

Hip-Hop and Black Identity: A Meta-Analytic Review Explaining How Modern Hip-Hop Relates to Black Identity and How It Has Created Signs of Complacency in Today's African- American Youth

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Abstract

Hip-hop is not just music; it is comprised of fashion, arts, icons, and it is a unique culture. Originally, hip-hop was created with the propensity to gauge the psychology and lived experiences of young people growing up in underrepresented neighborhoods. In the past, hip-hop was used as a voice for disenfranchised youth of low-economic areas, and it served as a battleground for respect and recognition in the world. Today, hip-hop has lost key elements that initially led to its widespread positive effect. Identifying hip-hop as an authentic representation of black culture and showing the relation of having a moral conflict or dilemma when listening to lyrics. We systematically reviewed the prospective association between hip-hop and morals compared to an association between morals and complacency. From 352 citations retrieved, 98 relevant articles were identified. Meta-analysis of all available data from unique selection criteria eliminated 53 articles because of lack of available data. It additionally excluded 23 more because of too few associations between hip-hop and black identity. There were 22 studies that were produced from the meta-analysis that provided constructive associations between the identified selection criteria. Studies were able to suggest multiple associations with hip-hop and black identity and hip-hop and morals. There was also a slight association of morals and complacency. The gap in the literature suggests more studies need to be done exploring the correlation among moral conflict and acts of complacency and hip-hop music's effect on culture and complacency.

Keywords: Hip-Hop, Identity, Complacency

1. Introduction

American hip-hop, though in the past was used as an emotional response to injustice, has transitioned into a genre of music that does not focus on community issues. In spite of this, American hip-hop in today's youth culture continues to be a popular genre. As referenced in a study, listening to American hip-hop has led to creations of new innovative music variations in the genre.⁹ The new variation of hip-hop created in Zimbabwe was banned due to its vulgarity and unsavory lyrics.⁹ The young people were affected greatly by the hip-hop generation produced in the American hip-hop society. Additionally, hip-hop has become associated with black identity.¹⁶ A study states that by repetition of a genre that upholds violence and misogyny, black culture seems to have adopted a similar mindset.¹⁶ Hip-hop culture has continued to influence young African-American youth culture and has been associated with today's modern day hip-hop culture.

2. Hip-Hop and Rap Culture

Hip-hop is composed of many aspects within its musical genre, one of which includes the most recognized form of musical expression: rap. The aspects presented in common presentations in the media show that hip-hop does in fact relate to black identity. During late twentieth century, hip-hop began developing in post-industrial American cities, and recognized key issues in communities where minorities faced inequality, poor socioeconomic levels, low employment opportunities, and high crime rates.¹⁹ Hip-hop along with its new counterpart, rap music or 'gangsta rap', served as a platform for a voice within their communities. Rap, over the years, has developed into another form of hip-hop that includes 'gangsta rap'.²⁰ Gangsta rap has a common goal in African-American culture to make a political statement against racism, distinct socioeconomic differences within communities, and lack of social awareness. However, as referenced in a finding, many gangsta rap artists feel the music has become victim to widely distributed with a lack of understanding of the social context and power it represents.²⁰ With this lack of understanding follows many widely known mainstream artists who create misrepresentations of what hip-hop culture intended when creating the genre.

Therefore, popular forms of gangsta rap such as Jay-Z's blueprint album produces mixed effects within today's youth culture that displays a lack of holistic understanding of African-American history, culture or even African culture.²¹ This undermining of culture continually fails to bridge the disconnect between black culture and identity and hip-hop culture because of the perversion of the once highly effective 'gangsta rap' into an enhanced music experience compared to a distinct political statement. Additionally, hip-hop culture and rap culture has begun to tear the positive images of black women in the community. They are instead considered invisible in the 'new rap culture,' and lack a positive and empowered lyrical representation of African-American girlhood.²² Many black girls have become projected images of sexual eroticism and misogynistic values. There is a divide between the images in hip-hop culture promoted for black girls and black boys that has begun to undermine the original intent of the musical genre. This large infrastructural decline within the musical genre has led to controlling images of black womanhood, gangsta representations of black men, and high crime statistics that relate to the negative images associated with this musical genre.²²

