

THE PORTRAYAL AND FREQUENCY OF RELIGION
IN SECULAR RAP MUSIC

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

JANUS A. ABELLO

Dr. Cynthia Frisby, Thesis Supervisor

MAY 2012

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

THE PORTRAYAL AND FREQUENCY OF RELIGION
IN SECULAR RAP MUSIC

presented by Janus Abello,
a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Cynthia Frisby

Professor Paul Bolls

Professor Debra Mason

Professor Richard Callahan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Cynthia Frisby for being the chair of this committee. This thesis would have never been completed without her constant guidance and patience. I am especially grateful for her sacrificing countless hours of her time in order to read draft after draft that I've sent her way.

I also need to thank Professor Paul Bolls for being a source of motivation and encouragement. I cannot thank him enough for always pushing me to finish this research and always believing in me. Professor Bolls was always able to guide me back to having a gratitude for the opportunity to earn a graduate degree. I would like to thank him for always helping me remember what a blessing this journey really has been.

I also need to thank Professor Debra Mason for loaning me what seemed to be her entire academic library. I would have never finished without her willingness to help in every way possible, from loaning me literature to counseling me through the initial steps of my research.

I also want to thank Professor Richard Callahan for taking the time to serve in my committee and offering valuable insight when it came to conducting research on religion. His knowledge on religious studies was irreplaceable, and I am grateful for his guidance that helped me measure religious concepts as accurately as I possibly could have.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introductory Paragraphs.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose.....	3
Significance of the Study.....	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Brief History of Framing Theory.....	6
Linking Framing Studies to Rap Music.....	9
Rap Music and Religion.....	15
3. METHODOLOGY.....	24
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	24
Purpose.....	24
Data Analysis.....	24
Population and Sampling.....	25
Operationalization of Concepts.....	28
Rappers.....	28

Religious References.....	29
Conceptual Definition.....	29
Operational Definition.....	29
Candidate Words.....	30
Instrumentation.....	31
Use of Content Analysis.....	31
Description of Coders.....	31
Demographics of Coders.....	32
Coder Training.....	33
Code Sheet #1.....	33
Code Sheet #2.....	35
Procedure and Time Frame.....	36
Procedure for Code Sheet #1.....	37
Procedure for Code Sheet #2.....	38
4. RESULTS.....	41
Intercoder Reliability.....	41
Research Question 2.....	41
Research Question 1 and Hypothesis 1.....	43
Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 2.....	45
5. DISCUSSION.....	47
Contributions to Framing Research.....	47

Contributions to Research on Rap Music.....	50
Contributions to Research on Tupac Shakur.....	51
6. SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....	55
Summary of Key Findings.....	55
Limitations.....	56
Time Period Limitations.....	56
Theoretical and Methodological Limitations.....	57
Sample Limitations.....	59
Rappers.....	60
Future Research Recommendations.....	61
APPENDIX A.....	64
1. Sample Code Sheet #1.....	64
APPENDIX B.....	65
2. Sample Code Sheet #2.....	65
APPENDIX C.....	68
Committee Revisions.....	68
Role of Tupac Shakur in Study.....	68
Added Explanations for Methodology.....	68
Revisions for Future Research.....	69
REFERENCES.....	71

LIST OF TABLES

Figure	Page
1. Sample of Rappers and Albums in Study.....	28
2. Examples of Lyrics From Positive, Neutral, and Negative Songs.....	39
3. Distribution of Songs With Specific Amounts of Religious References.....	42
4. Distribution of Positive to Negative Portrayals of Religion in Songs with “Low” and “High” Amounts of Religious References.....	44
5. Distribution of Positive and Negative Portrayals of Religion in Songs on Albums Released Before or After Tupac Shakur’s Death.....	46

THE PORTRAYAL AND FREQUENCY OF RELIGION IN SECULAR RAP MUSIC

Janus Abello

Dr. Cynthia Frisby, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Secular rap has arguably become one of the most influential and popular genres in music, and its effects on aspects of American culture, like sexuality (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005) and violence (Jones, 1997), have been measured. The way rap music may have potentially influenced the religiosity of its listeners has yet to be explored. This study starts that line of research by measuring the amount of religious references in secular rap songs and examining any possible relationships between the amounts of religious references and how religion is portrayed in those songs. The researcher conducted a content analysis of lyrics from twenty influential rappers. The researcher then compared the portrayal of religion in rap songs released before the death of rapper Tupac Shakur to the songs released after that date. The results indicated a significant relationship between the amount of religious references and the framing of religion, while the researcher found significant negative relationships in how religion was framed after the death of Shakur. The results indicate a need for media effects research on the lyrics of Tupac Shakur to further examine the influence the lyrics have on listeners.

Chapter I- Introduction

Introductory Paragraphs

From Kanye West's Grammy-award winning single "Jesus Walks," to Bone Thugs-n-Harmony's Billboard Chart-topping hit "Tha Crossroads," rap music has always delved into the realm of religion. Religion is a concept that has always found a place in rappers' lyrics. Reid (2007) has documented the ways in which rappers have included religious references in their songs in the last decade, and Miller (2009) has analyzed the search for meaning within religiosity that has permeated the lyrics of some of hip-hop's most respected lyricists.

The current research will examine the possible relationships between the frequencies of these religious references in secular rap music and how religion is portrayed in those songs. The current research will also examine how the portrayal of religion in rap music may have changed after rapper Tupac Shakur's death. Past studies (Jones, 1997) (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005) suggest that rap lyrics do have an effect on audiences. This research aims to provide preliminary data for future media effects studies that could better examine how religious references in rap music can influence the religious views of rap audiences.

The possible influence these lyrics could have on audiences is important because rap music has become one of the world's most popular genres of music. According to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), two rap acts, OutKast and the Notorious B.I.G., have each released albums that have sold over 10 million copies, while

Eminem, 2Pac, Will Smith, and Nelly have all released at least one album that has sold 9 million copies. 2Pac is the highest-selling rapper, with 37.5 million albums sold over his career and posthumously, while Jay-Z and Eminem are tied for second, with both selling 27 million copies of their respective albums. The huge amount of listeners that this genre attracts is constantly exposed to the opinions of these rappers, and the content of the religious messages communicated through this genre needs to be further examined.

Statement of the Problem

Although scholars like Pinn (2003) and Miller (2009) have examined the interactions between rap music and religion, there has been a gap in research focused on how positively or negatively rappers frame religious messages in their lyrics. This lack of research does not reflect rap music's growing fascination with religion. The extent of religious and spiritual references resided with the more "conscious" rappers from the 1980s, such as KRS One and Rakim, who rhymed occasionally about their adherence to Christian and Islamic teachings. The early 1990s, however, ushered in the rise of rapper Tupac Shakur, also known as 2Pac. 2Pac's lyrics presented a conflicted view of religion and the concept of a higher power that had never been seen before in mainstream rap. The music 2Pac released before his death in 1996 laid the groundwork for future rappers' exploration of more complex religious themes (Watkins, 2003, p. 189).

2Pac can be considered the catalyst for the collective change in how rappers addressed religion. 2Pac has been described as a rapper with an "obsession with God" (Erskine, 2003, p. 79), and 2Pac's lyrical content included an intense questioning and internalization of both personal spirituality and organized religion that was unprecedented

in rap. Little research has been conducted on how rappers' lyrical content has changed since 2Pac became an established rap act. 2Pac's influence on future rappers' views on religion and spirituality has been documented (Watkins, 2003, p. 189), and this influence has yet to be measured empirically.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to look for a statistically significant relationship between the frequencies of religious words in secular rap songs and whether or not those rap songs portray religion positively or negatively. This study also aims to find out how rappers' portrayal of religion changed after 2Pac's ascent to rap stardom. A content analysis sampling rap lyrics will be conducted in order to find "religious" references in secular rap songs, along with a judgment of whether or not these songs portray religion in a positive or negative manner.

Framing theory suggests that messages can be interpreted in different ways depending on how messages are worded, which, represents a "frame." (Kahneman & Tversky, 1981). This content analysis of sampled rap lyrics represents a first scholarly attempt at trying to find a significant relationship between the frequencies of religious words in secular rap and how religion is portrayed within those sampled songs. Past research conducted on the relationship between rap music and religion has yet to employ quantitative methods to analyze rappers' religious messages. There has been much qualitative research done on this relationship, and many scholars have examined the different ways that religion interacts with rap music. However, there has been very little

statistical data produced on these varying religious messages and how negative or positive towards religion these messages have been.

This research aims to fill that void through the content analysis on rappers' lyrics. The amount of "religious" references in these lyrics will be measured, along with a Likert scale that will measure how positive or negative these lyrics framed religion. This study will feature a before-and-after component, revolving around the death of Tupac Shakur, which was on September 13, 1996. The results of rappers' views on religion before Shakur's death will be compared with how rappers viewed religion after Shakur's death. Shakur's death will be the dividing line for the before-and-after component of the study because it has been argued that Shakur went from being a typical rap star and became a cultural icon after being murdered (Grant, 2011).

Significance of the Study

The influence of rap music on its audience has been a debated topic and a source of controversy for years now (Binder, 1993, p. 753). Studies on how rap music has influenced gender-roles (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005) and violence (Jones, 1997) have been done, which suggests that rap music does indeed have effects on its audience. How that audience responds to rap music videos, for example, has been the subject of past research. Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker (2005, p. 159) have suggested that people who watched more rap music videos held more stereotypical gender role attitudes and placed more importance on the physical attributes of the opposite sex. Wingood, DiClemente, Bernhardt & Robillard (2003) also used exposure to rap music videos to compare adolescents' attitudes towards violence, drug use and sexual behaviors. This

study found that adolescents exposed to more rap music videos than their peers over a 12-month period were 3 times more likely to hit a teacher, 2 times more likely to have multiple sexual partners and more than 2.5 times as likely to get arrested.

How rappers frame issues in their songs, therefore, can be an influence on how their audiences view a specific issue. Research by Kahneman and Tversky (1981) has shown that a simple change in how an issue is worded can dramatically change how a group of people will decide to act on that issue. Gamson and Modigliani (as cited in Schuefele, 1999) have suggested that the frame used by a form of media can direct audiences to the “essence” of an issue. It can be argued, therefore, that the frames rappers use to portray religion can influence how their audiences view religion, as well.

This study will contribute to the field of media studies by systemically describing the ways that rappers frame religion in song lyrics. Content analyses are an initial step needed in a line of research that ultimately could involve testing the effects of media content on individuals. The proposed study has the potential to provide the initial content analysis that could help future researchers explore how rappers’ lyrics influence audiences’ attitudes towards religion. The results found from the content analysis can then be used to suggest that the feelings and thoughts conveyed by the rappers about religion reflects the sentiments of the hip-hop and inner-city culture the rappers represent (Dyson, 2001, p. 210). The proposed content analysis also extends framing theory to an understudied and culturally significant form of media content.

Chapter II- Literature Review

Brief History on Framing Theory.

This literature review aims to show how applicable framing is to this research, along with explaining how the framing of religious themes in rap music has been an understudied topic. Framing theory can provide a theoretical base for this research because framing places importance on the exchange of point-of-views between the sender of a message and the message's receiver. An example of this relationship is displayed in how rappers' lyrics can influence the religious views of the audiences reached.

Goffman (1974) emphasized the importance of the frames by which people view the world and situations and circumstances that arise within it. Goffman claimed that people look at events through "primary frameworks" and that people can view events differently depending on what kind of framework is used (p. 24). Goffman (1974) differentiates between two ways a person could view something as simple as a game of checkers: "Behavior at the board can easily be separated into making moves and shifting checkers" (p. 24). So according to Goffman's claims, people's perceptions of an event can be heavily influenced by the frame from which the event is viewed. Goffman's claims helped provide the theoretical argument for the goal of the current research, which is to provide data for future media effects studies that could suggest that rap lyrics have a positive or negative effect on the religious views of listeners.

