

A Comparative Content Analysis of Anti- and Prosocial Rap Lyrical Themes Found on Traditional and New Media Outlets

Avriel C. Epps and Travis L. Dixon

Previous studies investigated the content of rap music within the context of traditional media and found that rap often contains antisocial themes associated with negative effects. The current content analysis investigates whether rap's lyrical themes consumed and shared online are more diverse and less anti-social than rap aired on traditional outlets. The analysis revealed that songs shared on Facebook were less antisocial and more prosocial than the songs that made the Billboard charts. Additionally, online lyrical themes were more diverse than traditionally distributed lyrics. Rap consumption and sharing behaviors will be discussed in light of the theory of selective exposure

Since it was introduced in the early 1980s, rap music has skyrocketed in popularity, becoming synonymous with pop music if not pop culture (Dixon & Brooks, 2000). At the same time, rap music has been consistently controversial (Dixon & Brooks, 2000; Dixon & Linz, 1997; Hansen, 1995; Rose, 1994). Most notably, critics contend that rap promotes controversial antisocial messages dealing with violence, sex and materialism that may be psychologically harmful to listeners (Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995; Smith, 2005). Others suggest that rap music often promotes positive messages, including political awareness and community engagement (Kubrin, 2005). Scholars have contributed to both sides of this intense debate (Conrad, Dixon, and Zhang, 2009a; 2009b; hooks, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Kubrin, 2005).

However, almost all of the previous literature on rap music has studied it within the context of traditional media (e.g., CDs, television, and radio). This traditional media paradigm forged a particular view of the content and effects of rap music that largely relied on the cultivation and priming perspectives (Conrad et al., 2009a; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002; Johnson et al.,

Avriel C. Epps (B.A., University of California, Los Angeles) conducted this research as part of her honor's thesis for the Department of Communication Studies at UCLA.

Travis L. Dixon (Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1998) is the communication alumni professorial scholar and associate professor of Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research investigates the prevalence of stereotypes in the mass media and the impact of stereotypical imagery on audience members.

1995). These perspectives assume that lyrical content derived from limited sources spreads out to the masses and then cultivates a social reality viewpoint consistent with the mediated content (Conrad et al., 2009a). However, these theoretical notions may not fully apply to the paradigm shift that has occurred with the introduction of new media, particularly social media. A number of scholars suggest that the new media environment has produced much greater fragmentation and segmentation of audiences, creating niche media realities for different social groups (McQuail, 1997; Metzger, 2009; Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012).

Since the introduction of online file sharing and social networks, the music industry has shifted dramatically (Jones, 2000; Kusek, 2005; Meisel & Sullivan, 2002; Tschmuck, 2012; Waldfoegel, 2010). The ways in which individuals produce, market, find, consume, and share music have caused the industry to revamp most of its established practices (Arewa, 2010; Hardy, 2012; Kusek, 2005; Preston & Rogers, 2013; Stafford, 2010; Waldfoegel, 2010). Consumer choice plays an increasingly large role in influencing which artists acquire contracts with various corporations in the form of endorsements, cross marketing sponsorships, and traditional recording/distribution contracts (Caramanica, 2013; Galuzka, 2015; Schoon, 2014; Ugwu, 2013). The rise of independently produced, digitally distributed, and promoted mixtapes has been the catalyst for many rap artists' careers (Horowitz, 2011). Still, scholars have yet to look at how big a role consumer choice plays, and what exactly influences music consumption trends online (Baek, 2014; Galuzka, 2015). We designed the current research project to address these shortcomings.

Specifically, the current study investigates whether online users of social media make different rap music lyrical theme choices than what is promoted through traditional media distribution. We focus on the prevalence of antisocial or prosocial thematic content to investigate these potential differences in music choices, an issue that has occupied the attention of both scholars and critics of rap music for decades. Our study involves dual content analyses. First, we perform a systematic content analysis of the Billboard Hip Hop 100 between 2010 and 2012. Second, we empanel a group of social media users and content analyze the rap songs respondents shared with their online friends between 2010 and 2012. We then compare the prevalence of both prosocial and antisocial themes contained in each sample (i.e., Billboard or social media) to investigate the ways in which social media and the power of choice influence rap music consumption.

In this article, we provide a literature review of rap music studies focused on the content and effects of antisocial content. Then, we discuss the online musical trends that have come about as a result of new technology. Next, we provide an overview of the theoretical shift from the cultivation/priming paradigm to the selective exposure paradigm that might be more appropriate for assessing the content and effects of rap music in a new media environment. Finally, we provide a study overview and outline our hypotheses.

Literature Review

Prior Research on Rap Themes: A dominance of Antisocial over Prosocial

Both in the literature and in this study, rap is defined as the musical component of the larger hip hop culture. While hip hop includes elements of break dancing, graffiti, and turntabalism, rap is the component of hip hop that involves rhyming over beats and sampled music (Rose, 1994). An issue inherent in studying rap music is the inconsistency in how scholars have examined the genre. Because the genre changes very rapidly, it is difficult for scholars to keep up. Although forms of rap emerged in the early 1970s, scholars' interest in the genre peaked in the late 90s/early 2000s because of the rise of violence in the lyrical themes and its appearance on TV. Therefore, much of the research and criticism of rap music have involved the propagation of antisocial themes.

One of the most frequently voiced concerns about hip hop is its promotion of misogyny. Many scholars note that rap lyrics often objectify, devalue, or subjugate Black women (Henderson, 1996; Pinn, 1996; Watts, 1997). For example, a content analysis performed by Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) on 403 rap songs from platinum selling rap albums found that more than one-fifth contained misogynous themes, which they defined as the derogatory naming and shaming of women, sexual objectification of women, distrust of women, legitimation of violence against women, and celebration of prostitution and pimping. Similarly, research by Zhang, Dixon, and Conrad (2010) revealed that when sexual or materialist ideas were discussed in rap music they tended to feature objectified women with "thin-ideal" bodies. Here the authors defined misogyny as sexualizing women and the dominance of men over women.