3. Hip-Hop and Black Identity

A study observed that hip-hop has become correlated with black identity. This has become a trend in the literature when focusing on hip-hop.¹⁶ In his play, Traber presents his actors as a representation of hip-hop artists that have become successful in hip-hop culture.¹⁶ Within this play, the artists were all playing roles that cited hip-hop's reasons for success. They each followed the steps that undermined internal values in order to obtain success. As hip-hop has been spread to other regions, it has continually produced negative concepts such as unsavory language and misogynistic themes.⁹ Hip-hop has additionally been associated with the promotion of materialism and negative regard of Blackness.⁶ However, with the evolution of times, hip hop has also begun to change and transform as well. As stated in a study, an analysis shows that hip-hop has even developed into a method used for attaining success in schools for young people.³ Hip-hop involves many well-known artists, and they promote many different social themes that endorse materialism and misogyny.⁶ These same young people become very active when inspired by celebrities, such as hip-hop artists, to stand behind social causes.¹ Even in presidential elections, studies have shown that when popular celebrities endorse certain ideas and concepts, many young people also begin to support those concepts and ideas.¹ The important takeaway from the study is that there is a connection between popular culture and the ability to effect emotions in youth.¹²

The common issue with popular hip-hop is that the themes many young people identify with in the lyrics have currently become part of Black identity.⁹ This formulates a cultural disconnect in the black consciousness level of our youth.⁹ The history of hip-hop has in fact faced the issue of not being understood by non-black culture in its meaning, and thus support the case that there are various methods of associating hip-hop culture with certain negative characteristics.⁵ For example, in a study that performed a textual analysis of lyrics, there were various assertions in the words that demonstrated distinct gender identities and struggles with in the study.⁹ As hip-hop music has evolved, it has also incorporated negative stereotypes and characteristics within the lyrics.⁶ Further analysis of hip-hop shows that popular hip-hop has even become associated with identity cross-culturally.⁴ There are many issues that have been listed within hip-hop that detract from its original purpose, and our youth have become more accepting of the negative stereotypes promoted by popular mass media.¹⁸ The important issue that needs to be

addressed is despite the inconsistencies in the lyrics in popular hip-hop songs and the listener's conflicting moral values, many young people choose to intake these negative stimuli. In retrospect, this has led to an overall negative reaction towards their identity.⁶

3.1 Complacency And Automation Bias

Complacency is defined as remaining in dominant culture in order to avoid becoming isolated or unpopular.⁸ The attempt of our study would be to draw that same parallel but to assert that black youth seem to be following a similar trend in which they attempt to remain a part of dominant culture and do not challenge concepts and beliefs within the lyrics and media they do not necessarily support. This large gap in studies has failed to be addressed in hip-hop culture and associations need to be made about the mindset that is encouraged when listening to the popular hip-hop themes presented over time. The impact that it may have on the human, more specifically the African-American mindset can potentially be catastrophic for all parties involved.⁶ Travis suggests that hip-hop narratives contribute to developmental changes in today's young people which would support a claim that hip-hop has some effect on young people's developmental process.¹⁷

The major issue that seems to be common among critics of hip-hop is that it is used today as a technique to inspire young people; however, the lyrics of the most popular songs do not produce a positive image of black culture or black identity.³ Prevalent in current studies are claims that hip-hop is encouraging misogyny.⁹ That same trend has spread to other cultural communities, and we are seeing in studies that young people are identifying with hip-hop as a means of becoming a part of a cool culture.¹¹ Most young people who listen to popular hip-hop have been known to allow popular celebrities around them to dictate what they should stand up for. This is possibly why it is easier for popular artists to effect change in young people.¹ However, as referenced by Parasuraman and Dietrich, automation bias leads to internalized error systems that force participants to make errors in judgment because of systems overload of conflicting activities.¹³ Therefore, when faced with lyrics that lead to conflict in the moral values of young people, they may too internalize a sense of automation bias, such as singing a song they do not agree with. This possible trend could communicate that automation bias produces an unfixable state of complacency.¹³

