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LOVE AND HIP HOP:
AN EXAMINATION OF HIP-HOP
MEDIA EFFECTS ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN ROMANTIC
RELATIONSHIPS

by

LATOYA D. BINFORD

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication in
The Department of Communication Arts to
The School of Graduate Studies of
The University of Alabama in Huntsville

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

2019

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Latoya D. Binford

5/17/19

ABSTRACT

School of Graduate Studies
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Degree Master of Arts College/Dept. Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Communication Arts Professional Communication
Name of Candidate Latoya D. Binford
Title Love and Hip Hop: An Examination of Hip-Hop
Media Effects on African American Romantic Relationships

Hip-hop has grown immensely since its invention in the 1970s. No longer just a musical genre, its influences can be seen in all facets of culture, especially within the African American community in which it was created. Because so much of the commercially successful hip-hop media is shrouded in themes such as violence, abuse, and misogyny, it is important to examine its effects on its consumer. This study examined the effects of hip-hop consumption on romantic relationships, as perceived by African American/black women. Through thematic analysis and the theoretical framework of Mere Exposure effect, findings revealed that the participants correlated five topics between hip-hop media and African American relationships: loyalty, community reflection, betrayal, relationship goals, and communication.

Abstract Approval: Committee Chair



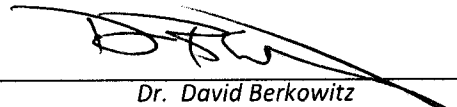
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*This work is
dedicated to African
American women
worldwide. May you
always know that you
are magical. I am
what I am because of
you!*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The words love and hip-hop were once not a synonymous pair, that is of course until 2011 when the explosive media brand premiered (Charlton, 2016). Since its debut on VH1, the lone show, *Love and Hip, Hop* originally taped in New York City, has franchised, expanded to three other cities, and has inspired countless spin-offs, reunion specials, and launched the careers of some of the most colorful entertainers to date (Charlton, 2016). But is this really a thing? Does hip-hop convey romantic love or is it a figment of the imagination? Many of the harsh lyrics that hip-hop has branded as its own, presents a conflicting view of its overall message. Does hip-hop convey love? With misogyny and demeaning lyrics, is love represented in hip-hop attainable and if so, at what cost?

Since hip-hop has expanded beyond the realm of simply music, hip-hop's representation of love has too been expanded as evidenced by the many television programs dedicated to it. Not only do consumers of hip-hop media visualize romance based on lyrics, they are also privy to visual examples of their favorite hip-hop celebrities' romantic relationships in reality shows. One must ask what the effects of this exposure is producing. While all of hip-hop is not representative of negative imagery, misogynistic language, and abuse perpetuation, hip-hop based television programs have been dedicated to featuring these behaviors. It is very possible that romantic love is conveyed through hip-hop, but often and especially in the most commercially successful albums and television programs, it is not conveyed in an appropriate manner. It is often riddled with stipulations and void of healthy boundaries.

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In short, this study seeks to debunk the notion of being “ride or die”, for it is nothing more than a glamorization of the unhealthy relationship perpetuated by hip-hop media. To do so, it is first important to examine music’s general impact on people, then more specifically, how hip-hop as a genre was established and how it has evolved. Armed with this knowledge, we will then explore the positive and negative impacts of hip-hop on society, followed by an overview of media effects and how they relate to the study. With hip-hop’s immense influence on African American culture, it is important to examine the effects of its exposure in the African American community. This study seeks to add to the growing academic scholarship dedicated to African American studies.

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Literature Review

2.1 Music's General Impact

Music is an art form that has been around since the dawn of time. Virtually all cultures have some form of music. In every era of human history and in every society around the globe, music has allowed people to express their feelings and communicate with others (Harvard, 2011). Because of this, music is credited with having several benefits to physical, emotional, and psychological health. Music therapy has emerged as a treatment for patients who have suffered strokes, children with severe mental disabilities, and victims of trauma. Beyond, music's healing powers, it can also be quite persuasive. Music has been used in various forms of advertising for this very reason. Music commonly follows the central route of persuasion, which states that rhetoric, in this case song lyrics, are thought about and reflected on by listeners (Seiter & Gass, 2018). Over time, lyrics become a part of recall for listeners and, in turn, influence their choices. For example, Seiter and Gass note that Emling's 2004 study found that hip-hop star Busta Rhymes' hit single "*Pass the Courvoisier*" is credited with a 30 percent sales increase of the Cognac brand upon the song's release (Seiter & Gass, 2018).

Over time, music has transformed in a myriad of ways. For example, instruments continually change due to modern advances in technology. Also, the way we consume or listen to music has changed throughout the years as well. Music was once an art that required physical presence to be enjoyed. For example, earlier musicians did not have the ability to be recorded, so live concerts, parties, and/or social gatherings were the only means of enjoying the music. An artist would need to physically play an instrument for the sound to be produced. Once again, with advancements in technology, the world saw the advent of the vinyl record,

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the 8-track tape, cassette, CD, and digital music forms. Now, the world has music at the tip of its finger in instant gratifying ways. In fact, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, by the end of 2017, 176 million users had paid subscriptions to digital music streaming services which accounted for 54% of the global revenue for music (IFPI, 2018). From radios to television, and television to the web, music has become much more accessible and its influence much more widespread. It has also taken on many forms in terms of genres including but not limited to opera, folk, country, jazz, pop, bluegrass, and hip-hop. The following section explores the evolution of hip-hop in greater detail.

2.2 History and Evolution of Hip-hop

The musical art form that would later be known as hip-hop is officially recognized as being born in Bronx, New York in 1973. The location was 1520 Sedgwick Avenue at a birthday party on August 11th (Hip-hop is born, 2009). Jamaican immigrant Clive Campbell, the host of the evening, acted as the party's DJ (disc jockey). But there was something remarkable about the way Campbell played the records. He had previously noticed how crowds would react to certain parts of a song, often the parts that were heavy with drums and free from lyrics. He pioneered the practice of using the two-turntable setup to play this "breakbeat" over and over endlessly to extend the portion of the song that crowds favored. The practice spread like wildfire in a grassroots movement of the new genre (Hip-hop is born, 2009). Thus Campbell, or DJ Kool Herc as he became known, is credited with being the father of hip-hop.

