in the sample as a whole. The third part of the qualitative analysis allows for a comprehensive examination of the song and considers the brevity or duration of violence and misogyny defined in the entire song. In addition, this part of the analysis allows for the consideration of songs that may not be solely about violence but may contain messages of violence and misogyny. In addition, examining the song as a whole will allow for the social context of the song to be addressed. For instance, do various themes emerge such as violence as a means of protection or survival? Does the song highlight themes of learned violent behavior, violence as a means of defending oneself, or as a response to social standing or inequality? Themes could also include the identification of a particular type of violence being gender specific or targeted to a specific gender, or a pattern of justification for violence.

A major challenge facing the current research is the dynamic nature of slang in rap music. The terminology used is constantly changing and evolving. Consequently, the current research will focus solely on those terms, concepts, and phrases that are commonly associated with violence. For instance, the term bitch is commonly associated with gender



and can be used with a violent connotation. Terms or phrases in which the definition or intent of the term is unknown (or unclear) will be excluded from the analysis. However, if there are terms or phrases in which the definition or intent is unknown are used repeatedly this will be noted. Restricting the analysis by excluding these terms will allow for a less subjective assessment of the lyrics by allowing for less researcher bias.

### **Research Implications**

The current research will contribute to our understanding of how masculinity, femininity, and violence are socially constructed while adding to the understanding of how media may influence ideology about gender and violence. In addition, this analysis may allow for a deeper understanding of where perceptions of crime come from. This study may also add to the growing literature on cultural and feminist criminology. In particular, it may add to the body of literature regarding cultural criminology, which “references the increasing analytical attention that many criminologists now give to popular culture constructions, and especially mass media construction of crime and crime control (Ferrell, 1999, p. 395-396). This includes performing scholarly reading of different types of media that relate to crime (Ferrell, 1999). Feminist criminology is used to understand risk factors, perceptions, and constructions of crime based on gender specific research and theory (Adler, 1975; DeCoster & Heimer, 2006; Kimmel, 2005). This study will add to the growing body of literature regarding how media (music) may reflect criminal behavior. Contemporary rap music is a reflection of the current culture and its interpretation of violence. Understanding how violence is interpreted—and how those interpretations are shared—allows for a broader understanding of how to address violence at large. Further, this study may add to the literature on feminist and cultural criminology by looking at the context under which race,

gender, and violence intersect within contemporary rap music and how that may shape the society at large.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This study examined the Top Ten rap singles from 1997 to 2007; the study examined 100 songs total. The songs contained in the sample were rendered by 77 artists. There were 72 songs in which a male was the lead artist and 5 songs in which a female was the lead artist. While this study is examining songs—and not artists—it is important to note the gender differential since this study sought to address how violence is described or interpreted in contemporary rap music and if those discussions of violence are gender specific. Violence ranging from physical acts to emotional forms of violence were portrayed in rap music. The most commonly discussed form of violence was emotional violence (e.g., name calling), followed by lethal violence, and non-lethal (which included threats and non-lethal physical acts). Gender-specific forms of violence and misogyny were also evident in the sampled lyrics. These gender-specific forms of violence included the use of derogatory language to describe women or sexual acts and language used to debase other males or discriminate against homosexual orientation.

#### **How is violence described or interpreted in contemporary rap music?**

There were many ways in which violence was portrayed in the data based on the terms/phrases commonly used by artists. As mentioned, many of these terms depict physical forms of violence (both lethal and non-lethal), while others centered on emotional violence. These terms and concepts were found at the sentence by sentence, paragraph/stanza, and overall song level. These terms and the context under which they were used are presented below.

## Lethal

Lethal violence is defined as violence that could end in death, references to death, or discussions/mention of weapons. Looking at the sample line by the line, the most common terms used that indicated this form of violence were “gun” and “kill.” The term kill was used 30 times and the term gun was used 28 times in the sample (see Chart 1). These terms were used in a variety of ways. For example, references of weapon possession were made, describing lethal acts that have already happened, and threatening to commit lethal violence. At times, the use of the term gun was simply to state the artist had a gun. A line by line example of this is: “shit, ain’t no stoppin’ ‘em, guns we got a lot of ‘em” (Whitefield, Smith, James, & Giles, 2002). At the stanza level, this is also found: “from the day to the night I rock, say what you like, never not, staying alive, living the life, gots to keep it hot, shotgun in the drop” (Harris, Cox, & Dupri, 2000).

In other examples the mention of a gun is to show a willingness to engage in lethal violence. This is shown at the line by line level: “act shady and feel my three eighty” (Anderson, V., Brown, J., Combs, S., Jones, K., & Jordan, S., 1997) and “homeboy trippin’ cause I’m staring at his chick, now he’s on the sideline starin’ at my click” (Williams, Jones, & Kent, 2004). Another example, at the stanza level, of this is:

“Anyone disrespect my zone, we gon’ get it on til we get it gone, ... but you gettin’ it wrong, or you gonna get shot and blown” (Bailey, R., Barnett, R., Bell, F., Benjamin, A., Burton, T., Gipp, C., Johnson, E., Knighton, W., Patton, A., & Young, N, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whole stanzas are not presented as to stay in compliance with fair share/use laws. Fair share/use laws indicate that particular copyrighted material may be used for criticism and for academic purposes. There is no defined number of words in regards to fair use. However, said material should not compromise a major portion of the work. Thus, no more than four lyrical lines have been utilized from any one given song. Further, the lyrical lines are being utilized in a scholarly fashion, without material gain, to present a criticism of the work. In addition, the work is being used to enhance an understanding of criminality which benefits society as whole; another aspect of fair share/use laws.

In this stanza, the willingness to engage in lethal violence is detailed so that others are aware that the artist will not tolerate anyone being disrespectful to them.

There are other times in which the mention of a weapon is used to showcase how violent a particular group of people may be—in particular, those from a certain geographical area. For instance:

“... , peter got a nine millimeter, playa haters can feel the flame from my heater, Brooklyn niggas...because when its beef they arin’t scared to shoot, ... niggaz outta Queens ... strapped with the glock...” (Fagen, D & Becker, W, 1998).

In this stanza we see not only the mention of a weapon as a means of protecting self (“...playa haters can feel the flame from my heater” and “...peter got a nine millimeter”) but also a means of showcasing how violent a particular group can be (“...Brooklyn...because when its beef they ain’t scared to shoot” and “...niggaz outta Queens...strapped with the glock”).

