MUSICAL INTERACTIONS: GIRLS WHO LIKE AND USE RAP MUSIC FOR EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper builds upon a new era of research seeking to understand variability in how desirable outcomes result from engaging rap music as a health enhancing artifact. More specifically, the study explores the music mediated pathways to individual and community well-being. The study emphasizes female music engagement. Quantitative methods are used to examine listening habits and preferences associated with empowering rap music engagement among a female sample of 202 university students using an a priori established path analysis model. Results echo prior research that suggests the functional value of music in helping to define the self independently and articulate one's social identity within the context of community (Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2009; Hill, 2009; Travis & Bowman, 2012). Specifically, results suggest that among females in this sample, (a) their appropriation of rap music can be empowering, (b) specific factors play a significant role in determining the difference between females that feel more or less empowered from their interactions with rap music, and (c) female listeners were more likely to appropriate rap music for personal and community growth if it was their favorite music type, if they listened often, and if they tended to listen alone more often than with friends. These research findings offer promising routes for more in depth qualitative analysis to help uncover the nuances of preferred engagement strategies and to help define the subjective lived experiences that lead to feeling empowered by music to act toward positive change for oneself and others. Practical results indicate the possibility for gender-specific education, therapeutic or empowerment- based programs that utilize rap music as a rubric.

Keywords: Rap; hip hop; symbolic interaction; gender; identity; youth

INTRODUCTION

While rap music has grown in popularity and social impact, an unmistakable stigma exists about the portrayal of women and girls within some of the music. Misogyny, violence, and unhealthy attitudes about interpersonal relationships are prominent in the lyrics, marketing, and distribution of mainstream rap music (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2009; Herd, 2009; Rose, 2008; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Empirical work to determine potential detrimental effects of all music genres exist in the literature (Allen et al., 2007; Hennessy, Bleakley, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2009; Mulder et al., 2010), but there is particular scrutiny of rap music's influence on youth and adolescents (Schneider, 2011). These concerns heighten because of both opportunities and vulnerabilities present as youth and young adults negotiate psychosocial development and increased auton- omy in decision-making, both having potential to influence lifelong health and well-being (Ben-Shlomo & Kuh, 2002; Clarke, et al., 2014; Saarikallio, 2011; Shlafer et al., 2014). The developmental sensitivity of this period regarding physiological growth, emotions, identity and self-image, indivi- duation, and social cohesion not only makes music use that is functionally related to these areas meaningful in the moment but also meaningful as a lifelong source of fuel for empowerment (Rentfrow, 2012; Travis & Leech, 2013).

Beyond value in everyday listening, evidence also continues to mount in education, therapy/counseling, and out-of-school time (OST) settings that effective integration of *rap* music and hip-hop culture within activities can be empowering, and help improve the health and well-being of young people (Alvarez, 2012; Hill & Petchauer, 2013; Lightstone, 2012; Prier & Beachum, 2008; The Wallace Foundation, 2008; Tyson, 2002; Tyson, Detchkov, Eastwood, Carver, & Sehr, 2012).

While general examinations of "health" and "well-being" are often associated with an individual's emotions, attitudes, choices, behaviors, and physical status, there is another body of literature that seeks to examine both the larger symbols and symbolism apparent in health and well-being, as well as the subsequent interaction-effects according to the symbols and symbolism. Symbolic interactionism is a scholarly approach to understanding

the cognitive process by which man interacts with his social and physical environment through various tools, i.e. language (symbols), gestures, and signs, in such a manner that he is able to incorporate the ideas of others and past experiences into his unique knowledge system and, thus, to use this information in various situations which demand unique and creative responses. (Knott, 1974, p. 6)

Specific to this study, the examination of the symbolic interactions between listeners and musical lyrics will be tested by examining four research questions for female listeners:

1. What is the association between favorite music type and empowering rap music engagement?
2. Is the amount of time spent listening to rap music associated with empowering rap music engagement?
3. Does the social context of listening relate to empowering rap music engagement?
4. Which factors have the greatest significance in their association with empowering rap music engagement when controlling for other factors?

While research about rap music and gender has examined influences on identity and risky behavior within women and girls (Hunter, 2011; Peterson, Wingwood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2007), limited research exists about the potential for empowering rap music engagement. Emergent research on the functional uses of music in general (Chin & Rickard, 2012; Juslin, Liljestrom, Laukka, Vastfjall, & Lundqvist, 2011; Saarikallio, 2011), and the empowering uses of rap music (Travis, 2013; Travis & Bowman, 2011, 2012), suggests there are desirable outcomes relevant to females at the individual and community levels (Table 1). Unlike most traditional studies that incorporate a symbolic interactionist

Table 1. The Individual and Community Empowerment Framework Includes Interrelated Dimensions of Self and Community Improvement: *Esteem, Resilience, and Growth* for Individual Empowerment, and *Community and Change* for *Community Empowerment*.

Individual Empowerment (Person)			Community Empowerment (Environment)	
Esteem: To feel better	*Resilience*: To do better	*Growth*: To be better	*Community*: A better sense of belonging within a community	*Change*: Better conditions for a community

Source: Adapted from Travis and Deepak (2011).
Note: The framework bridges person and environment, for the ongoing goals of psychosocial development across the lifespan.

approach, a statistical path analysis method was utilized to understand how the symbolism of rap lyrics interacts with female empowerment. This study contributes to existing research by identifying factors most closely associated with positive health and well-being for women and girls via empowering rap music engagement.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

At the core of Symbolic Interactionism is the relationship amongst (a) the self, (b) interpretation and understanding of the social cues and symbols derived from one's social setting, and (c) the subsequent interactions developed and performed within the social setting. While there has been significant debate regarding Max Weber's influences on the early formation of Symbolic Interaction Theory (Platt, 1985; Prus, 1996; Segre, 2014), coupled with acknowledging the early influences of Dewey (1922) and James (1890), the earliest examination of the phenomenological approach which becomes "symbolic interactionism" is often associated with Cooley and his presentation of the "looking-glass self" (1902) and the "primary group" (1909). Generally, Cooley was attempting to construct the individual as a reflective, reflexive "self" that was developed and reinforced through social groups. His notion of the "looking-glass self" suggests that an individual's under- standing of self is constructed within interactions with others and the reflection of others that are placed back upon the individual. It is the combination of how the individual sees herself, how she perceives that others see her, and how this interplay shapes social interactions.

