

ABSTRACT

Get Rich or Die Tryin': A Semiotic Approach to the Construct of Wealth in Rap Music

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For the past 30 years, rap music has made its way into the mainstream of America, taking an increasingly prominent place in popular culture, particularly for youth, its main consumers. This thesis looks at wealth through the lens of semiotics, an important component of critical/cultural theory, using a hermeneutical analysis of 11 rap songs, spanning the last decade of rap music to find signification and representation of wealth in the rap song lyrics. The research finds three important themes of wealth - relationship between wealth and the opposite sex, wealth that garners respect from other people, and wealth as a signifier for “living the good life” - and five signifiers of wealth – money, cars, attire, liquor, and bling.

Get Rich or Die Tryin': A Semiotic Approach to the Construct of Wealth in Rap Music

by

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
Hip Hop and Rap Music	
Wealth and Materialism in Rap Music	
Rap Music, Spatially Constructed	
Genres	
<i>East Coast</i>	
<i>West Coast</i>	
<i>Dirty South</i>	
Examining Rap	
<i>Violence</i>	
<i>Misogyny and Sexism</i>	
<i>Drugs/Alcohol</i>	
<i>Rap as a Positive Influence</i>	
The Artists of Rap	
3. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK AND METHODS	35
Critical and Cultural Theory/Semiotics	
Hermeneutics	
Data	
4. FINDINGS	44
Relationship Between Wealth and the Opposite Sex	
Wealth that Garners Respect from Other People	
Wealth as a Signifier for “Living the Good Life”	
5. DISCUSSION	53
Limitations and Future Studies	
<i>Limitations</i>	
<i>Future Studies</i>	

6. CONCLUSION	61
APPENDICES	63
Appendix A	
<i>Rap Lyrics from 2000-2010</i>	
Appendix B	
<i>Urban Dictionary Definitions</i>	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1975, President Gerald Ford vetoed a request from New York City for a federal bailout to prevent the city from having to file for bankruptcy. Because of the lack of federal help, social services were cut and a housing crisis ensued that continued well into the '80s. Because of other major economic and demographic forces, wealth distribution and socioeconomic inequalities continued. "The message was loud and clear: to be stuck here was to be lost" (Rose, 1994). As an outlet for expression and identification during this time, the youth of South Bronx grabbed hold of rap music and did not let go until it became a "sonic force" (Kelley, 1997) that has changed the shape of American culture (Kubrin, 2005).

"Rap music is a symbol of "hope, increased pride, and self-esteem at a time when any other evidence of the three has been eroded by prevailing social conditions" (McDonnell, 1992). While at first rap music was merely used as an outlet for frivolity, it soon became a tool for oppressed inner-city youth to explore the history of race relations and their own lived experiences in comparison to the ideologies of white people (Harkness, 2011). To many, and not just African-Americans, rap music became the voice of resistance, a counter-cultural expression of protest (Kitwana, 2005). Lawrence Levine (1977) likens

rap to earlier black music, such as jazz, that defied the typical Eurocentric music that was considered a “new rhetoric” of protest.

By the 1980s, wealth distribution in the inner cities declined (Porter, 1995). Poverty, unemployment, and isolation from mainstream America all defined many inner-city “hoods” from whence rap came (Kubrin, 2005). Although rap music stems from impoverished African-American roots (Quinn, 2005), a prominent construct of the music is money and material possessions of the rappers who have made it “big,” having come from impoverished roots. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines wealth as “an abundance of valuable material possessions and resources,” which includes both money and possessions. Much of the previous literature that has looked at wealth in any particular form in rap has been in the context of how rappers symbolize a life of materialism (Conrad et al., 2009; Crossley, 2005; Small and Newman, 2001; Abdul-Jamar, 2004), but there remains a gap in the literature of how rap music’s message constructs wealth and how the lyrics represent wealth. This study endeavors to fill that gap with a modern look at how wealth is constructed in rap lyrics.

Rap music is now one of the most popular music genres in the United States. In 2002, 37 million adults reported listening to rap (Mizell, 2003), yet adults do not comprise the majority of listeners. Reese (2000) quotes Russell Simmons, a major executive in the hip-hop realm and co-creator of Def Jam records, when he said that 75 percent of those who listen to rap are non-black youth. Rap music ultimately belongs to the youth, a group whose populace

reaches more than 30 million adults in America. As Miles Davis, author, puts it, the music “is a fundamental matrix of self-expression for [a] whole generation [of youth]” (Rose, 1994). But it is not just for those living in “the ‘hood.” As rap music has grown, it has reached beyond the barriers of inner-city neighborhoods to grasp the listening ears of a good percentage of the American population, both black and non-black.

This is why studying rap music is so important. Scholars must understand the landscape of popular culture and what factors contribute to its growth and movement. Ray Browne (2001), a scholar of American studies, characterized popular culture as “a way of life” in America and the “voice of the people.” According to Mills (2001), the culture of rap music – hip hop – “has infiltrated numerous aspects of mainstream white culture [or popular culture] including its fashion, movies, and vocabulary.” To understand popular culture, then, rap music must be understood. And to understand how wealth is constructed in popular culture, rap music must be studied.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Hip Hop and Rap Music

In 1973, Bronx street parties featured never-before-heard music samplings via two turntables that brought out extended instrumental “breaks,” while “break” dancers performed their own style of dance (Weinstein, 2006). In the center of the mix was Kool DJ Herc, a Jamaican native who moved to inner-city New York City from Kingston in 1967. Before there were rappers, there were DJs, like Herc, who made it a competition to create the most diverse samplings of music (Blair, 1993), giving inner-city youth a wealth of opportunity for expression when New York City was in economic turmoil. Herc, along with several other DJs, did not know it at the time, but they quickly became the foundation of a new culture in America: hip hop.

Hip hop consisted of four, interrelated forms of expression: DJing, break-dancing, graffiti, and rap (Weinstein, 2006). Many listeners of rap music use the words “rap” and “hip hop” interchangeably. But as KRS-One, a notable rap group, stated, “Rap is something you do. Hip hop is something you live” (Krim, 2000). Of the four expressions of hip hop, rap is by far the most well-known. This type of music, as with hip hop as a whole, is rooted in the African-American tradition. The music’s main signifiers are narrativizing, signifying,

call-and-response, “playing the dozens,” boasting and toasting (Cummings, 2002).

In the oral tradition of Africans, rap emphasizes the importance of the lyrics, often to tell a story. “Narrativizing takes commonplace anecdotes and renders them as fictional or semiautobiographical accounts. The intention of these stories is to explain a point, to persuade holders of opposing views to one’s own point of view, and to create word-pictures about general, abstract observations about life, love, and survival” (Smitherman, 1997). In this way, oppression and marginalization can be expressed, whether it be from the rapper’s own life, or the life of their “hood.” The storyteller roll of a rapper dates back to early African history in which a gifted storyteller, or *griot*, tells the tales of a people-group’s history (Smitherman, 1997), much like the *bard* in Greek tradition.

Another important feature of rap with roots in ancient African tradition is the call-and-response mechanism. This form is common in ritual chanting used to communicate with gods and ancestors (Perkins, 1996). Also known as a “harmony indicator” (Cummings, 2002), the rapper uses this method to communicate with the audience, so as to harmoniously include them in the performance and create a way for the audience to identify him or her (Keyes, 1984).

“Playing the dozens” is a verbal exchange between rappers who try to “one-up” each other using insulting metaphors, and indeterminate allusions.

Rappers playfully exchange verbal darts at each other until one of the duelers runs out of comebacks. Even while insulting, though, the dozens is merely verbal gameplay, resulting in increased respect or rapping credibility (Keyes, 2002). This oral exchange comes from African-American slavery where deformed or devalued slaves were bargained for in groups of 12 in auction houses. To “toughen” themselves, the slaves would engage in verbal affronts to each other to downplay the verbal assaults of the slave traders (Saloy, 1998). One technique used in the dozens is signifying, a way of playfully insulting another. When signifying in rap music, Smitherman (1997) says a rapper will insult another rapper, usually indirectly (Keyes, 2002). Often, they insult another rapper’s mother (“yo’ mama”) in a humorous way to either add frivolity to the lyrics or to “make a point, to issue a correction, or to critique through induction and humor.”

Since rap music finds much of its form rooted in self-expression, an important aspect of the genre is “boasting.” This is exactly what it sounds like it is – bringing to light the superior skills in rhyming or toasting, whether it be truth or exaggerated (Perkins, 1996). The boasting tales within the lyrics often contain narratives of bad guys who are able to confront any adversary and win (Saloy, 1998).

The last significant (and most obvious) feature of rap includes “toasting,” where a rapper speaks over the music in a rhythmic way. Toasting stemmed from the Jamaican tradition in the 1960s and 1970s and is one of the cultural

roots of rap (Rose, 1994). It can include all of the lyrical elements mentioned above. When Kool DJ Herc came from Jamaica, his toasting DJ style brought rap into the spotlight of new forms of expression. In competitions, rappers often boast to outdo each other, often “dissing” their opponents to create a more significant boast (Cummings, 2002), like in signifying or the dozens. Common themes of boasting are verbal skills and sexual prowess (Smitherman, 1997). Modern rappers also use visual displays of boasting, such as material goods or style of dress (Cummings, 2002).

Wealth and Materialism in Rap Music

Since most rappers have come out of the impoverished inner city, many consider the money and possessions earned as a rapper a vehicle for leaving their poor circumstances (Keyes, 2002). In a wealth and poverty study conducted by Lomansky and Swan (2009), they find that the number one way people in “extreme want” make their way out of that condition is acquisition, which would explain the movement of many rappers from inner-city impoverishment to wealth, and then to materialism. “Growing up and getting green is what I wish,” one young rapper said (Russ, 2010).

There is not a plethora of literature on the connection between wealth and rap music, making this thesis an important addition to the literature. Most of the previous studies that have mentioned wealth in any way have been in the context of materialism (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Browne and

Kaldenberg, 1997; Ahuvia and Wong, 2002). The most encompassing definition of materialism comes from a cohesion of two definitions: “the importance people attach to owning worldly possessions” (Solomon, 1996), “which include holding the belief that more possessions lead to more happiness” (Chan and Prendergast, 2007). These definitions have a kind of cause/effect relationship – happiness is a direct result of the acquisition of possessions, a belief that Zhang et al. (2010) espouse in their research. Social scientists find people who live in wealthier nations generally report greater happiness than those who do not (Bozionelos and Nikolaou, 2010). However, the same study reports that another factor in happiness besides acquisition of possessions is psychological prosperity, or mental well-being. To that end, wealthier nations, though reporting economic happiness, falter when it comes to happiness stemming from psychological prosperity.

Kubrin (2005) found that possessing material wealth also leads to establishing self-image and gaining respect, a belief corroborated by Christopher, et al. (2007) when they studied the correlation between materialism and self-presentational tactics. Through a survey of almost 300 undergraduate students, Christopher, et al. found that materialistic people are prone to protect their self-image more so than less-materialistic people by using *excuses*, *disclaimers*, *justifications*, and *self-handicapping* (when a person places obstacles in their way to success in order for people to not make judgments about their abilities). In another study, Moody (2011) found that material wealth equals independence.

Material wealth as a “symbol of success” is seen in several studies. In a study of Chinese youth, Durvasula and Lysonski (2010) discovered that Chinese youth consider money a source of “power-prestige,” or “using money as a tool to influence and impress others and as a symbol of success.” Not having money, they found, was likely to aggravate the Chinese youths’ anxiety about needing money.

Rap music, according to Keyes (2005), is a symbol in itself of success to inner-city youth. The success rappers rap about in their music is an example to those youth that there is a possibility for upward class mobility. But within the lyrics, signifiers of success can be found, as well. Herd (2005) found in her study of the prevalence of alcohol in rap music that alcohol is used to show glamour and wealth. There has been an increasing use of rappers to sell alcohol, normalizing alcohol as a part of a rapper’s lifestyle. Other possessions such as particular cars (Nielson, 2010), jewelry (Kubrin, 2005), and specific types of dress (Harkness, 2011), all come to symbolize the success of a rapper.

Materialism is a significant contributor to a person’s fashion clothing purchases. O’Cass (2004) surveyed a group of 478 randomly sampled consumers in Australia. A materialistic values measure of Richins and Dawson (1992) was used to determine levels of materialism. Results suggested that materialism is positively correlated with a person’s fashion clothing purchases.

So whether it is happiness, success, a better self-image, respect, independence, or fashion, people use their wealth to fill the gap between “extreme want” and “extreme happiness.”