The term kill was also used in a variety of ways; these ways were found at both the line by line and the stanza level. At the line by line level this included using the term as a threat or an action already completed: “...look I will kill bro if I’m in your hood” (Mayfield, C., Davis, A., Hutson, L., Harris, C., Hathaway, D., Roberts, W., & Arillo, G., 2006), “...killed two sheriffs” (Burke, S., Greer, K., Henderson, A., House, S., Lindsey, F., 2004), and “...the feds hate me, the song of Satan, they say my killing too blatant (Jordan, S., Smith, T., Wallace, C., Combs, S., Conti, B., & Phillips, J., 1997)”. An example of this at the stanza level:

“...on the grill of my low rider, guns on both sides right up by the gold wires, I’ll fire ‘em, kill Bank’s on my song and really do it, ...” (Lyon, A., Valenzano, M., Taylor, J., Jackson, C., Felder, A., Harris, N., Baker, R., & Bailey, H., 2005).

The term kill was also used at the line by line level to label someone or a group: “...dis dance for the killers, the dealers” (Hill, J., Gleaton, M., Leverette, J., Hammond, C., Willingham, J., Tiller, G., & Hunt, D., 2006). In some instances, ‘kill’ was used as a compliment, such as “...physique extra ill, sundress to kill” (Law, S., Wheeler, C., & Hooper, N., 1997) whereas the kill, although a violent term, does not actually mean violence. However, this use of the term was very rare. The basis of an entire song can revolve around lethal violence. The song “Ghetto Cowboy” (Burke, S., Greer, K., Henderson, A., House, S., Lindsey, F., 2004) tells the story of a group of ‘bandits’ that are thieving, stealing, and killing. In this song, the ‘bandits’ are always one step ahead of the sheriff’s/law enforcement. This may indicate a desire to see themselves above the law—and/or as being able to elude law enforcement.

When examining the sample songs as a whole, the mention of lethal violence was most often utilized as a threat. However, the artist simply mentioning the presence of a weapon can be significant in terms of the discussion of lethal violence. The mentioning of a weapon or the ability to use lethal violence highlights that one must always be able to protect him/herself. This reference perhaps indicates a perception of vulnerability to victimization. Thus, the discussion of lethal violence within the lyrics may highlight not only a desire to show how powerful one is—but how vulnerable a person may be if they are not willing or able to protect themselves. Perceived vulnerability may help to explain why the prevalence of guns and other discussions regarding lethal violence are so prevalent in the sample.

### **Non-Lethal**

Non lethal violence is defined as violence which could cause bodily harm but not death. In looking at the sample songs line by line the use of non lethal violence includes the

terms: hit (used 13 times), kick (used seven times), slap (used five times), beat (used five times), bang (used three times), punch ( used one time), rape (used one time), and screw (used one time). In addition, the term gangbang and various forms of this term (used nine times) were found as well (see Chart 1). The use of non lethal violence was almost exclusively used as a threat. Example of this at the line by line level include: "...I hit your ass up boy, I done warned you" (Jackson, C. & Storch, S., 2005). At the stanza level:

"...back your ass, whooo, the fuck up ... put your meanest face on for me...gonna stomp your ass ... some old niggas ready to jump your ass" (Hall, O., Johnson, A., Miller, C., Miller, P., Miller, V., Phipps, M, Price, P., Stephens, C., Tyler, M., & Wilson, M., 2000).

In these examples, the mention of non lethal violence is in the form of a threat—an indication of what could happen if someone is disrespectful. Further, at the stanza level the threat moves beyond the artist threatening to commit the non lethal violence, but the use of others to complete the violence as well. The threat of revenge through the use of violence may highlight the constant fear of possible victimization by reminding the target of the possibility of an old fight, or enemy, to comeback and extract revenge. The threat of revenge is important because it distinguishes that violence is not only a possibility when someone is disrespected but that violence is a possibility at all times—based upon previous interactions.

In addition, variations of the term gangbang were also used. For example, "been bangin' since my...lil nigga Rob got killed" (Lyon, A., et al., 2005), "...but would you bang with the clique if it was thick" (Stewart, C., Nasarenay, T., Johnston, T., Thompkins, J., Money, J. & Davis, D., 1999), and "...all my niggas represent your bang" (Dogg, S., Dupri, J., Gibb, A., Shider, G., Spadley, D., Cox, B., Clinton, G., & Gibb, B., 2000) The use of the term gangbang (or its various forms) is mentioned casually and rarely used.

In looking at the sample songs as a whole, there were more threats of non lethal violence than mention of committed acts of non lethal violence. Further, the use of non lethal violence was most often a passing threat—the entire song did not revolve around the violence. The threat of non lethal violence is used with such brevity within the songs that it highlights a sense of normalcy surrounding the use of violence and perhaps the perceived need to showcase that one is always willing to engage in violence.

### **Emotional**

Emotional violence is defined as verbal assaults; terms and/or concepts designed to demean, discriminate, or debase another person. The use of emotional violence was included in a variety of ways. In looking at the sample line by line, the most commonly used term was “bitch.” The second most common form of emotional abuse at the line by line level was the use of the terms “hoe” or “slut.” However, terms such as “faggot” and “punk,” though less common, were also used against others. Again, looking at the sample line by line, the term bitch was used 155 times. The term hoe or slut was used 92 times. The term faggot (or a variation of this term) was found eight times. The term punk was used six times.

The term bitch was used in different ways. The term could be used generically at the line level to refer to a group such as “...remind these bitches to mind they business” (Atkins, J., Vest, M., Lorenzo, I., 2001). It could also refer to a particular person such as “...situation get real (the) bitch’ll die for me” (Lester, S., Combs, S., Hawkins, C., Thomas, M., Jones, M., & Frampton, T., 1997). Examples at the stanza level:

“...brand new shoes, brand new tool... snappin’ my fingers, then reaching for my glock Bitch, reppn my block bitch” (Bailey, A., Stevens, E., Joseph, S., & Smith, J., 2010).

“...we can’t stop now bitch, we can’t stop, and you can’t stop us, so bitch don’t try... we don’t die” (Quezerque, W., Tyler, M., Miller, V., Johnson, J., & Bazile, C., 1999).



It could also refer to the way a person is talking or acting. For instance:

“...gang bang, slap a bitch nigga... monies on the 20, you know, we still own niggaz who talk bitch shit” (Broadus, C., Means, D., Spillman, K., Gilliam, K., & Davis, T., 1999).