In addition to misogyny, violence and alcohol/drug consumption are other themes commonly associated with antisocial rap music. For instance, an analysis of 340 popular rap songs revealed that 60% contained violent images and 44% contained references to alcohol (Herd, 2005). This study and many of the other prior investigations assumed that rap would contain antisocial themes even before the research was undertaken.

However, even research that attempted to assess the dominance of prosocial and antisocial themes found that antisocial themes dominate. For example, a content analysis done on 108 popular rap music videos aired on TV in 2008 found that prosocial themes (including political awareness, love, and creating community unity) definitely existed in popular rap videos. However, the antisocial themes in the videos were significantly more prevalent, especially those themes surrounding misogyny and materialism (Conrad et al., 2009a).

Thus far, we can point to a number of studies that indicate that rap music has traditionally been associated with problematic antisocial themes, defined as themes that lead to destruction, violence, abuse, and negative emotions (e.g., gang violence,

misogyny, materialism). Prosocial themes defined as themes that add to safety, growth, and empowerment of communities of color (e.g., respect, community unity, and political consciousness) are not absent, but do appear to be overwhelmed by the antisocial messages (Conrad et al., 2009a; Kubrin, 2005). These antisocial themes have not only been propagated, but also appear to have negative effects on audience members.

The Effects of Antisocial Rap Themes

Content analyses cannot, in and of themselves, reveal much about effects. Therefore, we must review the media effects literature with regard to rap to understand whether antisocial lyrical content might have a negative impact on listeners. Much of the empirical research suggests that the antisocial themes in mainstream hip hop do indeed have a deleterious effect on listeners and contribute to the degradation of society as a whole (Dyson, 2008; Wester, Crown, Quatman, & Heesacker, 1997). Most of the rap effects studies have relied on the priming and cultivation paradigms to explore these notions. Researchers argue that rap's lyrical themes activate and link cognitive structures that connect socially defined groups to stereotypical attributes. Given its emphasis on sexuality and misogyny, it is no surprise that studies have examined how antisocial rap themes affect individuals' ideas about sexism and Black women's sexuality, finding that rap listenership correlates with stereotypically negative views of Black women and sexist ideals (Barongan & Hall, 1995; Gan, Zillman, & Mitrook, 1997).

For instance, Barongan and Hall (1995) found that misogynistic music facilitates sexually aggressive behavior and supports the relationship between cognitive distortions and sexual aggression. Similarly, Johnson, Adams, Arshburn, and Reed (1995) found that women who viewed rap videos of women in sexually subordinate roles showed greater acceptance of violence than females who were not exposed to these videos. Dixon, Zhang, and Conrad (2009) found that exposure to misogynous rap led to a rejection of the notion that rap was in fact degrading. Tyson, DoungTran, and Acevedo (2012) found that adolescents who found rap music to be socially relevant and empowering had better school outcomes and that exposure to rap videos had a more negative relationship with school outcomes than exposure to rap music lyrics. Besides effects on sexual stereotypes, several researchers have also found links between heavy listenership to rap and aggressive behavior and thoughts (Baronagan & Hall, 1995; Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2006; Johnson et al., 1995; Lozon & Bensimon, 2014; Rubin, West, & Mitchell, 2001).

Limitations of Prior Rap Work

In summary, research has shown that antisocial rap perpetuates racial stereotypes, which contribute to how Black individuals are negatively viewed in society (Entman

& Rojecki, 2007). However, there are some notable limitations that inspire the current study. First, we should note that the majority of content analyses performed on rap music specifically look for negative themes and do not attempt to look for positivity. Diversity in lyrical themes of popular and mainstream rap may help to counterbalance this negativity and expose rap fans to a broader, more balanced perspective of Black individuals and culture (Conrad et al., 2009b).

Second, the music utilized in both the content and effects studies has always been commercial, mainstream rap backed by major record labels, and these labels have typically utilized traditional media to push their message. The new media environment with the ability of users to share and select content might create a different set of dominant rap themes. This second point also lays bare the notion that priming/cultivation may present limitations for the study of rap effects in the new media environment. The production and selection of music by audiences means that they no longer exclusively rely on mainstream media marketed by large corporations (McQuail, 1997). Greater selectivity fostered by new media has been theorized to limit the theoretical assumption in cultivation that people experience marketed media content at the same time in the same way (Metzger, 2009). We test this notion in the current study.

This study seeks to address both of these limitations of the existing literature by: 1) assessing both traditionally distributed popular rap music and socially mediated rap, and 2) coding for both prosocial and antisocial themes. Below, we discuss how rap music distribution patterns via social media might contribute to a change in the thematic content of rap.

Online Musical Trends and the Rising Importance of Selective Exposure

This study investigates how the power of choice and the increased variety in rap accessible to a mass market increasingly shape the rap industry (Galuszka, 2015). Fans now interact with music producers in very novel ways, and we believe that this is the first study to undertake an investigation of the implications of this change within the context of rap. Through a comparative content analysis, we will determine if lyrical themes online are in fact more diverse than those found via the traditional outlet of radio. This may have serious implications for the theory of selective exposure, as music consumed and shared online is largely driven by consumer choice rather than access to a limited set of choices provided by an elite corporate controlled force. Because major record labels tend to distribute antisocial rap, and have historically been the gatekeepers to mass production of music (Gladney, 1995), it may have been difficult for rap consumers to find alternative, prosocial messaging before the digital age (Kurtz, 2010).

Online Musical Choices

Today, independent rap is being made and distributed through new media now more than ever, without investments from major record labels (Baek, 2014; Schoon, 2014).

Previously unknown artists like Chance The Rapper and Tyler The Creator become popular, seemingly overnight, on sites such as Hip Hop blog, 2dopeboyz.com, YouTube, and Twitter. Digital radio sites such as Pandora.com and last.fm, where artists can market their music independently and listeners can create custom radio stations, are luring listeners away from traditional radio. Even online music stores like iTunes are being replaced by music databases such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Jay Z-owned Tidal, where consumers can listen to virtually any song at any time for little to no cost. Where major record labels once dictated what music was accessible for consumption, today consumers have instant access to all the world's music, granting them the power of choice. What consumers do with that power of choice is the focus of this study.