Rap Music, Spatially Constructed

Rap music first belonged to socially and culturally marginalized black Americans (Pederson, 2009). Inner-city youth attempted to navigate their way through identity construction, cultural oppression, and their economically marginalized state by using the different forms of hip hop. Entities as diverse as the U.S. Department of State and *National Geographic* found that, “Just about every country on the planet seems to have developed its own local rap scene” (Jackson, 2009).

The music began to represent the masses of people in other urban locations and, soon, those locales formed their own styles of rap. In the late ‘80s, another impoverished area on the other side of the continent from New York City gave voice to poor young, black males in Compton and Watts, inner-city neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California. With similar experiences of alienation from mainstream America - unemployment, police harassment and economic isolation – rap linked other regions together. Oakland, Detroit, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, Miami, Philadelphia – all became important spaces from which rap sprang.

The spatial constructs of rap have become an important identifier of the music and are deeply embedded in rap's genres. Rapper's foundation were built on claiming the streets of their "hood," beginning in South Bronx. This coincided with the gang mentality to which rap was often connected. Other aspects of hip hop demonstrated this special construct, especially graffiti artists who tagged sides of trains or buildings, marking their space and demarcating it from other artists' turf. This led to a city-wide attack on graffiti and the hip hop culture in general for fear that inner-city minorities would spread beyond their geographical spaces (Nielson, 2010). Unfortunately for the hegemonic city officials, the culture did spread, and rappers identified themselves with their respected geographies. Two of the most well-known "gangsta" rappers rose to fame from their hometown in New York: 2Pac and The Notorious B.I.G. (Harkness, 2011). Known for their heated rivalry, both rappers were shot down and killed in the late 1990s (Grem, 2006). Another "gangsta" rapper, Schoolly D, identified with his inner-city roots in Philadelphia with his gang, the Parkside Killers. Schoolly is best known for creating the first gangsta rap track, "PSK (What Does It All Mean)" (Quinn, 2005). The Geto Boys represented Houston. Scarface, Bushwick Bill, and Willie D were a controversial force in the South. Though successfully known for their gangsta rap style, the Geto Boys faced a good deal of censorship in the late '80s for their violent lyrics and references to necrophilia (Bush, www.mtv.com). On the West Coast, a group of rappers rose to fame and became the face of gangsta rap. NWA (Niggaz With Attitude) was

synonymous with Los Angeles (Kubrin, 2005). Using their mostly violent lyrics to attack “institutions of power,” NWA member, Ice Cube, coined the term “gangsta rap” to express the spatial construct from which the group came – deep in the inner-city neighborhoods of Los Angeles, where gangs were the predominant way to “belong” to a group (Quinn, 2005). With their 1988 album, *Straight Outta Compton*, NWA made Los Angeles the center of rap music commercialization (Kubrin, 2005). Though regions spatially constructed the importance of each regional enclave, they all signified the same thing: those from the inner city had something to say and people were listening.

Genres

In the literature, it seemed as if every study came up with its own construct of rap genres (Jamison, 2006; Iwamoto, et al., 2007; Herd, 2008; Gourdine and Lemmons, 2011; Newman, 2005; and Cummings and Roy, 2002). From gangsta, hardcore, and realist rap to politically aware and socially conscious rap to party rap, there has been a rap genre for every rap lover. Since spatial constructs were so important in developing rap music in different inner-city regions of America, the following explication of the different types of rap come from spatially-constructed means: the rap of the East Coast, West Coast, and more recently, Dirty South rap.

East Coast Rap

The East Coast marks the epicenter of the hip-hop movement. Starting in South Bronx, New York, old-school hip hop turned out tunes on the tables of Kool DJ Herc, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa (Rose, 1994). It is truly the birth center for rap music. Others soon joined the DJ masters in the spotlight. In 1979, rap became a part of popular music when The Sugarhill Gang's song, "Rapper's Delight," a sampled song, "Good Times," from the band, *Chic* (Armstrong, 2002). In Krims' (2000) listing of genres, "mack," or "pimp" rap includes the work of popular East Coast rapper, Big Daddy Kane. He and other rappers like him brought to rap the much-criticized misogynistic lyrics, very similar to gangsta rap. Kane came into prominence in the late '80s and is well known for his MC skills. A Tribe Called Quest's marked the rap scene with their blending of rap and jazz together. This type of rap, not limited to Quest, uses rap narratively, telling stories of love or toasting an MC's skills (Krims, 2000). Harkness (2011) calls rappers like Quest "socially conscious." Their curse-free lyrics essentially espouse the opposite of gangsta rap, warning against the dangers of violence, drug abuse, and alcohol. Included in the socially conscious grouping are Public Enemy, a group made up of Chuck D and Flava Flav, known best for their 1988 album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (Erlewine, n.d.), and Talib Kweli, known as one of the most "uplifting" voices of rap because of his critique of major rap themes, like misogyny, in his lyrics (Chang, 2005).

Public Enemy's 1988 album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, marked a shift where rap music became an important avenue for political discourse (Nielson, 2010). Talib Kweli was raised in Brooklyn by politically active parents, but instead of following them in their footsteps, he decided to be a voice in the music realm, critiquing misogyny and violence (Chang, 2005). Other East Coast rappers include Queen Latifah, one of the first black female rappers, who used her music to question society and communicate positive ideas. The Beastie Boys were one of the first successful white rap groups. Adam Yauch, Michael Diamond, and Adam Horowitz primarily discuss sex and violence in their lyrics, though they come from Jewish, non-black backgrounds. Run DMC, also from the East Coast, became the first rap group to have two gold albums for selling more than 500,000 albums. With the help of their manager, Russell Simmons, now considered the godfather of hip-hop music culture, they brought rap into the mainstream, fusing rap with pop music (Perkins, 1996). Gangsta rap, though not popularized in New York City, had its own share of rappers from the East Coast – Dr. Dre, a former NWA member, The Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, a rapper-turned-major-label executive (Birchmeier, www.mtv.com), and Wu Tang Clan, a loose collection of nine MCs that got their name from an ancient kung fu sword (Erlewine and Huey, www.mtv.com), all claimed a “G” lifestyle in their lyrics (Powell, 1991).

West Coast

West Coast rap is best known as the place where gangsta rap was made famous. Gangsta rap stepped into the hip hop scene in the late '80s in Los Angeles, California (Kubrin, 2005). A West Coast rapper, Ice Cube, coined the term “gangsta rap” during an interview after the rap group, Niggaz With Attitude (NWA), came out with their hit single, “Gangsta Gangsta” (Quinn, 2005). It gained media attention mainly for its “real-life” lyrics portraying violence, misogyny, drug and alcohol use, among other controversial topics (Perkins, 1996). More discussion of gangsta rap themes will be addressed later in this thesis.

Ice-T was the first to write and perform a gangsta rap song, “6 N’ the Morning” (Armstrong, 2002). Though originally grounded in African-American, Latino, and Chicano neighborhoods, gangsta rap became known for its “black youth cultural imagination that cultivated varying ways of interpreting, representing, and understanding the shifting contours of ghetto dislocation,” shifting away from socially and politically conscious rap from the East Coast (Watkins, 2001). The group NWA put the city of Compton on the map when their album, *Straight Outta Compton* thrust the gangsta “lifestyle” into the spotlight (Herd, 2005; Kubrin, 2005). NWA first modeled the style of a gangsta – dressed entirely in black, wearing a Los Angeles Kings or Raiders cap, white sneakers, and gold chains, mimicking the style of L.A. street gangs (Kubrin, 2005). Later, the style of dress became flashier as rappers began their own clothing lines and

wore Sean Jean and Roc-A-Wear (both owned by rappers) with large diamond rings and watches and flashy chains (Harkness, 2011). Also fashionable among gangsta rappers are the baggy clothes, unbelted jeans, denim work shirts, and do-rags that come straight out of prison (these signifying styles of dress are now more mainstream than earlier styles) (Quinn, 2005).

In 1991, gangsta rap became a leader in pop culture music when NWA's album, *Niggaz4Life* jumped to No. 1 on Billboard's Top Pop Albums chart (Quinn, 2005). But with gangsta fame came political protest. Tipper Gore, then wife of Vice President Al Gore, had already been concerned with heavy-metal lyrics and their connection to Satanism and the occult. With rap reaching fame, she turned her attention to gangsta rap and called for parental advisory labels on all rap music and for internal regulations of the industry. These reactions calling for censorship only broadened gangsta rap's appeal to American youth (Perkins, 1996). Within the next decade, gangsta rap and other forms of hip hop moved out from Compton to Watts, Oakland, Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, and eventually made its way south.

Dirty South

In the mid '90s, the rap market had been saturated with rap from the East and West coasts. Rap enthusiasts were looking for something more, something different (Grem, 2006). The 1995 song, "Dirty South," by Goodie Mob introduced the music world to Dirty South rap, and Atlanta, the home of Goodie

Mob, became one of the major rap music centers of America (Krimms, 2000). Goodie Mob coined the term, “dirty,” as their lyrics tended to espouse what it looked like to grow up in the South, home to racial prejudices and distinct white and black demarcations of a century ago. One of Goodie Mob’s members explains more fully: “It’s just dirty in the form of racism, it’s still the old prune-face-ass white folk who still run the ATL. That’s what’s dirty about it, ‘cause they still run it.” The South’s white domination and continued inequality of wealth also contribute to its “dirtiness” (Miller, 2004). The “dirty” in Dirty South now stands more for what the genre is known for: sex and partying (Lena, 2006). Another genre of rap also formed in the South: crunk. Lil’ Jon and the East Side Boyz, another Atlanta-based group, created a style of music that was frenetic, bass-heavy, and “designed to make you wild out in the club” (Grem, 2006). Dirty South rap then grew in popularity and now extends from Atlanta to other parts of the South – The Geto Boys from Houston, previously mentioned, 2 Live Crew from Miami, made famous because of their sexually charged lyrics, and Master P from New Orleans, whose music label brought West Coast gangsta rap to the south, are all devotees, just to name a few (Miller, 2004; Grem, 2006).

Examining Rap

Because rap comes from an inner-city culture of turmoil and oppression and because rap music is so influential on youth, it has come under robust study and scrutiny (Tyree, 2009; Harkness, 2011; Iwamoto, et al., 2007; LaGrone,

2000; Powell, 1991; Peterson, et al., 2007, Dixon, et al., 2009; Reid-Brinkley, 2008; Cobb and Boettcher, 2007; Johnson, et al., 1995; etc...). Researchers have examined its effect and its message in a plethora of ways, some supporting its message to its listeners and others critiquing its deleterious effects on listeners. The following summarizes directions researchers have taken in scrutinizing rap music and its message.

Violence

In the early 1990s, “gangsta rap” became a powerful force in the rap music world, and with its violent themes and misogynistic lyrics, press and television coverage catapulted rap music into the spotlight like never before (Perkins, 1996). Media notables such as Rush Limbaugh and Bill O’Reilly accused gangsta rap of being the main impetus for the “total disintegration of American civilization” (Riley, 2005), violence being the chief, nefarious theme.

The role of violence as a whole birthed a goodly sum of research into the effects of violent lyrics. One early study by Johnson, et al. (1995) assessed the effects of rap music on the attitudes and perceptions of African-American males. In the study, three groups were formed – one group watched music videos with violent themes, one group watched music videos with nonviolent themes, and a control group saw no music videos. Results showed a greater acceptance of violence among the violent-video watchers, when compared to the other two groups and a higher probability that they would engage in violence, when

compared to only the control group. They found that exposure to violence does, indeed, have an effect on attitudes and perceptions among African-American males.

When looking at lyrics specifically, and not just their effects, Herd (2009) found a vastly changing landscape of violent themes in music from the 1970s through the 1990s. In the earlier rap songs, Herd found violence to be viewed negatively or with ambivalence. Over time, violence became more prevalent in the lyrics. Herd postulated a relationship between more prevalent violence in lyrics with an increase of “profiteering” among major recording labels, where violence and graphic sexuality were key factors in selling the music. He also proposed that the increase of violence in the music could merely be a reflection of increasing violence, especially among African-American males.