Additionally, Cooley's view of "primary groups" as an intimate, interperso-nal foundation for shaping interactional development explained the posi-tion by which the reflexive self is formed.

Mead (1934) expounds on how these interpersonal interactions, provided "an opportunity for the individual to carry on internal conversa- tions in reference to an environment that has symbolic meanings and that influences the self" (Smith & Bugni, 2006, p. 125). More specific to our study, Mead considers not only how individuals interact with one another but also how inanimate objects, as well as the larger social setting itself (the "gesture"), can influence how a person behaves, interacts, and con-templates self. Moreover, he includes the notion of an "internal dialogue" being as essential to the construction of self as the external interactions among individuals. To this point, Mead (1934) suggests that the self con-tains distinctions between the "I" and "me" that play out in an internal dialogue. The "me" is characterized by larger group characteristics and standards that become internalized by the individual, while the "I" is the individualized response to the influences of the "me." Furthermore, Mead (1934) contends that the construction of individual identity is formed through a copious, ongoing process of an internal dialogue between the "me" and the "I."

Finally, Herbert Blumer, who most famously originated the term "symbolic interaction," presented the three premises that have been "canonized" within symbolic interactionism. First, Blumer (1969) states that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them" (p. 2). Similar to his predecessors, Blumer indicates that the symbo- lism of objects, actions, and interactions contain meaning beyond a cur- sory, peripheral understanding. Second, he states, "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (p. 2). Here, Blumer asserts that these meanings cannot be derived while isolated; rather, they must be constructed and internalized through the process of interaction. Finally he explains, "These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (p. 2). Here, he main- tains that interpretation is equally essential to comprehension within the encounter.

Overall, the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism provides the foundation for not only examining the manner in which individuals interpret the larger meaning of interactions among other individuals, but also how inanimate objects (e.g., music) and the symbols associated with the interaction can additionally influence the formation of a reflexive self.

Symbolic Interactionism and Music

There is a recent, yet rich analysis of the manner(s) in which music listenership and music consumption in an interactive setting can influence a reflexive self (Aldredge, 2006; Bessett, 2006; Martin, 2006; Roy & Dowd, 2010). In explaining the contribution of symbolic interactionism to the study of popular music, Kotarba explains that "the most important, lasting, and influential contribution symbolic interactionism can make is the power of both its concepts and its procedures for creating concepts" (2006, p. 2). While the basic concepts for music can be the lyrics, melodies and setting, the creation of concepts can include the internalization and reflexivity that is associated with the interaction to the lyrics, melodies, and setting. DeNora (2000) describes the process of concept creation by identifying how music marks important aspects of listeners' lives, how those moments are interpreted and internalized, and how social and personal activities are negotiated. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the relationship to the greater meaning of music engagement becomes a point of analysis. Koelsch adds to this conversation with exploration of the specific neural pathways associated with music's evocation of emotion and subsequent meaning making, attitudes and resultant behaviors (Koelsch, 2015).

While scholarly examples of symbolic interactionism and music have been demonstrated for rock music (Bessett, 2006), heavy metal (Halnon, 2006; Kotarba & Wells, 1987; Rafalovich, 2006), punk rock (Davis, 2006), and swing (Renshaw, 2006), it can be argued that understanding the role of symbolic interactionism and lyrics is critical to the genre of rap music.

RAP MUSIC AND HIP-HOP CULTURE

Hip-hop culture is a complex system of values, artifacts, and practice elements that is worldwide in its popularity and incredibly diverse in its application (Harper, 2008, p. 5). Rap music, driven by emceeing and deejaying/music production, is a subset of the five core elements of hip-hop culture (i.e., emceeing, deejaying/production, graffiti, b-boying and b-girling, and knowledge of self). Rap music and the rest of the culture have shifted from being regionalized phenomena in U.S. cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Houston, to a multi-billion dollar, global, economic industry (Chang, 2005; Charnas, 2011; Rose, 2008; Stewart, 2006).

A consistent theme among hip-hop's cultural values is the negotiation of identity and the contexts that shape identity (Crawford, Grant, & Crews, 2014; Hill, 2009; Travis, 2015; Travis, 2016). The goal is often improvement, self and/or community improvement. A recognition exists that improvement is subjective, and perspectives may vary widely as to whether an individual's efforts toward self-improvement are more helpful or harmful, more empow- ering or risky (Travis & Deepak, 2010). Hip-hop culture also often offers a voice for youth "developing an individual political consciousness, and orga- nizing among other youth for social and political change" (Clay, 2012, p. 94). Travis (2016) offers a detailed examination of how hip-hop culture is integrated within a wide range of professional practices such as education, mental health, physical health, and out-of-school time programming. The intensely personal and identity-centric nature of hip hop makes the boundary between personal use and professional use fluid, as even in professional set- tings, much of the "work" is personal and subjective meaning making (Saarikallio, 2011; Travis, 2016; Travis & Bowman, 2011).

A disparity exists in the presentation of mainstream commercialized rap music content versus the rest of the rap music spectrum. "Mainstream" songs, now a regular part of popular culture tend to be the result of objec- tives from a profit driven and consolidated entertainment industry, unlike the objectives of independent labels and the rest of hip-hop culture (Rose, 2008; Travis, 2016). In fact, recent research suggests that the most recent

"revolution" in sound among modern popular music is hip hop driven beginning in 1991 (Mauch, MacCallum, Levy, & Leroi, 2015). Amid these varied exposures is a range of styles and types far beyond the limited "gansta/trap versus conscious rap" dichotomy often (mistakenly) touted by critics. Still under-examined within rap music is the functional value of music for people engaging these different types of music (Chin & Rickard, 2012; Juslin et al., 2011; Travis, 2013).