Selective Exposure Instead of Cultivation and Priming

Instead of a small group of music companies having a significant role in determining what kind of rap music gets distributed, consumers now have more of a say, as evidenced by popular rap artists such as Drake, Joey Bada\$\$, and Kendrick Lamar building large fan bases and mass appeal online without the help of major record labels (Horowitz, 2011). From a theoretical standpoint, we have moved from a need to understand what ideas might be cultivated or primed by the activities of rap producers to a need to understand how selective exposure might influence consumer choice (Lin, 2009; Metzger, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000). Cultivation has long had critics who asserted that its assumption of uniform messages does not allow for variation across different forms of media content (Potter, 1993). However, a number of scholars now suggest that the Internet allows for both different content distributors (corporate versus individual) and for people to greatly tailor their media exposure (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Metzger, 2009). As a result, scholars have increasingly turned to selective exposure and uses and gratification as theoretical notions better suited to explain the effects of new media consumption (Metzger, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000).

Selective exposure exists on the basis that people continue to find information about an issue or topic even after they have made their mind up about it (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; de Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012). For instance, even if an individual has already decided that all or most Black people are aggressive, they will continue to seek out information that supports their position (Melican & Dixon, 2008).

However, sharing and finding music online is not a solely personal endeavor, but rather a social process. This social process is influenced by communication and affiliation goals, a desire to express oneself, and a desire to create an online identity that represents how an individual views themselves (Lee, Park, Kim, Kim, & Moon, 2011). In this process, a person would utilize *de facto* selectivity to find media that support their goals of self-presentation as well as (un)consciously held values and beliefs.

Therefore, selective exposure has greater influence in a media environment, such as the Internet, with many more choices and opportunities for consumption. This is because, on the Internet, individuals have increased opportunities to consume music that more accurately reflects their beliefs. Even more so, support for deviant or controversial beliefs that

are not reflected in mainstream popular culture is more readily accessible on the Internet than in real life (Melican & Dixon, 2008). This allows those who contest modern racial oppression to find media that supports their ideas, while simultaneously providing outlets for white supremacists to congregate in virtual spaces (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). These theories suggest that the musical themes that are being shared online will more accurately reflect consumer demands, should they boast a different set of lyrical themes than songs found on traditional media outlets. We test this notion in the current study.

Study Overview, Hypotheses, and Research Questions

No previous research has explored the difference between rap music that is distributed via social media versus that supported by major record labels. We predict that new media distribution and selective exposure will increase the variety of rap music found online versus what exists on corporate controlled spaces such as radio. We seek not only an account of positive and negative themes in the music (which has rarely been explored in the past), but also to see how the role of consumer choice influences the popularity of lyrical themes. We do this by undertaking a content analysis of the Billboard Top 100 Rap Songs from 2010–2012 to represent traditional media. We examine social media by empaneling a group of respondents and content analyzing their archived Facebook newsfeed from 2010–2012, over a 6-month period. Below, we detail the hypothesis that drives this investigation:

H₁: Antisocial rap themes found in traditional media outlets will be more prevalent compared to prosocial themes, and less varied overall; the opposite will be true of rap shared on social media.

Because there is more music available online in general, it is logical to conclude that there will be more variance than what is available through traditional media outlets. In addition, variability might also be related to the increased access to production for independent artists that we described above. Finally, traditional media outlets most likely rely on lyrics based on tried and tested formulas that are much more limited because of the financial risks associated with large-scale distribution of media content (Harris, 2013; McQuail, 1997; Tubbs, 2013). In other words, traditional media producers utilize what has sold before in order to sell new products, which limits the variability of content. However, online music sharing allows audience members to both tailor their exposure to specific songs that align with their identity and to share the music of non-signed talent. These abilities and the constraints of traditional media might yield a larger share of lyrical themes in the music shared online compared to traditional media outlets.

As we have discussed previously, prosocial lyrical themes may be suppressed in major label music that receives major financial backing partly because the antisocial themes have done so well financially in the past. Prosocial artists and songs would primarily exist online because of the lower barriers to market entry. Selective

exposure theory suggests consumers will use their autonomy to seek out music that both affirms their positive beliefs and values about themselves.

Methods

The goal for this content analysis was to evaluate the thematic content of various rap songs pushed through traditional media outlets and shared by social network users. Two different samples of rap songs were analyzed and the themes found in each were compared to each other. Below we discuss the methods that were used in the analysis.

Billboard Sample

First, the top rap songs as designated by the Billboard charts for 2010–2012 ($N = 102$) were analyzed. The first sample of songs was collected from Billboard because Billboard is seen as a clear indicator of songs that have been pushed through the traditional media outlet of radio. Before 2013, Billboard song charts ranked the most popular songs based solely on radio airplay audience impressions as determined by Nielsen DBS (it now includes digital downloads and streams in its ranking system). Radio play is an indicator of major media corporation backing because major media conglomerates not only own the media networks that control radio stations, but also the record labels that can finance major radio marketing campaigns.

Social Media (Facebook) Sample

A random sample of rap songs ($N = 111$) was selected from a list of 455 rap songs shared on survey participants' social media profiles. (See Appendix A for the complete song sample lists.) Online music sharing informants were recruited at a large West Coast public university. We recruited students from a variety of campus outlets, utilizing academic programs, clubs, and large survey courses to target diverse students. We wanted to ensure economic and racial diversity in order to mimic the target audience for rap music. The sample consisted of ($N = 381$) subjects who granted access to their Facebook profiles during the completion of an online survey. Participants were .5% Native American, 12% Black, 25% Latina/o, 31% White, and 31% Asian. Additionally, 70% of participants were Female, and 30% were Male. The median age of the participants was 19 years old. Approximately 84% of respondents reported listening to hip hop, with 87% reporting that they listen to mainstream rap at least a few times a month.

Once we were granted access to participants' Facebook pages, we examined their histories to explore what songs they shared with their social media friends over the same period as the Billboard sample was drawn (2010–2012). We also asked participants their familiarity with the top 25 rap songs charted on Billboard over this two-year period, and 70% reported a strong familiarity with these songs. This

provided evidence that our informants chose to share different songs on social media though they were familiar with songs aired on traditional media outlets.