Goffman's conceptual advances regarding the impact a frame can have on an individual's point-of-view paved the way for Kahneman and Tversky's (1981)

experiment, which operationalized some of Goffman's conceptual principles. The experiment illustrates how influential a frame can be when it leaves out aspects of reality while highlighting and emphasizing others (Entman 1993, p. 53). Kahneman and Tversky (1981) posed the following to the experiment's subjects:

Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the programs are as follows: If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. If program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and a two-thirds probability that no people will be saved. Which of the two programs would you favor? (p. 343)

Seventy-two percent of subjects chose Program A and 28 percent chose Program B. Identical programs were offered for combating the same disease in the next experiment, except that these programs were framed in terms of likely deaths of instead of likely lives saved. Program C took the place of the identical Program A, and Program D replaced the identical Program B. The results for this second experiment had completely reversed results; 22 percent of subjects chose Program C and 78 percent chose Program D. The results of this groundbreaking study in the realm of framing indicate that the wording of an issue or topic can affect how that topic is viewed and received. Through Kahneman and Tversky's research, it can be suggested that the way rappers frame religiosity influences how audiences view the concept. The data regarding how rappers frame religion in the current study will provide some of the first statistical observations that could eventually help with future media effects studies that could use Kahneman and Tversky's findings for theoretical support. In turn, these studies could examine how rap music listeners' religious views could be influenced by the music.

Before the interactions between rap music and religion were thoroughly studied, other sections of American media and the accompanying connections to framing theory were examined first. Silk (1995) produced one of the first notable pieces of literature that focused on how religion is framed by mainstream media. Silk qualitatively analyzed journalistic stories on religion from newspapers across the United States, and the consistent frames that emerged became the basis for what Silk called “topoi.” The varying societal roles organized religion takes within American culture are examined through Silk’s analysis of the different news stories that employ these reoccurring frames. More importantly, Silk gathers a collection of notable stories that represent how American media as a whole consistently portrays religion. Moore (2003, p. 1) concludes that Silk “attempts to demonstrate that rather than coming to bury the church, the media come- wittingly or not- to praise it.” Silk’s analysis of different newspaper stories always focused on how the communicator, the newspaper writer, framed the message, as opposed to how the audiences framed the messages within their own minds.

After researching several articles on religion, Silk concluded that even more topoi needed to be developed because of the increasing diversity of how Americans frame religion. In Hoover, Hanley, & Radelfinger’s study (as cited in Silk, 1995), it’s suggested that while more people are shifting to an individualistic practice of religion, that same American public claims to prefer more institutionally-oriented religion stories rather than stories centered on “individual faith experiences”. This need for more topoi is reflected in the need for more research on how rappers frame religion. Part of the increasing diversity of religious framing in American culture can be found in the lyrics of secular rap artists,

and there has been very little data that statistically indicates how often rappers frame religion positively or negatively.

Linking Framing Studies to Rap Music.

Framing theory's emphasis on the communicator's point-of-view in a message ties in with how this study places importance on rappers' perspectives on religion.

Entman (1993) describes four roles that framing has: "defining problems," "diagnose causes," "make moral judgments," and "suggest remedies" (p. 52). Rappers' lyrics are consistently defining problems that existed in rappers' upbringings and experiences, and rappers have no problem with diagnosing the causes of those problems and suggesting remedies to fix those issues (Miller, 2009, p. 48-49).

Pinn (2003) uses the example of Speech, leader of the early 1990s rap group Arrested Development. Speech left the Christian church because of how it does not accommodate social progress but rather "pacifies the oppressed" (p. 91), and the rapper voices these opinions through songs like "Fishin' 4 Religion," which is a song from the album *3 Years, 5 months and 2 days in the Life of...* On "Fishin' 4 Religion," Speech raps, "Baptist teachings' dying is the only solution." Not only does Speech question any form of belief in God in this song, he also explicitly blames organized religion for a lack of social progress. Pinn (2003) concluded the study by saying that a subgenre within rap music has developed a critical view towards religion and has adopted a more humanist mindset that does not credit the triumph of humanity over the struggles to a higher power, but rather to an individual's intelligence (p. 99).

Potentially controversial content like Speech's lyrics are amplified in framing theory because frames naturally elevate the salience of issues that are highlighted within the frame (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Entman (1993) offered a definition for "salience:" "It means making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (p. 53). Whenever a rapper highlights religion in a frame, Entman (1993) suggests that that message on religion will more like be perceived, understood, and later remembered. Furthermore, frames are meant to organize information, which can make it easier for people to adopt particular beliefs (Brewer, 2002). Speech's thoughts on Baptist doctrine, for example, will be much more memorable for an audience because church doctrine was the focus of that frame. These theoretical claims suggest that the frequency of religious references in a rap song increases the salience of the topic of religion within the song. This theoretical argument supports the current research's first hypothesis and helped develop the first research question:

RQ 1: Do secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious references?

H 1: Secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references will portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious references.

The language that rappers use in their lyrics obviously form the basis of negative or positive frames that emerge, and Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) include the concept of "language" as one of three major components of framing. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) use examples that show that "it is easy to create alternative views of the world with a mere turn of a phrase. Highlight the negatives, and a problem looks overwhelming. Accentuate

the positives, and a solution seems just around the corner” (p. 7). The importance of language when it comes to developing frames helps show how influential the lyrics of artists like Speech can be when it comes to how religion is perceived by audiences. This is yet another framing study that supports a need for more research on how rappers frame religion and how that framing could influence the religious views of rap listeners.

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) include two other components besides “language” in their theory for frame development, which are “thought and reflection” and “forethought and spontaneity.” The two latter components, however, are simply the processes someone uses to create the language necessary for developing their own frames, which makes language the final product of the framer’s thought, reflection, forethought, and spontaneity. Developing frames is a skill useful for anyone filling a role of leadership, according to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996, p. 20), which further compounds the role that rappers’ language and influence could take in how audiences frame religious messages for themselves. The qualitative studies done on rappers’ interactions with religion point out the different ways that these lyrics have already allowed rappers to take a place of influence within the mentality of rap listeners (Watkins, 2003, p. 185). However, the current study aims to find statistical data that could lead to media effects studies, which in turn could provide more evidence as to how much influence these rappers really have on listeners.

Rappers’ communication with their audience through lyrics resembles ways that scholars have systematically broken down the communication process between the media and the public into separate stages or segments (Schuefele, 1999; Entman, 1993).

Schuefele (1999) differentiated between media frames and individual frames. In Gamson and Modigliani's study (as cited in Schuefele, 1999) the role of media frames is described: "The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue." An individual frame, meanwhile, has been defined as "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information" (Entman, 1993, 53). There has been no research that focuses on how rappers' framing of religious concepts, which in this case would be "media frames," is perceived and translated by "individual frames," which would be whether or not the coders from the content analysis think the rappers frame religion negatively, positively, or in a neutral context. The current research fills this void by using a 20-album sample where coders decide if songs from those albums frame religion in a negative, positive or neutral context.

Binder (1993) conducted one of the first notable studies that combined framing theory and popular music. Binder's study compared frames found in different publications' stories on heavy metal music to frames found in those same publications' stories on rap music. The contrast between rap and heavy metal was included to explore a racial issue, namely the difference between how heavy metal and rap was framed in "mainstream" news publications compared to "African-American" news publications. Binder created different types of frames, such as "corruption" and "protection," that were applied to the stories covering both genres of music.

Binder's (1993) study did not explore any sort of correlation between rap music and religion, but it did explore the different ways in which the messages of rap music can be viewed as being negative or positive. Four of the frames that Binder formulated were

grouped in a category called “Music Is Harmful.” The other four were grouped in a category titled “Music Is Not Harmful.” While Binder’s study was the first in many ways to attempt to tally the number of positive and negative messages derived from rap music, those perspectives and the resulting frames came from publications that do not specialize in covering rap music, such as *Ebony*, *Reader’s Digest*, and the *New York Times*. Few studies have measured the frequency of religious words and concepts directly from rap lyrics, and it can be argued that music is a medium that has exceeded print journalism in terms of popularity and influence within American culture. The current study attempts to fill this void by conducting a content analysis on the lyrics of 20 of the genres most respected artists, and the frequency of positive and negative religious references will be measured.

Swanson (2004) then used a methodology similar to Binder’s to conduct one of the first notable quantitative studies to measure how religion is framed. Swanson (2004) conducted a content analysis on the content from ten apostate Web sites. These Web sites were created by ten apostate organizations, and each organization was aligning itself against a specific religious group. Swanson looked for reoccurring frames within the ten Web sites examined, which included groups that opposed the Catholic Church and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

This study examined frames that had positive and negative characteristics, and these frames were also based on these web sites’ ideas on the religious movements they left behind. However, the study did not include a numerical compare and contrast section between actual positive and negative frames. The research questions for Swanson’s study

focused more on the different themes explored by the apostate websites and how those themes viewed established religious denominations. A positive frame-versus-negative frame approach was not used, and the lack of this approach decreases the explanatory value of future studies that aim to show how different mediums like the Internet and music can influence audience's religious views.

Skopal (2005) then conducted a study that included components that Binder and Swanson left out. Skopal conducted a content analysis directly from lyrics of reggae songs, which are usually intertwined with Rastafarian messages. Skopal's study also qualitatively measured how reggae musicians framed those lyrics. In this study, however, Skopal examined Rastafarianism as more of a social movement, not so much as a religion. This prompted the Skopal to use collective action frames (Snow & Benford, 2000) to categorize the results. Reggae, which is related to rap in terms of the genres musical origins (Erskine, 2003, 72), is arguably the closest of any genre resembling rap that has been the subject of a content analysis detailing how this genre frames a form of religiosity. This study only dealt exclusively with collective-action frames, which is a specific set of frames that would be hard to apply to religiosity in lyrics.

Even if a study dealing with framing in general, and not just collective-action frames, were applied to reggae, it could be suggested that reggae is not influential enough of a musical genre to reflect how a segment of the American population thinks about religion. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, rap music has become a major cultural influence, and how these artists frame religion can influence many fans' religious views. The religious views of the genre's most skilled and influential rappers needs to be

explored, and it has been argued that the more skilled someone is at framing one of their ideas, the more meaningful and memorable that message becomes to an audience.

(Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996, p. 4)

The literature mentioned suggests that there is a noticeable lack of quantitative research that combines religion and framing theory. The literature discussed does suggest that the framing of religious messages can be measured quantitatively, but the abundance of research articulating how rap music frames religion has been qualitative. All of this literature, taken together, led to the development of the second research question:

RQ 2: What is the frequency at which religious references occur in secular rap music?

Rap Music and Religion.

Rap music has always had a variety of viewpoints regarding the topic of religion. There are many examples of opinionated religious views throughout the rap music genre, and several studies have already explored the nature of the relationship between religion and rap music. Miller (2009) qualitatively analyzes lyrics from rappers such as Talib Kweli, Nas, and Common, and the results find an emphasis on a personal connection to a higher power. Being dedicated to a form of organized religion, however, is not promoted and is sometimes opposed. Kweli's lyrics, in particular, conveyed a sense of distrust towards any form of church leadership, while Nas' lyrics communicate the rapper's quest to better understand the higher power Nas believes in (Miller, 2009, p. 48-51). Russell Simmons, founder of legendary rap record label Def Jam, is willing to be called "spiritual" but not "religious" in order to imply that Simmons is not claiming any form of

institutionalized religion. (Pinn, 2003, p. 20) These are just a few examples of how the culture in which rap music is created often mixes positive and negative perspectives on religion, which is reflected in rap lyrics. Despite all of these qualitative analyses, little research has been done to quantitatively analyze any trends or correlations within those views.