In this stanza the use of the term bitch is used to demean not only the person (i.e., “bitch nigga”) but also to talk away from the power of threats from another group of men. Their threats are just “bitch shit”.

The term hoe or slut was used at the line by line level to refer to a group or individual person such as “...we heard there’s hoes out so we brought the cars” (Sandimanie, J., Lawson, C., Tyler, M., Smith, J., & Bridges, C., 2001). The term faggot was used at the line by line level exclusively towards a person or to label a group of people. For instance, “...all you faggot motherfuckers make way” (Sandimanie, J. et al., 2001) and “...these faggot niggaz even made gang signs commercial” (Betha, M., Cartagena, J., Smith, J., Mathers, M., Smith, R., & Storch, S., 2005). The term punk was used only to describe a particular person. For example, “...hit the trunk, grab the pump, punk I’ll be right back” (Sandimanie, J. et al., 2001).

Songs in the sample most often utilized emotional violence in passing—or through stanza development. The use of emotional violence throughout a song (or as the entire basis of the song) was rare—but did occur. An example of this is Ludacris’s 2001 single “Move Bitch” that has a repeating chorus that states “...move bitch, get out the way, get out the way, move bitch, get out the way” (Sandimanie, J. et al., 2001). In Soulja Boy’s 2007 single “Crank That” it states “...supersoak that hoe” and “...superman that hoe” multiple times as well (Way, D., 2007).

Overall, lethal violence was the most common form of violence found and emotional violence was the least common. In looking at the types of violence found, this study also sought to determine if the use of violence, and type of violence discussed, was gender specific. The results of this inquiry are detailed below.

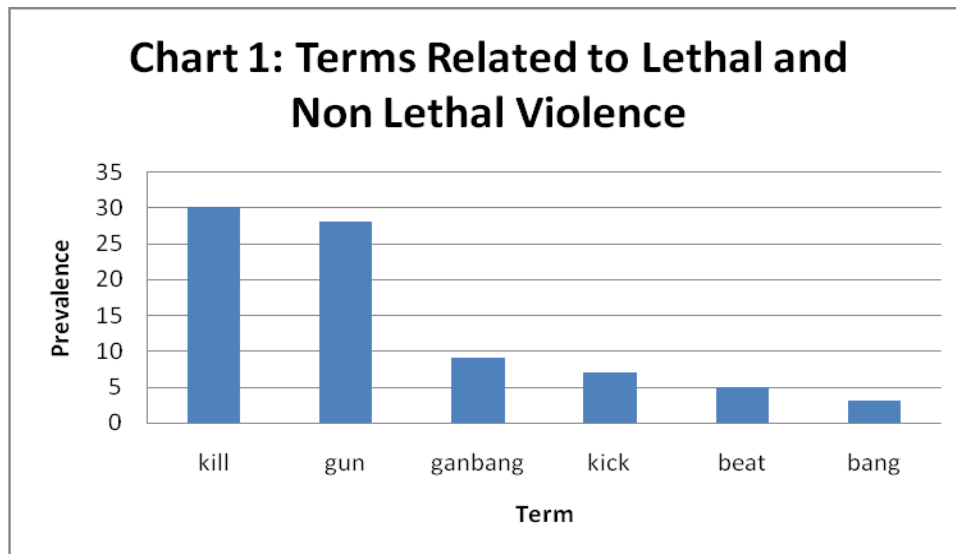


Chart 1. Terms Related to Lethal and Non-Lethal Violence

### **Are these discussions of violence gender specific?**

The second part of the analyses considers whether the aforementioned categories of violence are discussed in gender-specific ways. Indeed, the use of lethal and non lethal violence was overwhelmingly directed towards males. However, the use of emotional violence was almost overwhelmingly directed towards females. Given the gendered nature of violence, it is not surprising that misogynistic terms like bitch and hoe were commonly used in these descriptions. The use of misogynistic terms is important in a discussion of violence. In particular, it is important because misogynistic beliefs have been linked to increased

sexual and domestic violence (Hooks, 1994; Miedzain, 2005). In addition, the ways in which these terms are used—including the context in which they are found—is significant to the overall understanding of violence in contemporary rap music. In the sampled lyrics, derogatory and misogynistic terms were gender specific in several ways. Such language was used: (1) to emasculate or debase other males, (2) to discriminate against another’s sexual orientation, and (3) to demean or objectify women. The findings are presented in the subsections below.

### **Male Violence Against Other Males**

The use of violence by males against other males was a prevalent theme of gender-specific violence in this study. It included acts of lethal violence, non lethal violence, and emotional violence. However, it was the threat of violence (lethal and non lethal) that was most common. There were 41 of the 100 songs that included a threat of violence (lethal and non lethal) against another male or mention of a weapon as an indicator of the ability to commit violence against another male (see Chart 2). Examples of a threat of violence were found in a variety of ways. At the sentence level threats of this nature included: “...bruise crews who do something to us” (Wallace, C., Alpert, R., Angelettie, D., Armer, A., Combs, S., & Lawrence, R., 1997), “...peter got a nine millimeter” (Fagen, D. & Becker, W., 1998), and “...if a nigga get an attitude, pop it like it’s hot” (Hugo, C. & Williams, P., 2004). In looking at the context of a stanza or paragraph in a song there are examples as well. An example of this:

“Brooklyn niggaz get crazy loot...that's because when it's beef they ain't scared to shoot...harlem niggaz know how to play... Niggaz outta Queens got shit on lock...” (Fagen, D. & Becker, W., 1998).

In this stanza the threat of violence is continuously developed. The stanza describes how males from different areas are willing to use violence to gain material wealth or status. It is

important to note that this stanza, full of lethal violence, starts off with: "...lie and die in the fire, where I learned to ball" (Fagen, D. & Becker, W., 1998). Thus, the artist establishes that he has grown up surrounded by violence and is not fazed by it. Further, it may serve to highlight why the artist feels the need to discuss threats of violence—he is aware of how dangerous life can be and wants to ensure that everyone knows he is capable of protecting himself. This need for bravado is represented throughout the 41 songs that included threat of violence. Threats of violence within the sample were often preemptive and seemingly without provocation.