Procedure and Reliability

The content analysis happened in two phases. First, the Billboard rap songs were coded, then after gaining access to our informants' Facebook profiles, the sample of Facebook shared songs was coded. All songs that were not considered rap songs, based on their categorization on the Apple Music Web site for iTunes, were removed from the sample. For songs that were not on iTunes, coders used their best judgment to determine if the songs had the basic characteristics of a rap song. In phase one, a coding team was established and trained for 10 weeks before launching the analysis. The team consisted of two lead researchers and four undergraduate coders.

During a 20-hour training period over 10 weeks, coders and the lead researchers developed and refined a codebook. Reliability was then established with coder agreement of ($\alpha = .88$) during a preliminary diagnostic. Reliability was established using 20 Billboard songs and 26 shared songs from the sample of 213 total songs coded. Krippendorff's Alpha (2004) and Cohen's Kappa (1960) were used to compute reliability for each song. Both reliability measures were used to ensure that the variables were reliable by even the most conservative accounts. The variables in this analysis had a kappa range of .60 to 1.0 and an average kappa of .90. They had an alpha range of .60 to 1.0 and an average of alpha of .81.¹

Coding

In order to gather lyrics and assess how fans might interpret the slang used in rap songs, the Web site Genius.com—a user generated, crowd sourced, lyrics annotation system where fans collaborate to decode the meanings of lyrics—was used to create transcriptions of the analyzed songs. We used Genius.com to pull transcripts for the lyrics, not the annotations/interpretations of the lyrics. Coders themselves then used their own judgment to analyze lyrical meaning.

Thematic Variables

After collecting descriptive information, songs were coded for their portrayal of common themes found in rap and investigated by prior studies of the music (Conrad et al., 2009a; Kubrin, 2005; Smith, 2005). We also expanded on the prior literature by including additional themes we believed could be found in rap songs. Song themes were categorized into antisocial themes and prosocial themes. Coders measured most variables on an ordinal level based on how many phrases within the song contained a variable in increments of 5 from (01) none to (06) > 20. Other variables

were collected at the nominal level as (01) *absent* or (02) *present*. The specific themes along with their reliabilities are reported in the analysis.

Antisocial and Prosocial Scales

To assess the overall level of anti- or prosocial-ness of each song, a factor analysis was used to reduce all reliable thematic variables into scales and cut down on individual analyses. The factor analysis revealed two reliable and stable factors with ($\alpha > .70$). The first factor included many of the antisocial themes that are typically associated with rap music including materialism, violence, sexual explicitness, and misogyny. This scale was named Negative Black Stereotypes (NEGBLSTR) (e.g., "sexual objectification of women," 25 items, $\alpha = .83$, $M = 1.62$, $SD = .34$). The second factor included themes that challenge institutional oppression, promote community unity, and promote political activism. This scale was named Anti-oppression (ANTIOPRS) and included many themes that are typically associated with prosocial rap (e.g., "critique of racism," 10 items, $\alpha = .80$, $M = 1.03$, $SD = .09$). We chose to use these scales in an effort to stay true to the literature by utilizing prosocial and antisocial constructs. The themes comprising each scale can be found in [Table 1](#).

Results

Our hypothesis proposed that lyrical themes shared online would vary more than the themes that are found in rap music in traditional media outlets. To test this, we compared the number of themes that appeared in at least 5% of the songs in each sub-sample (Billboard and Facebook). First, we found the frequency of each variable appearing at least once in a song. Then we organized these frequencies by subsample: Billboard Songs and Songs Shared on Facebook, as shown in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#). In the Billboard songs, 19 themes were found in at least 5% of the songs. In the Facebook songs, 23 themes were found in at least 5% of the songs. Furthermore, Billboard songs boasted significantly higher frequencies of antisocial themes compared to Facebook songs, $\chi^2 = 47.52$ (24, $N = 220$), $p < .01$. Conversely, Facebook songs boasted higher frequencies of prosocial themes compared to Billboard songs, $\chi^2 = 16.50$ (9, $N = 220$), $p < .05$. These results lend support to H_1 with slightly more variance of themes in songs shared on Facebook than those on the Billboard charts.

Antisocial vs. Prosocial Themes

Our hypothesis also predicted that antisocial rap themes found in traditional media outlets would be more prevalent compared to prosocial themes, and the opposite would

Table 1
Variable Definitions, Examples, Reliability, and Averages

Variable	Definition	Example	Kappa	Alpha	Mean	SD	Avg pairwise % Agreement
Prosocial items Political engagement	Promotion of political engagement (participating in democratic processes, civil disobedience, or critique of political institutions)	"I really think the war on terror is a bunch of bullshit Just a poor excuse for you to use up all your bullets"— Lupe Fiasco, Words I Never Said	.98	.85	1.97	0.21	.98
Critique of racism	Mention, describe instances of, or critique institutionalized racism (defined as any system of inequality based on race.) This does not include times when the performer themselves was being racist.	"Evangelists making a living on the videos of ribs of the little kids Stereotyping the image of the images"—Damien Marley, Patience	.94	.78	1.08	0.28	.94

(continued)

Table 1
(Continued)

Variable	Definition	Example	Kappa	Alpha	Mean	SD	Avg pairwise % Agreement
Critique of oppressive institutions	Mention, description, or critique of oppressive institutions. This may include more complex social structures that reproduce themselves such as governments, economic systems, and legal systems or less complex social forms such as conventions, rules, roles, and social norms.	“Jihad is not a holy war, where’s that in the worship? Murdering is not Islam!... Israel don’t take my side cause look how far you’ve pushed them”—Lupe Fiasco, Words I Never Said	.92	.70	1.10	0.36	.92
Gratitude	Mention or promotion of giving thanks or being grateful	“And there’s no way I can pay you back But my plan is to show you that I understand You are appreciated”—2Pac, Dear Mama	.94	.63	1.06	0.27	.95

