Violent and Angry in the Age of Hip Hop: Exploring The Relationship between The Behavior and the Music

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Abstract

Hip hop has been found to have a profound impact on the pop culture in the United States and abroad.The lyrics in hip hop music have become more explicit in their reference to violence and aberrant behavior. The impact that the artform has on school aged students has become of paramount concern (Stewart, 2011).This research explored correlations between the hip hop music and proneness to violence and anger among adolescents. The sample included N=127 students in a rural Southern school district. The research yielded main effect differences and significant interactions.

Keywords: anger, violence, hip hop culture, adolescents, aggression, positive behavior supports in school

The United States Department of Justice (2017) foundthat students between the ages of 12-18 experienced victimizations a total of 749,400 times during the 2014-2015 school year. This included theft and nonfatal violent victimization at school. This meant for every 1,000 students, there were 29 victimizations at school. Away from school, 601,300 incidents of victimizations were counted during the 2014-2015 school year. For every 1,000 school aged students, there were 24 victimizations away from school. Numbers were found to be higher in male, than female, students. For every 1,000 male students, there were 38 victimizations compared to 20 for every 1,000 female students (USDOJ, 2017).

School based bullying has also been found to be a problem (USDOJ, 2017). Nationally, 22 percent of middle schools found that there was at least one incident of bullying every week during the 2015-2016 school year. During that same year, 15 percent of America's public high schools reported at least one incident of bullying every week. Eight percent of America's public elementary schools reported at least one bullying incident each week during the 2015-2016 school year (USDOJ, 2017).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) found that there were 47 staff, student and nonstudent-associated violent deaths between July 1, 2014, and June 30, 2015. This number included two legal intervention deaths, 17 suicides and28 homicides. Additionally, during the same time, there were 1,168 homicides of school-aged students(NCES, 2018).

Increased attention has been placed on child and adolescent violence and aggression (Stewart, 2011). To address the concern in public schools, officials have increased the presence of school safety resource and safety officers (NCES, 2018). In the 2005-2006 school year, 42 percent of public schools reported having security staff, compared to 57 percent during the 2015-2016 school year. Public schools also increased the presence of sworn law enforcement officers from 36 percent in the 2005-2006 school year to 48 percent in the 2015-2016 school year. Additionally, nearly 76 percent of public schools provided training for school personnel on issues related to bullying. Forty eight percent provided training related to identifying early warning signs for student antisocial behaviors and 30 percent provided training on addressing the use and abuse of substances (NCES, 2018).

Music and adolescence

During adolescence, music has been found to be very common and has often been considered a pleasurable activity (Stewart, 2011). In fact, some research has shown that music has been found to meet the developmental, emotional, and social needs of adolescents (Arnett, 1995; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Stewart, 2011). Music fascination is often lined to peer group formation (Arnett, 1995). Music has been known to create subcultures that make way for adolescents to form alternative cultural identities, ethos, and pathos (Arnett, 1995; Stewart, 2011).

Research found rap, or hip hop, (used interchangeably in this study) to have the propensity to negatively influence listeners (Rose, 1994). The research contended that adolescents who preferred rap music were at higher risks of poor academic achievement, delinquency, antisocial behaviors and substance use, than other adolescents.Hip hop music may be especially important for understanding adolescents' attitudes and behaviors toward increased violent and aggressive behavior, increased high-risk behaviors, including alcohol and tobacco use, and accelerated onset of sexual activity (Rose, 1994).

Several studies have documented a relationship between aggression and exposure to media violence (Bushman, Gollwitzer, & Cruz, 2015; Stewart, 2008;Stewart, 2011).Media and music have served as strong determinants that influence adolescent behavior (Brown, 2006; Stewart, 2011). Music portrays society, including aspects of one's environment. It has also met some aspects of adolescents' social and emotional needs (North et al., 2000; Stewart, 2008). Adolescents between 7th and 12th grades have been found to spend more than 10,000 hours listening to music before graduating high school (Stewart, 2008). Hip hop has been found to impact the cognitions and social and emotional development of African American adolescents (Yasin, 1999; Brown, 2006; Stewart, 2011).

Counselors, educators and psychologists have been found to have a growing interest in understanding the impact of hip hop music on the social and emotional development of adolescents (Brown, 2006; Stewart, 2011). The genre,and its impact on shaping the thinking, learning and behaving of adolescents, has often been found at the center of many debates. While it may be common knowledge that hip hop is the music of choice for many adolescents, little is known about the perceptions and attitudes people hold toward the art form (Stewart, 2011).