Other songs within the sample included lyrics that went beyond threats and described actual acts of violence against males. As shown in Chart 2 below, 19 songs that directly referenced violent acts were committed against other males. Examples of this at the line by line level would be: "...I'm hurtin' niggaz" (Blackman, D., Taylor, S., & Simmons, E., 1998), "...blood stains and chalk, cause your man couldn't walk after the talk" (Blackman, D. et al., 1998), and "...niggaz goin' to war, got to fightin; and shootin'" (Fiend, Master P, Mia X, Mystikal, Silkk, 1998), and "...slap up his boy" (Smith, J., Whitefield, N., & Giles, C., 2002). At the stanza level an example:

"You heard of us, the murderous, most shady; Been on the low lately, the feds hate me; The son of Satan, they say my killing's too blatant; You hesitatin, I'm in your mama crib waitin; Duct tapin, your fam' destiny" (Jordan, S., Smith, T., Wallace, C., Combs, S., Conti, B., & Phillips, J., 1997).

In this stanza there is not only an example of committed violence ("...my killing's too blatant"), but a sense of bravado in regards to the violence as well ("...you've heard of us") (Jordan, S., Smith, T., Wallace, C., Combs, S., Conti, B., & Phillips, J., 1997). Descriptions of committed violence were used similarly to the threat of violence in that it seemed preemptive instead of as a response to threats or committed violence against the artist.

Further, the mention of committed violence against other males within these 19 songs was intertwined with threats of violence as well. In addition, although these songs described committed violence, the songs did not all revolve solely around the committed acts of violence.

The use of emotional violence towards males, although not as prevalent, was also found. However, the use of emotional violence was typically not developed at a stanza level. Instead, it was used as a general term or as part of a larger line by line insult. There were 10 songs where a male called another male a faggot, homo, or 'dick rider' or stated another male 'rides dick'. In two songs a male called another male a bitch (see Chart 2). The use of the term faggot (or variations of this term) was typically used as part of an extended insult. For example, "...nigga full of holes, treat 'em like hoes, and show no love to them homo thugs" (Lorenzo, I., Atkins, J., & Green, T., 1999). The gendered nature of this emotional violence showcases the way in which a male is compared to a female in an effort to insult the male. The same is true for the use of the term bitch. The term, used in a variety of ways (to indicate a group of women, a singular woman or male, or a place) was also used to disregard or demean what a male was saying. For instance, "...this niggas bitchin'" (Smith, J., Whitefield, N., & Giles, C., 2002) and "...we still own niggaz who talk bitch shit" (Broadus, C., Means, D., Spillman, K., Gilliam, K., & Davis, T., 1999).

Female use of violence towards males was not a prevalent theme. However, it is presented for comparison. There were three songs that mentioned female use of violence against males. In two songs of these songs a male comments on a female's use of violence against another male. For example, "...but if she pack a gun you know you better run fast" (Burrell, O., Ducent, R., Pizzonia, S., Thompson, B., Allen, T., Brown, H., Dickerson, M.,

Jordan, L., Levitin, L., Miller, C., & Scott, H., 2000). It is imperative to note that it is males commenting on female violence against other males. There was one song in which a female mentions using violence against a male. In Lil Kim's "No Time" she sings "act shady, feel my three eighty" (Anderson, V., Brown, J., Combs, S., Jones, K., & Jordan, S., 1997).

### **Male Violence Against Women**

In the sampled lyrics, male-on-female violence was most often emotional in nature. The most prevalent form of emotional violence was the use of derogatory (misogynistic) names by males (see Chart 2). In 32 songs a male called a female a bitch and in 24 songs a male called a female a hoe or slut. Further, the contexts in which these terms are used are important as well. For instance, "...pimp a few hoes" (Jordan, S., Smith, T., Wallace, C., Combs, S., Conti, B., & Phillips, J., 1997), "...see them hoes represent for their rent" (Crooms, 2000), "...money over bitches" (Taylor, J. & Tom, J., 2005), and "...bitches come and go" (Broadus, C., Jackson, C., Porter, D., Parrott, B., 2003). The context around the terms showcases that women are viewed as replaceable or invaluable objects, intended for male consumption.

Further, the act of sex was often described in violent terms. In particular, the use of terms with violent connotations seems to serve as another way to demean women. Terms such as "hitting it", "banging", "beating", and/or some variation of these key terms and phrases were often used without a mention of the female's name or any other humanizing characteristics. There were also 10 songs where a male referred to sex as "hitting it", "banging" or "beating it". Examples of this at the line by line level include: "...I even hit her in the shower" (Burrell, O., et al., 2000), "...hittin' nothin' but tight bitches" (Fiend, et al., 1998), and "...I sure wouldn't mind hittin' that from the back" (Lee, J., Dupri, J., Daugherty,

S., & Bailey, H., 2006). The use of derogatory names for body parts (often referred to as part of the objectification process) was not as prevalent. Still, there were seven songs in which a male used the term “pussy”, seven songs that used the term “booty” or “ass”, and four that used the terms “titties” or “tits”. Examples of this at the line by line level include “...your pussy ain’t worth the Ramada” (Briggs, K., Burruss, K., & Cottle, T., 1999), “...the way you shake your booty I don’t want you to stop” (Rios, C., Lorenzo, I., Atkins, J., Cartagena, J., Lyle, G., Parker, A., & Britten, T., 2001) and “...baby bounce them tits” (Roble, J., Miller, J., Saunders, D., Williams, E., Allen, R., Bambaataa, A., Jackson, O., Fogleman, R., Rolison, D., & Baker, A., 2000). In these songs, the terms were utilized multiple times. This led to a high numerical content—while the actual usage represents a small portion of the sample. These songs most often revolved around watching a female dance—either at a general club/dancing establishment or at a strip club.

Further, there were songs within the sample in which the entire song was emotionally abusive in regards to its derogatory and debasing terminology. For instance, in the Ying Yang Twins’ 2000 hit “Whistle While You Twurk” the entire song is about a female (or females) dancing and derogatory and debasing terms were used throughout such as “...let me see ya make that pussy fart, good lord, make it shake like a salt shaker, too hard...see I love it when you hoes take it to the floor” (Crooms, M., 2000). In addition, the 504 Boyz 2000 hit “Wobble Wobble” repeats “...won’t you wobble, wobble, shake it, shake it, now won’t you drop it, drop it, take it, take it” (Hall, O., et al., 2000). Other examples include the above mentioned Ludacris’s 2002 song “Move Bitch” (Sandimanie, J. et al., 2001), Petey Pablo’s 2004 “Freek-a-Leek” (Love, C., Smith, J., & Jefferson, C., 2004), and Soulja Boy’s 2007 “Crank That” (Burrell, O. et al., 2000). These songs utilized not only derogatory names for

women (such as bitch and hoe) but also contain derogatory names for female body parts. This type of emotional violence was used exclusively in the sample towards women.