An alternative explanation comes with the construct of authenticity. Newman (2005) explained that rappers hold high regard for those who participate in violent actions, explaining that these men represented a lifestyle of authentic toughness and “an unwillingness to back down under pressure.” In rapping competitions, rappers often engage in verbal battles to best the others, which, as Riley (2005) clarifies, is a way in which authenticity is manifested. Homicidal lyrics are a part of these contests, where rappers will often take on a fictional persona, sometimes personifying homicidal killers, like Hannibal Lecter from *Silence of the Lambs*, and use violent lyrics to mark themselves as the best rapper (Hunnicut and Andrews, 2009). The authenticity of their lyrics is directly

related to their personal experiences growing up in the “hood.” Whoever is the “realest,” is “the one most able to face, affirm, and overcome suffering and to report it unflinchingly to others” (Riley, 2005). Acts of violence such as harming other characters, being successful criminals, brandishing weapons, or outwitting the police show authenticity of not only rapping about being a gangsta but actually living “the lifestyle.” The continuation of violent-themed rap music was exacerbated by successful sales of albums. It was an epidemic of violent proportions (LaGrone, 2000). As Dr. Dre, “the architect of gangsta rap” put it, “America loves violence. America is obsessed with murder. I think murder sells a lot more than sex... You don’t hardly ever hear anybody hollering about Oliver Stone or Martin Scorsese or Clint Eastwood and all the violence in their work... to me, the records and the videos we make are just pure entertainment” (Cheevers et al., 1995).

Misogyny and Sexism

Sommers-Flanagan, et al. (1993) defined misogyny as sexualizing women and the dominance of men over women (as cited in Conrad, Dixon, and Zhang, 2009), something gangsta rap lyrics espouse profusively. Some researchers expected misogynistic lyrics to increase sexist reactions in listeners (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Devine, 1989; Dunning and Sherman, 1997). In a study by Cobb and Boettcher (2007), exposure to misogynistic rap lyrics “primed” more sexist attitudes in males but “defensive” attitudes in females. Dixon, Yuanyuan, and

Conrad (2009) examined an African-American-only audience on the relationship between their rap music video consumption and perceptions of misogyny. Results showed that viewing more misogynistic videos predicted greater acceptance of female degradation and less likelihood to believe that the music actually debased females. A survey of participants, ages 18 to 24, found that the older the participant was, the less positive their reactions were to the misogynistic lyrics, suggesting that as youths mature, they may re-examine their opinions of rap music (Gourdine and Lemmons, 2011).

In a textual analysis, Tyree (2009) went to the source and looked for black female stereotypes and misogynistic lyrics to two specific genres of women: mothers and “baby mamas,” mother’s of a man’s baby, Tyree elucidated a separation between how black men view their mothers and mothers of their children. In a sample of 12 songs, the researcher found rappers have a high regard for their mothers but all 12 songs used misogynistic lyrics toward their baby mamas, specifically in reference to “gold diggers.” Reid-Brinkley (2008) supported Tyree’s results in her study of discussions on *Essence* magazine’s website, during their campaign to end negative female stereotypes in media products, such as rap. The researcher found a dichotomy between “good” black women (the “queen” or “princess”) and “bad” black women (the “hos,” or whores). The conclusion was that “some women are worthy of protection from misogynistic harassment and violence while other women deserve such treatment because of [the way they present] their femininity.”

Some researchers offer explanations for the culture of violence against women however. Pinn (1999) postulates that misogyny is based on fear. Since men are dependent on women for their and their progeny's survival, "gangstas" work to control and subdue women to maintain their manhood.

Closely related to misogyny is the prevalence of sexual imagery in rap music. Again, in gangsta rap and in a later genre, "Dirty South", overt displays of sexual exploitation have given rappers and African-American males, generally, a negative stereotype in relation to women (Reyna, Brandt, and Viki, 2009). In a study using high- and low-sexual videos, participants rated their opinions after watching either 20 high-sex rap-music videos or 20 low-sex videos. Results found that only males evinced higher levels of sexism towards women when viewing the high-sex videos, while effects of women participants were not significant. Researchers posit that women in this group were simply "unimpressed" by the sexist depictions of women in the videos (Kistler and Lee, 2010).

A similar study (Peterson, et al., 2007) looked at female African-American adolescents who viewed rap music videos and connections to their health. A regression analysis showed a higher likeliness to binge drink, test positive for marijuana, have multiple sex partners, and have a negative body image in those who perceived more portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos. The researchers concluded that female African-American teens may identify with the themes in the videos and may reinforce their tendency to engage in negative

health behaviors. Zhang, Dixon, and Conrad (2010) scrutinized rap videos further and found an overrepresentation of thin-bodied black and white women in the videos, especially in high-sex or materialistic videos (as opposed to larger women in politically-aware videos), further presenting negative body images to young women, like the participants in Peterson, et al.'s research. These deleterious stereotypes not only affect the viewers and listeners of the genre but attitudes and judgments toward black people, not only in America, but internationally (Reyna, Brandt, and Viki, 2009).

Drugs/Alcohol

Though violence and misogyny are far more researched in rap music than drugs and alcohol, they are no less prevalent. Roberts et al. (1999) reported on a U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy examination of 1,000 of the most popular songs of youth from 1996 and 1997. Results showed that drugs were mentioned in 63 percent of the rap songs versus 10 percent of the songs in any other category. Herd (2008) did a similar study of lyrics from 1979 to 1997 and found drugs to be mentioned in only 4 to 11 percent of the songs. By the '90s, the percentage of drug references jumped to 69 percent. When looking at the particular drugs referenced, Herd found that marijuana was most dominant (66 percent), above cocaine (32 percent) and cigars, or blunts (22 percent). Unfortunately, this tendency toward drug glorification was solidified as a racial construct linking African-American males to this lifestyle when President George

H.W. Bush's "war on drugs" used racial stereotypes and images as the center of his \$8 billion anti-drug campaign (Grant, 2002).

However, some inner-city members considered selling drugs as a way to pull themselves out of poverty. Jay-Z characterizes selling drugs and other such acts as "real things on the road to riches and diamond rings" (Riley, 2005). To him and other rappers, drugs are a means to an end. Other commentators explain drug use is a part of the lyrics because drugs are a part of growing up in an inner-city neighborhood (Herd, 2005).

As is alcohol. Herd (2008) did an identical study to her content analysis of drug-related lyrics in rap music and found that references to alcohol increased fivefold from 1979 to 1997. The increase of positive attitudes towards alcohol in the lyrics increased from 43 percent in the late '70s to 73 percent in the '90s. Also, references to brand-name alcohol increased from 46 percent to 71 percent. The study mentioned above by Robert et al. (1999) looked at alcohol use as well as drug use in lyrics of popular youth music and also found rap to contain the highest frequency of references to alcohol of all genres (47 percent). In early lyrics, the forty-ounce bottle (also called "'40s") of malt liquor was the alcohol of choice for the gangsta lifestyles (Quinn, 2005). Herd also found that rappers use alcohol to signify wealth and glamour and associated it with masculinity or toughness. Major white-rap labels cash in on the connection between alcohol and wealth. Marketers use alcohol to represent the "rap lifestyle" to gain a larger following and to sell more liquor. Product placement for liquor is not just

for the movies anymore. Marketers use rap videos to sell their goods, showing consumption of Hennessey, Alize, and Patron, just to name a few brands featured in lyrics (Hunter, 2011).

Rap as a Positive Influence

Though much of rap has been criticized and thoroughly scrutinized, some researchers do acknowledge that rap is not all bad. Palmer (1986) characterizes the music as “largely positive,” espousing that salient themes in the music give youth a message that they can “make anything of themselves if they work at it.” Diego Cortez, a freelance curator in New York City, said, “I think the work [of rappers] should be looked at as a highly sophisticated art form which is the image of New York. It’s definitely the soul of the underground scene at the moment” (George, 2004). Though calling it a “highly sophisticated art form” may offend the elites of America, it certainly is rightly labeled the “soul” of the hip-hop youth culture. To McDonnell (1992), the lyrics are a symbol of “hope, increased pride, and self-esteem at a time when any other evidence has been eroded by prevailing social conditions.” It is through this means of self-expression that youths, first black and then of other races, could protest social injustice and oppression. Before rap music, these marginalized youth lacked a voice (Tanner, et al., 2009).

The Artists of Rap

In this thesis, the songs of 10 rappers were analyzed. Understanding the background of each rapper, along with the history of rap explicated above, is important in order to add depth of understanding and give scope to the “whole picture” in the analysis of the lyrics. The following is a brief summary of each rapper represented in the data (biographies all cited from *Billboard* magazine online):

One of the most well-known rappers of the past decade, 50 Cent, lived the stereotypical inner-city lifestyle. Growing up in Queens, New York, in the 70’s and 80’s, 50 Cent, or Curtis James Jackson III, grew up with his grandmother and made money “hustling,” a term for selling drugs. He exchanged his drug-selling lifestyle for a career in hip hop when he met a member of then-famous rap group, Run D.M.C. In May of 2000, 50 Cent survived an incident that became what he was best known for: being gunned down and surviving. Right before one of his albums was about to be released, 50 Cent was shot nine times in a neighborhood on Manhattan. As a result, Columbia records wanted nothing to do with the rapper and soon parted ways with him. 50 Cent made his first large sum of money when famous white rapper, Eminem, signed 50 Cent to his record label in 2002. Despite further suspicious involvement in other violent offenses, Eminem’s label came out with 50 Cent’s most popular album, “Get Rich or Die Tryin,” which was where his highly-popular single to be analyzed in

this thesis, *In Da Club*, came from. Since then, 50 continued to work with his “crew,” G-Unit, to make more tracks, though none as popular as *In Da Club*.

A fellow East Coaster, Fabolous, grew up in the streets of Brooklyn. He, like 50 Cent, experienced much of the authentic rapper lifestyle that many rappers talk about in their lyrics. Fabolous was born John Jackson in the late 70’s. His first big hit, *Can’t Deny It*, came out in 2001. He was known as one of the first rappers to blend the style of West Coast gangsta rap with the sexually-themed and rich Dirty South rap. Like 50 Cent, Fabolous was able to cross over several different genres of rap, especially with his incorporation of pop music in his tracks. In 2003, three of his songs made *Billboard’s* Top 100 chart, increasing his fame and wealth. Being charged for weapons possession when he shot himself in the leg in 2006 did not deter his career. In 2007, a famous rap label, Def Jam (owned by Russell Simmons, the godfather of hip hop), put out a new album for Fabolous which immediately debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard’s* Top R&B/Hip Hop albums chart. On the album was his No. 1 song, *Make Me Better*, which is the song that will be analyzed later in the thesis.

Along with 50 Cent and Fabolous, the members of Terror Squad, Remy Ma, Prospect, Triple Seis, Big Punisher, Tony Sunshine, Cuban Link, Remy, Armageddon, and Fat Joe grew up on the East Coast. They started their group in 1998 in the Bronx and made their first album that same year. Big Punisher and Fat Joe were the headliners of the group, having already established themselves individually since the early 90’s. After the death of Big Punisher in

2000, Fat Joe continued his solo career and brought the singing talents of members of the original Terror Squad onto his albums. Five years after their first album release, new members of the Terror Squad collaborated together to release an album in 2004 on which was their No. 1 song, *Lean Back* (the song to be analyzed), that swept the clubs that year with their own style of dance as seen on their music video.

In the Dirty South, Yung Joc (Jasiel Robinson), broke the rapper-mold by being born into a middle-class family in Atlanta, GA. His father, who owned a hair-products company, gave Yung Joc his first musical job by writing a jingle for Revlon. After that, he knew he wanted to be a part of rap music. He formed his own company, Mastermind, and released a track in 2006, *It's Goin' Down*, the song to be analyzed in this thesis. The song soon became popular in the Atlanta area and luckily made its way into the hands of famous rapper-turned-executive, Sean “Diddy” Combs (also known as Puff Daddy). Eventually, the song made it to the top of the *Billboard* charts. Thus began Yung Joc’s multi-million dollar career on Combs’ label, though without other No. 1 songs.

Another Atlanta native, Lil’ Jon (Jonathan Smith), began his career in the South as a producer who specialized in making club remixes of popular dance songs. Later, he created his own group in 1997, Lil’ Jon and the East Side Boyz, and they made a name for themselves with a “crunk” style of rap, as previously mentioned in the “Dirty South” genre section. Lil’ Jon reached the peak of his career in 2003 with the club favorite, *Get Low*, that also made the top of the

charts that year. In 2004, he came out with an album that featured several other famous rappers, like Ludacris and Usher, including his No. 1 hit, *Lovers and Friends*, which will be analyzed later.