The rap on hip hop

Across urban America, hip hop has often been considered a standard by which youth have been found to live (Stewart, 2011). Hip hop lyrics are often laced with messages about drugs, sex and violence against women (Brown, 2006; Stewart, 2011). A preference forthis artform has been found to be an early warning indicator for onset antisocial behaviors in adolescents (Stewart, 2011; USDOJ, 2018).

Hamilton (2010) posited that hip hop was initially meant to keep kids off the streets and provide an avenue for kids to channel energies into what could become a positive pastime. Moreover, this art form was intended to reduce the number of kids who became involved in gang activities.

The words of rap music are recited and describe the violence of gang life (Thompson & Larson, 1994). The lyrics in rap music challenge restrictive middle-class values, especially those dealing with drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity and thoughts or acts of antisocial behavior. Rap music is one genre that, more than others, is identified as particularly glorifying and encouraging the use of alcohol, other substances and violence (Herd, 2005). Rap music is used by many advertisers to promote products targeted for urban teens and young adults (Atikson &Halliday, 2003). Moreover, many rap musicians are involved in promoting alcoholic beverages. Malt liquor is portrayed as the gangsta drink of choice in rap music and is associated in popular culture with drug use, underage drinking, misogyny, violence and irresponsible sex (Alaniz and Wilkes, 1998). Misogynistic lyrics, profane language of gangsta rap are criticized for potential detrimental influences on youth, resulting in calls for self-discipline from gangsta rap musicians (Rule, 1994; Toop, 1991).Yet, the trend in American hip hop music for the last decade has been to promote ever more vile, deviant, and sociopathic behaviors (Stewart, 2011).

Social Learning Theory

A primary focus of child development is Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. The theory emphasized the process of learning and forming behavior through instruction or observation of others. Bandura purported that children often model the behaviors they see and hear. Through social learning theory, Bandura contended that children imitate the behaviors and actions of adults and peers they hold in high regard (Bandura, 1986). His social learning theory posited that individuals either accept or reject pictures and thoughts by watching other groups engage in unique experiences and activities (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura (1986) formulated four central processesrequired for social learning: Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and Motivation. The process of Attention occurs when the observed model or behavior is unique or favorable to the individual. The individual is most likely to make the observed model or behavior the focus of their attention. The process of Retention occurs when the individual makes use of the information acquired through direct experience or observation. The observed information is symbolized and coded, and then kept in memory for the individual. The process of Reproduction occurs when the individual can reproduce or perform learned information. This process could include an individual performing a learned behavior until it is similar to the model's behavior. The process of Motivation occurs when external stimuli or reinforcement influences the performance of learned behavior. If the learned behavior is rewarded, the individual is likely to perform it (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986).

Social learning theory postulated how hip hop music plays a role in the socialization of adolescent behavior (Oredein, 2013). According to social learning theory, children learn vicariously by observing individuals perform behaviors and receive resulting rewards or punishments, which makes the observer more or less likely to perform the modeled behaviors. Therefore, if violence is repeatedly used to resolve conflict in hip hop music, adolescents may learn to use violent behaviors when encountering conflict in their own lives(Oredein, 2013).

Stewart (2011) argued that hip hop artists and rappers influence adolescent behavior. Hip hop music provides plenty of opportunities for modeling through lyrics and music videos. Harakeh and Ter Bogt (2018) explained that hip hop music artists function as role models, and adolescents may imitate these high-status role models. These models provide examples of behavior to observe and imitate. Adolescents may model the behavior regardless of whether the behavior is appropriate, but social learning theory processes make it more likely that a child will imitate the behavior that is found to be the social norm (Bandura, Ross, & Ross 1961).

Method

Participants

The sample for this study was 127 students in a rural southeast Louisiana high school. The students reported spending an average of 12.6 hours per week listening to hip hop music and 10.9 hours per week watching hip hop on television.

Table 1 Demographics of Participants

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Female	61	48
Male	66	52
Race		
African American	90	70.9
Caucasian	35	27.6
Latino/Latina	2	1.6
Age		
14	13	10.2
15	36	28.3
16	36	28.3
17-20	42	33.1

Grade level		
9	37	29.1
10	45	35.4
11	25	19.7
12	20	15.7

Note: The total number was 127 participants.