Female use of these terms was limited and used almost exclusively at the line by line level. There were three songs where a female calls another female a bitch and four songs where a female calls herself a bitch (see Chart 4). Although the use of the term bitch towards another female was used in a similar manner as that of male artists, the use of the term bitch to define oneself is not. When using the term to define themselves, female artists were typically expressing a sense of bravado. The term would be used to show a variation of strength, boldness, and/or ability to take care of oneself. An example of a female calling herself a bitch at the line by line level is "...me and my girls rollin' deep, represent the Sole, bunch of fly-ass bitches" (Stewart, C. et al., 1999). In only one song does a female artist call another female a ho'. The use of the term ho' in this song was used in conjunction with a threat of violence "...hoes better back up 'for they get slapped up" (Temperton, R., Elliot, M., Barcliff, M., & Mosley, T., 1997). The use of a derogatory term for a body part was used by a female in one song (term 'pussy'). In this song, the artist is referencing her own body part: "...the motherfucker never ate my pussy" (Brown, G., Bell, R., Bell, R., Taylor, J., Toon, E., Thomas, D., Smith, C., Muhammad, M., Jones, K., Elliot, M., Martinez, A., Harris, S., & Lopes, L., 1996). Although this is a derogatory term, the entire song revolves around the artist, Lil Kim, being in charge of her sexuality. The song revolves around when, and why, she is willing to engage in sexual behaviors. Thus, the use of the derogatory term may be an attempt to reclaim the language.

The use of lethal and non lethal violence towards women was not a prevalent theme; and was found only at the line by line level. However, it is presented for comparison. In this



sample, male use of lethal and non lethal violence towards females included actual, and threats of, physical and sexual assault. Altogether there were 14 songs that contained violence against women (see Chart 2). There were three songs that contained threats of violence. These threats of violence were utilized to demand respect, and to obtain control, over the female. Examples of this at the line by line level would be: "...ever lie again girl, that'll be your last" (Betha, M., Mayfield, C., Spivey, K., Combs, S., & Myrick, N., 1997) and "...we connect bitch better respect this, step quick cause I got a vicious right hand" (Fiend, Master P, Mia X, Mystikal, & Silkk, 1998). There were eight that contained committed acts of violence. These acts of violence were often brief references to the committed acts of violence. Examples of this, again at the line by line level, would be: "...took the mayor's daughter, that there's kidnapped" (Burke, J. et al., 2004) and "...them hoes I beat up in my home" (Gray, T., 2003). There were two songs that contained threat of sexual violence. An example of this at the line by line level would be: "...bitch, I'll make your shit hurt" (Angelettie, D., Lawrence, R., & Garfield, J., 1998). There were two songs that contained committed acts of sexual violence. A line by line example of this would be: "...gang bang, slap a bitch" (Broadus, C. et al., 1999). There were two songs that mentioned another male's use of violence against women. In one of these songs, "Runaway Love" by Ludacris and Mary J Blige, the entire song revolves around violence against women. The song describes sexual violence against girls ("...tryin' to have his way but little Lisa says ouch, she tries to resist but then all he does is beat her"), as well as physical violence (Davis, D., Jones, J., Walters, R., Bridges, C., & Hilson, K., 2006). However, while this song details how violence against women is not used as a threat but to highlight the violence that women may experience.

Female use of violence towards other females was not a prevalent theme. However, it is presented for comparison. There were four songs that mentioned female use of violence against other females. Line by line examples include the aforementioned “...hoes better back up ‘for they get slapped up” (Temperton, R. et al., 1997). In each instance, female use of violence towards other females was limited to non lethal threats of violence.

Table 1: Use of Violence By Gender

<b>Male Use of Violence</b>	
Male Threat of Violence Against a Male	41%
Male Committed Act of Violence Against a Male	19%
Male Threat of Violence Against a Female	3%
Male Committed Act of Violence Against a Female	8%
Male Threat of Sexual Violence Against a Female	2%
Male Committed Act of Sex Violence Against a Female	2%
Other Male Com Act of Sex Violence Against a Female	2%
<b>Female Use of Violence</b>	
Female Use of Violence Against a Male	2%
Female Use of Violence Against a Female	4%