A more recent Dirty South rapper, B.O.B., also came from Georgia and was one of the younger rappers to achieve fame. At age 17, B.O.B. signed his first major record deal. Growing up, Bobby (B.O.B.) Ray Simmons played the trumpet and other instruments; by high school, he had a manager and formed a group with another rapper, calling themselves Klinik. After performing in a club, even though he was underage, B.O.B. was signed by a major record label and in 2007, wrote his first single, *Haterz Everywhere*, which reached the top five on *Billboard's* R&B/Hip Hop chart. In 2008, B.O.B. came out with his first album, but he did not have a No. 1 single until 2010, when he collaborated with pop singer Bruno Mars in *Nothin' On You*, one of the songs to be used in this thesis.

In New Orleans, Lil' Wayne emerged as a pre-teen, spouting off hardcore rhymes and a vast amount of songs. Born as Dwayne Michael Carter, Jr., Lil' Wayne grew up in the New Orleans neighborhood of Hollygrove, also home to several other known music artists. Growing up, Lil' Wayne made A's in school but always thought school grades were not a true depiction of his intelligence, but music was the best way to express himself. At age 11, he began writing songs and convinced executives at the Cash Money record label to hire him to do odd jobs. In 1997, the label produced Lil' Wayne's first album that was a

collaboration with his rap group, Hot Boys. His music did not rise to fame until 2004 because of censure as a result of his hardcore rap lyrics. With the debut of his 2004 album, “Tha Carter,” Lil’ Wayne launched himself into mainstream music and rap-star fame. His most well-known hit, *Lollipop*, the song that will be analyzed for wealth constructs, was released in 2008, and within the first week sold more than one million copies.

Also in the South, one of the most famous female rappers (and the only female rapper in this study), Missy Elliott, grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia. Missy Elliott’s career began when the Swing Mob record label signed her with her group, Sista. Shortly thereafter, Swing Mob went under, so Missy Elliott called on her friend and fellow rapper, Timbaland, to help produce her album. It was a good move on her part because that was when the money started rolling in with the sale of her debut album. In 1997, her album, “Supa Dupa Fly,” increased her sales and impressed everyone who heard it. Her fame grew to the point of Missy becoming a cultural icon at the turn of the century when she topped the R&B/Hip Hop charts two year in a row with *Hot Boys* and *Get Ur Freak On*, the two songs of Missy’s to be analyzed here.

In the Midwest, in St. Louis, Missouri, Nelly’s (born Cornell Hayes, Jr.) rap songs identified the most with Dirty South rapping. His style is as much country as urban and incorporates pop-styled music with his rap, making him an immediate favorite with his first album, “Country Grammar,” in 2000. In his teens, Nelly formed his own group, the St. Lunatics, with four of his friends. The

group produced a hit in 1996, though no record label yet agreed to sign them. He reached his zenith in 2002, when songs from his album, “Nellyville,” topped ten of *Billboard*’s charts, including the song to be analyzed, *Hot in Herre*.

Not all popular rappers came from America, however. Though not native to America, Drake (Aubrey Drake Graham) became one of the most popular rappers of the last decade. Born in Canada, Drake’s career began with an acting job in a Canadian television show. In 2006, he made a name for himself as a rapper and soon became one of the most talked-about artists of the century, helped along by the support of already well-known rappers like Lil’ Wayne and Jay-Z. In 2009, he released a single that became No. 1 on the Billboard charts, *Best I Ever Had*, to be analyzed in this paper.

Since it has been shown that rappers use several constructs of wealth within their music, the question remains as to how the rappers themselves gain the wealth to buy what they mentioned in their music: money, cars, liquor, attire, and bling. According to the online website, celebritynetworth.com, all 10 rappers in this study have a net worth in the millions, ranging from \$250 million (50 Cent and Missy Elliott) to \$10 million (Yung Joc).

There are two main ways rappers accumulate their wealth: sales from their albums and singles and endorsements. Money made on albums can be tracked according to the number of albums or singles purchased. The Recording Industry Association of America created four different certifications for music artists that coincide with the amount of money earned. In order for a

single song to “go Gold,” 100,000 purchases of the song must be made (which is tracked by several companies). Each Gold award equals around \$1 million in sales. For a single song to “go Platinum,” 200,000 purchases of the song must be made. Multi-Platinum is 2,000,000 songs bought, and Diamond is 10,000,000. Working their way up to a Diamond certification increases the money earned by the rappers (riaa.com, n.d.).

To give this certification scope, Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* tops the Diamond certification chart as the most purchased song at over 29,000,000. The only two rappers to currently be on the Diamond award chart are the infamous gangsta rappers from the East Coast, The Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac, both at around 10,000,000 songs purchased (as a side note, these certifications did not occur until after *both* of the rappers’ deaths, so the awards were given posthumously). None of the songs analyzed in this thesis went Diamond, but Yung Joc and Lil’ Wayne did “go Multi-Platinum,” several times over for their songs, *It’s Goin’ Down* and *Lollipop*. This is evident by their net worths of \$20 million and \$85 million, respectively. The other songs were certified as either Gold or Platinum.

In addition to earnings from songs produced, rappers also earn money from endorsements. According to the *LA Times*, hip-hop fashion is a 2.6 billion dollar industry (Semuels, 2007), and several music artists, not just in rap, have created their own clothing lines. Rapper Nelly owns two clothing lines, VOKAL and Apple Bottoms; Sean Combs owns his own line, Sean Jean, and Jay-Z owns

Roc-a-Wear (Harkness, 2011). At the turn of the century, when Missy Elliott was just rising to fame, she appeared in TV ads for Gap and Sprite. Lil' Jon endorses Oakley, the famous sunglasses retailers, and Crunk Energy Drink. 50 Cent endorses Vitamin Water and several high-end audio products. Nelly has endorsed Nike, Reebok, Ford Motors, Inc., and Got Milk ads. Drake lends his face for advertising Kodak cameras and Sprite.

If each of these rappers possesses a net worth of at least \$10 million as a result of these endorsements and music sales, it also begs the question of what the rappers do with the money, other than spend it on liquor, cars, attire, and bling. Several rappers report using their money to help previous members of their rap groups to start their own individual careers as rappers. 50 Cent helped members of his G-Crew grow a successful franchise as well as sell-out tours for his platinum-awarded solo albums for group members (billboard.com, n.d.). Other rappers rap about not forgetting their roots and taking care of the people they left behind in the inner city (Harkness, 2011). Several rappers have created their own charities, funded by money made from album sales and endorsements. Nelly created a scholarship fund for students from his hometown, St. Louis, and is actively involved in the following charities: 21st Centruy Leaders, 4sho4kids, Ante Up for Africa, ENOUGH Project, Not On Our Watch, and Whatever It Takes. Drake hosted a charity fundraiser for Club Charity that raised money for people with CIDP, an inflammatory disorder through which Drake's long-time friend has been debilitated. 50 Cent donates both time and money to several

charities, including performing for kids from his neighborhood in Queens, New York, at an amusement park (looktothestars.org, n.d.).

CHAPTER THREE

Analytic Framework and Methods

Critical and Cultural Theory/Semiotics

The youth of America are the ones who listen to the rappers mentioned above (Riley, 2005). In order to study a cultural artifact, like rap music, it is important to look at it through the correct lens: critical and cultural theory. There is no singularly accepted definition for these theories, since they are a part of the social sciences and allow for studies that are diverse in themes and approaches. Critical theory, however, does have its roots in the Frankfurt School of the 1920s through 1950s. This school of thought desired to examine Karl Marx's theories through a critical viewpoint in order to apply his theories to contemporary culture – hence the connection between critical and cultural (Cavaliaro, 2001). The art of cultural criticism offers a viewpoint of looking closely at the meanings generated through different types of culture (McGowan, 2007), making critical and cultural theory the perfect lens through which to analyze rap music.

This study looks at rap music as a form of cultural text. Critical and cultural theory says to look for signification and representation of what the text is telling us as it is viewed in a cultural context (McGowan, 2007). One such approach within critical and cultural theory is to look for signification and

representation semiotically (Cavaliaro, 2001), which is the specific cultural and critical theory approach that will be used in this study.

Imagine the first day of college on a large campus. In order to get to a certain classroom on time, there need to be signs to signify, or tell, a person where to go. If taking a class on pottery, a person would be looking for the “Arts Center,” and would look for a *sign* on the side of a building that says “Arts Center.” In the same way, semiotics takes researchers on a journey of studying signs. What do they mean? How do they provide meaning? Just as the “Arts Center” sign indicates, or means, that is the building to go into for art-related classes, so does rap music indicate meaning for the culture of those who make it.

Umberto Eco first espoused semiotics as a valid way to study culture, but it was Roland Barthes in the 1950s who introduced the semiotic method to the general public as a way to understand our mediated culture. He defined semiotics as a “system of principles for the study of sign-based behavior” (Danesi, 2002). Both Eco and Barthes traced the idea for sign-based studies to Hippocrates, the founder of Western medical science. He coined the term semiotics as a branch of the medical field that studied symptoms, or signs, that “stand for something other than itself” (Danesi, 2002). The contemporary use of the “science of signs” has been mainly to study cultural texts and other artifacts of culture (Deely, 1990), which is why semiotics is the best critical and cultural theory approach to studying the “text” of rap lyrics. Deely (1990) goes on to say that semiotics is a “process of revelation,” by which a researcher looks at a text to

reveal the meanings of what is there. Music is said to be a representation of cultures (van Leeuwen, 1998), which makes semiotics the perfect way to view how rap music represents wealth in the inner-city culture.

Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, offered a view of semiotics as looking at words in a “dyadic” model. According to Saussure, each word has a “signifier” and a “signified” (Chandler, 2002; McGowan, 2004), which simply means that each word is made up of letters and syllables, the “signifier”, which stands for a meaning, the “signified.” For instance, the word “wealth” would be the signifier and the signified would be “an abundance of valuable possessions and resources.” So, since critical and cultural theory says there is a need to look for *signification* and *representations*, semiotics complements this lens by looking at words not just for what they are but also for what they signify, or mean. When looking at rap lyrics, each word can be looked at as a sign to represent the understandings of a culture. And the meaning of each word is determined by the context of the word and the culture surrounding the artifact.

The primary object of semiotics is threefold: finding out what something means or represents, explaining how it exemplifies its meaning, and discovering why it has the meaning that it has (Danesi, 2002). For this study, the first two objectives will form the foundation for studying the construct of wealth in rap lyrics: what words represent wealth in rap lyrics and how they signify and represent the meaning of wealth.

Again, just as humans look at signs to point the way to the art building, so can researchers use music to point the way to understanding how a culture thinks. Rap music can *signify* important ideologies of wealth as well as *represent* the construct of wealth for an entire culture.

Hermeneutics

To do this, a method of analysis must be used. Since this study aims to make sense of the signifiers of a text, hermeneutics will be utilized. The term “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word, “hermeneutikos,” meaning “related to explaining” (Bauman, 2010). The derivatives of the Greek word refer to the Greek messenger of the gods, Hermes. He was tasked with the job of taking the incomprehensible words of the gods and making them comprehensible to humans (Palmer, 1969). It is no wonder, then, that the study of hermeneutics has transported understanding and meaning of texts across history.

According to Socrates, words have the power to reveal (Hoy, 1982), so it is understandable how theologians used hermeneutics for the revelation of Biblical texts (Patterson and Pentland, 2008). By the 19th century, Friedrich Schleiermacher brought hermeneutics into its modern state by recognizing its ability to understand the social sciences, as well (Crotty, 1998).

In order to analyze rap music for its significations and representations of wealth, the *part-to-whole* method will be implemented. According to Thompson’s

(1997) study of hermeneutical frameworks, this process looks at texts in a cycle that will explain the methodology of rap lyric analysis in this study.

The *part-to-whole* method begins with reading background research and looking at the historical and cultural conditions relative to the construct of wealth and the history of rap music as a whole. If a person were studying the Bible, they would first look at both the Old Testament and New Testament, with all the books found therein. For this thesis, a comprehensive look at previous literature comprises the first stage of the *part-to-whole* method.

Then, for the *part* method, the entirety of each text in question is read, like reading each of the 66 books of the Bible. In this case, the lyrics of the number one rap songs from each year of the last decade will be studied, and the 11 rap song lyrics will be read individually. Reading them entirely gives a sense of the “whole” message and the constructed meaning of the text, relative to the aforementioned historical and cultural background. Understanding the background is “the most critical aspect of hermeneutic interpretation” (Thompson, 1997), most likely because the meanings of the text cannot be understood without a framework of understanding. If a person were to read the Bible without understanding the historical and cultural background of the people of Israel, then full comprehension of the entire text could not happen. So this study uses semiotic theory of understanding what signs, or words, stand for within the text.