3.2 Morals And Complacency

In one study, an association between morals complacency effects on ethical decision has guided research to suggest that one is guided by moral values in making complex decisions. It further suggests that being guided by moral reasoning that one would not allow for any deviations in that particular behavior because of a specific way of addressing a concept.²⁶ The association within moral values and complacency is practiced in norms of fairness and adherence to social contracts; however, in non-traditionally morally enforced environments, moral values are generally not the indicator exhibiting a particular behavior.²⁶ However, in another study the repetitive occurrence of conflicting morally corrupted behavior tends to incite a discounting of the practice or tradition by the general victims.²⁷ This discounting of the negative values tends to create conflict that has the power to incite change in that general community that could become widespread.²⁷ Morals and complacency tend to have a slight association among the studies that shows that conflicting moral values will elicit an emotional response.

3. Methodology

3.1 Search Strategy

Objective: Identifying hip-hop as an authentic representation of black culture and showing the relation of having a moral conflict or dilemma when listening to lyrics. We systematically reviewed the prospective association between hip-hop and morals compared to an association between morals and complacency. Methods: Electronic Databases (Academic Search Premier, Humanities & Social Sciences Index Retrospective African American Historical Serials) were searched for prospective studies of hip-hop as it related to black identity and morals. Then, we searched additionally for studies containing associations between morals and complacency. Inclusive dates were January 1, 1986, to December 31, 2014. Using meta-analysis data was then compared between studies to provide a selection criteria that eliminated irrelevant literature or studies that did not include data information.

3.2 Study Selection And Data Extraction

Studies were included if they met the following eligibility criteria: hip-hop culture, rap music, published in 1985 or later, morals, music theory, complacency, measures of recurrent phenomenon. We included observational studies, interviews, content analysis studies related to hip-hop, longitudinal studies, and archival research. We excluded articles that did not meet the search keyword criteria and were also unrelated to moral and ethical aspects of hip-hop culture such as hip-hop as a teaching tool that relates the ability of multiple schools using hip-hop in order to improve student learning capabilities. Within this study, improved student learning does not have a direct association with morals or complacency. One reviewer completed the first screening of abstracts/titles (N.S.). Studies that were considered eligible for inclusion were read in full, and suitability for inclusion was N.S. Disagreement were managed by discussion with a three separate reviewers (A.C., M.L., and M.M.). Data were extracted on the basis of document type, association between hip-hop and black identity, moral connection to hip-hop culture, and morals and complacent behavior.

3.3 Quality Assessment

The quality of the studies was assessed using the Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT) which allows the researcher to appraise 352 articles independently. The CCAT was used because it was known to the authors that it would provide less rater bias than informal appraisal; the CCAT could be used across all health research designs which would remove one confounding variable. As predicted in multiple studies, the CCAT proved to be a more reliable tool to assess quality of studies than informal appraisal of research papers.³⁰ Before applying the CCAT, the studies were excluded based on meeting criteria including: matching keywords to abstracts/titles, meeting the inclusive date range requirement, and were available in full text. From there we assessed the content for relevance based on inclusion of both keywords in the abstract as factors in the research study. Lastly, based on the data we were able to rate each individual study from the narrowed search criteria as it related to the larger idea of hip-hop and black identity or morals and morals and complacency.