Just six years later in New York City circles, the term hip-hop was coined by Cowboy of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (JET, 2007). It is also during this time that rapping in its modern form was invented. A master-of-ceremonies or MC as they are commonly

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referred, would talk over the breakbeat and the crowds would go wild. By the mid-1980s, the art form had transformed into an official American musical genre. Many elements including DJing, rapping, and breakdancing came to be known as hip-hop synonymously. The first commercially successful hip-hop recording was “Rapper’s Delight” by Sugar Hill Gang in 1979 (Larkin, 2009). The song is credited for introducing hip-hop to the world outside of New York City. After its success, artists all over New York began to record their rhymes. The early intent of hip-hop was to bring together a struggling impoverished community through unity and entertainment. An example of this can be seen in Afrika Bambaataa’s Zulu Nation movement in which he stressed that hip-hop was a way to overcome gang life, violence and drugs (Chang, 2007). Early hip-hop songs also echoed this sentiment as evidenced in Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five’s “The Message”. Many subgenres emerged throughout the evolution of hip-hop, including freestyle rap¹, battle rap², gangsta rap³, southern rap⁴, chopped and screwed⁵, G-funk⁶, conscious rap⁷, and Miami bass⁸ to name a few. Hip-hop has gone on to experience worldwide success and dominant popularity in America. For the first time ever, hip-hop surpassed rock as the most popular genre in the United States in 2017, according to [Nielsen's year-end report](#) on the music industry (Lynch, 2018). The global appeal of hip-hop has opened the doors of other forms of entertainment as well. As stated in this paper’s introduction, *Love and Hip-Hop* reality TV series has become a multi-media brand that regularly broadcasts on VH1. It is one of the networks most successful shows in the form of ratings (Charlton, 2016). Other television shows featuring hip-hop themes are seeing record

¹ Rhymes that are typically generated on the spot without prior preparation

² Rhymes that include bragging, boasting, and/or insults, aimed at an opponent

³ Rhymes that are characterized by themes and lyrics that describe the gangster or hardcore lifestyle

⁴ Hip-hop that emerged in the Southern United States, specifically Atlanta, Houston, New Orleans, Memphis, and Miami

⁵ A technique of remixing hip-hop music by slowing the tempo which originated in Houston, TX

⁶ A technique of mixing gangsta rap with the sounds of 1970s funk artists which originated on the West Coast

⁷ Sub-genre of hip-hop focused on creating awareness and imparting knowledge to its listener

⁸ Hip-hop that relies on an electro-funk sound and is often termed booty music for its dance-crazed influence

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breaking numbers in ratings as well including, *Black Ink Crew*, *Empire*, *Power*, *T.I. & Tiny: Friends & Family Hustle*, *The Braxton Family Values*, *Leave it to Stevie*, and *Growing Up Hip-hop*. With regular exposure on prime-time television, hip-hop's influence is now greater than ever. With such exposure, hip-hop has used its platform to promote many positive movements both within the African American community and around the world.

2.3 Positive Contributions and the Formation of Hip-Hop Culture

Hip-hop is no longer a term that is limited to a musical genre. It expands beyond its listeners to reach every corner of the earth in its influence of various mediums including fashion, language, dance, and sports. It has escaped the boroughs of New York City to be featured in commercials, its fashion has been emulated, and its terminology is used in everyday conversations. In fact, hip-hop terms have become so ingrained into society, that a few have even been added to the Oxford-English Dictionary including bling, twerk, dope, phat, and jiggy (XXL, 2013). It has truly blossomed into a culture. Once considered a "black" thing, hip-hop is no longer contained in urban communities. It can be seen, felt, heard, and represented in mainstream society. Hip-hop artists have been thrust into the living rooms, cars, schools and communities of people all over the world. Perhaps this following makes the African American experience more sympathetic to others who find connection with the culture. Because of its meteoric rise to popularity, African American issues have been given a modern voice. Not unlike African American celebrities of the past, hip-hop stars have used their platforms to discuss social injustice, poverty, and political issues.

Conscious Rap is a subgenre of hip-hop that stresses the importance of remaining aware of the social injustices of the world, particularly in the African American community. Key

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topics promoted by conscious rap include black pride, poverty, mass incarceration, police brutality, and the neglect of inner-city neighborhoods and education systems in minority neighborhoods. Artists such as Common, Childish Gambino, Lupe Fiasco and Mos Def, dedicate their music to discussing these issues. Though not as commercially successful as other hip-hop subgenres, conscious rap has given way to a cultural shift of its own. It is expressed in the term “woke”. Woke, in its colloquial form, means to be socially and mentally aware of the systematic and continued oppression of black people around the world. Songs such as Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power”, Nas’ “I Know I Can”, Childish Gambino’s “Made in America” and Common’s “Glory” all echo sentiments of African American struggle with the intent of rising above it. The “woke” movement in hip-hop has sparked the conversation of racial injustice around the world. For listeners that may otherwise feel removed from the cause, the “woke” movement has ignited not only an interest in the social ills of racial injustice in the United States, but also of the racial injustices taking place in countries that listeners may never see. In this way, hip-hop has acted as a new age civil rights movement. Though hip-hop has undoubtedly contributed to society in a positive manner, there is no denying that this issue is a double-edged sword. Many of the commercially successful hip-hop mediums are shrouded in negativity. It is important that we examine the full spectrum of hip-hop’s effects in order to effectively celebrate hip-hop’s positive contributions.

2.4 Hip-Hop’s Negative Characteristics

In Brazil, there is an expression that says “há males que vêm para bem”, which precisely translates to “there are bads that come from good”. Though hip-hop has many positive effects on society, there is no denying that with anything good, there is inherently a counterpart. Hip-hop’s raunchy lyrics and aggressive stance has undoubtedly shaped the bad.

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While many hip-hop artists reserve their lyrics for promoting positive imagery and unity in the African American community, somewhere along the way, hip-hop commercialized and began to profit from lyrics that are deemed shocking and outlandish. Many older artists argue that hip-hop has lost its purpose as evidenced in Common's 1994 single "I Used to Love H.E.R." in which he questions that direction of rap in terms of content and imagery. Early pioneers of hip-hop as well as critics argue that hip-hop no longer seeks to change negative aspects of ghetto life, but on the contrary it glorifies and perpetuates those negative stereotypes for profit. This is achieved in many ways, including violence.