Dyson (1996) has also explored the varying held by rappers towards religion. Dyson points out the pro-Islamic views of Public Enemy's leader, Chuck D, specifically Chuck D's allegiance to following Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Chuck D's religious ideologies reached the masses in the 1980s during the heyday of Public Enemy's popularity, as Dyson described automobiles across America playing the song in their car stereos. Dyson also recounts the charges of Anti-Semitism that confronted the group due to some of Chuck D's lyrics (Dyson, 1996, p. 167).

Ice Cube was another rapper subject to Dyson's analysis of mainstream rappers and their interactions with religion. Dyson remembers Ice Cube's song "When I Get to Heaven," where Cube indicts Christianity for what he views as sins towards African-Americans (Dyson, 1996, p.175). Dyson writes about both Ice Cube and Chuck D with a reverential tone regarding their status as influential figures in hip hop, and he considers hip hop culture to be one of the main causes for the divisions between older and younger African-Americans (Dyson, 1996, xiii).

Perhaps the defining piece of literature focused on rap's love-and-hate interactions with religion was compiled by Pinn (2003). Pinn's compilation of scholarly insights included Watkins' (2003) observation of rappers' theological evolution. Watkins

points out that the earliest rappers only espoused messages of “relative religious orthodoxy” (Watkins, 2003, p. 188) that tied in to mostly Christian and Islamic practices. Rappers’ religious concepts evolved as the genre matured in the 1980s and 1990s, as rappers compared neighborhood friends who were murdered to saints or martyrs in their lyrics. Many of the religious messages also began to create a new theology found only in rap music, as rappers combined elements from different religions to form their own ideologies. Watkins points out Ja Rule’s humanization of God in his lyrics, and also mentions Common’s definition of God as a “coming into a sense of self-awareness.” (2003, p. 191) Watkins does not explore or comment on how positive or negative these rappers frame religion overall, but his literature is still covers many different artists views, providing a pointed summary concerning rap’s religiosity.

Pinn’s compilation also included an analysis of rap’s relationship with African-American Islamic culture over the past few decades. Floyd-Thomas (2003, p. 51) compares the lyrics of Public Enemy and KRS-One to the rhetoric of Malcolm X and argues that the relationship between rap music and Islam needs to be further studied. Also in Pinn’s compilation was an essay done by Pinn (2003) himself on rap’s forays into humanism. In this essay, Pinn argues that many rappers, such as Scarface, Tupac Shakur, and Sage Francis, have created a subculture within the rap genre that doesn’t necessarily oppose the traditional modes of religiosity that many of these rappers were raised in. This subculture instead asks questions about traditional religious rhetoric and thinks critically about any “easy answers,” as Sage Francis would say (Pinn, 2003, p. 101). Like Watkins (2003) however, none of Floyd-Thomas (2003) or Pinn’s (2003) works explored the

frequency of negative portrayals of religion compared to positive portrayals of religion in the works of the artists these scholars analyzed. The gap of specific research in these studies led to the development of the second research question. By answering the second research question, the current study aims to provide an initial set of data that addresses the lack of a comparative, numerical analysis between positive and negative religious messages in rap.

While the mixed-messaged religious framing of artists like Kweli, Ice Cube, Chuck D, Speech, and others have all been the subject of analysis, there is no artist that better represents hip hop's love-hate relationship with religiosity like Tupac Shakur. Dyson (2001) explores the depth of Shakur's religious influence on the public, recalling a Baptist pastor who organized a memorial service after the slain rapper's death in Washington D.C. Young people from all parts of the U.S., all of whom were "befuddled, bewildered, lost (and) disillusioned" (Dyson, 2001, p. 201). No rapper captured the pain of the hip-hop culture and its young people the way Shakur did. Eminem, who is a hip-hop cultural icon himself, said of Shakur:

Tupac showed me how to incorporate emotion into a song. Whether he was pissed off, happy, sad whatever, he had the ability to let you know exactly how he was feeling. At the same time, nobody was really bringing that type of emotional intensity into rap. And nobody's really done it like him since. (hiphop365.com, 2011)

Dyson then points out the different perspectives Shakur shared about religion in his lyrics: asking God to take away his suffering, searching out a reason for his existence, pondering his destiny, and even questioning the existence of the same divine being he so often raps about (Dyson, 2001, p. 202). Although Shakur openly questioned faith and

religion, it could be argued that Shakur did not have a dominant positive or negative stance on religion. Shakur expressed an unabashed trust in God through songs like “Only God Can Judge Me.” Shakur also said:

I believe that everything you do bad comes back to you. So everything that I do that's bad, I'm going to suffer for it. But in my heart, I believe what I'm doing in my heart is right. So I feel like I'm going to heaven. (Vibe 1998)

Shakur’s contradictory views about religion are apparent in Shakur’s songs and interviews, and those mixed-messages help make Shakur an accurate representative of how many young people feel about religion today. There’s no overall positive or negative attitude towards religion, but rather an uncertainty and ambivalence.

The internal spiritual struggles Shakur expressed in his lyrics did not go unnoticed. White (1997) interviewed Rev. Herbert Daughtry, the pastor of a church that Shakur grew up attending in Brooklyn, NY. When Shakur began to feud with former friends and fellow rappers (e.g. Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre), Daughtry blamed the increasing turmoil on the fact that Shakur was “running away from God.” Daughtry goes on to compare Shakur to a modern-day version of the Biblical prophet Jonah, who did not confront his Godly responsibilities due to his anger.

White also quotes Scott Gordon, a West Coast radio DJ who knew Shakur from his younger days in the Oakland hip-hop scene. Gordon has his own diagnosis for Shakur’s personal unraveling later in his career, claiming that Shakur essentially “made a deal with the Devil” when Shakur agreed to work with controversial rap mogul Suge Knight in the mid-90s. Gordon also said that the combination of excessive wealth, fame,

and controversy that marked Shakur's career after he signed with Suge Knight was not a sign of a man connected to God, but rather evil. (White, 1997, p. 165)

Shakur was not afraid to express his spirituality to the masses, despite the complexities and apparent contradictions surrounding his beliefs. White (1997) points out that it was Shakur himself who co-directed the music video for "I Ain't Mad at Cha," which was filmed before his death but was released to music video channels shortly after Shakur's murder. In the video, Shakur is ironically shot and killed, ascends to heaven, and there meets up with other iconic African-American pop figures, such as Jimi Hendrix and Billie Holiday. White suggests that the video is a visual expression of where Shakur's spiritual beliefs eventually ended up before his death, as the video explored the afterlife Shakur so often rapped about, and the afterlife the video portrayed didn't include political rebels and social activists that the younger Shakur might have favored, but rather entertainers (White, 1997, p. 198).

The widespread dissemination of Shakur's spiritual beliefs is not only reflected in the observations of Gordon and Daughtry, but also through the content of music videos like "I Ain't Mad at Cha." It can be suggested that the framing of religion through the portrayal of such an expressive and popular artist influenced the religious views of many listeners. It is important to find a correlation between how often Shakur rapped about religion his songs and how he framed religious topics in those lyrics. Watkins (2003, p. 190) provides arguably the most persuasive evidence for this claim, as he recalled a visit to inner city Pittsburgh where he discussed religion with hundreds of young African-Americans. Watkins said, "... someone was bound to say, 'Well, you know Tupac

says...” Watkins’ (2003) study also suggests that other rappers were even influenced by Shakur’s religiosity. The study explained how 2Pac’s work laid the foundation for rappers to speak on their own theologies in their lyrics: “By 2000, Ja Rule had gone a step further, adding texture to the framework established by Tupac. Ja Rule asked a probing question: What if God were one of us?” (p. 189).

The need for continued research on rappers’ influential and varied points-of-view is reflected by the uncertain view of religiosity expressed by American culture as a whole. As previously stated, many rappers like Talib Kweli express a distrust towards church and other forms of organized religion, and this is reflected in research done by Zinnbauer and Pargament (1997). “Historically, spirituality was not distinguished from religiousness until the rise of secularism in this century, and a popular disillusionment with religious institutions as a hindrance to personal experiences of the sacred.” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1997, p. 550)

It can therefore be suggested that the mixed views on religion that permeates the lyrics of rappers is a reflection of how American culture views religion today. It can be suggested that religious views of those living in the inner city are even more vulnerable to the influence of rappers’ lyrics: according to Wilson’s study (as cited in Watkins, 2003), less than 29 percent of this group claims any type of relationship with a form of organized religion. The literature by Kahneman & Tversky and Entman that has already been discussed suggests that rappers’ framing of religion has the potential to influence that portion of inner-city Americans, along with any other Americans that have bought into the “popular disillusionment with religious institutions” that Zinnbauer and

Pargament described. As shown by scholars like Dyson, Pinn, and Watkins, rappers like Tupac Shakur have in some ways replaced the traditional Christian minister as the main religious influence for many of these audiences, and the religious content of these rappers' messages needs to be measured.

It can be argued that Shakur's influence on rap music would not be as widespread if he had not been murdered on September 13, 1996. Grant (2011) suggested that Shakur's death moved the rapper from superstar to legendary status as an artist. Grant also suggested that Shakur became more famous after being murdered, and went on to mention Shakur's name among other late musical icons, such as Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain. Ryabtsev (2010) compares Shakur's impact on rap music to the way artists such as James Brown, Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, and The Beatles influenced popular music in the past. Ryabtsev (2010) wrote:

But September 13th, 1996 did something else too. Not only did that day see the fall of Shakur as a human being, it saw his rise as a legend. Shakur was already making a name for himself both in and out of the music world for years but his death shot his relevancy and fame to another level.

It could be argued, therefore, that Shakur's influence not just on rap music, but even in popular culture might have never reached the level it did if the rapper had never been murdered, which makes the date of Shakur's death an important event in the history of rap music. Watkins (2003, p. 185) argued that Shakur influenced a new wave of rappers to become "theologians" and social critics as much as lyricists, even going so far as to argue that Shakur is the prototype for this new type of rapper who is also viewed as a preacher by this generation of music audiences. So perhaps it is not Shakur's death as

much as Shakur's musical career that is the real event of importance. For the purposes of this research, however, a concrete date had to be chosen in order to facilitate a before-and-after component, and the studies already mentioned suggest that Shakur's death is arguably the most important date when it comes to Shakur's influence on rap and music, in general. Historian Robin Kelley said that Shakur's death helped turn Shakur into even more a martyr: "He was a martyr before it ever happened... So much of his music was about the inevitability of his demise, and at the same time he also had this almost Jesus-like voice, where he would preach..." (Dyson 2001, 284)

The studies on the life Tupac Shakur, along with other studies suggesting the power and influence Shakur's lyrics could hold amongst rap audiences, led to the development of the third research question:

RQ 3: How did the portrayal of religion in secular rap music change after the death of Tupac Shakur, amongst other factors?

The overall conclusions of the studies concerning Shakur and other rappers' attitudes towards religion led to the development of its accompanying hypothesis:

H 2: The portrayal of religion in secular rap songs will become more negative after the death of Tupac Shakur, amongst other factors.

Including the disclaimer of "other factors" in RQ 3 and H 2 allows the current study to not imply a causal relationship between Shakur's death and any possible change in how religion was portrayed after that event. Shakur's death is only a milestone in time used by the current study to create a dividing line for a before-and-after component.

Chapter III- Methodology

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ 1: Do secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious references?

RQ 2: What is the frequency at which religious references occur in secular rap music?