Nowhere is this more relevant than in how gender is constructed and/or deconstructed within the music and culture. Intrinsic value exists in extend-ing the scholarly examination of rap music and hip-hop culture to include a gendered perspective centered on empowerment and risk. It stems from the unique psychological, social, and cultural experiences of young women and girls, as well as the larger issues of misogyny, violence and exclusion asso- ciated with gendered aspects of rap music.

Doing Gender

Countless gender and feminist scholars (Collins et al., 2012; Gilligan, 1993; Hill-Collins, 2008; hooks, 2000; Mackinnon, 1991, to name a few) have attempted to elucidate the invisibility of gender, challenging the larger under- standing of both the psychological differences and sociological roles of women. Additionally, women continue to experience rape, physical violence, and sexual assaults at a higher rate compared to males. In fact, sexual violence victimization other than rape occurs for nearly half of women, com- pared to twenty percent of men (Breiding, Smith, Basile, Walters, & Chen, 2014). Psychologically, girls over 12 years of age are significantly more likely to have one of the full range of anxiety disorders compared to men (e.g., PTSD, phobias, separation anxiety), with the rate two to three times that of males (Kessler, Petukhova, Sampson, Zaslavsky, & Wittchen, 2012).

Risky Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Women and Girls through Rap Music

Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) state that there are five distinct misogynistic themes within rap music: (a) naming and shaming, (b) sexual objectifica-tion, (c) distrust of women, (d) legitimating violence, and (e) prostitution and pimping (p. 12). Additional studies have shown an association between rap music engagement and increases in aggression, violence, misogyny, sex- ual activity, substance use, negative health, academic challenges, and

other psychosocial outcomes (Brown et al., 2006; Chen, Miller, Grube, & Waiters, 2006; Dixon et al., 2009; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995; Mulder et al., 2010; Travis & Bowman, 2012; Wingood et al., 2003). Earlier gender-specific research indicated a high prevalence of music associated with violence, and women portrayed as objects of male desire and pleasure (Armstrong, 2001; McFarland, 2003). These findings add fuel to speculation about rap music's priming of "dysfunctional or antisocial thoughts, judgments, perceptions, and behaviors" (Knobloch-Westerwick, Musto, & Shaw, 2008, p. 16) and the creation of pathways to young people's high-risk behaviors (Travis & Deepak, 2010).

The Empowerment of Women and Girls through Rap Music Engagement

Alternatively, *self-regulation*, a feature characteristic of empowering uses of music, has been explained as a process of (a) engaging music for affective, social, and physical functions (Chin & Rickard, 2012; Juslin et al., 2011), and (b) working toward "betterment" through an empowerment-based process of interacting with rap music that promotes self and community improvement (i.e., personal and community health and well-being) (Travis, 2013). Perspectives on its functional uses are explored in popular media, social media and non-academic sources with regularity (Table 2). Advocacy and interventions seek to reduce perceived undesirable outcomes associated with rap music engagement and increase the desirable outcomes for women and girls.

Table 2.   Opinions of Empowering and Risky Aspects of Female Representation within Hip Hop Culture: Perspectives Represented Outside of Traditional Empirical Research.

Females and Hip Hop as More Empowering	Females and Hip Hop as More Risky
Hip Hop provides an outlet for women; women should be Hip Hop Griots so that we have power in how the stories are remembered and the history. (Tesfamariam, 2013).	[Black] Women do not like how they are represented in music. Universal use of misogynistic language persists. (Cabral, 2013)
They hear opportunities in music to overcome adversities. (Tesfamariam, 2013)	Music is repetition of male fantasies brought to life through audio and video; men have all the power. (Cabral, 2013)
Women artists speak about the worth of women (i.e., Lauryn Hill) and humanity. "Music that you feel like … you just pulled my soul out and put it on display." (LeCrae, 2014)	Women are objectified; it reinforces historical physical exploitation and sexual violence; especially women of color. (Cabral, 2013)
Provides entertainment to all ages, whether they can relate to the music or plainly ignore misogynistic messages. (Cabral, 2013)	Everyone in the audience [listeners] is/are not familiar or conscious of [negative and misogynistic] terminology used by artist. (Intelligence 2 The World of Debate, 2012)
In education: It provides respectful oratorical opportunity. Artists should be allowed to express themselves without censors. Artistic freedom is paramount. (Intelligence 2 The World of Debate, 2012)	Artists should be accountable for their actions and words. Youth look to artists when they lack positive relationships in their life. "What does it mean to be a woman?" (Intelligence 2 The World of Debate, 2012)
Kids are watching/listening but the parents should take responsibility for raising their kids. It is not up to the artist to determine what is bad and good for their lives. (Intelligence 2 The World of Debate, 2012)	We should want to help and elevate one another out of our hardships and not get accustomed to the culture in which they glorify misbehavior; prison, thugs, criminality. (Intelligence 2 The World of Debate, 2012)
Because I do not identify with the [misogynistic] terms they use for women in the music I don't have a problem with listening to it. They are not talking about "me," they are talking about "her." (Cabral, 2013)	They only use particular women in music videos … light-skinned, curly haired women. Dark-skinned women are in the background. These should not be the only images put out there. (Cabral, 2013)

Table 2.   (*Continued*)

Females and Hip Hop as More Empowering	Females and Hip Hop as More Risky
"Explore themes that are found in music that adolescent females relate to … opportunities in controversial topics … develop skills to analyze and think critically." (Hadley & Yancey, 2012)	The music reinforces the mentality that [Black] men do not like [Black] women. (Cabral, 2013)
There are so many stories to tell. Women's voices haven't even scratched the surface." (Blackman, 2013)	People talk and talk about the positive and negative aspects of hip hop but a lot of action does not get put behind what is talked about. (Cabral, 2013)
Music acts as a spiritual experience, that manifests personally and through one's relationship with the community around them. (Maston, A., personal communication, April 20, 2013)	Mainstream music is becoming the arm of music and is producing risky messages. Underground stays underground because the messages are not what the white cooperation's want to produce. (Intelligence 2 The World of Debate, 2012)

HYPOTHESES

Engaging rap music places female listeners in a unique role. The symbolic role that being a rap music listener has on young women and the interaction between the listener and the symbolism of the lyrics and the listener is missed within other analyses. For example, what level of influence is exerted by the mainstream popularity of a listener's favorite artists, the social context of listening, or a listener's preferred music type? This study operates within these unexplored dimensions to determine factors associated with empowering rap music engagement for female listeners.