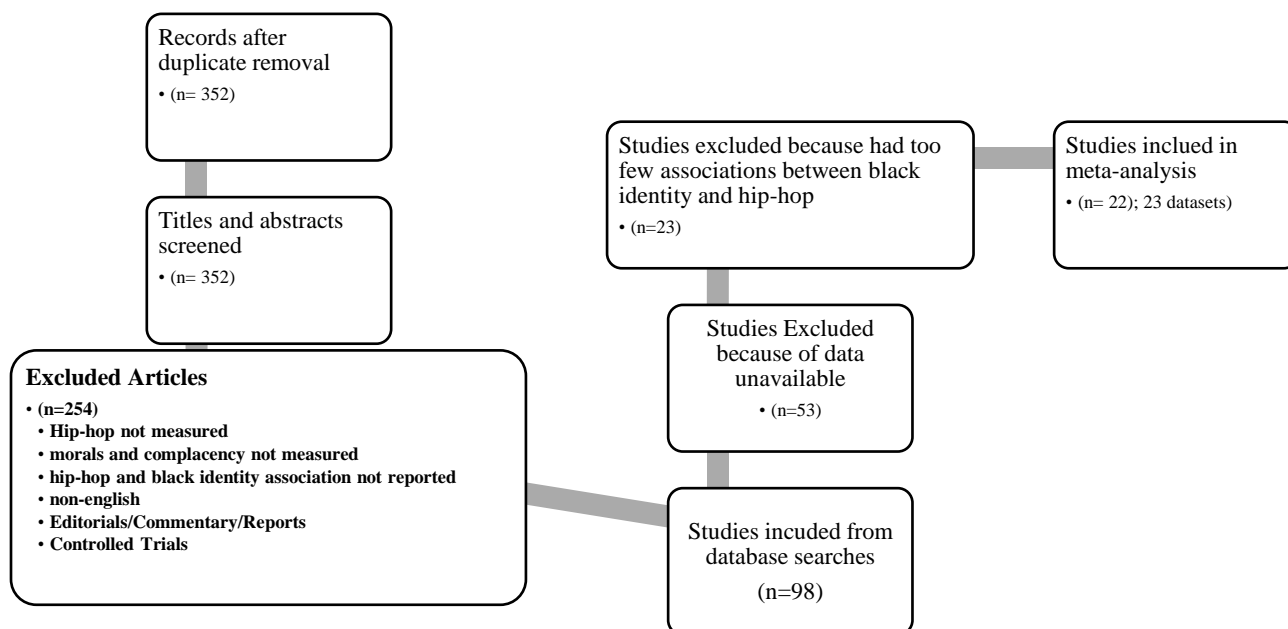
4. Data

4.1 Study Identification

From 352 citations retrieved, 98 relevant articles were identified. Meta-analysis of all available data from unique selection criteria eliminated 53 articles because of lack of available data. It additionally excluded 23 more because of too few associations between hip-hop and black identity. There were 22 studies that were produced from the meta-analysis that provided constructive associations between the identified selection criteria.

A flow diagram of the search strategy is presented in Table 1. The search yielded 352 articles, of which 254 were excluded. Ninety-six explored association between morals and complacency. Fifty-three more were omitted because data was unavailable, and 23 were excluded because they failed to meet criteria of identifying an association between black identity and hip-hop. This left 23 data sets from 22 articles for analysis.

Table 1. flowchart of selected articles



4.2 Included Study Characteristics

Hip-hop was shown to have an association with black identity across time. Sample studies involved youth cultures direct relationship with hip-hop culture and rap culture. Studies also included conflicting moral values as it relates to ‘gangsta rap’ another subgenre of the hip-hop music world. Most samples used lyrical analysis and youth culture effects to explain the association between hip-hop and today’s culture. Various studies cited that hip-hop and rap have become indicative of cultures of crime and resistance in today’s young adults.³¹ When including data that has merit in identifying an association between hip-hop and black identity, studies were itemized based on relevance to the hip-hop influence among moral values. As Roach states, there is a level of questioning that is necessary for us to explore in our exploration of hip-hop culture which speaks to further understanding if today’s minority youth culture identify hip-hop content like rap lyrics and themes as necessary elements of their internal identity.³²