Religion and spirituality	Reference to religion (a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values) or Spirituality (an ultimate or alleged immaterial reality, an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being, or the deepest values and meanings by which people live.)	"If Christ is real then what am I gonna do about Everything in Luke 12: 15 down to 21" —Lecrae, Don't Waste Your Life	.83	1.26	.44	.83
Emotional expression	Expression of an intense emotion that may leave performer vulnerable such as fear, sorrow, loneliness, betrayal, insecurity, or romantic love.	"Well, sitting here sad as hell Listening to Adele, I feel you baby"— Andre 3000, The Real Her	.70	1.71	1.33	.70
Building community unity	Engaging in actions or settings which bring together a group of people, including but not limited to families or communities, such as neighborhoods or entire social groups based on race or class.	"The way to be, paradise like relaxing Black, Latino and Anglo-Saxon"—Nas, If I Ruled the World	.92	1.84	.36	.92

(continued)

Table 1
(Continued)

Variable	Definition	Example	Kappa	Alpha	Mean	SD	Avg pairwise % Agreement
Female education	Mention, description, or promotion of educated women and the education of women as positive.	"Like you went to Yale, but you probably went to Howard Knowing you, weekend in Miami, tryna study by the pool"—Drake, Make Me Proud	.96	.62	1.07	0.40	.96
Antisocial items criminal activity (general)	Mention or description of any criminal activity witnessed, participated in, or are intending for the future. Criminal Activity includes any non-violent illegal activity (theft, drug dealing, gang activity, prostitution, etc.). This does not include mention of crimes committed by political or financial groups and figures (e.g., critique of war crimes, insider trading, other white collar crimes).	"Tell that bitch hop out, walk the boulevard I need my money pronto"—Tyga, Rack City	.95	.89	1.32	.47	.95

Bragging about money	Bragging about how much money the performer has	"All I do is win win win no matter what Got money on my mind I can never get enough"—DJ Khaled, All I Do is Win	.75	.81	1.61	.99	.78
Sexual objectification of women	Sexual objectification is the act of regarding a person as a merely a body or sum of body parts, reducing them to an object available for the use or consumption by others. Examples include talking about a woman as just a particular body part, or making reference to lack of interest in the wellbeing or humanity of a woman. This also includes references to a woman's body for the sole use or purpose of providing sexual pleasure.	"How your waist anorexic and then your ass is colossal"—Big Sean, Dance (A\$\$)	.64	.76	1.88	1.34	.60

(continued)

Table 1
(Continued)

Variable	Definition	Example	Kappa Alpha	Mean	SD	Avg pairwise % Agreement
Derogatory words in reference to women	Words generally used to demean women, directed toward women (as opposed to men), that are used in a negative context (e.g., bitch, ho, slut, cunt, dyke, skank, hoochie, whore, flip). This includes nouns as well as adverbs and adjectives (e.g., slutty and slut would both count). This does NOT include using the term bitch to denote a female in power (e.g., "I'm the main bitch in charge") or as a term of endearment (e.g., "I got the baddest bitch in the game, wearing my chain.") as well as using feminine derogatory words directed towards men.	"She a slut, she a dog, she a bitch with it"—Travis Porter, Bring it Back	.70	1.65	1.01	.73
Bragging about materialistic items	Bragging about materialistic items such as money, clothing, alcohol, jewelry, and cars	"Like these rappers rap about all the shit that I do really. I'm like "Really: half a billi nigga, really?" you got baby money"—Jay Z, H*A*M	.76	1.53	.72	.77

Mention of sexualized body parts	Mention or description of genitals, breasts, or other sexualized body parts.	"She knows my dick, she call it nigga Richard Prior to me cummin, I had to stick my thumb in"—Tyga, Faded	.78	.74	1.61	1.06	.81
Materialism (general)	Mention of materialism or materialistic behaviors and values. This includes any mention of materialistic items such as expensive clothing, excessive jewelry, expensive vehicles, or liquor, etc.	"Yeah, I be yelling out money over everything, money on my mind."—Drake, Headlines	.88	.70	1.76	.44	.88
Sexual explicitness (general)	Description or mention of lewd sexual acts. This does not include mentions of kissing or non-graphic affection, as well as any metaphors for sex that are not crude (e.g., "knocking boots" "doing it").	"I'm fuckin', well I'm tryna hit the hotel With two girls that swallow me"—Waka Flocka Flame, No Hands	.86	.70	1.63	.50	.86

(continued)

Table 1
(Continued)

Variable	Definition	Example	Kappa	Alpha	Mean	SD	Avg pairwise Agreement %
Gang activity	Mention or description of gang activities. This may include initiation activities (e.g., hazing, jumping), gang violence (e.g., drive-by shootings, gang fights, "banging" on others), and neighborhood patrolling. This may also include references to gang members, gang related language (e.g., "suwoop," "blood," "crip," "cuz") and gang related paraphernalia (e.g., color coded rags, color coded hats, color coded t-shirts).	"Been bangin since my lil nigga Rob got killed for his Barkley's"—The Game, Hate It, or Love It	.91	.70	1.14	.35	.92
Mentioning materialistic items	Reference made to materialistic items may include expensive clothing, expensive alcohol, jewelry, expensive cars, and property.	"Pull up on the block in a drop-top chicken box Mr. K.F.C, V.V'S is in the watch"—Rick Ross, Aston Martin Music	.70	.64	1.71	.80	.70

Words used to describe lewd acts	Profanity used to describe an obscene or sexual act. Examples include fuck (the act of having sex with someone) and obscene acts such as to "shit" on a person (the act of embarrassing or putting someone to shame by being better than them).	"Shitted on 'em, Man I just shitted on 'em Shitted on 'em,"—Nicki Minaj, Did it On'em	.79	.64	1.39	.75	.79
Bragging about property and assets	Bragging about property (houses, hotels, etc.) and other assets such as business, investments, athletic teams, etc.	"Sitting courtside Knicks and Nets give me high fives."—Jay Z, Empire State of Mind	.90	.64	1.14	.35	.90
Pro attitude towards materialism	The glorification of materialism, explicit promotion of materialism, and an abundance of materialistic themes used in the song without remorse.	"I wanna be a billionaire so fucking bad Buy all of the things I never had"—Bruno Mars, Billionaire	.83	.60	2.25	.51	.83
Illegal drugs	Mention or description of activities dealing with illegal drugs. This may include illegal drug dealing (a.k.a. moving weight, flipping birds, pushing, slanging, booming, hustling), possession of drugs illegally, preparation of illegal drugs (e.g., cooking crack, cutting cocaine, bagging pills, etc.), smuggling, etc. This does NOT include the consumption of illegal drugs.	"I think I'm Big Meech, Larry Hoover. Whipping work, hallelujah."—Rick Ross, BMF	.84	.60	1.22	.55	.85