2.4.1 Violence

Many hip-hop lyrics contain messages of violence. So much so that rappers constantly defend their use of such rhetoric by asserting that the content is reflective of their communities. Urban communities or ghettos, as they are referred to in many hip-hop songs, are riddled with poverty, despair, illegal activity, and violence. Because of the hardships faced in this type of community, a "code of ethics" or a set of informal rules, are developed to police personal and group behaviors which in turn, urges the youth to assert their physical presence as means of protection (Anderson, 1994). Many hip-hop lyrics include themes such as murder, guns, kidnapping, robbery, and intimidation. As previously stated, the lyrics are no longer reserved for chronicling what has happened but has foreshadowed what was to come. Arguably, the greatest example of violent hip-hop lyrics that has manifested to date is the East Coast/West Coast beef between the Notorious BIG and Tupac respectively. The two rappers exchanged violence riddled lyrics between each other until they were both eventually killed from unsolved murders. Other examples of lyrics that are wrought with violence include 50 Cent's "Many Men", Eminem's "Stan", and Tupac's "Hit Em Up". All reference grabbing guns and killing

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any that oppose them, making violence as a form of dealing with adversity appear natural to listeners. While numerous songs reflect the violent nature of some lyrics, abuse is also evident.

2.4.2 Abuse

In relationships, there are many types of abuse that can occur, but the types that are most often associated with romantic relationships are verbal, sexual, emotional, and physical. Verbal abuse is characterized as speaking to someone in an offensive and insulting manner (Gilchrist-Petty & Long, 2016), while sexual abuse is the use of forced sexual behaviors that dominate, manipulate, threaten, injure, or corrupt another person (Honeycutt & Sheldon, 2018). Emotional abuse is the use of mental strategies and mind games to manipulate, hurt, and/or isolate someone, and physical abuse includes the use of the body or weapons to threaten, punish, dominate, restrain, control, or injure others (Honeycutt & Sheldon, 2018). Hip-hop exemplifies each category of abuse. With lyrics that use terms such as “bitch” “hoe” and “slut” as well as a mix of other profane terms, it is deeply troubling to think of the implications of the language, as the persuasive power of words have long been recognized (Seiter & Gass, 2018). It is no secret that hip-hop has been charged with being misogynistic and sexist. Unfortunately, hip-hop has not only committed and perpetuated the verbal abuse of women, but sexual, emotional, and physical abuse as well.

Hip-hop lyrics often denote that women are only good for one thing, sexual conquest. This type of dangerous language influences rape culture. Rape culture is defined as, “a society or environment whose prevailing social attitudes have the effect of normalizing or trivializing sexual assault or rape culture” (Oxford University Press, 2018). Hip-hop has epitomized rape culture with songs like the 2013 remix of hip-hop artist Rocko’s “UOENO” that features the

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wildly popular Rick Ross rapping “Put Molly all in her champagne, she ain’t even know it. I took her home and I enjoyed that, she ain’t even know it” (Rocko, 2013). Though the lyrics clearly denote date rape, the rhetoric is so common that it raises very few eyebrows. Another disturbing example of this is found in Three 6 Mafia’s “Let’s Plan a Robbery” which says, “I had to rape his bitch cause the ho was stacked, I fucked her from the back, with my gun to her back” (Three 6 Mafia, 2005). These lyrics are problematic for many reasons, and they certainly confirm that women are constantly exploited and characterized as fantasy objects in hip-hop.

Hip-hop inspired television shows continue this portrayal of women. African American women in particular are characterized as beautifully adorned in the finest and most expensive clothes doing nothing more than standing around waiting, arguing, and fighting over men. Female worth in hip-hop is non-existent judging by its lyrics and other media representations. The violence personified in the lyrical content manifests in the physical realm of the reality shows. Hip-hop’s men and women physically fight, assault, and violate each other regularly. But this is not seen as demoralizing by audiences who tune in; it is labeled as entertaining. Examples of the abuse present in hip-hop television can be seen in its most successful franchise to date, *Love and Hip-hop*.

In 2013, season 4 of *Love and Hip-hop: New York* featured rapper Peter Gunz, the mother of his children Tara Wallace, and his wife Amina Buddafly entangled in a bizarre love triangle. Audiences watched as Peter cheated on Tara with Amina, whom he subsequently married in secret, all while continuing to live and engage in romantic relationship with Tara. Peter was seen lying to each of the women as he continued to use, manipulate, and deceive them simultaneously. Even after the full scope of the triangle became apparent to the women, they did not end the relationships. In fact, the two women hurled verbal insults at each other for

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three seasons as they each took turns sleeping with, conceiving a child with, and professing their love to Peter. In 2012, *Love and Hip-hop: Atlanta*'s season 1 featured producer Stevie J and his mistress Joseline Hernandez. He often verbally assaulted her with demeaning names and threats of sending her back to the strip club where he "found" her. *Love and Hip-hop: Hollywood* has also portrayed forms of abuse. On November 24, 2014, during episode 11 of season 1, actor/singer Ray J pushed his girlfriend Princess Love so hard, that she fell into a pool. With this kind of imagery, it isn't hard to see the negative effects on the women in the shows.

2.4.3 Negative Impact on Women

Hip-hop music promotes masculine hegemony, and it depicts women as individuals who must rely on men (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). The successful 2007 single released by rapper Plies "Shawty" chronicles a relationship between the rapper and a woman that he must provide for financially. In exchange, she is permitted to sleep with him and brag about it while not being able to enjoy a committed relationship. Many of the television programs echo this same sentiment. Women are often "kept" in exchange for their loyalty. Furthermore, as highlighted in Hunter and Soto's (2009) study, the dichotomy of the "good girl/bad girl" distinction allows women to enjoy hip-hop media while distancing themselves from its female subjects, thus avoiding feelings of degradation. There are two predominant roles for women characters in hip-hop: (a) the "hoe," who is essentially a prop for male sexual pleasure often seen as video vixens and characterized as sidepieces, and (b) the "ride or die chick" who is characterized as the loyal girlfriend who is willing to die for her man (Hunter & Soto, 2009). *T.I. and Tiny: Friends and Family Hustle*, provide a good example of the notion of being "ride or die". The show follows the martial relationship between hip-hop stars. While the premise of

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the show is to provide positive imagery to hip-hop families, it ultimately validates the stereotype that rappers are unfaithful to their wives. Broadcast on October 22, 2018, Episode 1 deals with T.I.'s continued infidelity as his wife Tiny is praised by other cast members for being a good "ride or die" or committed woman through the process. The Mere Exposure Effect provides a useful theoretical framework for examining hip-hop's negative impact on women.

2.5 Theoretical Contribution

Many studies have been dedicated to unraveling the effects of prolonged media exposure on audiences. Jensen, Bernat, Wilson, and Goonewardene's (2011) study tested the delayed hypothesis by looking at whether exposure to false information in a televised narrative was more persuasive over time. The results showed that individuals were most likely to endorse false beliefs two weeks after viewing the program as opposed to immediately following it. In light of this finding, it is plausible to believe that perhaps hip-hop has the same effect on its listeners and viewers. Through the continued exposure to such negative themes, African American women may experience delayed effects of supporting its negative imagery.