As the process continues, the lyrics will be read again for further understanding of their meanings. Further in the *part* method, the analyzation process will look for patterns, or themes, in each of the 11 rap song lyrics. Again, this entire process is looking for *meanings* and *representations* of wealth in rap music. Each theme will be a clue into how wealth is constructed and comparing those themes to previous literature will ensure correct meanings and representations are constructed.

Data

For the 11 songs to be hermeneutically analyzed, the study will use *Billboard* magazine's Top Rap Albums and Top R&B/Hip Hop charts. Other researchers have found *Billboard* to be the fairest and least subjective of published music charts (Lena, 2006; Denisoff, 1986, Lopes, 1992, Peterson and Berger, 1975). *Billboard* is the most widely recognized authority on music inside and outside of the industry. The charts are based on sales and radio plays. This research only looks at chart-topping songs because they are most widely heard by youth. Looking at mainstream rap ensures looking at the most popular trends in rap (Hunter, 2011). The songs looked at will be the top rap songs from each year beginning in 2000 and ending in 2010. This will give a comprehensive overview of how wealth has been constructed by rap songs in the past decade.

The top rap song for the year 2000 and 2001 came from the Top R&B/Hip Hop chart. The chart for both of those years featured R&B artists as

the No. 1 song, so the first slot in the chart that featured a rapper was chosen. *Get Ur Freak On* by Missy Elliot as No. 11 on the chart for 2001 and *Hot Boyz* by Missy Elliot was No. 4 on the chart for 2000. From the year 2002 to 2010, the No. 1 rap song from the Top Rap Singles were used. Those included, *Hot in Herre* by Nelly for 2002, *In Da Club* by 50 Cent for 2003, *Lean Back* by Terror Squad for 2004, *Lovers and Friends* by Lil' Jon and the East Side Boyz for 2005, *It's Goin' Down* by Yung Joc for 2006, *Make Me Better* by Fabolous for 2007, *Lollipop* by Lil' Wayne for 2008, *Best I Ever Had* by Drake for 2009, and *Nothin' On You* by B.O.B. for 2010.

Using the *part-to-whole* method of hermeneutical analysis, the next stage in the process was to look at the whole body of text of the 11 songs by reading them several times. Lyrics were obtained online on a database of modern music lyrics that is part of *Billboard*: metrolyrics.com. The obtained lyrics were then compiled chronologically in a document. To add to the cultural understanding of the text, part of this process included watching the music videos for each song. This added depth of understanding to sometimes difficult-to-understand lyrics. Smitherman (1997) explains why rap lyrics are sometimes difficult to understand when he defines the term *semantic inversion*. This technique used by rappers takes English words and uses them in a completely different way or reverse their meanings. For instance, when Terror Squad raps, "Got a date at 8/I'm in the 740 fizz-i," there was very little context as to what the group was referring to when they said they were in a "740 fizz-i," until looking at the music video. As

the lyrics were rapped, the camera panned to the back of a BMW car that was a 745i make. Putting the lyrics together with the music video and understanding of semantic inversion, it became clear that “the 740 fizz-i” was a different way to name the 745i make of the BMW being driven. It is also in this way that the *part-to-whole* method of hermeneutical analysis begins to make sense: the whole picture of the meaning of this phrase came not only through context of the *part* but also understanding of the *whole*, i.e. the historical understanding found in the body of literature and the cultural signifiers represented in the music videos.

After reading through the lyrics to the 11 songs, the *part* method of the *part-to-whole* method commenced. Now having a better idea of the meaning behind the words of each song through repetitious reading, viewing the music videos, and having a broad understanding of the previous literature, the *part* method consisted of choosing the phrases in the songs that pertain to wealth. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the construct of wealth used in this research includes representations of both *material possessions* and *money* in the lyrics. Semiotics said looking for representations and significations are of high importance when looking at cultural texts. After choosing specific lyrics signifying either aspect of wealth, a new document was created to compile all the lyrics into one group, in order to read the lyrics again to understand the references to wealth. Since rap music uses quite a bit of slang and semantic inversion, an online archive of slang terms, the Urban Dictionary, as used by Moody (2011) in her study of the “independent woman” in rap lyrics, was used

to help provide meaning, along with the context of the lyrics. Though the Urban Dictionary was created by the input of unselective entries of people who may not be “experts,” it was still a valid database when coupled with analysis of context and previous scholarly literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Three over-arching themes emerged as the lyrics were analyzed and grouped according to type of wealth: relationship between wealth and the opposite sex, wealth that garners respect from other people, and wealth as a signifier for “living the good life.” Within each of these themes, five sub-themes emerged as signifiers for wealth: money, cars, attire, liquor, and “bling,” or jewelry, though not all sub-themes are represented in every main theme.

Relationship Between Wealth and the Opposite Sex

Upon analyzing the lyrics, a relationship emerged between wealth and the opposite sex. Drake, in his song, *Best I Ever Had*, talks about his relationship with a woman whom he considered the “best he ever had.” As he explicates reasons why the woman is so great, he includes in the chorus of the song, “I want this forever/I swear I can spend whatever on it,” indicating that he does not mind spending his wealth on this woman, which connects wealth to the importance of a relationship with the opposite sex. In a Missy Elliot song, *Hot Boyz*, she states that the hot boys “got what I want.” Part of the reason she likes the hot boys is for their money: “Yo, Imma dig in yo’ pockets/Dig in yo’ wallets/Is there money unfounded/Yeah, you got my heart poundin’,” again, pointing to a direct

relationship between having money and the desirability of a relationship with the opposite sex. In a less direct relationship between wealth and the opposite sex, the rapper B.O.B. uses his money in *Nothin' On You* to travel, comparing his girlfriend as better than any other woman he has met in other countries: "I've been to London, I've been to Paris/Even way out there in Tokyo/Back home down in Georgia, to New Orleans/But you always steal the show."

Along with money, material possessions, also play into the relationship between sexes. In the *whole* method of hermeneutical analysis, previous literature mentioned cars as a staple in rap lyrics (Nielson, 2010), so it makes sense that cars also become a signifier for wealth in the lyrics, depending on the make and model. Several instances of cars related to relationships occur. In the song, *Lovers and Friends*, rapper Lil' Jon explores the tenuous relationship between being friends and becoming "lovers." Lil' Jon weaves a narrative of leaving the club with his platonic girlfriend and uses his status car, a GT, to cross the bridge between friends and becoming "lovers." He says, "'Cause once you get inside [the car], you can't change your mind." The GT, according to Urban Dictionary, stands for "Grand Touring" and is the best make of a car a person can buy. Lil' Jon uses his status of wealth, his GT, to symbolize his transition from friend to "lover." In *Lean Back*, Terror Squad raps, "Half a mil' for the charm, nigga this is life/Got the Phantom in front of the building on Trinity Ave." These lyrics ostensibly indicate an illusion to wealth, but the *whole* picture of what Terror Squad referred to did not come to light until looking at the music

video, as when translating 740 fizz-i earlier in the analysis. The video shows a pretty girl sitting on the hood of their Phantom Rolls Royce, which seems to signify cars as wealth that draws in women. So again, the *whole* background (such as music videos) in hermeneutical research elucidates the *part* (one section of lyrics).

Missy Elliot, in *Hot Boyz*, not only desires relationships with boys with money in their pockets, but ones who drive high-end cars. She mentions the Jaguar, Bentley, Rolls Royce, SK-8, and the Mercedes-Benz, Lexus, and Lincoln jeeps as desirable vehicles for her boyfriend to own, most of which, according to their websites, price at over \$100,000. Included in the construct of cars as wealth is the ability buy the cars. Part of what Missy Elliot wants from her *Hot Boyz* is the use of their Platinum Visa's, a credit card with a high spending limit: "Hot boyz/Baby you got what I want/See cuz y'all be drivin' Jaguars/And the Bentley's, and the Rolls Royce/Playin' hardballs wit' them Platinum Visa's." Finally, in Terror Squad's *Lean Back*, the connection between relationships and cars is made in a slight mention of going on the date in a "740 fizz-i." According to the process mentioned above by looking at the music video for further understanding of this type of car, the music video clarified that it was a BMW 754i, priced between \$71,000 and \$135,000.

Similar to Drake's song, *Best I Ever Had*, Fabolous raps about a woman in *Make Me Better*. In this case, he uses attire as an important part of his relationship with his woman. Fabolous explains that "you plus me, it makes better math,"

and goes on to paint the picture of the pair of them both wearing designer attire: “Daddy do the Gucci, mami in Giuseppees,” referencing two expensive designers. One pair of Giuseppe Zanotti shoes, according to their website, can be bought for \$500.

In order to make their attire stand out, rappers often wear large jewelry, or “bling”, a staple of their “lavish lifestyle,” as previous literature elucidates (Zhang, et al., 2010). Missy Elliot in *Hot Boyz* not only wants money and expensive cars but also diamonds from the boys she considers dating: “These diamonds I’m needin’/Make you believe it/I want a lot, boy/With a hot boy.” Diamonds, in this instance, signify both wealth and attachment in a relationship.

Another aspect of wealth to rappers is the consumption of expensive liquor. When looking at the *whole* hermeneutically for significance of liquor, Herd (2005) found that liquor is mentioned 45 percent more in rap music than any other genre and is often a signifier of wealth. Dance clubs are often the place where liquor is consumed in rap songs. 50 Cent’s *In Da Club* mentions two types of liquor, Bacardi, a type of rum, and champagne. This was one point where the Urban Dictionary was utilized, since 50 Cent called champagne a “bottle full of bub,” and did not explain the meaning of the phrase. The Urban Dictionary explained the meaning of “bub,” as the carbonated bubbles found in champagne when opened. Again, the *whole* gave meaning to the *part*.

Both of these wealth signifiers are connected to 50 Cent partying with women: “You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub/Look mami, I got the X

if you into takin' drugs/I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love/So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed.” When Lil’ Jon is in the club with his girl friend, as they are on their way to become “lovers” in *Lovers and Friends*, he says, “Girl, I can’t leave you alone/Take a shot of this here Patron,” speaking of an expensive type of tequila. Both rappers connect buying expensive liquor for the women they are with in order to party at a club.

Wealth that Garners Respect from Other People

Rappers use their money and material possessions to garner the respect of others as well as relationships with women. In *It’s Goin’ Down*, Young Joc creates a picture of other men flocking to him and wanting to know everything about him because he now has money: “Niggaz in my face/ Damn near er’ day/Asking a million questions like/Joc where ya stay.” As a side note, “niggaz,” in this usage is not used as a derogatory term for black people, but as a term of camaraderie with other black men, according to the literature (Smitherman, 1997) and the Urban Dictionary. Terror Squad echoes this connection between the respect of others and wealth when they rap about people wanting to be close to them (and their money): “See niggas get tight when you worth some millions.” Young Joc goes on to list how he uses his money: “Eat 20 grand/Spend a grand at the bar,” describing how he goes through thousands of dollars in a day; “Catch me in the hood/Posted at the sto’/Pistol in my lap/On the phone countin’ dough,” describing his lifestyle of hanging out at a

neighborhood store as he counts his money; “Cubes on my neck/Pockets full of Ben Frank/When I’m in the mall/Hoes just pause,” showing how he draws attention from women when he wears diamonds on his neck and has one hundred dollar bills in his pockets. All of these descriptions add up to Young Joc saying, “Er’body love me/I’m so fly/Niggaz throw the deuces e’r time I ride by,” which means the neighborhood men acknowledge, or respect, his presence when they see him. 50 Cent garners respect when he speaks of how much money his rap career has made but how he still is working hard for his money, in *In Da Club*: “I’m fully focused man,/My money on my mind/Got a mill’ out the deal and I’m still on the grind.” 50 Cent goes on to express how other men who do not respect him will begin to: “If the niggaz hate, then let ‘em hate, then watch the money pile up.” Young Joc describes giving money to “the Feds” when they try to arrest him: “I’ma make it rain, nigga, I ain’t scared to share it.” When looking at the literature, “make it rain” has become a common phrase in rap music, especially in Dirty South rap, that references throwing money, or making it rain, on strippers in a strip club (Hunter, 2011). In this case, Young Joc is “makin’ it rain” on the cops he wants to leave him alone.

Cars also come to signify respect, as well as a link to relationships as seen above, because of wealth in rap music. Young Joc in *It’s Goin’ Down* expresses how his fame lets him and his “crew” of people drive expensive cars, like BMW’s, and get respect from other “niggas”: “Lights, camera, action when I

walk through the door/Niggaz know my crew we certified stars/Valet in the front 'bout 35 cars/Bitches in the back/Black beamer coupes.”