METHODS

Participants

A subset of data comprising a convenience sample of 531 undergraduate students was utilized. The full dataset sample attended an orientation workshop at the start of the academic year (Table 3) and agreed to partici- pate in this research described as "studying youth perspectives on empow- ering and risky engagement of Hip Hop culture." The full sample is used to

describe a comparison model at the onset of the study (combined gender model, $n = 531$), and then the female only subsample ($n = 202$) is used to inform the main research model. The majority (91.6%) of female students were 17 or 18 years of age.

Variables

Six contributing variables modeled the relationships with empowering engagement of rap music. These six variables were gender, listening habits (i.e., listening alone or with friends, favorite music type, daily hours listening to rap music, favorite rap artist's average Billboard position), and time spent learning about ethnicity. The main outcome variable was level of empowering rap music engagement. Despite measuring the "influence" on empowering engagement, these are cross-sectional measurements and do not permit us to infer causal relationships.

Gender

Approximately 38% ($n = 202$) out of the sample of 531 are female. These 202 respondents are used in the main "female only" research model. Variable frequencies and percentages are based on this female only sample.

Listening Alone or with Friends

We examined potential variability in rap music listening experiences. The most introverted engagement (alone) was coded zero and the most extroverted engagement (with friends) was coded as two. Individuals circling both were coded as "one."

Favorite Music Type

Favorite music type allowed respondents to describe their preferred genre of music. Respondents were able to write in any music type. The responses were coded according to whether or not any of the top two written responses included "rap" or "hip hop" music. No prioritization was given to whether it was listed first or second.

Table 3.   Summary of Study Variables Included in Analyses (*n* = 202).

Characteristics (at Time 1)	*n*	% of Full Sample
Listen with friends		
0 (Alone)	33	16.3
1 (Both)	6	3
2 (with friends)	132	65.3
Missing	31	15.3
Gender		
Female	202	100
1st or 2nd favorite music is rap		
0 (No)	112	55.4
1 (Yes)	80	39.6
Missing	10	5
Daily hours listening to rap music		
0−2	96	47.5
3−4	33	16.3
Greater than 4 Hours	20	9.9
Missing	53	26.2
Favorite artists average *billboard* position		
3 (Higher/Better average)	37	18.3
4	41	20.3
5	13	6.4
6 (Lower/Worse average)	9	4.4
Missing	102	50.5
Ethnic identity interest		
1 (Strongly disagree)	40	19.8
2	21	10.4
3	69	34.2
4	50	24.8
5 (Strongly agree)	22	10.9

Daily Hours Listening to Rap Music

Daily listening (i.e., "exposure") was examined with an open-ended variable with no forced response categories. Responses were coded into intervals, includ- ing listening two hours or less, three to four hours, or more than four hours.

Favorite Artists' Average Billboard Position

Average artist Billboard position was a variable constructed to approximate exposure to and attitudes about mainstream rap music artists. Hip-hop culture and rap music's steady ascension into the mainstream has yet to be incorporated empirically into research despite being a fixture in popu- lar culture. Each respondent's favorite artist had their position on the year- end 2011 *Billboard* rap song artist chart quantified (Billboard, 2013). The position or lack thereof was used to code open-ended responses to "What are your Top 3 favorite rap music artists?" The top 25 artists from the chart were used to create numerical codes ranging from 1 to 25. Responses were coded with the actual number corresponding to artists chart position. Artists that did not fall in the top 25 were given a code/value of 26. The final constructed variable for use in the model was the result of adding each of the two favorite artist's coded values and then dividing these values by two for an average number. A lower score for this variable meant that a respondent's favorite artists tended to be higher and more popular on the Billboard chart.

Ethnic Identity Interest

Prior research results found that ethnic identity was strongly associated with empowering rap music engagement (Travis & Bowman, 2012). Unlike prior work that used questions from a reliable and validated measure (Travis & Bowman, 2012) to approximate the broad construct of ethnic identity, this model used a single item to capture an element of identity. The question prompt asked respondents to rate how strongly they agree with the statement, "I spend time trying to find out more about my race/ethnicity." The intent was not to represent the comprehensiveness of racial or ethnic identity as in prior research, but to indicate some level of variabil- ity in identity salience.

Empowering Rap Music Engagement

The variable of primary concern, by which we measure the strength of association of the other model variables, is empowering engagement of rap music. The Individual and Community Empowerment framework scales are the foundation of this construct. Prior research examined two distinct

scales: for the latent constructs of *individual empowerment* and *community empowerment*, both valid and reliable (Travis & Bowman, 2011, 2015). A recent study successfully integrated the two scales to represent a single con- struct and reported results of a valid and reliable collective measure (i.e., individual and community) of empowering rap music engagement (Travis & Bowman, 2015). The collective measure of empowering engage- ment comprised 15 total items. A higher value means that the respondent reported greater levels of agreement for specific examples of empower- ing engagement.