Theoretical contributions to the research stem from a psychological theory, Mere Exposure Effect. The theory states that "the tendency for repeated exposure to a stimulus has been found to be sufficient in enhancing an observer's liking for it or attitude towards it" (Colman, 2015, p. 528). Mere exposure was first referred to by German philosopher Gustav Theodor Fechner in 1876 and was later rediscovered and discussed by US psychologist William James in 1890, but it was ultimately first applied in a quantitative study by US-based Polish psychologist Robert Boleslaw Zajonc in 1968 (Colman, 2015). Since 1968, many

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studies (Hekkert, Thurgood, & Whitfield, 2013; [Inoue, Yagi, & Sato, 2018](#); [Zizak & Reber, 2004](#)) have been conducted to examine the mere exposure effect on different demographics. For example, Weeks, Longenecker, McKinney, and Moore's (2005) study looked at the role of the Mere Exposure Effect on ethical tolerance of business decisions in the workplace. Results showed that a significant difference in ethical judgement depended on prior exposure to the ethical situations. The study found that those who had been exposed to such situations adopted a more tolerant stance toward the ethically questionable behavior (Weeks et al., 2005). In essence, the theory informs that the more an individual is exposed to an image, thought, ideal, etc., the more likely he/she is to adopt its principles and see them as normal. With such sparse representation in hip-hop, it is inevitable that life begins to imitate art. One might ask why African American women still support an art form that degrades them so much. Whatever the answer may be, the implications are both great and far reaching. This study looks to add to the theoretical contribution of Mere Exposure Effects by exploring the relationship between exposure to hip-hop content and abusive behaviors in relationships. Hence, this study asks the following research question:

RQ: What is the correlation between exposure to hip-hop content and the perception of abusive behaviors in African American romantic relationships?

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CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Participants:

The purposive sample was comprised of 20 women who self-identified Black, African American, or African as at least one of her primary identity markers. All participants were age 18 or older with a mean range of 25-34. The relationship status of the participants was as follows: single, never married (n=13; 65%), married (n=5; 25%), divorced (n=1; 5%), and single, but cohabiting (n=1; 5%). The participants reported being consumers of Hip-hop music and/or Hip-Hop television programming (e.g., *Love and Hip-Hop*, *Love and Hip-Hop Atlanta*, or *Empire*) as criteria for participation in the study. The purposive sample was solicited primarily from the principal investigator's association with them on a mid-sized Southern university campus, as well as her associations with African American sorority members, church members, family, and friends within the community. Participants volunteered to participate and were not compensated for their participation.

3.2 Quantitative Procedures:

Participants were first asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix A). After consent was obtained from the participants, a brief closed-ended and multiple-choice survey was distributed to gather demographic data as well as assess the amount of time spent listening to and/or viewing hip-hop content (see Appendix B). Among the participants, the average weekly time spent listening to hip-hop music was 3-5 hours. Descriptive statistics for each listening range were: 1-2 hours/week (n=7; 35%), 3-5 hours/week (n=8; 40%), 6-8 hours/week (n=2; 10%), and 9 or more hours/week (n=3; 15%). The average weekly time spent viewing hip-hop programming was 1-2 hours. Descriptive statistics for each viewing range were: None

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(n=4; 20%), 1-2 hours/week (n=12; 60%), 3-5 hours/week (n=2; 10%), 6-8 hours/week (n=1; 5%), and 9 or more hours/week (n=1; 5%). Following completion of the first portion of the questionnaire, the focus group discussion began, which will be explained in the qualitative procedure section. After the focus group discussion concluded, the participants were shown two video clips of scenes from hip-hop television shows. The first clip was from *Love and Hip-hop: New York*, Season 9 Episode 7. The clip depicted an example of emotional abuse by way of neglect. The second clip was from *TI and Tiny: Family and Friends Hustle*, Season 1 Episode 1. The clip depicted an example of emotional abuse by way of habitual cheating. The participants were then asked to complete a Likert scale ranging from 1 (unlikely) to 5 (most likely) regarding how likely they would remain in the relationship if they experienced the actions in the clips. In response to the first clip, (n=11, 55%) responded with 1 (unlikely), (n=1; 5%) responded with 2 (somewhat unlikely), (n=6; 30%) responded with 3 (not sure), (n=2; 10%) responded with 4 (somewhat likely), and (n=0; 0%) responded with 5 (likely). In response to the second clip, (n=8, 40%) responded with 1 (unlikely), (n=3; 15%) responded with 2 (somewhat unlikely), (n=6; 30%) responded with 3 (not sure), (n=2; 10%) responded with 4 (somewhat likely), and (n=1; 5%) responded with 5 (likely).

3.3 Qualitative Procedures:

For the qualitative portion of the research, four focus group sessions and four personal interviews were conducted⁹. The focus groups were comprised of two to seven participants. A total of 16 women participated in the focus groups. Participants consented to being audio recorded during the discussion for accuracy. Each session took approximately 40-60 minutes and was later transcribed verbatim. The focus group and interview questions were asked to

⁹ It was necessary to conduct data via both focus groups and personal interviews to best accommodate the participants' availability.

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assess the effects of hip-hop media exposure on the romantic relationships of the participants (see Appendix C). Focus groups and interviews were conducted by a self-identified young African American woman. This was strategic in that we hoped to maximize comfort for participants who might otherwise feel uncomfortable discussing racial issues with those outside of their race.

The focus groups and interviews began with a broad question to determine the relevance of the topic at hand: “What does it mean to be ‘ride or die?’” Other follow-up questions included: “When listening to hip-hop music, how do you identify with the experiences of the characters in the song?”; “When watching hip-hop shows, how do you identify with the experiences of the characters in the show?”; “In what ways do you strive to have a relationship like the ones you hear about in hip-hop songs?”; and “What are some of the challenges faced in African American romantic relationships?”

Data from the focus groups and interviews were first transcribed, which resulted in 56 double spaced typed pages. Data were then analyzed through thematic analysis, as outlined in Spradley’s (1979) book *The Ethnographic Interview*, to identify patterns and themes emergent in the conversations. Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behavior which can come from direct quotes and/or paraphrasing of common ideas (Aronson, 1995). Themes were identified based on three criteria: repetition, recurrence and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Repetition refers to the repeating of key words and/or phrases, while recurrence revealed the meaning of such themes, particularly when the same thought was expressed using different words. Forcefulness was determined by identifying shifts in vocal inflection, volume, and/or emphasis on words or phrases.