There are fewer representations of wealth when looking at the intersection of a rapper’s attire and respect. However, Young Joc does talk about his Air Jordan shoes, nicknamed “Jays,” and his desire for his friends to “get like me”: “Eat 20 grand spend a grand at the bar/Jest bought a zone jays on my feet/I’m on that Patron so get like me.” Terror Squad uses attire to make other people they know jealous, especially those who stick too close to their group because of the money they have, “See niggas get tight, when you worth some millions/That’s why I sport the chinchilla to hurt they feelin’s.” Chinchilla is a very expensive type of fur.

In the research, there was only one reference to liquor when looking at wealth and respect. Like much of the analysis above, this representation of wealth comes from Young Joc’s *It’s Goin’ Down*. He references an expensive type of tequila when he tells other men to “get like me”: “Eat 20 grand spend a grand at the bar/.../I’m on that Patron, so get like me.”

Young Joc also tries to garner respect by showing the diamonds he wears to police who are trying to arrest him: “Stunting is a habit let ‘em see the karats,” which refers back to earlier lyrics where Young Joc blew marijuana smoke into the faces of the police. Apparently, if they see the “karats” of Young Joc’s diamonds, they might gain respect for him (even though he blew smoke in their face). If only looking at this phrase, the lyrics would not make much sense as to

why Young Joc would want to show the cops diamonds and blow smoke in their face. Because of the *part-to-whole* method of hermeneutical analysis, though, the lyrics are understood as an example of “boasting,” an important element of rap lyrics (Cummings, 2002).

Wealth as a Signifier for “Living the Good Life”

Since most rappers came from the poverty of inner-city living, wealth can become to them a symbol for “living the good life,” or a life that takes them out of extreme want into extreme possession (Lomansky and Swan, 2009). Some rappers explicitly rap about the difference between the way of living they came from and the way they live presently. 50 Cent raps in *In Da Club* that his talent is how he acquired so much wealth, but even though he has much more money than he did, he says it has not changed him as a person, “My flow, my show brought me the dough/That bought me all my fancy things/My crib, my cars, my pools, my jewels/Look nigga, I done came up, and I ain't changed.” *Hot in Herre* boasts of Nelly being able to pay for the penthouse suite at the Four Seasons, a very upscale hotel, “Check it, got it locked at the top of the Four Seasons penthouse.” Terror Squad boasts they are “bout to buy me a mansion” in *Lean Back*. Both these examples signify how wealth created for them a different lifestyle.

The sub-themes of money, cars, attire, liquor, and bling also come into play when looking at wealth as a signifier for the good life. Terror Squad’s *Lean*

Back echoes 50 Cent's sentiment of not changing their personality even though they have more money: "See, money ain't a thing nigga, we still the same nigga, flows just changed." They also go on to characterize their new lifestyle by connecting their millions with it being a part of "the life," or the good life: "Half a mil' for the charm, nigga this is life."

Because Nelly is living the good life, he brags about his ability to buy designer attire, like Gucci: "Now we livin' better now, Gucci sweater now." When he's in the club, Nelly expresses the connection between the good life of fame giving him the ability to drink champagne, among other things, "Why you at the bar if you aint poppin' the bottles/What good is all the fame if you ain't fuckin' the models." Along with liquor and attire, Young Joc describes how he wears diamonds around his neck to signify his wealth: "Verse numba 2, do the damn thang/Cubes on my neck, pockets full of Ben Frank."

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

50 Cent's No. 1 song, *In Da Club*, comes from his popular album, "Get Rich or Die Tryin.'" This seems to be an apropos title for not only his album but also the sentiment of many rappers. "Getting rich," along with being famous, is ostensibly a major goal for rappers. Most of them came out of the impoverished inner city and now boast of possessing much wealth, including money and material possessions. This study drew from the rich history of the hip-hop culture and took a decade-long overview of the No. 1 rap songs for each year between 2000 and 2010 to see how the most popular rap songs signified and represented wealth.

It is interesting to note that although 11 songs were analyzed for representations of wealth, only nine of the 11 songs contained references to wealth. The other two songs, *Lollipop*, by Lil' Wayne, and *Get Ur Freak On*, by Missy Elliot, contained no references to wealth in their lyrics. However, within the other nine songs, more than 40 references to wealth were mentioned. When looking at each reference of wealth together, three main themes took shape: relationship between wealth and the opposite sex, wealth that garners respect from other people, and wealth as a signifier for "living the good life." Within

these themes, wealth was signified by five sub-themes: money, cars, attire, liquor, and “bling”.

In the relationship between wealth and the opposite sex, money signifies the importance of a relationship. The rapper, Drake, will spend whatever amount of money he needs to in order to keep his girlfriend, who is the *Best I Ever Had*. Money also signifies a type of acceptable relationship – the one that includes money. For Missy Elliot, the *Hot Boyz* she wants to be in a relationship with are ones that have lots of money in their pockets and credit cards with high spending limits on them to buy expensive cars. To B.O.B., money signifies a way to compare his girlfriend to other women, explaining that he has used his money to travel many places, but all the other exotic women he has met have *Nothin’ On You*.

Cars are an important signifier for material wealth. In Nielson’s (2010) study, he related that “The car has always been an important symbol of wealth and mobility in African American culture—in his 1963 autobiography, for example, Malcolm X frequently notes the iconographic status of the Cadillac in the Black community, and the importance of cars generally is readily observable in Black music and popular culture throughout the decades leading up to hip hop.”

In these lyrics, cars represent several things to a relationship. Lil’ Jon uses his expensive car to signify his relationship changing from “friend” to “lover.” Terror Squad’s *Lean Back* shows expensive cars as a way to attract

women when the music video shows a woman sitting on the top of a Phantom Rolls Royce. Missy Elliot wants *Hot Boyz* who drive expensive cars, signifying expensive cars as a requirement for an acceptable relationship with men.

Having the proper, expensive attire also plays a role in relationships, which agrees with Harkness (2011), who found that particular types of dress among gangsta rappers signify success: “The stereotypical gangsta dresses in professional sports gear or “celebrity” clothing lines... Gangstas sport massive diamond rings, thick watches, and chains with flashy medallions. For footwear, gangstas prefer Timberland boots or name brand tennis shoes, such as Nike or Adidas.” In these findings, attire can signify a successful couple, like Fabolous and his girlfriend, whom he pictures as wearing the high-end designers, Gucci and Giuseppe Zanotti. Missy Elliot wants, along with money and cars, *Hot Boyz* that will give her diamonds, placing importance on “bling” when in a relationship. Liquor has already been found to be a signifier for wealth (Herd, 2005), so several mentions of expensive liquor were found to connect rappers with women. 50 Cent consumes champagne and Bacardi when he is *In Da Club* with women. On his way to becoming more than friends, Lil’ Jon has his girl friend drink shots of Patron, an expensive tequila.

Rappers also seem to want the respect of their friends and even enemies around them. Kubrin (2005) explained that “Rappers are virtually fixated on ‘respect’; they tell listeners that no one should tolerate disrespect and are clear about the consequences of such behavior, which can include death for the

‘perpetrator.’ Kubrin went on to describe rappers’ use of violence as part of respect acquisition. Wealth is another way to gain this respect from others. Because they have money, Terror Squad and Young Joc rap about other men wanting to hang around them. Young Joc in *It’s Goin’ Down* goes through a whole verse listing the ways in which he uses exorbitant amounts of money on any given day, ending with the sentiment that “Everybody love me/I’m so fly/Niggaz throw the deuces e’r time I ride by.” Both money and hard work are how 50 Cent calls for respect in *In Da Club*. He says he has already made a lot of money, but is still hard at work. To the other men around him who are jealous, 50 Cent says, “If the niggaz hate, then let ‘em hate, then watch the money pile up,” indicating money is proof that he should be respected for his hard work. Young Joc also tries to gain the respect of police using money as a way to earn it. Using a new phrase for sharing money, he brags that he can “make it rain” and shower money on the cops to leave him alone. “Money, for many of the people in poverty, means being treated with respect and feeling like they are somebody” (Beegle, 2007).

Expensive cars, which are an obvious signifier of wealth, can be used to gain respect as well as relationships, as stated previously. Young Joc raps of his fame and how people watch as his “crew,” or friends, have a line of 35 cars, specifically black BMWs. He also boasts of his Air Jordan’s that he wears every day while he spends money, and Terror Squad uses expensive furs (probably on a jacket) to signify wealth and make other men jealous: “That’s why I sport the

chinchilla to hurt they feelin's." Liquor is referenced only once when Young Joc wants his friends to respect him and "get like me" by drinking Patron. He then goes on to show off the "bling" he wears along with his money as he talked to the police, later in the song. Though all of these signifiers show off the wealth rappers have come to own, they are still a means to garner respect among other men.

The last theme found in the lyrics was using wealth to signify "living the good life." Research has already found that the signifiers of wealth such as cars, liquor, jewelry, and clothing are rife within music videos (Olofsson, 1993), often portraying living a "lavish lifestyle." In this body of text, "living the good life" meant "coming up" in the world but not changing who they are as a person (50 Cent, *In Da Club*, and Terror Squad, *Lean Back*), renting a penthouse suite in the Four Seasons hotel (Nelly, *Hot in Herre*), buying a mansion (Terror Squad, *Lean Back*), being able to buy designer attire (Nelly, *Hot in Herre*), drinking expensive champagne, or "poppin' bottles" (Nelly, *Hot in Herre*), wearing diamonds, and having lots of money in their pockets (Young Joc, *It's Goin' Down*). These were the main ways rappers bragged about living a life of wealth.

If wealth can be constructed from a body of a cultural text, rap music is the most important place to look for the constructs. With 37 million adults listening to rap in 2002 (Mizell, 2003), and knowing that rap music has become the music of youth in America (Rose, 1994), it is important to see how wealth is constructed by the very voices of youth: rappers. As shown, wealth represents a

broad range of things. Wealth can be used to show the importance of a relationship, the means to garner respect, and also the way to signify “living the good life.”

Limitations and Future Studies

Limitations

As with most mainstream music, rap music has been affected by consumerism (Hunter, 2011). Because of this, the use of Billboard magazine is good to use for its records of most popular songs, but since many rap labels are owned by rich, white men, there is an emphasis on making a profit, sometimes with censure or encouragement of specific lyrics or topics and less importance is placed on creativity and authenticity (Herd, 2009). The wealth construct in these lyrics, then, may be a result of gaining profits, whether it is from the approval of the rap label or by product placement within the rap song and music videos themselves.

Another limitation is the 2001 and 2008 No. 1 rap songs in this study, Missy Elliot’s *Get Ur Freak On* and Lil’ Wayne’s *Lollipop*, respectively, do not contain any reference to wealth in the lyrics. Lil’ Wayne’s song contains mainly sexual themes, whereas Missy Elliot’s song mainly elucidates on the meritorious attributes of the rapper herself.

Future Studies

This study looks at only the top rap songs of each year. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the construct of wealth in rap music, another study might include top rap *albums* of the year to look at several rap songs from each year across the past decade. Looking at single songs rather than albums only gives a backdrop to the whole picture of what rappers have to say about wealth in their music. In an album there are more songs with more references to wealth, so looking at albums would add comprehensiveness to what has already been laid out in this thesis by looking only at one song from each year of the past decade.

Since most of the signifiers mentioned in the study are consumerism-related, such as buying things with money and owning expensive cars and clothes, it would be important to look at the perceptions and attitudes of consumers of rap music, as well. Like a previous study on images of sexual stereotypes in rap videos and adolescent's perception of them (Peterson, et al., 2007), it would be interesting to reconstruct the same study and look at the perceptions of wealth in these same rap videos among adolescents to see if these images of wealth have affected youth's perceptions of wealth and if they have the same constructs of wealth as the rappers in the songs.

In the same vein as consumerism, it would be wise to look at the connection between this study and materialism. Since this thesis did not incorporate materialism into the analysis, further study could connect the

signifiers of wealth found in this paper by determining if, in fact, the signifiers – cars, attire, bling, and liquor – are consumed by materialistic consumers, not just rappers. Further study could also consider how materialism is connected to the message of rap music, using the themes explicated above as a framework.

Additionally, it would be worth comparing the signifiers found in this study to other signifiers of other genres of music. There is such a vast difference in music genres, although many of them mention wealth in their lyrics, especially “pop” music. Are the signifiers for wealth the same or different? What factors contribute to the differences or similarities?