The fifteen questions assess the extent to which rap music contributes to *individual empowerment* through enhanced esteem, greater confidence in overcoming adversity, stronger identity, an embrace of healthy attitudes and behaviors (Travis & Bowman, 2012). The desirable and functional outcomes of music engagement are to feel better, do better and be a better person (Travis, 2013). *Community empowerment* questions ask about culture, cultural resilience, sociopolitical development, and the desire to act on behalf of justice and equity in health. Desired functional outcomes of engagement include greater *belonging* to prioritized communities and greater civic engagement toward positive change within those communities (Travis, 2013).

Questions had Likert-type response options from one to five, with one as "strongly disagree" and five reflecting "strongly agree." The question prompts include: "Rap music helps me make it through bad times" (indivi- dual empowerment); "Rap music helps me think about doing more positive things" (individual empowerment); "Rap music makes me want to do something positive for my community" (community empowerment); and "Rap music helps me think critically about the world around me" (commu- nity empowerment).

RESULTS

Data Analysis

The study analyzed the relative contributions of gender, ethnic identity interest and listening habits to empowering rap music engagement. The study also investigated associations between gender and listening habits. Path analysis models were created to represent these variable relationships, and the appropriateness of these models was analyzed with the statistical package Amos 17.0 for Windows (SPSS Inc., 2008).

The value of path analysis as a data analysis strategy in the study is the ability for simultaneous testing of multiple variable relationships with statistical controls across multiple relationships. For example, in the study there is interest in the potential of both (a) multiple influences of gender (model #1) and (b) multiple contributions to empowering engagement (models #1 and model #2). Path analysis modeling also allows investigation of smaller variable relationships within the larger model. For example, building on prior research examining the effects of "exposure" (daily hours of listening) to rap music, in the model we can assess whether these exposure effects hold when accounting for whether one prefers to listen to rap music or some other music type.

A priori hypothesized relationships are examined, such as gender's potential associations with listening habits, and how listening habits associate with empowering music engagement. *First*, we examine the fit and path- ways within a full sample model that included both men and women, ethnic identity interest, listening habits, and empowering rap music engage- ment. We expected gender to associate with all variables except hours lis- tening. Prior research did not show an association with hours of listening (Travis & Bowman, 2012). The *second* model is the female only model with the same ethnic identity interest, listening habits and empowerment engage- ment variables. Similar variable relationships are expected. We investigated each model for fit, parsimony, stability, and covariate contribution to empowering rap music engagement.

Variable Normality and Missing Data

Evidence of multivariate normality was excellent for all continuous vari- ables. Each variable had a normal distribution according to measures of skewness and kurtosis with statistic values between positive and negative 1.5 using IBM SPSS 20.0 (IBM Corp., 2011). Item specific missing data was handled by imputation (series means).

Descriptive Analyses

Rap music engagement response frequencies were dichotomized from the original frequency range, to categories of "yes" and "no" by percentages (Table 4). *Yes* corresponded to responses four (agree) and five (strongly agree) on the original Likert-type scale. *No* corresponded to responses one

Table 4. Frequencies for Rap Music Engagement Individual Items, ICE Inventory Measure.

Item	Yes	No
Empowerment subscale (individual and community)		
1. Rap music helps me feel I can make decisions that will have a definite positive impact on my life	28.2	71.8
2. Rap music helps me make it through bad times	41.1	58.9
3. Rap music has helped me see that other people go through similar life problems as me	55.4	44.6
4. It is easier to listen to Rap music that talks about issues in my life than for me to talk to other people about issues in my life	32.2	67.8
5. Listening to Rap music has made it easier for me to talk about my problems	17.3	82.7
6. Rap music makes me want to do something positive for my neighborhood	21.8	78.2
7. I hear message about doing well in school when listening to Rap music	19.8	80.2
8. Rap music helps me think carefully about my behavior	31.7	68.3
9. Rap music gives me the chance to do things that I am good at in a way I can't in school	17.3	82.7
10. Rap music provides me an outlet to express myself	42.1	57.9
11. Listening to Rap music has helped me think critically about the world around me	45.5	54.5
12. Rap music that I listen to gives me hope that conditions in my neighborhood can be better	25.7	74.3
13. I connect with other people that share my interests through Rap music	37.6	62.4
14. Rap music encourages me to be proud of my race/ethnicity	33.2	64.4
15. Rap music helps me think about doing more positive behaviors	18.3	81.7
Individual risk subscale		
16. I am more likely to think about engaging in sexual activity when listening to Rap music than when listening to most other music	27.7	72.3
17. I am more comfortable with the idea of smoking marijuana (i.e., weed) while listening to Rap music	17.3	82.7
18. I am more comfortable with the idea of selling drugs after listening to Rap music	11.4	88.6
19. I am more comfortable with the idea of drinking alcohol while listening to Rap music	27.2	72.8
20. I am more comfortable with the idea of using cocaine while listening to Rap music	5.4	94.6

Table 4. (*Continued*)

Item	Yes	No
21. I tend to feel more comfortable with using codeine promethazine (AKA lean, drank, purple stuff, or barre) while listening to Rap music	6.9	93.1
22. I feel more okay about committing some crimes after listening to Rap music	5.9	94.1
23. I am more comfortable with the idea of using Ecstasy while listening to Rap music	8.4	91.6

(strongly disagree), two (disagree) and three (neither agree nor disagree) on the original scale.

Frequency patterns were varied (Table 5), including frequencies greater than 40% for powerfully empowering experiences including "rap helps me make it through bad times" (41.1%), "rap has helped me see other people go through similar life problems" (55.4%), "rap music provides me an outlet to express myself" (42.1%), and "rap music has helped me think critically about the world around me" (45.5%).