Themes that emerge from the participants’ responses were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience (Aronson, 1995). McCracken’s (1988)

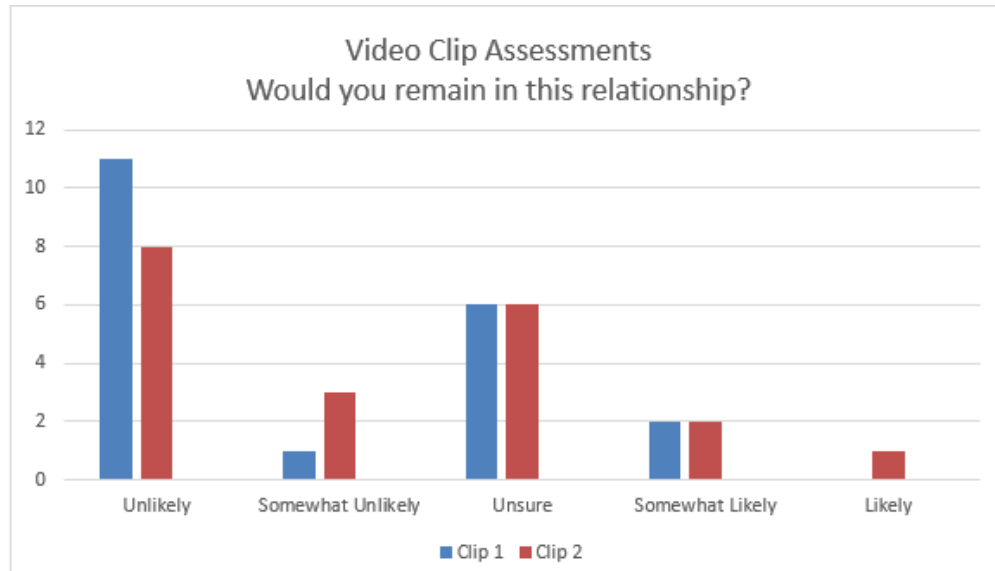
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guidelines were used to examine emerging themes within the data. Our analysis followed five steps: (1) initial sorting of information from unimportant data; (2) examination of pieces of data for logical relationships and contradiction; (3) rereading of transcripts to confirm or disconfirm relationships and the beginning of recognition of general properties within the data; (4) identification of general themes and sorting of the themes hierarchically; and (5) review of emergent themes for each transcript and determination of how these can be synthesized into themes (McCracken, 1988). The results of the thematic analysis are presented in the following section.

CHAPTER 4

Results

4.1 Quantitative Results



The research question asked, what is the correlation between exposure to hip-hop content and abusive behaviors in African American romantic relationships. To analyze this question, a Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was performed which measures the strength and direction of association between two ranked variables. The two variables tested were the number of hours spent listening and viewing hip-hop media and the participant's personal assessment of abuse in clip 1 and 2. As previously stated, the average number of hours spent listening to hip-hop music was 3-5 hours weekly, while the average number of hours spent viewing hip-hop media was 1-2 hours weekly. There was no significant effect found between the number of hours spent listening to hip-hop media and participants' perceptions of abuse in clip 1, $r(20) = .191, p > .05$), or between the number of hours spent viewing hip-hop media and perceptions of abuse in clip 1, $r(20) = .224, p > .05$). There was also no significant effect found between the number of hours spent

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listening to hip-hop media and participants' perceptions of abuse in clip 2, $r(20) = .242$, $p > .05$), or between the number of hours spent viewing hip-hop media and perceptions of abuse in clip 2, $r(20) = .258$, $p > .05$).

4.2 Qualitative Results

The questions asked during focus groups and interviews were categorized into two types: Thematic and demographic. Questions that were categorized as demographic gave a general consensus of how the participants felt about certain topics. Questions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9 were identified as demographic and were generally answered with closed ended (yes or no) answers. Questions that were categorized as thematic had emerging themes that were further explored. Questions 1, 6, 7, 8 and 10 were identified as thematic. Five emerging themes were identified: loyalty, community reflection, betrayal, relationship goals, and communication. A breakdown of each theme will now be further discussed.

4.2.1 Loyalty

The single most repetitious and recurrent theme discovered in the data was the idea of loyalty in African American relationships. Its importance was reflected in a multitude of answers. The participants stressed, in a variety of ways, that loyalty is not only important in African American relationships, but it is reflected heavily in hip-hop media. The first question asked during the focus group discussions and interviews was "What does it mean to be 'ride or die'?" Many of the participants responded with definitions of the hip-hop term, many of which included the idea of loyalty in the answer. An example of the types of responses were: "*Someone who sticks with you through thick and thin no matter the*

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situation.” “Loyalty in whatever decision or actions that the person is involved.” and, “Someone that always has your back; no matter what.”

It is important to note that the idea of loyalty in relation to hip-hop media and African American relationships was not exclusively positive. Many explained that hip-hop media has enforced the negative notion of remaining loyal to abusive partners as expectation. In much of the commentary, the participants discussed the various ways in which African American women are expected to remain loyal and available to men, regardless of the situational factors involved (i.e., incarceration, fathering outside children, betrayal, etc.). One respondent expressed this idea in her statement that said:

“The definition is always displayed in hip-hop media. I think the term was derived from the hip-hop culture. You always see males in the hip-hop industry that have gotten into legal trouble and their significant others who stick by them through court cases and even jail time.”

Question one was not the only question that elicited a response that reflected loyalty as a central theme. When asked if the term “ride or die” was a compliment, many participants responded with the answer “yes”, and when asked to list some of the challenges faced in African American romantic relationships, loyalty and commitment were among the listed.

4.2.2 Community Reflections: Violence, Upbringing/Environment, & Lack of Resources

The second theme identified in the data was the idea of community reflections displayed in hip-hop media. Many of the participants asserted that hip-hop media tends to reflect the upbringing and environment of many African Americans, making it very relatable. Question six asked, “When listening to hip-hop music, how do you identify with the experiences of the characters in the song?” Respondents specifically identified with

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themes such as violence, police brutality, and lack of resources within the community as relatable concepts conveyed in hip-hop media. Many responded with answers that reflected this theme, such as: *“How I grew up was very reminiscent of their [hip-hop’s] stories of typical hood life”* and *“I mean, I grew up in the ninth ward in east New Orleans and all I saw was violence. I’d go to sleep to police sirens. I’d see fights in school. I was around all kinds of stuff.”*

When discussing challenges faced in African American relationships, a forceful theme of lack of resources and upbringing were identified. Many of the participants identified that lack of education, lack of positive role models, and the absence of seeing healthy, vibrant relationships in their upbringings were significant factors that directly affect African American romantic relationships. When asked what some of the challenges faced in African American romantic relationships are, one participant responded:

“Breaking the cycle that one grew up in. A lot of African Americans grew up in single parent households or broken marriages (where usually the husband cheated on the wife and going as far as to have multiple outside children). They never really grew up with having a representation of what it’s like to have healthy relationship and how those are fostered.”