Instrumentation

Adolescent Psychopathology Scale-Short Form™

The Adolescent Psychopathology Scale-Short Form™ (APS-SF) (Reynolds, 2000) is a multidimensional measure of adolescent psychopathology and personality characteristics. There are 12 clinical scales and two validity scales on the instrument. Six of the clinical scales assess for DSM criteria associated with conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse disorder.The remaining clinical scales are not aligned to DSM criteria, but assess eating disturbance, suicide, academic problems, anger/violence proneness, self-concept, and interpersonal problems. The anger and proneness to violence subscale was the only subscale used for this study.

Table 2. Clinical Significance of Participants relative to Anger and Proneness to Violence

Variable	N	%
Mild Clinical	23	18.1
Moderate Clinical	9	7.1
Severe Clinical	4	3.1
No clinical score	91	71.7

Note: The total number was 127 participants.

Self-Developed Instrument

Each subject also completed a demographic profile, where subjects self-reportedage, current academic grade, current grade point average, gender and race. Each participant also self-reported the number of hours spent consuming hip hop music.

The study used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test differences between variables.

Results

The main effect of student age on anger and proneness to violence was significant ($F(3, 127)=2.751$, $p=.047$) (See Table 3).This finding suggested that the younger students presented with more anger and proneness to violence than older students. There was also a main effect difference on race and anger and proneness to violence ($F(2, 127)=6.444$, $p=.002$) (See Table 3).This finding suggested that African American students presented with higher rates of anger and proneness to violence than students from other ethnic backgrounds.

Table 3. ANOVA Results:

Source	df	F	p
Age	3	2.75	.047
Race	2	6.444	.002

Note: Main effects were evaluated with $p \leq .05$.

There was a significant interaction between exposure to hip hop and race($F (3, 127)=2.908$, $p=.038$) (See Table 4). This finding suggested that African American students who spent 11-15 hours viewing hip hop music presented with the greater amount of anger and violence proneness. There wasalso significant interaction between exposure to hip hop music and grade point average ($F (2, 127)=4.726$, $p=.011$).

This finding suggested that students with a grade point average of 2.0 or below, spent 6-10 hours viewing music and 16-50 listening to music reported higher rates of anger and proneness to violence than students with higher grade point averages.

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Table 4 ANOVA Results:

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Source	df	F	p
Race	3	2.908	.038
GPA	3	4.726	.011

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Note: Significant interactions were evaluated with $p \leq .05$.

Discussion

The literature has documented that adolescents are not passive consumers of the hip hop phenom (Tyson, 2002; Brown, 2006; Stewart, 2011). A Kaiser Family Foundation study (2007) found that large majority of mothers contended that violent messages in hip hop music served as a pathway to violent school behavior in their children. The art form is ever present in their lives. It is also a fact that there is a constant increase in aberrant and antisocial behaviors among adolescents. These behaviors are just not present at home. Schools are seeing a manifestation of the behaviors as well. In school, it can present as repeated office discipline referrals, failing grades, lack of motivation, drug use, defiant, just to name a few. Several research studies have documented increased exposure to hip hop has the propensity to desensitize adolescents and perpetuate violent responses to stimuli (Stewart, 2011; Brown, 2006; Ballad & Coates, 1995).

This investigation found that there is a relationship between increased exposure to hip hop music and anger and proneness to violence in some adolescents. The results support the thesis that anger and proneness to violence increased as exposure to hip hop music increased. Grades, age, and race were all statistically significant factors. These findings best support Bandura's social learning theory. To the sounds of hip hop music, those men—mostly Black—brag about their firepower, sometimes in rhyming couplets. They also threaten their enemies in trades laced with the "n-word" and occasionally insult the police. Sometimes hip hop artists empty complete ammunition clips into the air. The 'gangsta" videos often visit the neighborhoods where violence is brewing, sometimes illustrating the blight where some residents live. At other times, there is no pretense at documentary realism. It is all scary, gun-toting posturing. From this, the listeners begin to imitate the behaviors they see and hear the hip hop artists sing and rap about.