Covariates

In the sample, approximately two-thirds of the overall sample of respondents (65.3%) *listened to rap music primarily with friends* (Table 3). Only 16% of the sample reported the tendency to listen alone; 15% did not answer this question; 40% of respondents listed *rap music as their first or second favorite type of music*, while 55% percent did not. When investigating *daily hours of listening*, approximately half (47.5%) reported listening to rap music two hours or less per day. Only 10% of the sample reported listening four or more hours per day. Overall, this is less time listening for the majority of respondents than that of an earlier sample using empowering engagement scales where 42% reported three hours or less and 50% reported four or more hours per day (Travis & Bowman, 2012). Only about half of respondents answered favorite artist, but overwhelmingly, their *favorite rap artists* were also popular by mainstream Billboard chart standards. Forty percent of the overall sample, and three-quarters of those answering this question had favorite artists averaging in the top four Billboard chart position.

Table 5. Largest Percentages of Empowering versus Risky Responses.

Largest percentages of responses

	>40%	30−40%	20−30%
Empowerment	• Rap music helps me make it through bad times • Rap music has helped me see that other people go through similar life problems as me • Rap music provides me an outlet to express myself • Listening to Rap music has helped me think critically about the world around me	• It is easier to listen to Rap music that talks about issues in my life than for me to talk to other people about issues in my life • Rap music helps me think carefully about my behavior • I connect with other people that share my interests through Rap music • Rap music encourages me to be proud of my race/ethnicity	• Rap music helps me feel I can make decisions that will have a definite positive impact on my life • Rap music makes me want to do something positive for my neighborhood • Rap music that I listen to gives me hope that conditions in my neighborhood can be better
Risk			• I am more likely to think about engaging in sexual activity when listening to Rap music than when listening to most other music • I am more comfortable with the idea of drinking alcohol while listening to Rap music

VARIABLE RELATIONSHIPS

Correlations and Means

Model variables were examined for strength of association and their potential collinearity. The empowering music engagement scale was significantly associated with all model variables ($p < .01$). Further, listening with friends was negatively associated with rap music being a favorite type of music. In other words, there was a greater tendency to listen to

Table 6. Comparison of Mean Scores for Model Variables by Gender and Age.

Scale	Gender		Age			Overall
	Male (*n* = 84) Mean	Female (*n* = 202) Mean	17 (*n* = 21) Mean	18 (*n* = 234) Mean	19−25 (*n* = 31) Mean	All age (*n* = 531) Mean
Empowerment (Full Scale)	47.5*	43.3*	52.0*	44.5*	41.3*	44.6*
Favorite Rap Artist – Billboard	4.5**	3.9**	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.1
Top 25 Position Listen Alone or With Friends	1.3**	1.6**	1.1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Favorite Music is Rap Music	.6*	.4*	.6	.5	.2	.5*
Rap Music Exposure	1.7*	1.5*	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.6*
Ethnic Identity	13.3	13.6	13.8	13.6	11.9	13.4

t-test for equality of means; post-hoc Bonferroni test: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.
Note: The variation in sample size is due to fluctuations in response rates for demographic information.

rap music in a group setting among respondents that indicated other music types as their favorite music. All variable relationships were below .5, except for a very strong association between favorite artist and empowering music engagement. No concerns of multicollinearity were warranted among explanatory variables.

Means were examined for all model variables (Table 6) with attention to potential trends by gender and age. Significant differences in empowering music engagement existed by gender (males = 47.5, females = 43.3), and all other model variables except ethnic identity interest. Females were signifi- cantly more likely to favor mainstream artists and listen with friends. Males were more likely to prefer rap music to other types of music and lis- ten more frequently on a daily basis. Significant differences also existed by age, with greater empowering music engagement occurring for the youngest participants (17 years old = 52.0%, from 19 to 25 years old = 41.3%). Unlike gender, age was not significantly associated with other model variables.

Path Analysis Full Model

Two distinct path analysis models were constructed and analyzed (Table 7). Model *one* included the gender variable and the second model did not, instead comprising a female only sample.

The initial model (Fig. 1) focused on gender-based pathways to listening habits and the association between listening habits and empowering music engagement.

Research questions capture the association between listening habits and empowering rap music engagement and the potential influences of gender on these dynamics. Model fit and parsimony were very good across most indices. The model Chi-square p-value was below .05, as Chi-square (df) = 20.8(10). However, research suggests that large sample size models often reject models (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). When examining incremental fit indices, the comparative fit index (CFI) was good at .962, how- ever the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was less strong at .893. Parsimony was analyzed using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Fit was strong at .045, including a narrow confidence interval (CI .016, .073). Using empowering rap music engagement as the variable of interest, R-squared was .35. The full model explained 35% of the variability in empowering music engagement.

Path Analysis Female Only Model

The female only model, focused on empowering rap music engagement for women and girls, is consistent with significant and non-significant paths in the full model (Fig. 2).

Model fit and parsimony were excellent across all fit indices, represent- ing an improvement from the full model. The model Chi-square was an

Table 7.   Path Analysis Model Results for Predictors of Empowering Music Engagement.

	r-square	Chi-square (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	CI All
empowerment ($n = 531$)	.357	20.8 (9)	.958	.871	.050	.021, .078
Female empowerment ($n = 202$)	.353	7.4 (7)*	.996	.950	.017	.000, .090