Table 2
Percentage of Songs That Contained Antisocial Thematic Variables and Their Reliabilities

Variable	Alpha	Billboard	Facebook
Antisocial Items			
Materialism (general)	.70	88%	64%
Sexual explicitness (general)	.70	73%	52%
Mentioning materialistic items	.64	66%	47%
Bragging about money	.81	66%	36%
Sexual objectification of women	.76	62%	32%
Non-romantic sexual act	.60	59%	41%
Derogatory words in reference to women	.74	57%	35%
Bragging about materialistic items	.74	57%	30%
Mention of sexualized body parts	.74	47%	36%
Words used to describe lewd acts	.64	43%	20%
Pro attitude towards materialism	.60	43%	14%
Criminal activity (general)	.89	37%	27%
Illegal drugs	.60	23%	15%
Bragging about property and assets	.64	19%	10%
Gang activity	.70	19%	9%

be true of rap shared on social media. To test this, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of the NEGBLSTR (i.e., negative Black stereotypes) and ANTIOPRS (i.e., anti-oppression) scales across the sub-samples. The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the Billboard and Facebook songs in relation to the Negative Black Stereotypes scale ($t = 4.73, df = 207, p < .001$). Billboard songs ($M = 1.73, SD = 0.35$) had higher levels of antisocial themes than Facebook songs ($M = 1.52,$

Table 3
Percentage of Songs that Contained Prosocial Thematic Variables and Their Reliabilities

Variable	Alpha	Billboard	Facebook
Emotional expression	.62	27%	35%
Religion and spirituality	.64	20%	32%
Building community unity	.62	39%	14%
Critique of oppressive institutions	.68	5%	12%
Critique of racism	.78	4%	10%
Female education	.62	2%	8%
Gratitude	.63	3%	7%
Political engagement	.85	2%	6%

$SD = 0.30$). The independent samples t -test also determined a statistically significant difference between the Billboard and Facebook songs in relation to the Anti-Oppression scale ($t = -2.21$, $df = 207$, $p < .05$), such that Facebook songs ($M = 1.04$, $SD = 0.11$) had higher levels of prosocial themes than Billboard songs ($M = 1.01$, $SD = 0.06$). The data of the content analysis support H_1 (Table 3).

Discussion

The comparative content analysis between rap songs on the Billboard charts and rap songs shared on online Facebook profiles revealed two main findings. First, songs on the Billboard charts were less diverse than what consumers were sharing online. Songs shared online boasted more lyrical theme diversity. Second, songs shared online were both less antisocial and more prosocial in general compared to rap songs on the Billboard charts. Across antisocial themes individually, songs on Facebook had less frequent antisocial messages, and had a lower mean score on a scale measuring negative Black stereotypes.

Antisocial Radio versus Prosocial Facebook

One of the most intriguing conclusions in the current study is the replication of the finding that mainstream traditional media outlets continue to market rap music containing antisocial themes dealing with both materialism and misogyny. This complements previous work and perhaps speaks to the formulaic and limited scope of content that often emanates from corporate media (Conrad et al., 2009b). What is fascinating is how this persists in spite of the fact that users are making very different choices online, while continuing to be aware of the Billboard music presented in traditional media. Unfortunately, there is little literature on rap industry practices and decision-making processes on the production side of the market. While popular pseudo-theories abound on blogs and in hip hop communities as to why rap has skewed so heavily antisocial in recent decades, it is difficult to determine the intentions and motivations of producers, manufacturers, and distributors of music without empirical support. Perhaps media conglomerates will begin diversifying their music portfolios as they come to realize the varied and more prosocial choices being made by social media users. Future research should continue to track this.

Selective Exposure Theories and Social Media

This content analysis was unique in the fact that it began to explore media consumption behavior. Because there were significant differences between the two sub samples of songs, it can be concluded that consumers are utilizing their autonomy in online music consumption. In other words, informants not only made individual choices about what music to consume, they also chose what music would be used to assert their individual identities online. The results of this study have several theoretical implications.

The content analysis findings provide invigorated support for selective exposure and potentially uses and gratifications theory. The results suggest that consumers are not passively ingesting everything that the media industry feeds to them, but are rather making conscious choices about which media products they consume and use as a basis for self-presentation to their online friends. Furthermore, consumers are resisting some of the negative messages that media corporations promote, and are using autonomy to find alternative narratives that tend to be more positive.

Future research should explore the reasons behind these decisions. The theory of uses and gratifications, which outlines how people use media to meet certain needs, might be a place to start (Ruggiero, 2000). For instance, we had a large population of women informants in our sample. Perhaps, these women were sensitive to the misogyny in the music and used their online profiles to create a different narrative regarding the place of women within society.

These findings may also have implications in the field of media effects. When consumers have more power over what they consume because content abounds, how does this change the way we are influenced by media? Furthermore, how does media effects research adapt in order to account for the near infinite choices that consumers have to engage with media? These questions should be the focus of future studies in this area.

Limitations and Future Research

Given that all of our social network informants were college students, it is difficult to generalize our content analysis findings. The educational attainment level of the individuals surveyed may imply that they are more politically conscious and aware of social issues than the general population. Furthermore, industry professionals could argue that college students are not their target market, as it is assumed that the tastes of suburban tweens and teens are the main market drivers for music (Kitwana, 2006). Conversely, college students do fall within the highly targeted 18–25 year old demographic. Future research should expand this study to a national random with diverse characteristics sample to address issues of generalizability.