It is also pertinent to mention that of the ten rappers whose lyrics were analyzed, about half of them identified with the Dirty South-style of rap. This could be explained by the fact that Dirty South rap was the last style of rap to be created. Introduced in 1995 (Miller, 2004), Dirty South rap soon took over the airwaves, especially into the decade analyzed here. However, the construct of wealth is no more prevalent in Dirty South rap as it is in East Coast rap. The only representation of rap lacking in the last decade was West Coast rap. Comparing the representation of wealth within the three types of rap, then, would be an important future study in order to examine how wealth is constructed across rap genres.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The results of this study help to offer a thorough overlook of how rappers construct the meaning of wealth in their lyrics. In the past, much of the research has focused on looking at the prevalence of misogyny, violence, and the use of alcohol and drugs. When looking at wealth, however, the literature only focused on “materialism.” The signifiers of wealth extrapolated from their look at this aligned perfectly with this study – money, liquor, clothing, jewelry, and his analysis fills a gap in the literature by looking specifically at . However, those signifiers within the lyrics as well as connecting wealth to themes. According to the analysis, much of the money rappers make from selling their cars craft and endorsing products goes toward sustaining relationships with the opposite sex, gaining respect from others, and simply “living the good life,” giving greater clarity to how the cultural text of rap, as part of the hip hop culture, constructs wealth for its millions of youth consumers. The results found in this study also add an important depth of understanding to the message rap music is sending youth and the message popular culture as a whole is sending to youth through music, which is an important medium of communication. As

consumers of both rap music and popular culture, youth would be wise to be aware of the subtle messages, like the signifiers discovered here, hidden in this popular music genre and the music's influence on their perception of wealth and material consumption.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Rap Lyrics from 2000-2010

2010 – B.O.B.: Nothin' On You

[Chorus - Bruno Mars]

Beautiful girls all over the world, I could be chasing
But my time would be wasted, they got nothing on you, baby
Nothing on you, baby
They might say hi, and I might say hey
But you shouldn't worry, about what they say
Because they got nothing on you, baby
Nothing on you, baby

[Verse 1- B.o.B]

I know you feel where I'm coming from
Regardless of the things in my past that I've done
Most of it really was for the hell of the fun
On a carousel, so around I spun
With no direction, just trying to get some
Trying to chase skirts, living in the summer sun
And so I lost more than I had ever won
And honestly, I ended up with none

[Bridge - B.o.B]

It's so much nonsense, it's on my conscience
I'm thinking "maybe I should get it out"
And I don't want to sound redundant
But I was wondering, if there was something that you want to know
But never mind that, we should let it go
Because we don't want to be a TV episode
And all the bad thoughts just let them go, go, go, go, go

[Chorus]

[Verse 2 - B.o.B]

Hands down, there will never be another one (Nope)
I've been around, and I've never seen another one (Never)
Because your style, I ain't really got nothing on (Nothing)
And you wild when you ain't got nothing on? (Ha-ha)
Baby you the whole package
Plus you pay your taxes
And you keep it real, while them others stay plastic
You're my Wonder Woman, call me Mr. Fantastic
Stop, now think about it

[Bridge 2 - B.o.B]

I've been to London, I've been to Paris

Even way out there in Tokyo
Back home down in Georgia, to New Orleans
But you always steal the show
And just like that, girl you got me froze
Like a Nintendo 64
If you never knew, well, now you know, know, know

[Chorus]

[Bridge 3- B.o.B]
Everywhere I go, I'm always hearing your name
And no matter where I'm at, girl you make me want to sing
Whether a bus or a plane, or a car, or a train
No other girls on my brain, and you're the one to blame

[Chorus]

[Outro - B.o.B]
Yeah
And that's just how we do it

2009 - Drake: Best I Ever Had

You know a lot of girls be thinkin' my songs are about them
This is not to get confused, this one's for you

Baby, you my everything, you all I ever wanted
We can do it real big, bigger than you ever done it
You be up on everything, other hoes ain't never on it
I want this forever, I swear I can spend whatever on it

'Cause she hold me down every time I hit her up
When I get right I promise that we gonna live it up
She make me beg for it till she give it up
And I say the same thing every single time

I say you the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the best I ever had, best I ever had
Best I ever had, best I ever had, I say you the fucking

Know you got a roommate, call me when it's no one there
Put the key under the mat, and you know I'll be over there
I'll be over there, shawty, I'll be over there
I'll be hitting all the spots that you ain't even know was there

Ha and you all ain't even have to ask twice
You can have my heart or we can share it like the last slice
Always felt like you was so accustomed to the fast life
Have a nigga thinking that he met you in a past life

Sweat pants, hair tied, chillin' with no make-up on
That's when you're the prettiest, I hope that you don't take it wrong
You don't even trip when friends say you ain't bringin' Drake along
You know that I'm working, I'll be there soon as I make it home

And she a patient in my waiting room
Never pay attention to them rumors and what they assume
And until them girls prove it
I'm the one they never get confused with

'Cause baby, you my everything, you all I ever wanted
We can do it real big, bigger than you ever done it
You be up on everything, other hoes ain't never on it
I want this forever, I swear I can spend whatever on it

'Cause she hold me down every time I hit her up
When I get right I promise that we gonna live it up
She make me beg for it till she give it up
And I say the same thing every single time

I say you the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the fucking best, you the fucking best

You the best I ever had, best I ever had
Best I ever had, best I ever had, I say you the fucking

Sex, love, pain, baby, I be on that tank shit
Buzz so big, I could probably sell a blank disk
When my album drop, bitches will buy it for the picture
And niggas will buy it too and claim they got it for they sister

Magazine, paper, girl, but money ain't the issue
They bring dinner to my room and ask me to initial
She call me the referee 'cause I be so official
My shirt ain't got no stripes but I can make your pussy whistle

Like the Andy Griffith theme song
And who told you to put them jeans on
Double cup love, you the one I lean on
Feeling for a fix then you should really get your fiend on

Yeah, just know my condo is the crack spot
Every single show she out there reppin' like a mascot
Get it from the back and make your fucking bra strap pop
All up in yo slot until the nigga hit the jackpot

Baby, you my everything, you all I ever wanted
We can do it real big, bigger than you ever done it
You be up on everything, other hoes ain't never on it
I want this forever, I swear I can spend whatever on it

'Cause she hold me down every time I hit her up
When I get right I promise that we gonna live it up
She make me beg for it till she give it up
And I say the same thing every single time

I say you the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the best I ever had, best I ever had
Best I ever had, best I ever had

I say you the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the fucking best, you the fucking best
You the best I ever had, best I ever had
Best I ever had, best I ever had

Uh, uh yeah, see this the type of joint
You got to dedicate to somebody
Just make sure they that special somebody
Young Money
Ya, ya, you know who you are, I got you

2008 – Lil' Wayne: Lollipop

I said he's so sweet
Make her wanna lick the rapper
So I let her lick the rapper

Shawty said l-l-lick like a lollipop
She said l-l-lick like a lollipop
Shawty said l-l-like a lollipop
She said like a lollipop

Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And oh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps
She wanna lick the rapper

Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And ooh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps
C'mon, yeah

Okay, lil' mama had a swag like mine
She even wear her hair down her back like mine
I make her feel right when it's wrong like lyin?
Man, she ain't never had a love like mine

But man I ain't never seen an ass like hers
That pussy in my mouth had me at a loss for words
I told her to back it up like burp burp
And make that ass jump like shczerp shczerp

And that's when she said I lick like a lollipop
(Oh yeah I like that)
She said l-l-lick like a lollipop
(Oh yeah I like that)
She said lick like a lollipop
(Oh yeah I like that)
Shawty said like a lollipop

Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And ooh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps
Shawty wanna hump

Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And oh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps

Get up, like you make it up, don't stop
Drop it shawty, drop it like it's hot
Drop, dr-dr-drop it like it's hot

Do it shawty, don't stop

Shawty said the nigga that she with ain't shit
Shawty said the nigga that she with ain't this
Shawty said the nigga that she with can't hit
But shawty I'ma hit it, hit it like I can't miss
And he can't do this, and he don't do that
Shawty need a refund need to bring that nigga back
Just like a refund I make her bring that ass back
And she bring that ass back, because I like that

Shawty wanna thug
(Yeah I like that)
Bottles in the club
(Yeah I like that)
Shawty wanna hump
And oh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps

Shawty wanna l-l-lick like a lollipop
Shawty said I'm l-l-like a lollipop
She said I'm l-l-like a lollipop
So I let her lick the rapper, like a lollipop

Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And ooh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps

Call me so I can make it juicy fo ya
C-c-call me so so I can get it juicy fo ya
C-c-call me so so I can make it juicy fo ya
C-c-call me so so so I can get it juicy fo ya

C-c-call me so I can make it juicy fo ya
C-c-call me so so I can get it juicy fo ya
C-c-call me so I can make it juicy fo ya
C-c-call me so I can get it juicy fo ya

Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And oh I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps

I get her on top she drop it like it's hot
And when I'm at the bottom she Hillary Rodham
The middle of the bed givin' gettin' head
Givin' gettin' head, givin' gettin' head

I said mmm I like that
Said mmm yeah I like that
I said mmm yeah I like that
Mmm hmm

Call me so I can come and do it fo ya
Call me so I can come and prove it fo ya
Call me so I can make it juicy fo ya
Call me so I can get it juicy fo ya

Shawty wanna l-l-lick me like a lollipop
She said I'm like a lollipop
Saying he's so sweet
Make her wanna lick the rapper

What'd she do?
So I let her lick the rapper

2007 – Fabolous: Make me Better

[INTRO: Ne-Yo, Fabolous]

Timbo.
Hey, Ne-Yo.
Say what? Lo-So.
Hey, hey.

[CHORUS (Ne-Yo):]

I'm a movement by myself.
But I'm a force when we're together.
Mami I'm good all by myself.
But baby you, you make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.
You make me better.

[Fabolous]

You plus me, it equals better math.
Ya boy a good look but, she my better half.
I'm already bossin', already flossin'.
But why I have the cake if it ain't got the sweet frostin'? (yep yep yep yep).
Keepin' me on my A game (what what what what).
Without havin' the same name (that that that that that).
They may flame (but but but but).
But shawty, we burn it up.
The sag in my swag, pep in my step.
Daddy do the Gucci, mami in Giuseppes.
Guess it's a G thing, whenever we swing.
I'mma need Coretta Scott, if I'm gonna be King.

[CHORUS]

[Ne-Yo]

First thing's first, I does what I do.
But everything I am, she's my influ.
I'm already boss, I'm already fly.
But if I'm a star, she is the sky (ah ah ah).
And when I feel like I'm on top (she she she).
She give me reason to not stop (ch ch ch ch ch).
And though I'm hot (too too too).
Together we burn it up.

[Fabolous]

The caked up cut, the cleaned up ice.
When shawty come around, I clean up nice.
Dynamic duo, Batman and Robin.
Whoever don't like it, it's that man problem (ch ch ch).
And when I feel like I'm tired (ma ma ma).

Mami be takin' me higher (ah ah ah ah ah).
I'm on fire (but but but).
But shawty we burn it up.

[CHORUS]

[Voices]

Inside every great man, you can find a woman like a soldier holdin' him down.

[Fabolous]

And she treats me like a Don, watches for the hit.
Checks where I go, even watches who I'm with.
The right when I'm wrong, so I never slip.
Show me how to move, that's why I never trip.
And baby girl, you're so major, they should front-page ya (front page ya).
God bless the parents who made you (who made you).
Middle fingered anybody who hate the,
Way that we burn it up.

[CHORUS]

[Fabolous speaking]

Yeah baby, them lames you playin' with.
They gon' put you down.
We tryin' to compliment you, you know?
Make it better.
Top-notch Tim.
Nice-look Ne-Yo.
Livin' good Lo-So.
They ask you how you doin' now, tell 'em better 'den them.
Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

[CHORUS]

2006 – Yung Joc: It's Goin' Down

[Lil Boi]

This a nitty beat (boing)

[Nitty]

Here we go again

Ghettoville U.S.A. (uh Oh)

You know I go by the name nitty right (uh huh)

I gotta introduce you to another motherfucker out my squad right (who dis nigga mane)

Dis nigga go by the name of Joc (Joc?)