Increasing student achievement is a research drive at the heart of educators, psychologists, parents and policy makers, as the work continues to investigate what determines academic outcomes of learners. Studies have found that academic performance and antisocial behavior were inversely related (Stewart, 2011; Stewart, 2008; Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998; Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Specifically, students who present with the most aberrant behavior are also the ones who have the poorest academic performance (Stewart, 2011; Brown, 2006). This is can be explained from the notion noncompliant and abnormal behavior in the classroom impedes learning. These students will often spend less time on task than their nondeviant peers (Stewart, 2011; Shinn, Ramsey, Walker,O'Neill, & Steiber, 1987). Another consistent finding is that students who are found to present with antisocial behaviors in school will also have several academic deficiencies. When students are continuously removed from class, they will miss the instruction. When instruction is missed, it is likely that the students will not be able to perform the academic tasks put before them during the assessment process.

Implications for School Mental Health Providers

Many contend that school-based violence is out of control and that school officials are not appropriately managing the issues related to the antisocial behavior in the schools (Clark, 2018). In fact, some say that officials are dealing with the issue poorly (Clark, 2018). The schools' lack of success in managing this behavior is being criticized.

Research found that aggressive, antisocial behavior among children is not just a phase to be outgrown; antisocial behavior in early childhood is the most accurate predictor of delinquency in adolescence; children who present with antisocial behaviors as early as three or four years of age; if an antisocial behavior pattern is not altered by the end of third grade, it can become chronic, only to be "managed" through supports and interventions; and prevention and early intervention. The aforementioned have been found as best hopes to divert children from this developmental trajectory (Clark et al., 2014; Walker et al., 1995).

One key first step is to understand the massive amounts of media that adolescents are exposed to daily. Coordinated school system efforts can help divert many children from antisocial behavior, keeping them in school and out of the juvenile justice system. In every school, three types of students can be identified: typical students not at risk, students with an elevated risk, and students who have already developed antisocial behavior patterns.

A three-tiered strategy of prevention and intervention is the most efficient way to head off potential problems and address existing ones.

School-wide primary prevention activities may include teaching conflict resolution, emotional literacy and anger management skills on a school-wide, or universal basis. Such interventions have the potential, not only to establish a positive school climate, but to divert students mildly at risk of antisocial behaviors. Primary prevention can avert 75 percent to 85 percent of student adjustment problems (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Barrington &Hendricks, 1989).

Many students who do not respond to primary prevention will respond to more individualized secondary prevention efforts, including behavioral or academic support, mentoring, and skill development. Thesesecondary prevention strategies also include small-group social-skills lessons, behavioral contracting, check-in/check-out, specialized tutoring, remedial programs, counseling, and mentoring.

Students with persistent patterns of antisocial behavior require more intensive interventions and can benefit from intensive individualized services that involve families, community agency personnel, educators, administrators, and support staff working collaboratively to meet the immediate needs of the child. These strategies require comprehensive assessments of the problem, and involve flexible, comprehensive, and sustained interventions (Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker, &Kaufman, 1996; America's Promise Alliance and its Center for Promise, 2014).

Limitations

The study's findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the sample was taken from a population in rural southeast Louisiana. Thus, all the results of this study are not generalizable to a larger adolescent population outside of the area. Future investigators should replicate this investigation with a considerably larger sample and in other geographical areas to confirm or refute the results. Moreover, the sample used for this research was limited to one public school. A larger study may yield a higher range of results. Significant limitations to the current study include limitations created by thenature of data collection. All measures were self-report and depend on the willingness ofparticipants to disclose the true levels.

Another limitation was that the researchers could not attach personal interpretation of the adolescents' responses. It was assumed that allparticipants understood the questions being asked. This may not have been true, and some participants very well may have answered without full knowledge of what was being asked.

Future Research Implications

With the steady increase in rates of violence among children and adolescents, and their increase exposure to these incidents, it has been imperative that more research into understanding the developmental paths of early antisocial behavior is called for, and much effective treatment approaches for antisocial behavior in children and adolescents are encouraged. This study identifies a statistical positive relationship between exposure to hip hop music and the development of antisocial behaviors in adolescents. However, many questions still need to be addressed if there is ever to be a full understanding of these developmental trajectories on adolescents.

This is a significant topic that has not received adequate research attention, but certainly needs further exploration. This further exploration requires that appropriate measures be designed to better search out the possible relationship in question. A study that could determine if adolescents gained certain aspects of their identity, such as clothing styles, vernacular and slang, feelings about society and politics, and opinions on the creation of an identity. Further, it is possible that a qualitative study is needed to establish a foundation for the exploration of a link between antisocial behavior and hiphop music.

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