4.3 Meta-Analysis

Using the selection criterion hierarchy outlined in the “Methods” section, the most reliable studies were able to distinctly show a recurrent association of hip-hop and identity over time. These studies included hip-hop as it relates black youth culture, cultural impact, and moral dilemmas. Additionally a screening process was done to show an association between hip-hop and morals which produced seven articles that displayed work displaying hip-hop as a morally conflicted genre within rap lyrics, misogynistic themes, and sexually erotic images.²² A final association was additionally found to show an association between morals and complacency. Thus, those who are exposed to recurrent hostile themes in a system of values and beliefs, like those present in hip-hop culture, are also constantly spurred to take action.²⁷ Therefore, there is an association among morals and complacency that has been produced within the Hook’s study of Intellectual classes and institutional values. In parallel to Hook’s article, hip-hop was intended to be a tool used to empower youth culture and over time has continued to evolve as it has included more morally unjust images.²²

6. Conclusion

Based on the data gathered from the included studies, the common themes among hip-hop culture included the use of misogynistic language, sexually erotic images, derogatory language, and lack of empowering representation of girls and boys in its narratives.²² Studies were able to suggest multiple associations with hip-hop and black identity and hip-hop and morals. There was also a slight association of morals and complacency. The gap in the literature suggests more studies need to be done exploring the correlation among moral conflict and acts of complacency and hip-hop music's effect on culture and complacency.

Within the meta-analysis, we continue to explore the inefficacies between young men and women as they depicted in the lyrics and as leaders in the industry. The hip-hop industry is composed of rap artists such as Jay-Z, Nas, and T.I. are all charged with the responsibility of producing positive black imagery to be consumed by growing young adults.²³ However, the major issue in the media is that these 'gangsta rap' artists inspire mainstream music production that fails to follow the objective of 'gangsta rap music' and has caused a perversion in the industry. Throughout many studies, it has been referenced that morals and complacency tend to have an association when there is a moral conflict.²⁷

6.1 Strengths

The merits of the studies all state that hip-hop is an effective platform to reach and plug into youth culture as it can interface with many different socioeconomic levels reaching as far as low-income communities to upper-class cultures. As there has been an association between hip-hop and black identity, some studies have recognized the necessity to improve the representations of minority culture present in their community.²⁵ For example, abolishing derogatory language in their community helped empower the youth culture to have a more defined identity that they felt confident in expressing.²⁵

6.2 Limitations

Limitations of this meta-analysis include not having more articles with ordinal data to compare results across the studies. Also nominal data such as measures of derogatory lyrics, recurrences of morally unjust themes, negative images would be better measured using an association between moral values and complacency. The studies are also limited because there is a gap in the literature showing an association between hip-hop and complacency directly as defined as having conflicting moral values and practices. Throughout the literature many advantages were content analysis measures that itemized the occurrences of negative images portrayed and interpreted in the lyrics.³¹ Also, in the studies there is a common occurrence of mass media's power to both reify and challenge stereotypes in many marginalized communities, and this power is also extended to hip-hop as a genre.²²

6.2 Future Studies

Future studies would include devising a study that would show a relation between hip-hop and complacency in college-aged students who were surveyed based on music motivation. A total will be distributed as data becomes available based on numbers of students. A diverse metropolitan city such as Washington, DC would have a direct knowledge of hip-hop culture and history as determined by survey criteria. Professors will be allowed to mention the opportunity to students in psychology courses specifically and any other relevant coursework such as African-American studies, music therapy, etc. Materials needed would be a survey that will recruit individuals based on music motivation. After that, these participants would be selected based on their level of music motivation to listen to a hip-hop stimulus. Future studies would also develop a design method that could both utilized nominal and ordinal data to help define the correlational study between hip-hop as defined as rap in this study and complacency as having conflicting moral values that a participant willingly violates. Finally, a procedure would need to be defined to explain test administration, informed consent procedure, IRB regulations, and addition literature would be needed to support the association among the relation between hip-hop and black identity, hip-hop and morals, and morals and complacency as defined by meta-analytic research of current studies.

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