RQ 3: How did the portrayal of religion in secular rap music change after the death of Tupac Shakur, amongst other factors?

Hypotheses:

H 1: Secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references will portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious references.

H 2: The portrayal of religion in secular rap songs will become more negative after the death of Tupac Shakur, amongst other factors.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to look for a statistically significant relationship between the frequencies of religious references in secular rap songs and whether or not those rap songs portray religion positively or negatively. This study also aims to find out how rappers' portrayal of religion in rap lyrics changed after Tupac Shakur's death.

Data Analysis

Analysis was done for RQ 2 first in order to make the overall data analysis more time-efficient. For RQ 2, a data analysis consisted of a frequency distribution conducted on SPSS that indicated that religion is not a dominant theme in most secular rap songs.

For RQ 1, standardized z-scores were used to measure agreement for portrayal between coders, and a chi-square test conducted on both coders' data indicated a statistically significant difference between the proportion of songs that portrayed religion positively compared to songs that portrayed religion negatively. For RQ 3, a new variable was coded that represented whether a song was released before or after Shakur's death. A chi-square test was conducted with this new variable, and a statistically significant difference in how rap songs portrayed religion before Shakur's death compared to how rap songs portrayed religion after was revealed. H 1 and H 2 were both supported by the data found.

Population and Sampling

In order to answer the research questions, this study used a content analysis that examined the lyrics of secular rap albums. The population for the content analysis included the albums of all secular rappers whose careers were active during the years that 2Pac released his studio albums. An artist designated as active would be a rapper who has not gone longer than five years without releasing an album, single, or at least being featured on another artist's song.

A purposive sample was selected within the aforementioned population. The purposive sample for this study included the albums of rappers featured on MTV's "The Greatest MCs of All Time" (MTV Networks, 2007). This is a segment on the network's Web site that includes an ordered list ranking the 10 greatest rappers of all time, according to network's selection committee, which was dubbed "The MTV Hip-Hop Brain Trust." The 10 people in this committee were all MTV employees, and some had

production duties while others had managerial positions. There was one creative consultant, one on-air correspondent, and one hip-hop editor.

The 10 greatest rappers of all time, in order from the artist placed last on the list to the artist placed first, are: LL Cool J, Eminem, Ice Cube, Big Daddy Kane, KRS-One, Nas, Rakim, Notorious B.I.G., Tupac Shakur (2Pac), and Jay-Z. All ten of these rappers will be included in the study.

A separate list in the same segment entitled “Honorable Mentions” included a non-ordered list of 10 rappers that were considered for being placed in the top 10 list but were ultimately left off. These rappers are: Snoop Dogg, Slick Rick, Scarface, Kool G Rap, Lauryn Hill, Ghostface, Common, Black Thought, Big Pun, and Andre 3000.

Selecting rappers based on their inclusion within these two lists allows the study to analyze the lyrics of the arguably the greatest rappers in the history of the genre. The introduction before the list mentions that the selection committee “is not claiming that the list is perfect, but we do claim that it was devised by people who love and live this culture we know as hip-hop” (MTV Networks, 2007). Having a list of what several knowledgeable rap fans consider the twenty greatest rappers of all time ensures that these rappers were not just selected randomly by listeners that do not fully appreciate or understand the nuances and cultural differentiations that affect the lyrics of these songs.

This study used a purposive sample of rap lyrics taken from a list of twenty rappers because all 20 rappers made a lasting impact on the genre, not just because of the amount of records these rappers have sold but also because of the high level of influence these rappers hold within the genre. These are the rappers that virtually every other

rapper listens to in order to study innovative rhyme schemes and vocal deliveries. So while the rest of the genre looks to these artists for inspiration, the rap genre audience listens to the top 20 rappers along with the rest of the rappers that study the top 20's rap styles.

The top 20 rappers in MTV's two lists arguably represent the most exposed group of rappers, considering that these twenty rappers not only collectively appeal to the mainstream culture but also to devoted hip hop purists, as well. The sample of the study, therefore, will include the highest-selling albums from each of these twenty artists, meaning that the sample will have a total of 20 albums. On the following page is Table 1, which lists the twenty artists included in the study, along with the highest-selling album from each artist and the number of songs included in those albums. By including only each artist's highest-selling album, the study is able to examine the songs that were arguably exposed to the most listeners.

Table 1

Sample of Rappers and Albums in Study

<u>Artist</u>	<u>Album</u>	<u>Amount of Songs in Album</u>
Jay-Z	Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life	14
2Pac	All Eyez On Me	27
Notorious B.I.G.	Life After Death	24
Rakim	Paid In Full	10
Nas	It Was Written	14
KRS-One	Edutainment	21
Big Daddy Kane	It's A Big Daddy Thing	17
Ice Cube	The Predator	16
Eminem	Marshall Mathers LP	18
LL Cool J	Mr. Smith	15
Snoop Dogg	Doggystyle	19
Slick Rick	The Great Adventures of Slick Rick	12
Scarface	The Diary	13
Kool G Rap	4, 5, 6	12
Common	Finding Forever	12
Ghostface Killah	Ironman	16
Big Punisher	Capital Punishment	22
Lauryn Hill	The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill	16
Andre 3000	The Love Below	19
Black Thought	Phrenology	13

Note.

Operationalization of Concepts

Rappers.

Keyes (2002) defined rap as “a musical form that makes use of rhyme, rhythmic speech, and street vernacular, which is recited or loosely chanted over a musical soundtrack.” Rappers, therefore, can be conceptually defined as a musician that communicates through rhythmic, spoken-word lyrics with or without a beat, or accompanying background music. For the purpose of this research, the operational definition of “rappers” will be the artists included in an online ranking from MTV called “The Greatest MCs of All Time” (MTV Networks, 2007). 20 secular rappers compose

that list, and the highest-grossing album from each artist will provide the songs for the study.

Religious References.

Conceptual Definition.

Conceptually, “religion” describes people’s actions and thoughts towards anything sacred, with these thoughts and actions manifesting through:

A: A connection with a form of organized religion

B: The practices of an organized religion

C: Or with an individual’s personal connection to a belief in a higher power or other sacred entity.

Essential to the defining “religion” will be the concept of “the Sacred,” which is defined as “a person, an object a principle or a concept that transcends the self” (Hill, 2000, p. 64). Placing the idea of “the Sacred” at the root of this conceptual definition allows the research to include organized religions that do not focus on just one or even several forms of traditional higher powers. The Five-Percent Nation of Islam, for example, has been referred to in rappers’ lyrics since the 1980s, and this is a religious sect founded on the belief that black men are the “physical manifestation of God” (Floyd-Thomas, 2003, p. 55).

Operational Definition.

For the purposes of this research, a “religious reference” will be operationally defined as any word that the two coders using Code Sheet #2 both agree is religious. If

both coders agree that a candidate word included in Code Sheet #2 is “religious,” then operationally that word would be defined as a religious reference.

The framing of “religion” will be operationally defined by how positive or negative the overall framing of those religious words happened to be throughout the course of each set of song lyrics in the study. Two coders will determine how positive or negative religion was framed in each song through a Likert scale filled out on the specific Code Sheet #2 for each song.

Candidate Words.

Candidate words will be operationally defined as any word that either of the two coders using Code Sheet #1 felt were religious words. If one coder does not believe a word is religious but the other coder does, then that word still becomes a candidate word. A candidate word is not an actual religious reference; it is only a word that has made it past the first round coding in the form of Code Sheet #1. These candidate words that are selected by either of the coders using Code Sheet #1 would then be included and highlighted in Code Sheet #2, where two different coders decide if that candidate word is religious. A candidate word becomes an actual religious reference only if both coders feel like the word is religious in context of the lyrics given in Code Sheet #2. In other words, the candidate words found by either of the first two coders using Code Sheet #1 formed a pool or collection of words eligible for the analysis in Code Sheet #2. These candidate words then became actual religious references if both of the second two coders felt like the candidate word was religious in Code Sheet #2.

Instrumentation

Use of Content Analysis.

The measurement technique of content analysis was used in the current research because of many methodological reasons. Stemler (2001) suggests that content analysis is a method useful for finding “trends and patterns within documents.” Although RQ 2 only seeks to measure the frequency of religious references in rap songs, both RQ 1 and RQ 3 seek to find patterns within the sample of rap songs from the current research. Stemler (2001) further suggests that content analysis becomes more effective when the technique is extended beyond just simple word counts and evolves into studies where data is coded and categorized. The current study also goes beyond a simple word count by categorizing religious references into “negative,” “positive” or “neutral” references. The current study also sampled 20 rap albums, which resulted in a large set of lyrics that needed to be analyzed by coders. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office (as cited in Stemler, 2001), content analyses systematically allow researchers to examine large quantities of data, and the code sheets from the current study enabled coders to analyze the 20 albums as quickly as possible.

Description of Coders.

This study used four coders in all. Two separate coders compiled an initial sample of candidate words during a pre-study that used Code Sheet #1. The pre-study found the candidate words throughout all 20 albums in the sample. Then two new coders used different versions of Code Sheet #2 for each song in the sample, with each song having its own specific version of Code Sheet #2 featuring the lyrics to that specific song. The

two new coders used Code Sheet #2 to confirm which of the candidate words were actually religious references. Code Sheet #2 also had a Likert scale, which allowed the coders to select a number between 1-9 to describe how positive or negative that specific song framed religion, with “9” being the most positive, and “1” being the most negative.

Demographics of Coders.

The coders that used Code Sheet #1 are both black males that attend the University of Missouri-Columbia. These two coders are both self-described rap fans and devout Christians. The coders that used Code Sheet #2 were also both self-described rap fans. Both are males attending the University of Missouri-Columbia. One coder is white and the other is black, but both coders had neutral religious beliefs.

The coders using Code Sheet #2 were purposely selected to represent a typical rap music listener. A white coder was included to represent the large consumption of rap music among whites. Kleinfeld’s study (as cited in Thompson and Brown, 2002) claims that whites account for 70 percent of rap music sales. Wang (2005) claims that this statistic is often cited to argue that rap music “has become part of the fabric of multicultural American life.” While white rap fans have become the norm, teenagers and college-age listeners buy more than 50 percent of rap music sold, and “white young men buy more rap than white women and black men and women combined.” (Danton, 2007) The selection of both a black male and white male reflect how rap music has transcended racial boundaries, and having both coders be college-aged reflects the dominant age range of rap audiences.

Coder Training.

For the pre-study, each of the first two coders were individually instructed to only look for words that were being used in a religious context. So if words that would usually be considered “religious,” such as “God” or “hell,” were used in a non-religious context in the song, then the coder was trained to not mark that word as “religious.” Definitions on the concept of “religion” and “the sacred” (Hill, 2000) were included at the beginning of the first code sheet to prime the judgment of the first two coders towards the song lyrics and helped them decide which words were “religious.”

After the candidate words were found in the pre-study, the researcher first met with both of the two new coders for training. At this meeting, the researcher gave each of the new coders four samples of Code Sheet #2, which featured rap songs from albums not included in the sample. These sample code sheets were given during the meeting to help the coders become acclimated with the coding procedure. Each sample code sheet had pre-selected candidate words that were chosen by the researcher. When coders disagreed with certain candidate words in the sample code sheets, the researcher helped the coders understand the context of the operational and conceptual definitions and helped them agree on whether or not the candidate word in question was actually a religious reference. This meeting helped ensure high intercoder reliability when the coders began using actual versions of Code Sheet #2 for each song in the current research’s sample.

Code Sheet #1.