Note: CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CI = 90% confidence interval for RMSEA. Chi-square (df); *p > .05.
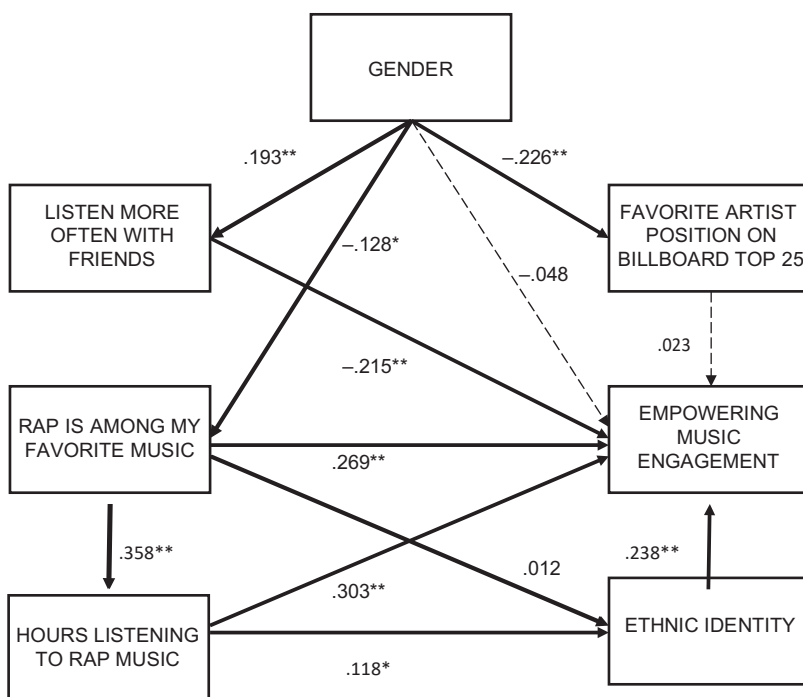
Fig. 1. Full Sample (*n* = 531) Path Model for Predictors of Empowering Rap Music Engagement. *Notes*: Empowering music engagement corresponds to higher scores on the empowerment scales of the *Individual & Community Empowerment Inventory* (Travis & Bowman, 2011). CFI = .962, TLI = .893, RMSEA = .045

(CI: .016, .073), Chi-square (df) = 20.8(10), *p* < .05, **p* < .01.

excellent fit with a *p*-value greater than .05, Chi-square (df) = 9.9(8). Both representations of incremental fit indices were excellent, including the comparative fit index (CFI) at .981, and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) at .950. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) had a very strong fit at .035, with a relatively narrow confidence interval (CI .000, .094). The female only model explained 33% (*r*-square = .334) of the variability in empowering music engagement.

We describe the four main research questions below using the female only model. All model pathways were statistically significant except for the relationship between favorite artists' Billboard position and empower-ing engagement.
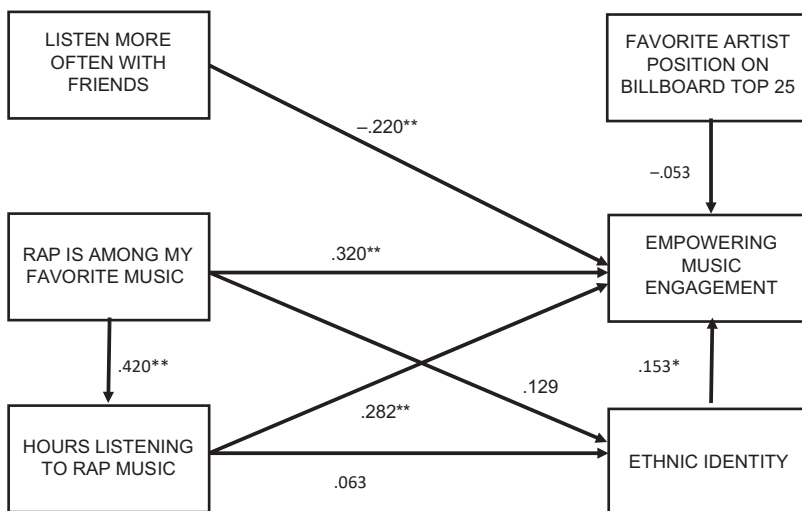
Fig. 2. Female Only (*n* = 202) Sample Path Model for Predictors of Empowering Rap Music Engagement. *Notes*: Empowering music engagement corresponds to higher scores on the *Individual Risk* scale of the *Individual & Community Empowerment Inventory* (Travis & Bowman, 2011). CFI = .981, TLI = .950, RMSEA = .035 (CI: .000, .094), Chi-square (df) = 9.9(8)†, †*p* > .05; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01.

What is the association between favorite music type and empowering rap music engagement? The full model initially investigated whether males and females differed according to preferred music type (males were more likely to prefer rap music). Next, the female only model examined the relationship between musical preferences and empowering music engagement. Female students were significantly less likely to consider rap music one of their top two favorite types of music. However, those students declaring rap music as one of their top two favorite types of music were significantly more likely to express empowering experiences with the music. These students were also significantly more likely to listen to rap for a longer duration each day. Female students were significantly more likely to report their favorite rap artists as more mainstream (i.e., ones ranked highest on the 2011 Billboard charts). However, average Billboard position was not associated with empowering rap music engagement.

Is the amount of time spent listening to rap music associated with empowering rap music engagement? Participants reporting more time spent

listening to rap music were significantly more likely to identify empowering engagement. Daily hours of listening was more significantly associated with empowering rap music experiences than preferring mainstream or more popular Billboard rap music. It is also a *positive* association.

Does the social context of listening relate to empowering music engagement? The full model examined gender and listening context first. Female students were significantly more likely to listen to rap music in the company of friends as opposed to alone. Next, the female only model examined listening context and empowering engagement. Female students that tend to listen to music alone were significantly more likely to report empowering music engagement.

Which factors have the greatest significance in their association with empowering rap music engagement when controlling for other factors? The final research question positions gender versus listening habits to determine associations with empowering rap music engagement. Gender is associated with empowerment in the original full model, even though an earlier research study found men/boys with higher levels of empowering engagement (Travis & Bowman, 2015). As outlined above, in the female only model, variability in empowering engagement could be explained by listening habits. In the sample, female listeners are more likely to elicit empowering themes from their music if rap music is their favorite type of music, if they listen to it often, and if they tend to listen alone more often than with friends. Whether or not their favorite artists enjoy mainstream *(Billboard)* success matters little for their ability to be empowered by rap music. Ethnic identity interest is also significantly associated with empowering engagement, but not gender specific.

DISCUSSION

Bolstered by the need for more empirically rigorous research on media and rap music effects, researchers are more systematically investigating the empowering aspects of rap music engagement (Travis, 2013; Travis & Bowman, 2012, 2015; Tyson, 2006; Tyson et al., 2012). Rooted in a symbolic interactionist perspective, the overarching question asked, "What con- tributes to more empowering rap music engagement among women and girls?"