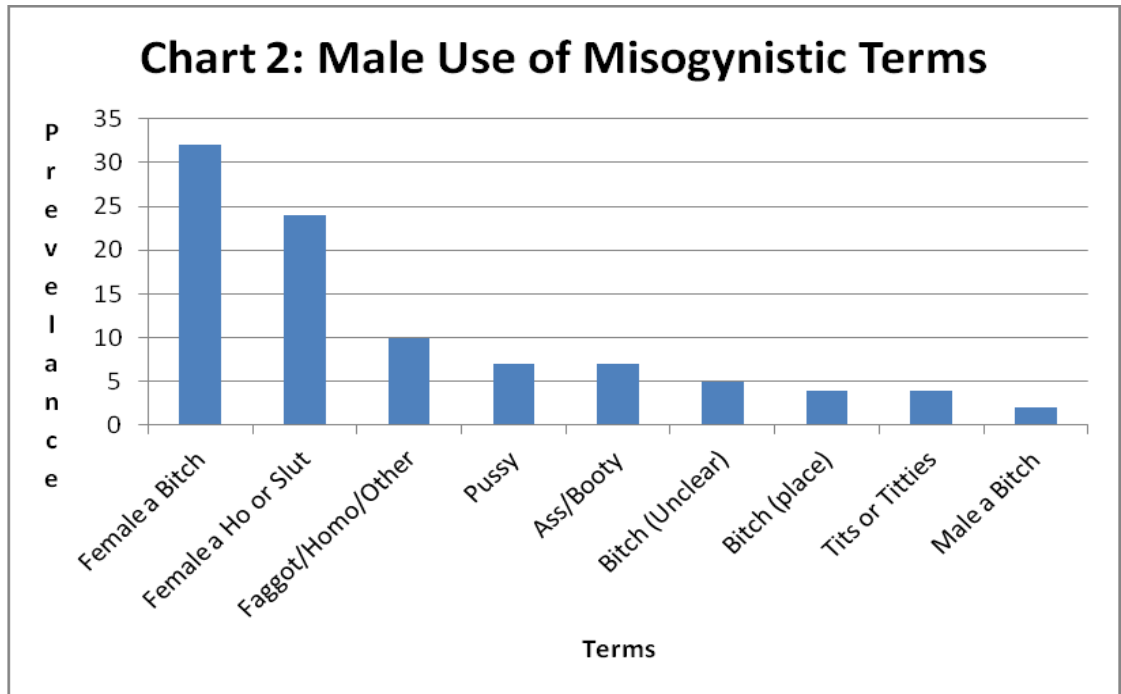


Chart 2. Male Use of Misogynistic Terms

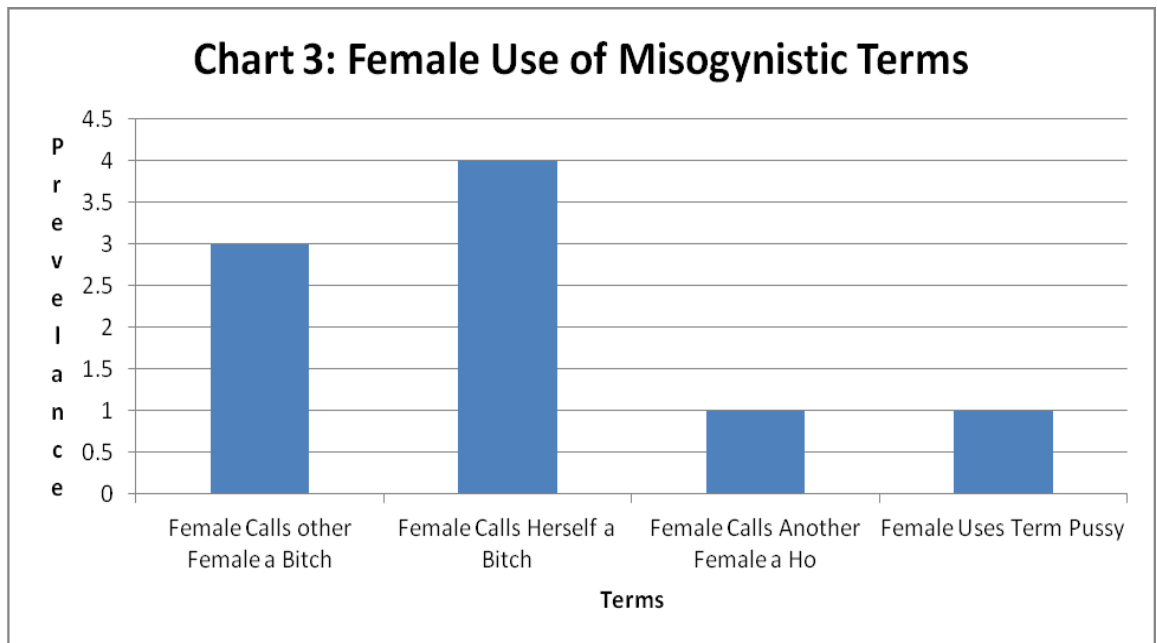


Chart 3. Female Use of Misogynistic Terms

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how violence is described or interpreted in contemporary rap music. Furthermore, the current study sought to determine if these discussions of violence are gender specific. The study found that violence is described in emotional, lethal, and non-lethal ways. The most common theme is emotional violence; while the least common is non-lethal violence. In addition, the study found the ways in which violence was described to be gender specific. Lethal and non-lethal violence was most often described in relation to men. Emotional violence was almost exclusively described in relation to females; or by using terms that had a negative female connotation. Males utilized terms with female connotations to demean other males. In addition, males used derogatory terms for female body parts. Terms with violent connotations describing sexual acts were also prevalent.

Female artists were underrepresented in this sample. However, female artists did utilize emotional violence to demean other women through the use of terms such as bitch. The included female artists did not utilize lethal violence.

This study may add to the growing body of literature on social constructionism and cultural criminology by addressing the way in which violence is described by a particular subculture. Findings from this study indicate that violence is described, and used, in gender specific ways. The findings highlight the ways in which the socially constructs of gender influence descriptions of crime. In particular, looking at those social constructs from a cultural criminology standpoint, this study highlights how the social construct of culturally specific language can provide insight into how a subculture views, describes, interprets, and

reflects violence. Further, this study may add to the literature on feminist criminology, cultural criminology, and to the research on contemporary rap music by providing a framework for how violence in the music is described and/or interpreted. In addition this study may contribute by focusing on the terms that are most common and the context under which they are used. In addition, this study highlights the role that gender plays in these descriptions and interpretations.

Scholarly discussion regarding contemporary rap music has indicated that violence in the music is a reflection of the broader society (Krimms, 2000; Keyes, 2001). The use of lethal and non lethal violence by males, almost exclusively towards males in the sampled lyrics, suggests that contemporary rap music reflects the broader society. In general, men are much more likely to experience violence in their lives, as well as to commit violence. The use and prevalence of violence in rap music reflects the reality of violence in American society (Hooks, 1994; Henderson, 1996).

Of most interest is that discussions of/lyrical content of violence among males in the sample focused on threat of violence; including mention of weapons as a means of assuring that one could engage in lethal violence. In fact, this type of violence was found in 41 percent of the sample. This finding is of value for two distinct reasons. First, it suggests rappers are not just bragging about their violence, but offering up their ability and willingness to protect themselves. Second, this finding could suggest that male's fear of victimization, as indicated by lyrics, may be high in society or certain subcultures. After all, emphasis on the ability to protect oneself would indicate, at some level, fear of being perceived as easy to victimize. Theories of violence among male youth (particularly inner city minorities) has indicated that the threat of violence is considered a normal response to a verbal slight due to the need to

appear strong and capable of protecting oneself (Anderson, 1995; Kimmel, 2005). The threat of violence (seemingly) without provocation within the sampled rap music may highlight this very concept. Anderson (1995) states that by showcasing that the slightest slight will not be tolerated, one gains respect and thus protection from violence. Further, Kimmel (2005) adds to this by stating that aggressiveness is considered a staple of masculinity. Therefore, the threats of violence, or mention of weapons, within the lyrics may serve to showcase not only the ability to protect oneself—but may also serve as a constant protective factor. For instance, if one is threatening violence—or mentioning weapons—they may be asserting not only their strength but their masculinity as well.