The appendix of this thesis includes two separate code sheets. The first code sheet was to be used specifically by the first two coders after looking through each song to

provide a large pool of “candidate words” that could or could not be used in the actual study. These first two coders would not be responsible for analyzing any sort of framing of religion in the songs. Instead, the first two coders scanned through the lyrics from all of the albums for any words the coders deemed to have “religious connotations.” Using a code sheet for the specific song where each candidate words were found in, the coders then listed those words in a blank space at the bottom of the code sheet designated for the listing of any “candidate words.” The first two coders filled out these code sheets for all of the songs from the albums listed, producing a primary sample of “candidate words” that either both or just one of the coders felt was religious, in context of the song it was featured in. Any song that did not include at least two words that either of the coders thought was “religious” was disregarded in the rest of the study.

Below is an example taken from code sheet #2 for “Take It In Blood,” by Nas. This example shows a word, “Jesus,” that both of the first set of coders thought was religious, and therefore became a “candidate word” in code sheet #2:

“I rock a vest, prestigious, Cuban link flooded Jesus (R/ NR)
in a Lex watchin Kathie Lee and Regis”

Although the word “Jesus” here refers to a pendant worn by the rapper Nas, both coders independently thought that the word in context still was a religious word based on the conceptual definitions given by the researcher. As shown in this example, one of the new coders using code sheet #2 also felt like this reference was religious in context.

Code Sheet #2.

The second code sheet in the appendix was a completely separate coding instrument used by two new different coders. The new coders used this second code sheet after the primary sample of “candidate words” was formed from the first wave of coding by the original coders. Only songs that the previous two coders found to have at least two religious references according to at least one of the coders were included in this second wave of coding. Each of these remaining songs had a matching code sheet that included the entire set of lyrics for that song. Coders were e-mailed these sheets, one to three albums’ worth of songs at a time. Some albums only had one or two songs that were eligible for this final code sheet because many of these albums’ songs did not have enough religious references to qualify for the second wave of coding.

Any “candidate word” that was found in the lyrics within the code sheet for a specific song was bolded in the new code sheet so that the candidate word would stand out among the other words. An “R” or “NR” was included in parentheses right after the bolded candidate word. Using a word processor, coders were instructed to bold the “R” if they felt the word next to it was religious, or “NR” if they felt like it was not. Below is an example of the song lyrics from Lauryn Hill’s “Tell Him” that was formatted into the second code sheet:

“Let me be patient let me be kind
Make me unselfish without being blind
Though I may suffer I'll envy it not
And endure what comes
Cause he's all that I got and
tell **him (3) (R/ NR)**...”

The bolded “R” in the parentheses next to “him” indicates that the coder felt that that word was religious in the context of the song. This is also the result of the coder being trained to keep the entire context of the song in mind when making a decision to label a certain word “religious” or “non-religious,” because “him” by itself is not usually a word that is used in religious terminology.

At the bottom of each code sheet was a Likert scale, and coders were instructed to select a number that best represented how the song framed religion. 0 represented a very negative framing of religion, and 9 representing a very positive framing. Coders bolded the specific number in the Likert scale that best represented how the song framed religion.

Procedure and Time Frame.

The lyrics of these rappers were collected from *The Original Hip-Hop/ Rap Lyrics Archive* (<http://www.ohhla.com/all.html>), which has been a credible source of lyrics for previous studies involving content analysis of rap lyrics (Kubrin, 2005; Kubrin, 2009). The lyrics on this Web site are posted vertically from top to bottom, and typically the first line supplies the first part of a lyric, followed by the second line supplying the second part of the lyric, which is placed under the first line. An example would be the lyrics posted for rapper AZ’s “A-1 Performance”:

“Critically acclaimed, verbally I’m sickly insane
Officially, I remain the Ripleys of the game
Believe or not, the hustler’s here to retrieve his spot
From y’all dungaree thieves that mislead the block” (The Original Hip-Hop/ Rap Lyrics Archive, n.d.)

The lyrics for the songs on the specific albums composed the units of analysis for the current research. Using Code Sheet #1, the first two coders scanned through the lyrics of 20 albums, with each coder selecting words that had religious connotations. Using Code Sheet #2, the second two coders only scanned through the lyrics for songs that had at least two candidate words to select actual religious references from the candidate words, along with deciding if those same songs framed religion positively, negatively, or in a neutral manner.

Procedure for Code Sheet #1.

Each of the original coders entered the words that were used in a religious context in the allotted space for each song in the coding sheet. Each coder also placed the number of times each word occurred in every song within a parenthesis by the word. If a coder thought the word “God” was being used in a religious context four separate times in one song, the coder would have written: God (4). If a coder did not feel like there were any religious words, then the allotted space for each song would be left blank. If there were multiple occurrences for a word, coders did not specify which occurrence they were referring to in their coding sheet. Each coder went through the songs independently and was trained independently.

If coders felt like multiple words from a set of lyrics made up a religious potential religious reference (ex. “Tribe of Judah), then coders were instructed to code the whole phrase as being “religious.” If both coders felt the at least one of the words within the phrase was religious in context, that specific word was included as a potential unit of analysis, or a candidate word. If both coders agreed that the entire phrase was religious,

the researcher chose one word that best represented the entire phrase to be the candidate word. A textual analysis program called TextStat was used to confirm the number of occurrences of each word that either one or both of the original coders thought were “religious.” The results of those confirmed occurrences were recorded into a Microsoft Excel file that charted how many times each word occurred in each song. If the word “God” appeared 2 times in a song to a coder and appeared 3 times to another, that number was taken into account when the TextStat analysis was ran. If the TextStat showed that the word “God” did appear three times, then “3” was recorded into the Excel file for the word “God” in the slot for the specific song. Any song that did not include at least two confirmed candidate words in the Excel file was not included in the rest of the study.

Procedure for Code Sheet #2.

Once the number of occurrences recorded by each coder was confirmed, a second pair of coders was selected. The second code sheet discussed in the Instrumentation section was then created, and the researcher met with both coders to go over the conceptual definitions of religion used for the study. After meeting, the researcher e-mailed both coders with the new code sheets for one, two, or three specific albums at a time. The second code sheets included the bolded “candidate words,” along with the Likert scale at the bottom of each code sheet. The coders were instructed to examine the lyrics first and decide which bolded words were “religious” or “non-religious,” then fill out the Likert scale afterwards.

The Likert scale started at “1,” which signified a “very negative” portrayal of religion if selected, and ended at “9,” which signified a “very positive” portrayal of

religion. During coder training, the coders were only trained to give a more “positive” ratings to songs if the songs did not display any form of religious questioning, critique, or criticism. Likert ratings from 7 through 9 would be considered positive scores. Coders were trained to give neutral scores, which would be Likert ratings from 4 through 6, if songs had expressed forms of religious questioning and uncertainty. Coders were trained to give negative ratings from 1 through 3 if songs expressed more explicit forms of religious criticism and distrust.

Below is a table displaying lyrics from the study that were operationalized into songs that were given positive, neutral and negative ratings.

Table 2

Examples of Lyrics From Positive, Neutral, and Negative Songs

Lyrics From “Positive” Song: “Only God Can Judge Me” by 2Pac

“Cause the media is full of dirty tricks
But only God can judge me...”

Lyrics From “Neutral” Song: “Hypnotize” by The Notorious B.I.G.

“So I just speak my peace, keep my piece
Cubans with the Jesus piece...”

Lyrics From “Negative” Song: “When Will They Shoot?” by Ice Cube

“Now if I say no violence, devil, you won’t respect mine...”

Note. Each set of lyrics were gathered from songs where both coders from Code Sheet #2 agreed that the song portrayed religion either positively, negatively, or in a neutral manner.

As the coders went through the code sheets for each album, the coders were advised to be aware of the following potentially confusing lyrics:

- Eminem is a rapper who used the words “hell” and “God” in vain often, and coders were advised to mark as many of those occurrences as “Not Religious” or “NR.”
- LL Cool J uses the term “talk in tongue” in one of his two songs in the sample of albums, which is a term used by many Christian denominations.
- Ghostface Killah uses the term “three-sixes,” which is a reference to the number 666. This number is also known as the “mark of the Beast” in Christian theology.
- Ghostface Killah also refers to Joseph, a Biblical figure.
- Lauryn Hill and Kool G Rap allude to the Christian hymn “Marching To Zion” in their songs “To Zion” and “Take Em To War,” respectively.
- KRS-One refers to the biblical figure Noah in one of his songs

The coders filled out each code sheet independently and on their own time. After each coder finished an e-mail attachment of two or three albums, the coders would e-mail the finished code sheets back to the researcher. The coder would then be e-mailed another set of one to three albums until all 20 albums were finally finished. Once both coders filled all of the songs’ specific code sheets out, all of the data was analyzed through SPSS.

Chapter IV- Results

Intercoder Reliability

Cohen's Kappa was used to calculate intercoder reliability for the candidate words that were bolded in each code sheet, and the Cohen's Kappa reliability percentage was .837. 105 songs were used in the sample to obtain this statistic. All of the other songs that did not have at least two religious references and were no longer used in the study.

After calculating intercoder reliability with the 105 songs that had at least two religious references, all songs that did not have 100 percent agreement for religious references were removed from the sample. Using a sample with songs that all had 100 percent agreement for religious references helped the methodology have a more accurate and defined definition for what religious references actually are. The final sample consisted of 91 songs after removing songs that did not have 100 percent agreement for religious references between coders. These 91 songs provided the data for the statistical tests that would help answer the research questions.

RQ 2: What is the frequency at which religious references occur in secular rap music?

To help make the data analysis process more efficient, RQ 2 was addressed first by the researcher. A frequency distribution was conducted for this research question, and the resulting data indicated that 68.1% of rap songs only had between 2 to 4 religious words. Of the 91 remaining songs in the final sample, 28 songs had 2 religious words, which equaled 30.8% of the final sample. The song with the most religious words was

“My Downfall,” by Notorious B.I.G., which had 37 religious words. The mean of the final sample was 5.05 religious words per song. Below is a table displaying the amount of songs that include a specific frequency of religious references.

Table 3

Distribution of Songs With Specific Amounts of Religious References

<u>Column #1</u>	<u>Column #2</u>
<u>Amount of References in Song</u>	<u>Frequency of Songs with Specific Amount</u>
2	28
3	23
4	11
5	5
6	3
7	8
8	2
9	1
10	3
11	2
12	1
13	1
23	1
30	1
37	1

Note. “Amount of References in Song” indicates amount of religious references, while “Frequency of Songs with Specific Amount” indicates how many songs from the sample had the specific amount of religious references listed in column #1

Of the 91 songs remaining, 51 had between two to three religious references. This means that over half of the sample had between two to three religious words. This finding suggests that religion is generally not a dominant theme in secular rap. Furthermore, only 10 percent of the 91 songs had 10 or more religious references, which indicates that only a small percentage of secular rap songs would have religion as a dominant theme.

RQ 1: Do secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious words?

H 1: Secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references will portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious references.

The data analysis for this research question began with standardizing the Likert scale ratings for each song from Code Sheet #2. The standardizing of these Likert scale ratings led to two z-scores, with one z-score for each Likert scale rating given by both coders. A positive z-score for a Likert scale rating meant that the song portrayed religion positively, while a negative z-score meant that the song portrayed religion negatively. Using this criteria, the sample was narrowed to only songs where both coders agreed on how religion was portrayed according to the z-scores. If Coder 1's z-score indicated that the song portrayed religion positively and Coder 2's z-score indicated that the song portrayed religion negatively, then that song was disregarded for the rest of the study. The criteria yielded a new sample of 58 songs, meaning that 33 out of the 91 songs that received z-scores were disregarded in the rest of the study.