The first main finding suggests that females are significantly less likely to consider rap music one of their top two favorite types of music. Since

this aspect of the study specifically addresses individual listenership and (ostensibly) the reflexive effects, it is expected that music that is lyrically derogatory toward girls and women would hold no reflexive value for a female listener listening alone. Returning to DeNora's argument that "music gives meaning to social life" (Roy & Dowd, 2010, p. 187), it is concluded that females are less likely to favor rap music with misogynistic and violent lyrics because they provide minimal symbolic meaning and value to female listeners. If as Blumer suggests, females would "act on toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them," then they would not be expected to engage music with lyrics that have no valued meaning.

The second significant finding is, when looking exclusively at females listeners, those that prefer rap music are significantly more likely to listen alone and are more likely to elicit empowering messages in the lyrics, regardless of the *Billboard* position of their favorite rap artist. Specifically, those that did demonstrate a higher preference for rap music sought out music personally and with a valued meaning. Female listeners that do engage in rap music listenership seek songs that contain empow-ering lyrics, thus providing a useful, symbolic meaning to them as young women. In addition, females that engaged the music construct a personal process that established an "I" and "me" connection to the empowering lyrics, allowing for an internal dialogue that facilitates identity construc-tion. The findings also indicate that female students that feel rap music is one of their top two favorite types of music are significantly more likely to listen to rap music for a longer duration each day, suggesting that those preferring rap music are able to negotiate rap music and lyrics that are empowering in order to engage and interpret the music for longer periods of time. Again, the "meaning of social life" that music provides is such that they are willing to engage for longer (and more symbolically meaningful) periods of time. In addition, rap music for young women that engage empowering lyrics is symbolically, interactively valuable enough to produce active engagement results that reinforce further listen-ing on an ongoing basis. The positive association between daily time lis-tening and empowering engagement contrasts with some prior findings (Travis & Bowman, 2012); however, it supports a growing body of research and theorizing that rap music exposure does not consistently compromise well-being and for many it promotes well-being (Gourdine & Lemmons, 2011; Travis, 2013; Travis & Bowman, 2015; Travis & Deepak, 2010; Tyson et al., 2012). Despite the fact that it may be

seemingly difficult for young women to come by rap music with empow-ering lyrics, these results support the theoretical basis, in that facets of empowerment exist in rap music (Travis, 2013; Travis & Bowman, 2012; Travis & Deepak, 2010).

The final result found that, despite that fact that young women were less likely to list rap music as their top two favorite genres of music, young women were significantly more likely to listen to rap music in the company of friends. This indicates a duality of symbolism for young women between instances where they are engaging rap music among in the company of peers versus instances where they engage the music alone. The results indicate that when young women are listening to music in the presence of others (presumably in mixed-gender settings), the sym- bolic interactions of these "primary groups" outweigh the personal symbolic interaction associated with the music and lyrics. As a result, young women in "primary groups," with potentially little control over the "music playlist" within the setting, engage others in the setting and essen- tially forgo the lyrics (particularly if they are misogynistic and/or violent) and instead privilege the beats and melodies along with the social value of the experience. On the other hand, when they are alone and have defini- tive control over their own playlist, they are choosing and engaging rap music and lyrics that is empowering. Similar findings existed for Juslin et al. (2011), who reported the value of engaging music alone, consistent with self-reinforcing engagement where, "Intrinsic motivation is intense pleasurable experiences with music, leading to a deep personal commit-ment to music" (Chin & Rickard., 2012, p. 430).

The overall findings indicate that females generally choose alternative forms of music over rap music; however, a process of "negotiation" exists for those that choose to listen to rap music. For those that do engage rap music, there is a clear process of seeking lyrical content that supports a positive, empowering internal dialogue. In instances where the lyrics are contradictory to the internal dialogue, female listeners either supplant the value of the lyrical symbolic interaction (in the case of group listening) or disconnect from the music altogether. Contrary to the research that has addressed the effects of misogynistic and/or violent lyrics on listeners (Dixon et al., 2009; Gourdine & Lemmons, 2011; Peterson et al., 2007), the findings suggest that female listeners can generally engage rap lyrics when larger symbolic interactions are present, reject the lyrics and symbolic inter- actions that are non-supportive on a personal level, and engage lyrics that produce a strong, empowering, internal dialogue.

LIMITATIONS

Earlier studies have highlighted the specific relevance of audio *and* visual media as additive for rap music exposure, and the potential undesirable effects of high-risk audio and video (Martino et al., 2006; Tyson et al., 2012; Wingood et al., 2003). In the present study we asked about music only interaction, and did not suggest or mention interaction with music and video together. In addition, most symbolic interactionism research is conducted through a qualitative methodology, either allowing for participants to provide detailed description of meanings or for researchers to discover meanings according to their interpretation of the symbolic interactions.

Despite these limitations, the study offers new insight about the factors associated with empowering rap music engagement among females and does so with survey questions that capture the effects of listenership engagement. Opportunities exist for promoting greater empowering engagement among women and girls, especially through reinforcing empowering collective experiences, affirming identity, and identifying girls that embrace hip-hop culture. Energy should be directed toward initiatives that already integrate hip-hop culture, and strategies that can be immediately useful to women and girls highly engaged with rap music.

Many unanswered questions also remain and are worthwhile next steps for exploration. For example, what specific music lyrics resonate greatest with women and girls? What messages provide the symbolic interactions that encourages girls to construct a better identity? How do girls define growth in the context of their identity as a woman? How consistently will girls thrive when formal organizations are available and seeking to create Hip hop integrated communities characterized by shared environments, shared activities and shared emotions? Outside of programs and interven- tions, and additional research on empowering engagement, research should also examine who contributes to the risky rap music engagement among women/girls.

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