4.2.3 Betrayal

Betrayal was the third forceful and recurrent theme that emerged in the data. When asked how the participants identify with experiences of the characters in hip-hop shows, cheating was the first answer that many named. The idea of being cheated on and/or betrayed within a relationship is a central theme in hip-hop media, and the participants expressed that the scenes that depict betrayal are not only realistic, but they have or have

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known someone who has experienced the same. In her comments about cheating, one respondent stated:

“And unfortunately, in today's society, black women's worth has been valued as how much pain she's able to endure and willing to endure at the hands of her man, which I think is unacceptable and we should change that. But if you are not the type that will stick around, be around for everything, a man will treat you like you're unworthy in a sense.”

Many agreed with her comments and asserted that this theme was not only present in hip-hop media, but within the African American community as a whole. In the listing of challenges faced within African American romantic relationships, betrayal was mentioned repeatedly. The notion of pain equaling worth was also mentioned again, citing that misplaced values within the African American community influenced this idea that long suffering in relationships is sure to reap rewards.

4.2.4 Relationship Goals: Longevity, Positive Image, & Success

Relationship characteristics were identified as the fourth theme in the data. Specifically, longevity, positive images, and success were all highly revered in the discussions of relationships within hip-hop. Couples within hip-hop that exemplify these attributes were praised during the discussions, and many participants revealed that they too strived to have relationships like these examples. When explicitly asked if they aimed to have relationships like the ones they hear of in hip-hop songs, the single most repeated answer was Beyoncé and Jay-Z. Majority of the participants identified their relationship as an example of the standard to strive for in romantic relationships. Reasons such as overcoming obstacles, forgiveness, success, and the image of the power couple were listed.

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One respondent summed up Beyoncé and Jay-Z's relationship by saying: "*We could work through it [problems]. I can't for sure say yes, but money makes the world go round and I would love to be successful with my partner. Money makes it easier to forgive indiscretions.*" The idea of success playing a role in the determination of what is and isn't accepted within a relationship was brought up more than once. A respondent stated in the course of the discussion, "*You can't be broke and a cheater!*" While success was not the only factor that the participants strived for, it was certainly listed as an aspect of hip-hop relationships that was considered positive.

Many other hip-hop couples were listed among those to strive for, including Ice Cube and his wife (Kimberly Woodruff) and Snoop and his wife (Shante Broadus). The idea of positive imagery in relationships was another important aspect of the respondents' answers. They identified feelings of these relationships being a positive image within the African American community not only for their longevity but for appearance of the strong family unit. Many tied this back to the second theme of community reflection. For example, many of the participants felt as if these relationships became surrogate examples that filled the void of growing up seeing successful African American relationships.

4.2.5 Communication

The final theme that emerged from the data was communication practices within the African American community. Many participants identified that there is a lack of communication taking place in many African American relationships, thus exacerbating pre-existing challenges that are already faced. This forceful theme was most prevalently discussed in question 10, "What are some of the challenges faced in African American romantic relationships?" Participants expressed the communication factor both explicitly

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by saying, “*there is a lack of communication*” and in more nuanced ways by alluding to “*being led on [by romantic partners] and not making intentions clear.*”

It is also important to note that the theme of communication was discussed, not explicitly in relation to romantic relationships, but within African American communities as a whole. Many participants identified that the lack of healthy communication is often present within the community and that many African Americans are unwilling and/or are unlikely to seek help for it. Phrases such as, “*We don’t know how to express our feelings*” and “*We refrain from expressing our feelings out of fear of being judged, like the angry black woman stereotype*” were evident in the discussions.

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Discussion

5.1 Implications

The overarching objective of this study was to examine the effects of hip-hop's influence in the African American community, as perceived by African American/black women. The research question asked: What is the correlation between exposure to hip-hop content and abusive behaviors in African American romantic relationships? While quantitative measures did not support correlation in answering this question, from the qualitative analysis, the participants stated that factors such as upbringing and environment play a much larger role in determining whether abuse of any kind is accepted within a relationship. This is directly related to hip-hop because hip-hop has been and continues to be representative of the urban African American experience. As discussed in the literature review (Anderson, 1994), many of the social ills that go on in inner-city life are expressed in the artform. Hip-hop is merely a reflection of what is seen and heard in many African American communities across the country.

Due to the presence of these factors within the African American community, many of the participants had conflicting beliefs. Participants would discuss certain topics with valor and then later, answer related questions with answers that seem to discredit the first, thereby displaying a level of cognitive dissonance. For example, in focus group one, several of the participants considered being "ride or die" as a negative thing. However, when later asked in question nine if they strived to have relationships like those depicted on hip-hop television shows, they each responded with relationships that were classic "ride or die" situations. Respondent 1 responded to question 2, "Is being considered ride or die a compliment?", by stating,

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“To me no, but in hip-hop yes. Juelz and Kimbella’s relationship is a good example. She stuck around through the cheating and it paid off. She got the ring. He married her because he’s going to prison but, to her, it’s a compliment. Like, oh yeah, I got the trophy. I won and I beat y’all [other women].”

Respondent 1 later answered question 9, “Do you strive to have romantic relationships like the ones you watch on hip-hop television shows?”, by stating,

“There are some positive examples of relationships, like Remy and Pap [Remy Ma and Papoose]. Pap gets a pass on cheating on her because she [Remy] was locked up for a long time. So yes, I would strive to have a relationship like theirs.”

Other respondents in group one identified couples Gucci Mane and Keyshia Ka’oir (Keyshia remained with Gucci while he served a 2-year prison sentence) and Bambi and Scrappy (Bambi remained loyal as Scrappy cheated multiple times before marrying her) as relationships that they strived for with their partners.