In order to test Hypothesis 2, the remaining 58 songs were divided into songs with a "high" or "low" amount of religious references. The sample of 58 songs was further narrowed down to create two equal groups that were representative of songs with a "high" amount of religious references compared to songs with a "low" amount of religious references. Based on the frequency distribution of the 58 songs, it was decided

that the group of songs categorized as having a “low” amount would be songs that only had two religious references. Songs categorized as having a “high” amount would have five or more religious references. This led to both the “high” and “low” groups having 17 songs, with a total of 34 songs for this final sample.

A chi-square test for this sample of 34 songs revealed a significant difference in the proportion of positive to negative portrayal of religion in songs between the “high” and “low” groups, $X^2(1, N=34) = 7.771, p = .005$. The distribution of positive to negative portrayal of religion on songs for the “high” and “low” groups is displayed in the table below.

Table 4

Distribution of Positive to Negative Portrayals of Religion in Songs with “Low” and “High” Amounts of Religious References

	<u>Portrayal of Religion</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Positive</u>	
“Low” Group	11	6	17
“High” Group	3	14	17
Total	14	20	34

Note. Each cell value represents the number of songs in each portrayal and amount category.

“Low” Group = 2 religious references, “High Group” = > 4 references

This statistically significant data supports Hypothesis 1, meaning that secular rap songs with a higher amount of religious references do portray religion more positively than songs with a lower amount of religious references.

RQ 3: How did the portrayal of religion in secular rap music change after the death of Tupac Shakur, amongst other factors?

H 2: The portrayal of religion in secular rap songs will become more negative after the death of Tupac Shakur, amongst other factors?

The statistical analysis for this research question was based on the same 58 songs used in RQ 2 where both coders agreed on how religion was portrayed according to each song's z-scores. With these 58 songs, a frequency distribution was conducted, with an additional variable that represented whether a song was included on an album that was released before or after Shakur's death. Of the 58 songs, 31 songs were on albums released before Shakur's death, and 27 songs were on albums released after Shakur's death.

A chi-square test for this sample of 58 songs revealed a significant relationship between the portrayal of religion in rap songs and whether a song was on an album released before or after Shakur's death, $X^2(1, N= 58) = 4.185, p = .041$. The distribution of positive to negative portrayals of religion in songs on albums released before or after Shakur's death is displayed in the table on the following page.

Table 5

Distribution of Positive and Negative Portrayals of Religion in Songs on Albums Released Before or After Tupac Shakur's Death

Release Date	<u>Portrayal of Religion</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Positive</u>	
Before 2Pac's Death	9	22	31
After 2Pac's Death	15	12	27
Total	24	34	58

Note. Each cell value represents the number of songs in each portrayal and release date category.

These values support Hypothesis 2, meaning that secular rap generally portrayed religion less positively after Shakur's death compared to before the rapper's death.

Chapter V- Discussion

Contributions to Framing Research

Goffman (1974) discussed the importance of “primary frameworks,” and the results from this study suggest that religion is more likely to be portrayed positively in a particular song if there are more religious words used in that song. The data from RQ 2 suggests that there is a significant difference in the proportion of positive to negative portrayal of religion in songs with high and low amounts of religious references.

Along with Goffman (1974), Kahneman and Tversky’s (1981) study on how the framing and wording of an issue affects the perception of that issue can also now be potentially extended into the realm of religion in rap music because of the results of RQ 2. How a change in the wording of a rap song can affect how audiences perceive religion in that song could not be examined in this study, but the current research does suggest that the frequency of religious words in a rap song does generally lead to a more positive portrayal of religion in that song.

Future researchers could use this data to create media effects studies comparing how rap audiences could view religion differently after listening to rap songs with either high or low amounts of religious references, then analyzing that data for a difference in how audiences that listened to songs with high amounts of religious references viewed religion as opposed to audiences that listened to songs with low amounts of religious references.

The future research could use the same methodology from this study to gather a larger sample of songs that have agreement between coders' z-scores. The potential study could also include the criteria for categorizing songs with a "high" amount of religiosity compared to a "low" amount of religiosity that was used in the methodology of the current research. The researchers could use some songs from this study, along with songs from popular rappers whose careers started after MTV conducted "The Greatest MCs of All Time" list. Combining this updated sample of rappers along with some of the elements from the methodology of the current study would help future researchers start with that potential study.

Entman (1993) also argued that the framing of a topic like religion would increase its salience within the overall message. The results from this study, especially the statistically significant results that support Hypothesis 1, suggest that the salience of religious messages in a rap song can influence how the tone of those religious messages are perceived by audiences. As the amount of religious references increased in a song, the portrayal of religion became more positive. This finding can suggest that the increased salience of religiosity influenced how the coders perceived the topic of religion in general for the songs with a higher amount of religious references. Although nothing from this study can indicate anything further, future media effects studies can build on what this study has established.

A future study could include a subject listening to actual rap music and seeing how the subject frames religious concepts before and after, especially if the researcher includes songs that repeatedly use the same religious words and examines how the

listener views that specific concept after listening to those songs. Future researchers could include albums from popular new rappers along with the rappers from the current study. The potential future study could also use the same methodology for designating which words in the lyrics would be labeled as being “religious.”

This potential study would also require more background research on the subjects. The researchers for this potential study would have to develop a criteria for subjects with “negative,” “neutral,” or “positive” views on religion and examine how those views changed after the subjects were exposed to songs with religious ideas and portrayals. A subject with “negative” religious views before the potential study could listen to a song such as “Only God Can Judge Me,” a song that the current study designated as having a “positive” portrayal of religion, with the researcher examining whether or not the person’s religious views became more positive after listening to that specific song.

Another study that focused on the salience of religious issues was Silk’s (1995) development of religious frames called “topoi,” which used American newspaper articles on religion to create several categories that focused on specific aspects of religiosity in America. Silk concluded that more of these frames would be needed because of the increasing religious diversity in America, along with the continuous development of new religious views. The answers to the research questions indicate that more research is needed on how these new and differing religious messages, especially when expressed in rap music, could influence the religious views of the audience consuming the message. Many new religious perspectives that could lead to the development of more topoi are

expressed in the songs that were researched, especially religious viewpoints that focused more on an individualistic form of religiosity rather than a traditional, organized form.

Tupac Shakur's songs led rap music's exploration into new, less idealized, and more thought-provoking ideas about religion, and the data from RQ 3 indicates that rap music became even more focused on this trend after Shakur's death. The results suggest that more topoi needs to be created in order to help understand all of the potentially new ways that rappers are portraying religion after Shakur's death. Although the current research did not delve into what those new frameworks are, future research can examine songs from after Shakur's death and compare that sample to songs from before Shakur's death to see what kinds of differences in the framing of religion result.

Contributions to Research on Rap Music

The varying perspectives that different rappers have held towards religion over the years have been documented, but the literature review suggested that the positive or negative tone of those perspectives was yet to be statistically analyzed. An artist like Ice Cube would frame Christianity negatively, but in the same song Ice Cube would then pledge allegiance to Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan, leaving researchers with no data that could even suggest at the overall positive or negative tone the song had towards religion. Although the current research did not provide an exhaustive overview of how rappers have portrayed religion positively or negatively, the current research does provide data on how 20 of arguably the genre's greatest rappers have portrayed religion in either a positive or negative tone.

The research previously done on rap music did not focus on how consistent these religious messages were, regardless of whether the religious messages were in a positive or negative tone. The study performed and the data that resulted indicates a consistency of at least two religious references throughout the 91-song sample, but this study did not address the issue of how positive or negative these individual religious references were. The data collected from this research suggests that a gap in research concerning the consistency of positive and negative religious references in hip-hop music has been explored numerically for the first time. This data, however, does not adequately take into account the differences between the religious references, such as whether or not one set of lyrics framed Islam positively while simultaneously framing Christianity negatively, which is a reoccurring theme in artist like Ice Cube's lyrics.

Contributions to Research on Tupac Shakur

The results from this study also add quantitative evidence to the several qualitative analyses that have already been done on Shakur's influence on rap music. The impact of Shakur's music on hip-hop culture was well-documented by Dyson (2001) and Watkins (2003), and the decrease in rap songs that portray religion positively after Shakur's death indicate that the rapper's work affected the entire hip-hop community, from fans to well-known artists. Miller (2009) used the example of rapper Talib Kweli as an artist who was not afraid to question to validity of organized religion. Kweli's career started after Shakur's death, as did Sage Francis', a rapper who has been even more vocal about his disdain for religion. Pinn (2003) uses Francis as one of the more well-known rappers with "humanist" ideologies, and it could be argued that Shakur's lyrics that

questioned religion set the precedent for Francis' stronger and more pointed criticisms of religion.

Dyson (2001) pointed out the seemingly contradictory beliefs Shakur held towards religion and the depth of how Shakur expressed those beliefs lyrically. The first and second research questions indicate supporting evidence for the varying depths of positive or negative views rappers have held towards religion. The limitations section in the next chapter explains how the different religious views of these rappers could not be included in this study, but the results for the first research question does show that 68 percent of the songs in the 91 song-sample does have between at least two to four religious references. The statistically significant results for RQ 3 and its supported hypothesis also correspond with the complex religious views of artists like Talib Kweli and Sage Francis. Both are rappers that have been critical of organized religion, and both started releasing music after Shakur's death.

More importantly, the results for RQ 3 indicate that Shakur's lyrics started a trend for more negative religious references in rap music. If rappers have become the ministers of American society's unchurched youth like Watkins (2003) has claimed, then that audience is being exposed to a more ominous picture of religion. The artists from the study's sample reflected Watkins' assessment, expressing a noticeable amount of religiosity before and after Shakur's death, but the increase in negative religious references was accompanied by an even more dramatic decrease of positive religious references.

It could be argued, therefore, that rappers didn't begin to hate religion more after Shakur's death, but that rappers simply reflected the religious apathy of the unchurched culture surrounding them. Zinnbauer and Pargament (1997) have done research on how individuals' "spirituality" is now preferred by most Americans over attending and identifying with institutionalized religion, and the decrease in positive religious references could support the arguments made by Zinnbauer and Pargament. If the unchurched youth that Watkins (2003) has described is becoming less and less connected to a religious institutions because the society around them favors individual "spirituality," then one has to wonder where those ideas of individual "spirituality" will come from. It can be argued that rap music could become as prominent as any other form of popular media when it comes to disseminating ideas about how religion will be portrayed to a society that is becoming more and more disconnected with religious institutions.

It is also important to note that there is no causal relationship between the date of Shakur's death the statistically significant results of RQ 3. The change in how rap music portrays religion is not simply because of Shakur's death. The statistically significant results may have been due to other explanations that affected the results. Shakur's death was used as the dividing factor in the before-and-after component of this study not for causal reasons but because Shakur's death was one of rap music's more momentous events in the brief history of being its own genre. The moment of Shakur's death was arguably the first major tragedy of the genre since rap had become a mainstream part of American culture. The usage of Shakur's death as the important timeline event in this study was to simply explore Shakur's possible influence on rap's relationship with

religion and to set up future research that better answers the question of how Shakur's career truly influenced rap music's portrayals of religion.

Shakur's career and the uniqueness of Shakur's message may have been one of the causes of the change in how rap portrays religion. Using Shakur's death as the major timeline milestone in this study was more for convenience and finding a concrete date that would operationalize the influence of Shakur's career on rap music's portrayal of religion.

Chapter VI- Significance and Future Directions

Summary of Key Findings

The data for the third research question holds the most interest for future research. The data patterns from both coders indicate that negative religious references in secular rap music significantly increased after Shakur's death. This finding is significant because it suggests that Shakur's mixed messages on religion inspired even more artists to do so after his death, which means that more audiences are being exposed to more questions and critiques on religion that arguably were inspired by Shakur's lyrics. A final sample of 58 songs with coder z-score agreement produced the most interesting results, with 22 songs negatively framing religion after Shakur's death compared to only 12 songs that portrayed religion positively.