Analyzing what people share, however, only tells one side of the story. Future research should explore what people are seeking and listening to, but not broadcasting, and how that differs from what they are sharing. This further supports the need for scholars to study intent of media consumers in the new media era. Future research should uncover the nuanced ways in which consumers are exercising their autonomy. Additionally, future studies should seek to uncover some of the specific underlying motivations for music consumption and exhibition online.

Research should also consider how individual consumers' ideologies around race and racial stereotypes impacts the type of rap music they consume and share. Additionally, because music exhibition online is an act of self-presentation, future studies should examine how consumers and sharers of both antisocial and pro-social rap interact with others and form intra-group relationships with others in online settings.

Finally, it is difficult to know how these sites of sharing and consuming music are controlled and manipulated by corporate forces, and to what extent. Just as radio spins can be bought, it is not far-fetched to think that plays, likes, and endorsements from online “influencers” can be bought as well, thus increasing the perceived popularity of an artist/song and attracting more listeners. Because of the lack of academic literature and industry provided evidence, it is difficult to know how democratic these online spaces really are. Future research should examine the level of corporate influence and control of “free” online music consumption spaces, and how that affects consumer psychology and behavior.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the contextual implications of the new media era. As communication and media scholars, we can no longer ignore the role that autonomy and choice play in media consumption. While mainstream media still influences the choices made available to consumers, individuals increasingly have the power to create their own narratives more easily than ever before. Therefore, the direction of media research should begin to move towards the path of uncovering consumer motivation and interpretation of messages. More specifically, the field should move towards understanding media consumption as a means of identity performance.

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Note

1. We have reported three reliability indicators for our study. These include Krippendorff’s alpha, Cohen’s kappa, and percent of agreement. Our goal here was to use multiple indicators of reliability given that we were assessing categories that may occur infrequently within the population of songs being assessed. Although Krippendorff’s alpha has become a standard reliability coefficient in media scholarship, several scholars have noted that it tends to punish investigators for infrequently varied judgments among coders, compared to other measures (Artstein & Poesio, 2008; Zhao, Jun S. Liu, & Deng, 2012). These infrequently varied judgments might be more an indication of the population distribution under consideration than a problem with actual coder reliability. In order to determine whether lower alphas were due to issues with reliability rather than infrequently occurring categories, we also examined percent agreement and kappa. When kappa and percent of agreement were also low, we took this as a problem with attaining reliability for that variable and it was not included in our analysis. In cases where kappa and percent agreement remained above .70, we retained the variables for analysis even if alpha dipped below .70.

Appendix A: Content Analysis Sample

Top Rap Songs from 2010–2012 Billboard Charts

Song Title	Artist Name	Major or Indie
6 Foot 7 Foot	Lil Wayne	Major
Airplanes	B.O.B.	Major
All I Do Is Win	DJ Khaled	Major
All of the Lights	Kanye West	Major
Another Round	Fat Joe	Major
Aston Martin Music	Rick Ross	Major
Ayy Ladies	Travis Porter	Major
B.M.F.	Rick Ross	Major
Backseat	New Boyz	Major
Bag of Money	Wale	Major
Bedrock	Young Money	Major
Beez in the Trap	Nicki Minaj	Major
Better With the Lights Off	New Boyz	Major
Billionaire	Travie McCoy	Major
Black and Yellow	Wiz Khalifa	Major
Body 2 Body	Ace Hood	Major
Break My Bank	New Boyz	Major
Bring It Back	Travis Porter	Major
Buzzin' Buzzin	Mann	Major
Ca\$hing Out	Ca\$h Out	Major
Can't Get Enough	J. Cole	Major
Dance (A\$\$)	Big Sean	Major
Did It on 'Em	Nicki Minaj	Major
Drank in My Cup	Kirko Bangz	Major
Empire State of Mind	Jay-Z	Major
Faded	Tyga	Major
Fancy	Drake	Major
Far Away	Tyga	Major
Fire Flame	Birdman	Major
Fly	Nicki Minaj	Major
Give Me Everything	Pitbull	Major
Good Feeling	Flo Rida	Major
Got Your Back	T.I.	Major
Grove St. Party	Waka Flocka Flame Flame	Major
H*A*M	Jay-Z & Kanye West	Major
Headlines	Drake	Major
Hello Good Morning	P. Diddy	Major
Hey Baby (Drop it to the Floor)	Pitbull	Major
How Low	Ludacris	Major
How to Love	Lil Wayne	Major

(continued)

(Continued)

Song Title	Artist Name	Major or Indie
Hustle Hard	Ace Hood	Major
I Do	Young Jeezy	Major
I Don't Deserve You	Lloyd Banks	Major
I'm on One	DJ Khaled	Major
I'ma Boss	Meek Mill	Major
John	Lil Wayne	Major
Just a Dream	Nelly	Major
Kush	Dr. Dre	Major
Leave You Alone	Young Jeezy	Major
Lighters	Bad Meets Evil	Major
Like a G6	Far East Movement	Major
Look at Me Now	Chris Brown	Major
Lose My Mind	Young Jeezy	Major
Lotus Flower Bomb	Wale	Major
Love the Way You Lie	Eminem	Major
Loving You No More	P. Diddy	Major
Make a Movie	Twista	Major
Make It Rain	Travis Porter	Major
Make Me Proud	Drake	Major
Marvin & Chardonnay	Big Sean	Major
Mercy	Kanye West	Major
Miss Me	Drake	Major
Moment 4 Life	Nicki Minaj	Major
My Chick Bad	Ludacris	Major
My Last	Big Sean	Major
Ni**as in Paris	Jay-Z & Kanye West	Major
No Hands	Waka Flocka Flame	Major
No Love	Eminem	Major
Nobody's Perfect	J. Cole	Major
Not Afraid	Eminem	Major
Nothin' on You	B.O.B.	Major
Otis	Jay-Z & Kanye West	Major
Out of My Head	Lupe Fiasco	Major
Over	Drake	Major
Party Rock Anthem	LMFAO	Major
Pretty Boy Swag	Soulja Boy	Major
Rack City	Tyga	Major
Racks	Yung Chris	Major
Right Above It	Lil Wayne	Major
Right Thru Me	Nicki Minaj	Major
Rocketeer	Far East Movement	Major

(continued)

(Continued)