Further, the descriptions of weapons—particularly guns—within the sampled lyrics as a form of masculine expression ties in with Dyson’s (2007) work that indicates that guns are considered a staple of American masculinity. In the sampled lyrics, only 19 percent of the sample included lyrical descriptions of committed acts of violence; indicating that it is ability, not the actual engagement in, violence that is important. Thus, the threat of violence (particularly that which involves a weapon) may indicate contemporary rap music reflects not only violence in society, but that discussion of violence in the lyrics allows for an expression of masculinity. Additionally, there have been a variety of debates regarding violence and women in rap music (Hooks, 1994; Krims, 2000; Rose, 2001; Wheeler, 1991). Further, research on contemporary rap music has shown that violent rap music increases acceptance of dating, domestic, and sexual violence (Barongan & Hall, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995). However, the findings from this study suggest that the use of lethal and non-lethal violence (or threat of) against females is not a prevalent theme. In fact, this type of violence against women was present in only 14 percent of the sampled lyrics.

Therefore, the exposure to violence against women in contemporary rap music is, while important, small.

It is also important to note male use of violence against women was used differently than male use of violence against other males; thus, indicating that violence in rap music is gender specific. Male use of violence against other males indicated a need to showcase one's willingness to engage in violent and lethal solutions to conflict. Male use of violence against females was most commonly used to objectify females (such as derogatory terms to describe the body or sex acts). Although the use of violence often fell under emotional violence, physical violence was also utilized. However, physical violence was often utilized to showcase control over or disregard of females. The use of violence to showcase control was often used in the context of a woman stepping outside of the role of a sex partner and thus, being punished for it.

Further, the use of violence toward females was also used to showcase loyalty to male friends over a female friend (girlfriend/sexual partner/etc); and often referenced females as being sexual objects easily replaced by another female. In addition, male violence against females was different in its extent as well. The use of male violence against women was most commonly found in threat of, or committed acts of non-lethal physical assault (i.e. "slap that bitch"). Although references to sexual violence are found in the sample, the threat of, and committed acts of, sexual violence were present in only four percent (4%) of the sample. In addition, these threats (or committed acts) often related to something someone else had done.

Given the depiction of women in the sampled lyrics, it is not surprising that only six percent (6%) of the sampled lyrics referenced female's use of violence. Of interesting note is that male's use of violence against other males was most often a result of altercations with

each other. However, female use of violence was most often in relation to males. In addition, in the six songs that included female use of violence, only once was violence used in response to a situation that did not include a male. This would indicate that male rappers (and perhaps female rappers) do not see female violence as relevant. Studies have shown that female use of violence is thought of as ineffective and trivial (e.g., Cobbina, Like-Haislip, & Miller, 2010). This could be why it receives such little commentary in rap music.

Although the sampled lyrics have a low level of violence against women, it is possible to argue that the emotional abuse in rap music may be an indirect form of violence against women. The use of terms related to misogyny in the sampled lyrics is important to note due to misogyny being linked to increased acceptance of sexual and domestic violence (Barongan & Hall, 1995; Hooks, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995; Miedzain, 2005). There were 72 songs that contained some form of misogynistic terms in them. Past research on misogyny in rap music found misogyny in 22 percent of the sample (Armstrong, 2001). However, it is important to note that Armstrong (2001) looked at 13 artists while this study examined 77. Thus, this study may present a more comprehensive examination of misogyny in contemporary rap music.

There was a high level of misogyny (in this study considered part of emotional abuse) with a main focus on the terms bitch, slut, and ho. In 32 percent of the sample the term “bitch” was used in reference to a female. In 24 percent of the sample the term “ho” or “slut” was used in reference to a female. In some of these songs the terms were used multiple times. However, these terms were very rarely used in regards to males. Thus, although it can be argued that the use of the term “bitch” and “ho” are to demean women (and, according to some theories, make violence against females more acceptable), the question must be asked



if the point is simply to demean in general. Additionally, even though the numerical content of objectifying terms was high, the overall prevalence within the sample was not. In fact, the use of objectifying language (“pussy”, “booty/ass”, “titties”, etc.) is not a prevalent theme. These terms were present in no more than seven percent (7%) of the sample.

However, this is not to say that sex (and perhaps, objectification) was not present. It is that the misogynistic terms, and discussions of sexual conquests, were often found within the same song. For instance, the reference to sex as “hitting” or “beating” showcases a sense of violence in regards to the act (Moore-Foster, 2005). In looking at the context in which females are described we can also find comments that highlight the treatment of women as objects to be replaced at will. For instance, “your bitches get low”. In this example the women are not only bitches, but the property of another male. The treatment of women as objects solely for sexual pleasure, at a price, provides a context for the usage of these terms. In addition, when discussing these sexual conquests it was not uncommon for the rapper to highlight that the women were sleeping with them to gain status (i.e. “golddigger”). This may indicate that artists are justifying the use of misogynistic terms by offering that the women they are talking about are amoral. Nonetheless, it is important to note that while this is a very important piece of understanding contemporary rap music it is not reflective of a majority of the sample.

The use of misogynistic terms by males towards males is also important to note. The use of the term ‘bitch’ to refer to another male or the terms ‘pussy’, and ‘faggot’ (or other variations such as homo, dick rider, etc.), although small, is still significant in context. When using these terms toward another male as to demean the male by placing him in the same category as a female; thus insulting him by making him look weak (Kimmel, 2005). This is

often done in one of (and/or) two ways; labeling them with a term used to describe females and by pointing out their perceived weaknesses. For instance, a male may call another male a ‘bitch’ while threatening violence. For example, “I’m jocking on yo bitch ass, and if we get the fightin, Then I’m cocking on your bitch ass” (Way, D., 2007). The use of the term ‘bitch’, with its female connotation, may indicate that the male is more susceptible to being victimized because he is like a female (or at least being referenced as one). This would indicate at a certain level the perceived belief that women are easier to victimize than men.