The final sample of songs that yielded such a dramatic result are representative of secular rap as a whole because these songs still came from some of the most influential rappers of the genre. Some of the songs in the final sample were also extremely successful commercially. Jay-Z's "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)" peaked at no.15 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 singles chart, which means it once was the 15th most popular radio song in the country, regardless of genre. Notorious B.I.G.'s "Sky's The Limit" reached no. 26 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100, and it also reached no.1 on the U.S. Billboard Hot Rap Singles chart, meaning it was once the most popular commercially-released rap song in the country. The popularity of some of these songs means that these

were listened to by a wider majority of the rap music audience and is more relevant than many other songs that did not make the final sample.

The present study also indicates a statistically significant difference in the proportion of secular rap songs with a positive portrayal of religion compared to songs with a negative portrayal. The statistically significant data analysis helps make the results of the second research question more generalizable to include the rest of rap music, especially when it can be argued that the most influential rappers in the history of the genre are represented with this statistically significant relationship.

Limitations

Time Period Limitations.

An important limitation to mention is that the music industry, especially the rap genre, has changed drastically since 2007. Rappers are now releasing large quantities of free music through the Internet, and many hip hop fans today are inundated with music from new artists monthly, and in some instances even weekly, all of whom are making a name for themselves through the Internet. It can be argued that it is now impractical to represent such a wide range of rappers through a sample of only 20 artists, especially when some of those artists have not been relevant in a commercially-successful sense for almost two decades. It can be argued that the current hip-hop fan can relate more to some of those newer artists that were not included in the sample than some of the artists from the purposive sample used.

This study also could not include some songs with many religious messages performed by artists included within the sample because only the highest-grossing album

from each artist was used. Some of Jay-Z and 2Pac's most religion-focused songs could not be researched because of the sample criteria. It could be argued that the final sample's ability to represent rap music as a whole was decreased by the omission of songs such as "D'Evils" by Jay-Z or "I Wonder If Heaven Got A Ghetto" by 2Pac, which are full of religious references from both of those artists. Both of those songs, however, were not featured in either of those artists' highest-selling albums.

Theoretical and Methodological Limitations.

Although the research questions did provide some evidence as to how often religion is framed in secular rap, the study failed to demonstrate the depth of the different religious views rappers can have. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) argue that the wording of an issue drastically changes how that issue is framed in the minds of an audience. Although this study collects data on how audiences perceive how religion is framed on a song level, the study does not examine how audiences' perception can change about religion on a word level.

Dyson (2001) explored the depth of Shakur's lyrics and the diversity of the religious themes the rapper covered. This study's research questions focused on the frequency of any type of religious reference as opposed to exploring the meaning of those references. Even the third research question, which explored the potential impact Shakur's lyrics had on rappers after the artist's death, did not ask how Shakur's religious framing might have had any sort of influence on those same rappers. Ultimately, this study failed to answer any questions about why Shakur's lyrics influenced rapper's

religious views, but it did find some of the first quantitative evidence that the framing of religion within rap music did change after Shakur's death.

The use of the content analysis method to answer these research questions comes with some limitations. The limitations of content analyses are closely related to those of surveys, with surveys usually having lower validity but higher generalizability.

(Neuendorf, 2002, p. 49) Neuendorf further points out that surveys only have high generalizability when a random sample is used. The purposive sample used in this study nullifies the higher generalizability a content analysis method normally would have.

Another important aspect the study did not adequately address was the different ways people describe religion "positively" or "negatively." Many rap listeners may describe lyrics that question religion and explore the reasons for why people have faith as being "positive," in the sense that these lyrics encourage critical thinking about having religious convictions. The researcher did not address this possibility when training the coders, which led to most lyrics that included any form of religious questioning to being labeled as "negative." Future studies on rap's interactions with religion should address this issue, because the possibility of people having a positive view of lyrics that question religion does reflect how American society as a whole sometimes thinks about religion.

(Marler and Hadaway 2002, p. 290)

Another limitation needing to be acknowledged is the high variability of the Likert scale used in Code Sheet #2. The coders were not trained to make specific ratings because of the countless ways rappers expressed religious opinions in the lyrics, which left all scale ratings from the study with high levels of coder subjectivity. Coders were

trained to rate songs as being more “negative,” meaning a rating between 1 and 3, if the song openly criticized religious concepts. Coders were trained to rate songs as being more “positive,” meaning a rating between 7 and 9, if the songs openly praised religious concepts. “Neutral” scores were left up to the coders’ discretion regarding how “positive” or “negative” the coders felt that song was. Beyond these general guidelines, no more specific criteria for Likert scale ratings were given. This lack of specific direction could be the main cause of the high variability from the Likert scale.

Sample Limitations.

A purposive sample is used for this study, because using a random sample of rappers would not ensure that any of these artists have any relevance or influence on the past or present state of rap music. Using a purposive sample that’s based off of MTV’s “The Greatest MCs of All Time” (MTV Networks, 2007) list helps ensure that every rapper whose lyrics are analyzed has had a place of importance and influence in the history of rap music. Using the highest-selling albums of each of artist helps ensure that the work of each artist that was exposed to the most fans will be analyzed.

This type of purposive sample does limit the range of rap artists being covered. It is arguably impossible to represent all of the different viewpoints on religion in hip-hop within the confines of a list of only rappers. Another important limitation of this purposive sample is that it represents an older group of artists. MTV compiled their list in 2007, which means rap music from the past four years is not being represented at all. Artists that may not have been considered one the 20 greatest rappers of all time in 2007

could arguably be on that list now if their music from the past four years was being taken into account.

Rappers.

This thesis did not include the work of Christian rappers because, as Baker-Fletcher (2003) points out, many of their songs have an evangelistic mindset. “Broadly speaking, Christian rap sets about its task of proclaiming the saving message (or 'Gospel') of Jesus Christ...” (Pinn, 2003, p. 30) Baker-Fletcher (2003, p. 32) uses the example of a song by Christian rapper L.G. Wise entitled “Ain’t Gotta Be Like That,” where the rapper tells a young female friend who happens to be stripper that her life “Ain’t Gotta Be Like That” and that the only true love she can find lies with Jesus Christ. The direct, focused message of Christian rap contrasts with the constantly changing and sometimes contradictory thoughts conveyed towards religion and spirituality by secular rappers. (Miller, 2009, p. 47)

The contradictions that secular rappers feel towards their own spiritualities and organized religion will not match up with how Christian rappers view those two same concepts with conviction. Secular rappers have challenged the integrity of church leaders and have suggested that perhaps even atheists can make it to heaven (Miller, 2009). Christian rappers, however, generally trace back all causes of evil and negativity back to the devil (Pinn, 2003, p. 36) and view Jesus Christ as the only avenue towards salvation (Pinn, 2003, p. 39). The consistent portrayal of Jesus as humanity’s savior and an overall lack of negative references towards spirituality or religiosity will skew the results of the content analysis should songs by Christian rappers be included.

Baker-Fletcher's (2003, p. 32) survey of Christian rappers also points out that Christian rappers never derogatorily refer to women the way secular rappers do. Secular rappers' usage of derogatory names towards women is not always meant to have a negative connotation, however, as seen in a content analysis of misogynistic lyrics done by Weitzer (2009). Weitzer points out that those same terms that are commonly thought of as derogatory and shameful are sometimes used to praise women or refer to them in other positive ways (Weitzer, 2009, p. 9) The possible confusion in terminology between secular and Christian rappers should derogatory terms towards women be used within religious frames can be eliminated by not including Christian rappers.

Future Research Recommendations

The current research focused on positive and negative messages about religion in rap music, but many songs from the original sample could have featured more ambivalent messages about religion and were never included in data analysis. 33 out of the 91 remaining songs used for RQ 2's data analysis were disregarded because the coders' z-scores did not agree for those songs, meaning that one coder thought the song portrayed religion positively while the other thought it portrayed religion negatively. These types of contradictions in rap music need to be explored because of how these messages reflect the various conflicting ideas about religion that have surfaced in American culture.

The contradictions found in rap music parallels the growing schism between people who describe themselves as being "spiritual" and not "religious." Future research could focus on using some of the methodology from the current study to designate rap songs as being "spiritual" or "religious." Where the current study used coders to

designate songs as being “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral,” this potential future study could look for coders that subscribe to the ideology of being “spiritual, but not religious,” and vice-versa. The potential future study could then use the songs from the current research that were labeled as being “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral,” and see which of those songs were classified as being either more “spiritual” or “religious” by the coders from the future potential research. The potential study could explore whether or not songs classified as being “positive” or “negative” were labeled as “spiritual” or “religious” by the coders of the potential study.

The data obtained from this research also points to a need for media effects research on the lyrics of Tupac Shakur. As Kahneman and Tversky’s (1981) landmark study suggests, the framing of an issue has a dramatic influence on how that issue is perceived in the minds of the audience it reaches. The data from this study indicates a significant change in the framing of religion in secular rap after Shakur’s death, and more research must be done on how influential Shakur’s religious ideologies truly were.

The impact of Shakur’s death on hip-hop culture and its audience cannot be underestimated. Shakur’s death was the pivotal moment in how secular hip-hop music would frame religion, and there is no better indicator of this than how Shakur’s lyrics resonated with his audience. Dyson (2001) recalls the words of Reverend Willie Wilson, a Baptist pastor who held a memorial service for the slain rapper after shortly after Shakur’s death. When Dyson asked Wilson about Shakur’s influence on a potential “postindustrial urban prophecy,” Wilson answered:

He was their preacher, if you will, who brought a message that (young people) can identify with, related to what was real, that spoke to the reality of the circumstances, situations (and) environments they have to deal with every day. (202)

Wilson only agreed to organize a memorial service after radio personalities from the area called him to do so, saying that many young listeners had called the station painfully grieving over Shakur's death (Dyson, 2001, p. 201).

It has now been 15 years since Shakur's death, and his name continues to be spoken among casual hip-hop fans and purists, alike. The data presented from this study suggests that Shakur's lyrics were hardly a neutral influence on the rappers that came after him. Furthermore, the data presented points to an overdue need for research and perhaps even experiments that examine how Shakur's lyrics could directly influence the religious views of hip-hop listeners, and how his framing of religious themes can either sway audiences into thinking positively or negatively about religion.

Appendix A

Sample Coding Sheet #1:

Name of Artist:

Name of Album:

Directions for coding:

- 1) Choose an artist and the accompanying album for the artist from the 25 artists available.
- 2) Go to www.ohhla.com, and search name of artist and album. Once you find the appropriate artist and album...
- 3) Read through the song lyrics of each song from the artist's album twice.
- 4) As you read through the lyrics, please write down individual words or terms that you feel have "religious" qualities or connotations.
- 5) The criteria for a "religious" word is as follows (Hill 2000):
 - a. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term "search" refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term "sacred" refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.
AND/ OR:
 - b. A search for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health, or wellness) in a context that has as its primary goal the facilitation of (a);
AND:
 - c. The means and methods (e.g. rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people.
- 6) Write down all "religious" words in given space, then move on to the next song. Write down the title of each song as you progress through the album.