Song Title	Artist Name	Major or Indie
Roll Up	Wiz Khalifa	Major
Runaway	Kanye West	Major
Say Something	Timbaland	Major
Sex Room	Ludacris	Major
Sexy and I Know It	LMFAO	Major
She Will	Lil Wayne	Major
Starships	Nicki Minaj	Major
Super Bass	Nicki Minaj	Major
Take Care	Drake	Major
Teach Me How to Dougie	Cali Swag District	Major
That Way	Wale	Major
The Motto	Drake	Major
The Show Goes On	Lupe Fiasco	Major
UP!	LoveRance	Major
Welcome to My Hood	DJ Khaled	Major
Wild Ones	Flo Rida	Major
Work Out	J. Cole	Major
You Be Killing Em	Fabulous	Major
You the Boss	Rick Ross	Major
Young Wild & Free	Wiz Khalifa	Major
Your Love	Nicki Minaj	Major

Rap Songs Shared on Facebook

Song Name	Artist Name	Major vs. Indie
#Shortbusshawty	BYOB Entertainment	Indie
A Better Day	T.I.	Major
A Girl Named Hope	Atmosphere	Indie
All I Know	Roscoe Dash	Major
Alone	Asher Roth	Major
Amazing	Kanye West	Major
Back in L.A.	Apathy	Indie
Back to the Future	A\$AP Rocky	Indie
Base For Your Face	Lil B	Indie
Black Cloud	Joe Budden	Major
Black Republican	Jay-Z	Major
Blame Game	Kanye West	Major
Blow My High	Kendrick Lamar	Major
Bounce That Dick	Jenna Marbles	Indie
Break Up (the OJ Song)	Murs	Major
Breathe in the Sun	The Perceptionists	Indie
Candy	Foxy Brown	Major
Cleveland is the Reason	Kid Cudi	Major
Club Can't Handle Me	Flo Rida	Major
Come Over	Dom Kennedy	Indie
Come to Me	P. Diddy	Major
Creatures Lie Here	T.I.	Major
Crew Love	Drake	Major
Dear Mama	2Pac	Major
Disgusting	J. Cole	Major
Do For Love	2Pac	Major
Don't Waste Your Life	Lacrae	Indie
Down	Chris Brown	Major
Dreams	J. Cole	Major
Dreams Money Can Buy	Drake	Indie
DTA	Casey Veggies	Indie
En Focus	De La Soul	Major
Enemy Mind	LAC & Input	Indie
EPIC: Every Day Is Crucial	B.O.B.	Indie
Fireworks	Drake	Major
Fix Up	Black Star	Major
Follow My Lead	Joe Budden	Indie
Freaks and Geeks	Childish Gambino	Indie
God Loves Ugly	Atmosphere	Indie
Gossip Folks	Missy Elliott	Major

(continued)

(Continued)

Song Name	Artist Name	Major vs. Indie
Gucci Gucci	Kreayshawn	Major
Hands on the Wheel	School Boy Q	Indie
Hate it or Love it	The Game	Major
Heartbeat	Childish Gambino	Indie
Heartless	Kanye West	Major
Heavy	Waju	Indie
Higher	J. Cole	Major
Hold Yuh Remix	Gyptian	Major
Hot Boyz	Missy Elliott	Major
Hot Thing	Talib Kweli	Major
I Don't Want to be a Player No Mo'	Big Pun	Major
I Need a Girl	P. Diddy	Major
I Took Her	Lil Wayne	Indie
I Used to Love H.E.R.	Common	Major
I Wonder	Kanye West	Major
I'm Really Hot	Missy Elliott	Major
If I Ruled the World	Nas	Major
In the Morning	J. Cole	Major
Keep Steppin'	Atmosphere	Indie
La Bibliotica Spanish Rap	NBC Community	Indie
Like a Star	J. Cole	Indie
Love Affair	Lil Twist	Major
Love Letter	Shwayze	Major
Ludachristmas	Ludacris	Major
Making ATP	Tater Fresh	Indie
Man in the Hat	Mac Miller	Major
Marvin's Room	Drake	Major
Meter Feeder	Hail Mary Mallon	Indie
Mind on the Road	Rev Run	Major
Missin' You	Trey Songz	Major
No Hoe	D-Lo	Indie
No More	New Boyz	Major
November 18th	Drake	Major
Oh My	Sweatshop Union	Indie
One	Busta Rhymes	Major
One Minute Man	Missy Elliott	Major
Pass me by	J. Cole	Major
Patience	Nas	Major
Patron Tequila	Paradiso Girls	Major
Poppin'	Chris Brown	Major

(continued)

(Continued)

Song Name	Artist Name	Major vs. Indie
Poppin' Bottles	T.I.	Major
Pull, Push, Let Go	Inspired Flight	Indie
R.I.P. The Rap Game	Lil B	Major
Relax	YG	Indie
Remember 2 Forget	Murs	Major
Roll It Up Light It Up Smoke It	Cypress Hill	Major
Runaway Freestyle	Nipsey Hussle	Indie
Shake Senora	Pitbull	Major
Shake that Thing	Sean Paul	Major
Shorty Swing My Way	K.P. and Envyi	Indie
Stan	Eminem	Major
Stereo Heart	Gym Class Hereos	Major
Still D.R.E.	Dr. Dre	Major
Sunshine	Atmosphere	Indie
The Announcement	Jay Electronica	Indie
The Last to Say	Atmosphere	Major
The Race	Wiz Khalifa	Major
The Real Her	Drake ft. Andre 3000 & Lil' Wayne	Major
The Recipe	Kendrick Lamar	Major
The Thrill	Wiz Khalifa	Major
The Whole World	Outkast	Major
Thirsty	Starting Six	Indie
This Time of Night	T.I.	Major
Two Bottles Cracking	Mac Lethal	Indie
Unthinkable (Remix)	Alicia Keys	Major
Up Jumps Da Boogie	Timbaland & Magoo	Major
Wayzted	Jazzy	Indie
Woman Tonight	Murs	Indie
Words I Never Said	Lupe Fiasco	Major
Workin Em	Lil Wayne	Major
You	Atmosphere	Indie

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