Cognitive dissonance is the [mental discomfort](#) (psychological stress) experienced by a person who holds two or more contradictory [beliefs](#), [ideas](#), or [values](#) (Festinger, 1957). While this discomfort was originally believed to be attributed to the inner beliefs of the individual experiencing the conflict, updated research suggests an additional factor. Cognitive dissonance and the psychological character of the motivation for cognitive change can be interpreted as a need to preserve self-esteem (Greenwald, Ronis, & Estes, 1975). This was most notably visible in the focus group setting as many of the participants were aware that their answers might elicit judgement. Often times, participants would interrupt the flow of the conversation to ask each other questions about answers that were given. While this furthered the conversation in some respects, I suspect it may have hindered it in others.

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Further evidence of the presence of cognitive dissonance emerged from the qualitative analysis of the focus group and interview discussions versus the personal assessment of the video clips. Clip 1 depicted character Joe Budden having a discussion with his wife Cyn Santana regarding her mental health and feelings of neglect. He is terribly cold and dismissive. He curses at her and minimizes her feelings, while asserting that his work is more important than “dealing” with her “problems”. In response to the scene, 40% (collectively) responded with ‘not sure’ or ‘likely’ when asked if they would remain in the relationship. Examples of responses solicited from this clip include:

Respondent 3: *“He seems willing to move forward and try to make things better. As long as there is a will there’s a way.”*

Respondent 4: *“Did not see enough to tell who was in the wrong. From watching the clip, it seems like the boyfriend was trying to do his best to help.”*

Respondent 5: *“He’s manipulative, but I see love among them and based on the clip, I would try to work through some of these issues.”*

Respondent 12: *“But I do feel it should be a common ground to talk.”*

Respondent 13: *“Yes I would stay, but not if it continued.”*

Respondent 14: *“Joe is willing to address the main problem – her depression. However, it doesn’t seem as if he has the tools of the communication skills to make the appropriate changes.”*

This was also seen in the personal assessments of clip 2. The participants identified betrayal as not only a central theme of hip-hop, but a very real challenge within the African American community specifically in romantic relationships. Yet, when asked if they would remain in the relationship depicted (which contained evidence of habitual cheating and a dismissive attitude regarding the concern for disrespectful behaviors), a significant portion (45% combined) of the participants responded with ‘not sure’, ‘likely’, or ‘most likely’. An

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example of the statements that accompanied the participants' personal assessment are as follows:

Respondent 4: *"Their long history and many kids. I would be willing to work it out."*

Respondent 5: *"This is a long-standing relationship. I don't think I could just leave over something so petty; even though he is a cheater."*

Respondent 6: *"I agree with both people [in the clip]. Tiny is correct that he is wrong for cheating, but I feel that the public knowledge of the incident [is what is making her the most upset]."*

Respondent 7: *"I'm not sure because relationships aren't always perfect, but at the same time, certain things can't be taken back or you to move on."*

Respondent 11: *"They both have history and I think it can be worked out."*

Respondent 12: *"It all depends on the amount of love and time you spent with the person."*

These results pose an interesting question. Are African American women aware of the issues that plague their relationships, while continuing to subject themselves to it? And why are these issues known, yet dismissed or overlooked when faced with them in real-time? Perhaps the answer comes from The Mere Exposure Effect that we anticipated would explain the assumed positive correlation between number of hours viewed and listened to and the likelihood of acceptance of abusive behaviors. Again, this states that "the tendency for repeated exposure to a stimulus has been found to be sufficient in enhancing an observer's liking for it or attitude towards it" (Colman, 2015, p. 528). Perhaps the exposure is not directly attributed to the number of hours spent consuming hip-hop media per se, but the exposure of these behaviors based on upbringing, environment, and past experiences.

Another interesting fact that may be worth further exploring in future research is the fact that though the participants readily identified the negative aspects of hip-hop media that affect relationships, they still continue to be subscribers of it. For the participants who

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admitted to having no real connection in terms of identifying with the experiences heard of and seen in hip-hop media, they each stated that it was the “beat” that engaged them within a song. The same can be said for hip-hop media content on TV. Most of the participants adamantly conveyed that they generally had a negative opinion of the shows and their characters, yet 80% of the participants reported being viewers of the content. This may be a reaction based on the social stigma placed on hip-hop culture. While it is popular and profitable, it continues to be deemed as “ghetto”. Many of the participants began the conversations with statements, such as “*I don’t really watch it that much*” yet were able to participate in in-depth conversations about the themes, relationships, and drama of the shows. This may have had a direct effect on the reported number of hours spent viewing.

Finally, the focus group and interview discussions asked the participants to identify songs that were representative of the African American romantic relationship experience. A myriad of answers was given but above all others, Beyoncé and Jay-Z collaborations (Drunk in Love, Crazy In Love, 03 Bonnie & Clyde) were listed as the most representative. This is very consistent with the analysis of the relationship goals theme identified in the data. Although it was confirmed that Jay-Z at one point cheated on his wife Beyoncé, the way that the couple handled the scandal and have continued to present themselves as a power couple, resonates with the participants. Other songs listed were similarly consistent with the themes identified such as Fetty Wap’s *Trap Queen* (loyalty), Queen Naija’s *Medicine* (betrayal), and R Kelly’s *When a Woman’s Fed Up* (communication). This further confirms the notion that hip-hop is reflective of African American life and that it continues to represent African American experiences.

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5.2 Limitations and future research

While careful consideration has been given to the research practices to elicit an accurate insight to the questions posed, there are limitations to the study. The goal of this study was to examine the effects of hip-hop's influence in the African American community, as perceived by African American or black women. However, the sample size is small and might not be representative of the perceptions and experiences of all African American or black women. Also, the purposive sample was taken from a specific geographical location. Differing geographical locations may have an impact on the study's results. Future studies should consider a random sample collected from a greater surface area. Also, participants that were interviewed were much more open in the discussion than those in the focus groups. The focus group environment may have also encouraged groupthink to a certain degree in that participants may have felt judged if they did not agree with the majority. This was especially prevalent in the assessment of the video clips. Showing the video clips after the discussion made the participants hyper-aware of the themes presented in the clips. Perhaps future research may employ interviews only and present the clips prior to the discussion. Finally, for quantitative richness, a questionnaire that measured the presence of abusive behaviors within the participants' current or most recent relationship would have been useful. Future research could benefit from adding this variable into the study.

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Conclusion

With the intent of adding to the growing academic scholarship dedicated to African American communication, this study is important for many reasons. Interpersonal relationships are an integral part of life. Much of the scholarship dedicated to African American interpersonal relationships is rife with statistics that indicate a steady decline in family and marriage in many African American communities. Also, with social movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, it is important to explore the effects of media on the perception of abuse and violence. Many studies have been dedicated to explaining the effects of prolonged media exposure on audiences, but few have focused solely on hip-hop as a medium.