Write down "religious" words and song titles below:

1. Song Title:
Religious Words in lyrics:
2. Song Title:
Religious Words in lyrics:
3. Song Title:
Religious Words in lyrics:

Appendix B

Sample Coding Sheet #2:

Artist: Common
Album: Finding Forever
Song: Misunderstood
Typed by: junooni@hotmail.com

Please bold the "R" if word is religious, or bold the "NR" if the word is non-religious

[Common]
Victory won
in a world of Hennessey and guns
too young for the marches
but I remember these drums
to start reality
wars and battles
we fought for ours
caught in ghetto tragedy
I talk to my aunt named Mattie Lee
and recognize the importance of family
hand me the joint
good music and room to breathe
those that doubt
Com' will soon believe
can't judge the weave
my lady had one
I'm more like a fool
for **soul** (R/ NR) and passion
the price of gas rises
street life is pumpin' fast
lives is
I'm watch crash
and realize that we all survivors
no **religion** (R/ NR) or race
whatever describe us
My guys do dirt do dirt
but never really talk about it
Forever begins
just because I thought about it

[Chorus: repeat 4X]
Living
Once Again
We
Living
Then you go

[Common]
Ashes and snowfalls
I wonder when the roll call for **heaven** (R/ NR) gon' come

forever gon come
It's a cold world
and I can never go numb
look
fear in the eyes
say I never gon run
sooner or later
I know the cheddar gon' come
for now I write the world letters
to better the young
On tree by jury
together we hung
Now we let our chains hang
and gang bang to maintain
ghanastan goin' through the same thing
It trickles down
at each other we aim pain
I shoot for stars, peace and exclusive cars
Through the while I learned to earn hard
Watch gangstas turn God (R/ NR) in the mist of war
no matter how much I elevate,
I kiss the floor
It was in the ?? when she said Dilla was gone
That's when I knew we'd live forever
through song

[Chorus] - 2X

[Common's Father]

Origin
Is forever
well, well well
here we are back in the studio again
look at that
hey I don' need no cue cards
they got the engineers holdin up the cue cards
What that say
Oh they say, just talk, don't sing
son, i bet you feel like you and I've been here forever
30 years old red eyes
beholding red eyes
I see my world's tears
Yeah, origin is forever
every peak will have 2 valleys
hopeful eyes in the comfort
of true protection and admiration of the chime
that's forever
forever is to strive
a place of endearment
forever is what I leave
my I-self contribution
Damn, what I'm gon' leave?
Ok...
I leave my one and only grain of spiritual(R/ NR) sand

to universal scales of humanity, all humanity
forever is finding a solution to a solution
tsunamis, hurricanes,
following the trails of the African slave ships
war, war, and more war
Floods, Columbine, Global Warming, Earthquakes
Another somebody done me wrong, son
Virginia Tech, there's not a hole but to Heck
we're still, did you place your one grain
of **spiritual (2)** (R/ NR) sand forever?
confusion need a solution
Blend and stir, stir and blend
the part of humanity; sift the ingredients
of acknowledgment, apology, amendment, atonement
we gonna work with the four A's here
forever part

Common good is forever...

God (2) (R/ NR)'s memory is forever...

After reading through these lyrics, would you consider the depiction of religion in this song to be positive or negative?

Please bold the number below that you feel most accurately represents how the song portrays religion:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Negative			Neutral				Positive	

Appendix C

Committee Revisions

I am grateful to the committee members for their comments, and have made several revisions to the thesis with those comments in mind. The revisions are listed below and are organized by the main topic of each set of revisions.

Role of Tupac Shakur in Study

A major concern that the committee had after the thesis defense was the importance of Tupac Shakur's death in the study and why that event was used so prominently in the methodology. This led to a more detailed explanation as to why Shakur's death plays such a prominent role in the history of rap music and why the date of the death was used as a milestone for the study's before-and-after component. There was also added background on why Tupac Shakur was such an important figure when it comes to rap music's interactions with religion.

The Discussion chapter also now explains that there is no causation between Shakur's death and any changes in how religion was portrayed in secular rap before or after that date, which is an important distinction that the committee brought up in the defense. RQ 3 and H 2 were both re-worded to help clarify the lack of causation between Shakur's death and the outcome of how religion was portrayed in the study

Added Explanations for Methodology

The defense meeting also prompted a more detailed explanation for the potentially high levels of variance for the Likert scale used in the study. The high level of

variance and the reasons for why it is so high is now mentioned in the Limitations section. The Methods section now also includes a more thorough description of the Likert scale and how the coders were trained to use it during coding.

The Methods section also now includes a table of with different examples of song lyrics that were coded by both coders as being either “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral.” This table was added to help readers better understand the coding process and how songs were labeled as “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral.” Also now included in the Methods section are examples of song lyrics that were coded as either being “religious” or “non-religious.” These examples are meant to show the reader more concrete examples of “religious” and “non-religious” lyrics instead of relying solely on the descriptions given by the researcher.

There is also a more detailed description of the type of coders that were selected for the study. The new description also explains that the coders were chosen to reflect the typical rap music consumer according to statistics cited in the study.

Revisions for Future Research

The thesis defense also addressed a need for mentioning the potential importance of songs that were coded as being religiously “ambivalent.” These are the songs that were excluded from the study because the z-scores from the coders’ Likert scale ratings did not match up for these songs. The future research section addresses this gap in the thesis, and also recommends future research that explores how rappers’ lyrics could also reflect the different ways people can perceive thoughts and criticisms on religion as being “positive”

or “negative.” One person might think of a rapper who thinks critically about having faith as being a “positive” religious message, while another person might disagree.

Another important future study that needed to be included after the defense meeting was one that explored the growing difference between “religiosity” and “spirituality” that is being perceived among many Americans, and how rap music is many ways paralleling that trend. An idea for future research exploring this topic is now included in the future research section, as well.

REFERENCES

- Baker-Fletcher, G. K. (2003). African American Christian Rap: Facing “Truth” and Resisting It. In A.B. Pinn (Ed.), *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (pp. 29-48). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Binder, Amy. (1993). Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music. *American Sociological Review* 58, 6, 753-767.
- Brewer, P.R. (2002). Framing, value words, and citizens’ explanations of their issue opinions. *Political Communication* 19, 3, 303-316.
- Benford, R. D., & Snow D.A. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Reviews*, 26, 611-639.
- Danton, E. R. (2007) For rap stars, business is overtaking music. Retrieved from http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/musicnightlife/2003841721_rapbiz20.html (accessed January 13, 2012).
- Dyson, M. E. (1996). *Between God and Gangsta Rap*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Dyson, M. E. (2001). *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching For Tupac Shakur*. New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books.
- Entman, R.M. (1993). Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication* 43, 4, 51-58.
- Erskine, N. L. (2003). Rap, Reggae, and Religion: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance. In A. B. Pinn (Ed.), *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (pp 71-84). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Floyd-Thomas, J. M. (2003). A Jihad of Words: The Evolution of African American Islam and Contemporary Hip Hop. In A.B. Pinn (Ed.), *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (pp. 49-70). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York, NY: Harper Row.

- Hill, P. C., and Pargament, K. I., Hood Jr., R. W., McCullough, M. E., Swyers, J. P., Larson, D. B., and Zinnbauer, B. J. (2000). Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 30, 1, 51-77.
- Hiphop-365.com. (2011). Eminem, Rakim, J-Cole and More Speak on 2Pacs Legacy. Retrieved from <http://hiphop365.com/2011/08/eminemrakimj-cole-more-speak-on-2pacs-legacy/> (accessed October 2, 2011)
- Jones, K. (1997). Are Rap Videos More Violent? Style Differences and the Prevalence of Sex and Violence in the age of MTV. *Howard Journal of Communications* 8, 4, 343-356.
- Keyes, C. L. (2002). *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Kubrin, C. (2005). Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: Identity and the Code of the Street in Rap Music. *Social Problems* 52, 3, 360-378.
- Marler, P. L., & Hadaway C. K. (2002) 'Being Religious' or 'Being Spiritual' in America: A Zero-Sum Proposition. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, 2, 289-300
- Miller, M. R. (2009). 'The Promiscuous Gospel': The religious complexity and theological multiplicity of rap music. *Culture and Religion* 10, 1, 39-61.
- MTV Networks. (2007). The Greatest MCs Of All Time. Retrieved from http://www.mtv.com/bands/h/hip_hop_week/2006/emcees/ (accessed March 22, 2010).
- MTV Networks. (2007). The Greatest Hip-Hop Albums Of All Time. Retrieved from http://www.mtv.com/bands/h/hip_hop_week/2005/greatest_albums_0505/index3.html (accessed November 25, 2011).
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- The Original Hip-Hop/ Rap Lyrics Archive. AZ Lyrics. Retrieved from http://www.ohhla.com/anonymous/az_the_v/aziatic/perform.azv.txt (accessed April 2, 2011).
- Pinn, A. B. (2003). *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

- Reid, S. (2007). Finding My Religion: Hip-Hop Gets The Spirit. MTV Networks. Retrieved from http://www.mtv.com/bands/h/hip_hop_religion/news_feature_071904/ (accessed March, 8 2010).
- Roof, W. C. (1993). *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco, CA: Harper.
- Ryabtsev, M. (2010) 14th Anniversary of Tupac's Death Has Millions Remembering A Legend. Retrieved from <http://obama.net/14th-anniversary-of-tupac's-death-has-millions-remembering-a-legend/> (accessed January 12, 2012).
- Schuefele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a Theory of Mass Media Effects. *Journal of Communication*. (Winter): 103-122. Retrieved from <http://www.asc.upenn.edu/usr/ogandy/c45405%20resources/scheufele%20framing%20as%20effects.pdf> (accessed April 2, 2010).
- Silk, Mark. (1995). *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Skopal, E. (2005). "*Hear Dem Cryin*": *Rastafari and Framing Processes in Reggae Music*. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Smith, C. (2005). *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Swanson, D. J. (2004). The Framing of Contemporary Christian Apostasy on the World Wide Web. *Journal of Media and Religion* 3, 1, 1-19.
- Stemler, S. (2001). An overview of content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 7(17). Retrieved from <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17> (accessed December 4, 2011).
- Taylor, M. L. (2003) Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit: Rap as Spiritual Practice. In A. B. Pinn (Ed.), *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (pp. 107-130) New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Thompson, M. E. & Brown, R. K. (2002) Whites and Rap Music: Is It Really All Bad?, *Perspectives*, Fall 2002, 97-105.

- Trust, G. (2009, August 7). Ask Billboard: Steve Vai, Jay-Z, Radiohead. Retrieved from <http://www.billboard.com/column/chartbeat/ask-billboard-steve-vai-jay-z-radiohead-1003999123.story#/column/chartbeat/ask-billboard-steve-vai-jay-z-radiohead-1003999123.story> (accessed June 25, 2010).
- Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1981). The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice. *Science* 211, 4481, 453-458.
- Wang, O. (2005, June 10) Who Buys Hip-Hop?. Retrieved from <http://poplicks.com/2005/06/who-buys-hip-hop.html> (accessed January 13, 2012).
- Ward, M. L., Hansbrough, E., & Walker, E. (2005). Contributions of Music Video Exposure to Black Adolescents' Gender and Sexual Schemas. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20, 2, 143-166.
- Watkins, R. C. (2003). Rap, Religion, and New Realities: The Emergence of a Religious Discourse in Rap Music. In A.B. Pinn (Ed.), *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (pp. 184-192). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Weitzer, R., Kubrin, C. (2009). Misogyny in Rap Music. *Men and Masculinities* 000, 1-27. Retrieved from <http://jmm.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/1097184X08327696v1.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2010).
- White, A. (1997). *Rebel For The Hell of It: The Life of Tupac Shakur*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Wingood, G. M., DiClemente, R. J., Bernhardt, J. M., & Robillard, A. A Prospective Study of Exposure to Rap Music Videos and African American Female Adolescents' Health. *American Journal of Public Health* 93, 3, 437-439. Retrieved from <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/cgi/reprint/93/3/437> (accessed April 12, 2010).
- Zinnbauer, B. J., & Pargament, K. I. (1997). Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, 4, 549-564.