This study adds to the current research regarding contemporary rap music and violence through its findings regarding the way women use violence in the sampled lyrics. Female artists were present in 31 percent of the sample; however their role within the song was often limited to a line or two. There were three songs where a female directly referenced using sex to gain material things. Females also engaged in misogyny in this sample. In four percent (4%) of the sample a female refers to herself as a ‘bitch’, and in three percent (3%) the female references another female as a ‘bitch’. There could be multiple explanations for this. For one, rap is still considered a male dominated genre. In fact, women in rap are often used as back-up singers instead of leads. Thus, using this type of language may be part of gaining acceptance. In addition, it may be a way of engaging in oppositional femininity. Anderson (1995) argues that males may engage in behavior associated with violence as a form of oppositional culture. As women are taught to be viewed as passive (Lorber, 2005), the use of misogynistic terms (against others and oneself) may be a way of establishing a different type of femininity that allows for aggression. In doing so, the females artists may be creating an “oppositional femininity” that allows for women to be bold, brash, and vulgar. In addition, this could also be a way of reversing the meaning of the word (i.e. calling oneself a

‘bad bitch’ to change the connotation to positive). Further, this research found that females are very rarely described lethal and non lethal violence. This may add to Anderson’s (1995) work in which he found that females do not discuss lethal violence on the same level as males. In particular, this may add to the field of cultural criminology by showcasing how this particular subculture (female rappers) interprets and describes violence. However, it is possible that this is an anomaly created by a low number of female rappers within the sampled lyrics.

It is vital to note that although these terms can be considered verbal abuse, the main argument of feminist theories is that using these types of names encourages violence against women by allowing them to be seen as subhuman. If it does create a view of women as subhuman and as easier to victimize it would suggest that violence against women should be higher in both rap music, and in general society. However, violent crime in general has been decreasing (including violence against women) even with the mainstreaming of rap music.

Findings from this research also may serve to further tie together social constructionism and cultural criminology. Findings indicate that descriptions of violence within contemporary rap music are gender specific; this may add to the view of gender as a social construct. Further, it may serve to aid in understanding how views of violence and perceived vulnerability are constructed thru various avenues—such as music. The findings showcase the ways in which contemporary rap music may serve as a means of social construct for a particular subculture. In turn, an understanding of how violence is constructed within this group provides insight into how to utilize that construct to lower or change perceptions about crime. For instance, further research could examine how (or if) perceptions of violence (and gender) are influenced by utilizing different types of music.

Finally, this study may also prove useful to those who use media to educate about violence. The findings from this study showcase how violence is described in contemporary rap music. This information could be utilized to discuss how violence is constructed thru rap music. In particular, media literacy may be used to not only show how violence is gendered in contemporary rap music—but society at large. Media literacy based upon contemporary rap music could possibly help youth to identify the reasons behind violence (perceived fear of victimization, bravado, homophobia, etc.).

In addition, the high prevalence of male on male violence may indicate a need for more programs aimed directly at males in terms of providing alternative avenues for masculine expression, education around the use (and consequences) of violence, and assistance for those who have been victimized. For instance, Kimmel's (2005) rules for masculinity (nothing feminine, power/success/wealth, no emotions, and daring and aggressive behavior) can be found within the sampled lyrics. In particular, these rules can be found in the threats of violence. Threatening violence not only keeps one from looking feminine, but also provides a sense of power and bravado. It provides a means of engaging in masculinity, even if it is oppositional masculinity. Providing more outlets for positive masculine expression such as sports, after school programs, and job training may assist with providing positive outlets. Further, the casual way in which guns and violence are mentioned (often in passing or as part of everyday life) may give the false impression that violence is not only normal—but justifiable and with little consequence. Additional programs that seek to educate about the consequences of violence and alternative ways to handle conflict while still feeling safe and masculine should be created to address these needs. Further, outreach services for those who have witnessed or experienced violence should be developed to

address fear of victimization (and hopefully lessen threats of violence as preemptive measures).

Despite the contributions and implications of this study, there are several limitations that should be noted. The first limitation is in regard to the methodology itself. The use of content analysis does include a higher probability of researcher bias. This weakness could be lessened with the use of multiple coders. In addition, this study only looked at terms that are clearly tied to violence, gender, and/or misogyny. It is possible that a wider scope of terms and concepts would yield different results. Furthermore, this study only utilized Billboard's Top Ten Rap Singles from each year. Although the sample used 100 songs with 77 different artists (allowing for a certain level of generalizability), using the Top Twenty would have perhaps added a higher level of generalizability. Third, a study that utilizes multiple genres would also prove useful in determining if the findings are generalizable to other genres of music. Finally, this study did not include a high number of lead female rappers. Collectively, there were only five songs in the sample with a female as the main artist. Findings in regards to female use of violence and misogyny may be different in a sample that included more female lead artists. For instance, it is possible that a sample with more female leads could showcase an increase in the reference of female to female violence. . In addition, the lack of female artists also showcases a lack of knowledge regarding how females may define themselves in rap music.

Further, it is possible that the affects of commercialization have influenced the presence of violence within the lyrics. Commercialization of rap music creates a space in which artists who do not engage in lyrical discussions of violence may not receive as much attention—and thus airplay—as those that do. Therefore, the songs that are popular enough

to be in the top ten rap singles for any given year may not be an accurate reflection of rap music as a whole. Examining rap lyrics from a wider base (such as a randomized sample of artists) may create a difference in terms of the violence that is found (or level of violence found).

Consequently, there is still much to be learned. Future research should address these limitations and related issues in the study of violence in music. For instance, using multiple coders to do a study that examines the Top 20 songs in rap, country, and rock music may showcase the different ways in which violence is used across different genres of contemporary music. Findings from this research indicates a need for more research to be completed regarding the ways in which males interpret, utilize, and cope with violence in their lives. As the fear of victimization (or need to showcase that one is not an easy victim) is present in such a large part of the sample, further research addressing the ways in which males respond to fear of victimization and ways to provide services to those who have witnessed or experienced violence is needed. Research addressing these issues would be beneficial to the growing work of feminist and cultural criminology. In addition, future research should focus on the role of women in rap music. This study found that 31 percent of the sample had a woman in at least part of the song. However, this was often a minor role; with the female singing only a line or two. Thus, it would be helpful to learn if female rappers rely to the same extent on violence or the threat of violence.

A deeper understanding of how female rappers interact within the male dominated field of contemporary rap would add to the growing body of literature of feminist theory. In particular, the field of feminist criminology may benefit from examining how female rappers interpret and describe violence. This information may provide insight not only into this

particular subculture, but into a general understanding of female use of violence as well. It would be imperative to study misogyny in rap music using a broader level of discretion in terms of what is defined. Finally, the use of multiple coders would be necessary to ensure validity and agreement upon what is considered misogynistic.

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## VITA

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