Founded in the 1970s, hip-hop has become not only the most popular musical genre of our time but has branched into other realms of entertainment. Though hip-hop can contain messages of peace, love, and self-worth as seen in the conscious rap genre, most of the commercially successful hip-hop media is riddled with misogyny and violence. With its roots grounded in the African American community, future research should continue to examine the correlation between the exposure to hip-hop content and social behaviors in African American romantic relationships.

Through its thematic analysis model, findings from this study revealed that loyalty, community reflection, betrayal, relationship goals, and communication were the themes identified by African American women as correlative topics between hip-hop media and African American relationships. While most of the participants were aware of the themes and challenges facing African American relationships/communities, it was determined that

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many experienced conflicting ideals. The recognition of abusive and toxic behaviors in hip-hop was not enough to make the participants avoid consuming hip-hop. Also, the participants still supported or strived for relationships that exhibited some of the abusive behaviors, as illustrated in hip-hop music and television shows. Financial status and years together proved to be an important factor in determining whether abusive behaviors would be tolerated. It is also important to note that exposure to hip-hop content was not the only factor that the participants identified as an influencer in relationships. Upbringing and environment of the parties involved, was identified as a good indication of what to expect in African American relationships.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Love and Hip-hop: An Examination of Hip-Hop Media Effects African American Romantic Relationships

You are invited to participate in a research study about the media effects of hip-hop music and television programming on romantic relationships among African Americans. This study is designed to help us to further our academic understanding of media effects' in relation to interpersonal communication.

The primary investigator is Latoya Binford, from The University of Alabama in Huntsville, CTC 212.

PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE STUDY: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Once written consent is given, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic survey, followed by a 20-25 min focus group session. This session in total will take approximately 30-40 mins. The focus group sessions will be recorded for transcription purposes. If any participant declines being recorded, she will not be used for the study.

DISCOMFORTS AND RISKS FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY: There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. However, if at any time you become uncomfortable in the session, please notify the researcher. Additionally, resources are available to each participant in the form of counseling support should you need it. The Counseling Center at UAH is located at Executive Plaza Bldg 200, Suite 208 and the phone number is 256-824-6203. The Counseling Center is available to all students. For participants that are not students at UAH, the Counseling Center is available to refer you to outside counseling resources through its various contacts throughout Huntsville and the surrounding areas.

EXPECTED BENEFITS: While there are no direct benefits to the participants, results from this study can benefit society by furthering our understanding of media effects in relation to interpersonal communication and human interactions.

INCENTIVES AND COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION: No monetary compensation will be given for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESULTS: You will be assigned a random participant number. Before speaking in the focus group session, please say your participant number. This number will assist the researcher in accurately transcribing the focus group data yet protecting your identity. Also, pseudonyms will be used for any direct quotes used in the final write up. This consent form and the demographic sheet will be kept in a locked file cabinet that only the PI and the supervising faculty can access. This consent form will be destroyed after 3 years. The data from your session will only be released to those individuals who are directly involved in the research and only using your participant number.

APPENDIX A

FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW: You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be penalized because of withdrawal in any form. Investigators reserve the right to remove any participant from the session without regard to the participant's consent.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions, please ask them now. If you have questions later on, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Latoya Binford, in person at the

University of Alabama in Huntsville Conference Training Center Rm 212, by phone at 256-824-6871 or by email

at ldt0002@uah.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Eletra Gilchrist-Petty, by email at eletra.gilchrist@uah.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the IRB (IRB) at 256.824.6992 or email the IRB chair Dr. Bruce Stallsmith at irb.@uah.edu.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at UAH and will expire in one year from <date of IRB approval>.

- I agree to be audio recorded during the focus group session
- I decline to be audio recorded during the focus group session

Name (Please Print)	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please circle ONE answer from each question listed below.

1. What is your age?
 - 18 – 24
 - 25 – 34
 - 35 – 44
 - 45 – 54
 - 55 or older

2. Do you consider Black, African American, or African as at least one of your primary identity markers in terms of race?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?
 - Married
 - Separated
 - Widowed
 - Divorced
 - Single, but cohabitating
 - Single, never married

4. Do you listen to Hip-hop music?
 - Yes
 - No

If you answered Yes, answer question 5; if you answered No, proceed to question 6.

5. Approximately, how many hours do you spend listening to Hip-hop music in an average week?
 - 0 – 2 hours
 - 3 – 5 hours
 - 6 – 8 hours
 - 9 or more hours

6. Do you watch Hip-hop television shows (e.g., *Love and Hip-hop*, *Love and Hip-Hop Atlanta*, *Empire*, etc.)?
 - Yes
 - No

If you answered Yes, answer question 7; if you answered No, you are done with the survey.

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7. Approximately, how many hours do you spend watching Hip-hop television shows (e.g., *Love and Hip-hop*, *Love and Hip-Hop Atlanta*, *Empire*, etc.) in an average week?
- None
 - 0 – 2 hours
 - 3 – 5 hours
 - 6 – 8 hours
 - 9 or more hours

For now, you are done filling out this survey. Please wait for instructions from the study facilitator before moving forward

8. If this were your relationship, on a scale of 1 - 5 (1= least likely; 5 = Most likely), how likely are you to remain in the relationship? Explain

Least Likely		Not Sure		Most Likely
1	2	3	4	5

9. If this were your relationship, on a scale of 1 - 5 (1= least likely; 5 = Most likely), how likely are you to remain in the relationship? Explain.

Least Likely		Not Sure		Most Likely
1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C
Focus Group Questions

1. What does it mean to be “ride or die”?
2. Is this definition displayed in hip-hop media? If so, how?
3. Is being considered “ride or die” a compliment in a romantic relationship? If so, why? If not, why?
4. What are some hip-hop songs that you feel are representative of the African American romantic relationship experience? Explain.
5. Are hip-hop shows like *Love and Hip-Hop* or *Empire* representative of real-life African American relationships? If so, why? If not, why?
6. When listening to hip-hop music, do you identify with the experiences of the characters in the song? If so, in what ways?
7. When watching hip-hop shows, do you identify with the experiences of the characters in the show? If so, in what ways?
8. Do you strive to have romantic relationships like the ones you hear about in hip-hop songs? If so, in what aspect?
9. Do you strive to have romantic relationships like the ones you watch on hip-hop television shows? If so, in what ways?
10. What are some of the challenges faced in African American romantic relationships?

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