He resides in College Park (College Park cp)

But for right now what we gotta do for y'all (what we gonna do)

We gotta give y'all a hit (huh)

[Verse 1]

Niggaz in my face

Damn near er' day

Asking a million questions like

Joc where ya stay

Tell 'em College Park

Where they chop cars

Eat 20 grand spend a grand at the bar

Jest bought a zone jays on my feet

I'm on that patron so get like me

69 cutlass wit the bucket seats

Beat in my trunk bought it just for the freaks

Catch me in the hood posted at the sto

Pistol in my lap on the phone counting dough

If a girl choose let her do her thang

Just like her mama nice ass, nice brain

Er'body love me I'm so fly

Niggaz throw the deuces er'time I ride by

I know ya wonder why

I'm so cool

Don't ask me just do what cha do (ok)

[Chorus: repeat 2X]

Meet me in the trap its going down

Meet me in the mall its going down

Meet me in the club its going down

Any where ya meet me guaranteed to go down

[verse 2]

Verse numba 2 do the damn thang

Cubes on my neck pockets full of ben frank

When I'm in the mall hoes just pause

I pop a few tags give me that on the wall

Time to flip the work make the block bump

Boys from the hood call me black Donald Trump

Dope Boy Magic seven days a week

Numba one record long as nitty on the beat

Oh I thank they like me betta yet I know

Lights camera action when I walk through the door

Niggaz know my crew we certified stars
Valet in the front 'bout 35 cars
Bitches in the back
Black beamer coupes
Girls like girls time to recruit
If ya got a problem say it to my face
We can knuckle up any time any place

[Chorus]

[Verse 3]

Time to set it off let these nigga know
Have ya every seen a Chevy wit the butterfly doors?
I ride real slow no need to speed
Gotta make sure ya see the buckets on my feet
Feds on my trail but they don't thank I know
I keep my hands clean cuz I never touch dope
Every time I see 'em look 'em in the eye
Ask 'em how I know its me surprise!
Put it in the air rep where ya stay
Take a step back blow the kush in they face
Stunting is a habit let 'em see the karats
I'ma make it rain nigga I ain't scared to share it

[Chorus]

[Outro]

Yung Joc...
Nitty strikes again
This a Nitty beat
Playmaker
So So Def motherfucker

2005 – Lil' Jon: Lovers and Friends

[Intro - Lil' Jon]

Usher...
Lil' Jon...
Ludacris...

[Usher (with Lil' Jon)]

Yeah, man
Once again, it's on (It's on)
You know we had to do it again, right?

[Lil' Jon]

We had to do it again, boy
Want you to sing to these ladies, man

[Usher (with vocalizing)]

(Ohh-oh-oh-ohh)
A'ight, so I'm up first? A'ight, lemme have it...
(Ohh-oh-oh-ohh)
Let's do it...

[1st Verse - Usher]

Baby, how ya doin'?
Hope that 'cha fine, wanna know what you got in mind,
And I'm,
Got me fiendin' like Jodeci, girl, I can't leave you alone,
Take a shot of this here Petron' and it's gon' be on,
V.I.P. done got way too crowded,
I'm about to end up callin' it a night,
You should holla at 'cha girl, tell her you shake it the scene,
Pull off, beep-beep, shotgun in the GT with me
She said, "Ohhh-ohhh, I'm ready to ride, yeah,"
"'Cause once you get inside, you can't change your mind,"
"Don't mean to sound impatient, but you gotta promise, baby, ohh..."

[Chorus - Usher]

Tell me again (Tell me again, my baby),
That we'll be Lovers and Friends (Ohh, I gotta know, baby, aw yeah)
Tell me again (Make sho' you right, ohh, before we leave),
That we'll be Lovers and Friends (Ohh, it's a good look, baby)...

[2nd Verse - Ludacris]

Sometimes wanna be your lover,
Sometimes wanna be your friend,
Sometimes wanna hug ya,
Hold hands, slow-dance while the record spins,
Opened up your heart 'cause you said I made you feel so comfortable,
Used to play back then, now you all grown-up like Rudy Huxtable,
I could be your Bud, you could beat me up,
Play-fight in the dark, then we both make love,
I'd do anything just to feel your butt,
Why you got me so messed up?
I don't know, but you gotta stop trippin',

Be a good girl now, turn around, and get these whippings,
You know you like it like that,
You don't have to fight back,
Here's a pillow - bite...that,
And I'll be settin' seperate plays,
So on all these separate days,
Your legs can go they separate...ways...

[Chorus - Usher]

Tell me again (Tell me again, my baby),
That we'll be Lovers and Friends (Ohh, it's a good look, baby)
Tell me again (Tell me over-and-over-and-over again),
That we'll be Lovers and Friends (Make sho' you right, before you choose)...

[3rd Verse - Lil' Jon]

I's been know you fo' a long time (shawty),
But fuckin' never crossed my mind (shawty),
But tonight, I seen sumthin' in ya (shawty),
That made me wanna get wit 'cha (shawty),
But you ain't been nuttin' but a friend to me (shawty),
And a nigga never ever dreamed to be (shawty),
Up in here, kissin', huggin', squeezin', touchin' (shawty),
Up in the bathtub, rub-a-dubbin' (shawty),
Are you sure you wanna go this route? (shawty),
Let a nigga know before I pull it out (shawty),
I would never ever cross the line (shawty),
Shawty, let me hear ya tell me one mo' time...one mo' time...

[Chorus - Usher]

Tell me again (Tell me again, my baby),
That we'll be Lovers and Friends (Ohh, it's a good look, baby)
Tell me again (Make sho' you right, ohh, before we leave),
That we'll be Lovers and Friends (Tell me over-and-over-and-over again)...

[Outro - Usher]

Oh-oh-hoo
Oh-oh-hoo
Oh-oh-hoo-ohhhh-yeaaah...

[Ludacris (with Lil' Jon)]

Please tell your Lovers and Friends,
That Usher, Jon, and Luda had to do it again (Hey!! (Hey!!))
Please tell your Lovers and Friends,
That Usher, Jon, and Luda had to do it again, that's right (Hey!! (Hey!!))
Please tell your Lovers and Friends,
That Usher, Jon, and Luda had to do it again (Hey!! (Hey!!))...

2004 – *Terror Squad: Lean Back*

Yeah... My niggas...
Throw ya hands in the air right now man...
Feel this shit right here...

[Verse 1 - Fat Joe a.k.a. Joey Crack]

I don't give a fuck 'bout your fault or mishappenin's,
Nigga we from the Bronx, New York... shit happens,
Kids clappin' love to spark the place,
Half the niggas on the squad got a scar on they face,
It's a cold world, and this is ice,
Half a mil' for the charm, nigga this is life.
Got the phantom in front of the building on Trinity Ave.
10 years been legit they still figure me bad.
As a youngin', I was too much to cope with.
Why you think, mo'fuckers nick-named me, Cook Coke shit.
Should've been called armed robbery, extortion or maybe grand larceny...
I did it all, I put the pieces to the puzzle,
This long, I knew me and my peoples was gonna' bubble.
Came out the gate, no I didn't flow Joe shit.
Fat nigga with shotty was the logo kid.

[Chorus]

Said my niggas don't dance,
we just pull up our pants and,
Do the Roc-away.
Now lean back, lean back, lean back, lean back.
I said my niggas don't dance,
See we just pull up our pants and,
Do the Roc-away.
Now lean back, lean back, lean back, lean back.

[Verse 2 - Remy]

R to the E'zzy',
M to the whizz-i [Y],
My arms stay breezy,
The Don's stay fizz-i,
Got a date at 8, I'm in the 740' fizz-i
And I just bought a bike so I can ride til' I die,
With a matchin' jacket,
Bout' to cop me a mansion,
My niggas in the club, but you know they not dancin'.
We gangsta, and gangstas don't dance- we boogie,
So nevermind how we got in here with the burners and hoodies.
Listen we don't pay admission,
And bouncers don't check us,
And we walk around the metal detectors.
And there really ain't no need for a VIP section in the middle of the dance floor,
Reckless, check it, said it?!
Like my necklace, started relaxin' now, that's what the fuck I call a chain reaction.
See, money ain't a thing nigga, we still the same nigga, flows just changed
now we 'bout to change the game nigga.

[Chorus]

Said my niggas don't dance,
we just pull up our pants and,
Do the Roc-away.
Now lean back, lean back, lean back, lean back.
I said my niggas don't dance,
we just pull up our pants and,
Do the Roc-away.
Now lean back, lean back, lean back, lean back.

[Verse 3 - Fat Joe a.k.a. Joey Crack]

Now we livin' better now,
Gucci sweater now,
And that G4 could fly through, any weather now,
See niggas get tight, when you worth some millions.
That's why I sport the chincilla to hurt they feelin's.
Your can find Joe Crack at all type of shit,
Out at Vegas front roll on all the fights and shit,
If I visited Compton, they'd prolly squeel.
'Cause half these rappers get "Blow" like Dereck Foreal.
If you cross the line damn right, I'm gon' hurt you,
These faggot niggas even made gang signs commercials.
Even Lil' Bow Wow throwin' it up,
B2K crip walkin' like that's what's up.
Kay keep tellin' me to speak about rucker,
Matter of fact, I don't wanna speak about the rucker,
Not even Pee-Wee Kirkland could imagine this,
My niggas didn't have to play to win the championship.

[Chorus]

my niggas don't dance,
we just pull up our pants and,
Do the Roc-away.
Now lean back, lean back, lean back, lean back.
I said my niggas don't dance,
we just pull up our pants and,
Do the Roc-away.
Now lean back, lean back, lean back, lean back.

2003 – 50 Cent: In Da Club

Go, go, go, go, go, go

Go shawty, it's your birthday
We gonna party like it's your birthday
We gon' sip Bacardi like it's your birthday
And you know we don't give a fuck, it's not your birthday

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed

When I pull up out front, you see the Benz on dubs
When I roll 20 deep, it's 20 knives in the club
Niggaz heard I fuck with Dre, now they wanna show me love
When you sell like Eminem, and the hoes, they wanna fuck

But homie ain't nuttin' changed hoes down, G's up
I see Xzibit in the cut, hey nigga roll that weed up
If you watch how I move, you'll mistake me for a player or pimp
Been hit wit a few shells but I don't walk wit a limp

In the hood, in L.A. they sayin, "50 you hot"
They like me, I want them to love me like they love Pac
But holla in New York them niggaz'll tell ya, I'm loco
And the plan is to put the rap game in a choke hold

I'm fully focused man, my money on my mind
Got a mill' out the deal and I'm still on the grind
Now shawty said she feelin' my style, she feelin' my flow
Her girlfriend willin' to get bi and they ready to go

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed

My flow, my show brought me the dough
That bought me all my fancy things
My crib, my cars, my pools, my jewels
Look nigga, I done came up, and I ain't changed

And you should love it, way more then you hate it
Nigga, you mad? I thought that you'd be happy I made it
I'm that cat by the bar toastin' to the good life
You that faggot-ass nigga tryin' to pull me back, right?

When my joint get to pumpin' in the club it's on
I wink my eye at ya bitch, if she smiles she's gone
If the roof on fire, let the motherfucker burn
If you talkin about money, homie, I ain't concerned

I'ma tell you what Banks told me 'cause go 'head switch the style up
If the niggaz hate then let 'em hate then watch the money pile up
Or we can go upside your head wit a bottle of bub
They know where we fuckin' be

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami, I got the X if you into takin' drugs
I'm into havin' sex, I ain't into makin' love
So come gimme a hug, if you're into gettin' rubbed

Don't try to act like you don't know where we be neither nigga
We in the club all the time nigga, it's about to pop off nigga
G-Unit

2002 – Nelly: Hot in Herre

Hot in.....
So hot in herre.....
So hot in.....

[Nelly]
I was like, good gracious ass bodacious
Flirtatcious, tryin to show faces
Lookin for the right time to shoot my steam (you know)
Lookin for the right time to flash them keys
Then um I'm leavin, please believin
Me and the rest of my heathens
Check it, got it locked at the top of the four seasons
Penthouse, roof top, birds I feedin
No deceivin, nothin up my sleeve, no teasin
I need you to get up up on the dance floor
Give that man what he askin for
Cuz I feel like bustin loose and I feel like touchin you
And cant nobody stop the juice so baby tell me whats the use

[Hook x2]
(I said)
Its gettin hot in here (so hot)
So take off all your clothes

I am gettin so hot, I wanna take my clothes off

[Nelly]
Why you at the bar if you aint poppin the bottles
What good is all the fame if you aint fuckin the models
I see you drivin, sportscar, aint hittin the throttle
And I be down, and do a hundred, top down and goggles
Get off the freeway, exit 106 and parked it
Ash tray, flip gate, time to spark it
Gucci collar for dollar, got out and walked it
I spit game cuz baby I cant talk it
Warm, sweatin its hot up in this joint
VOKAL tanktop, on at this point
Your with a winner so baby you cant loose
I got secrets cant leave Cancun
So take it off like your home alone
You know dance in front your mirror while your on the phone
Checkin your reflection and tellin your best friend,
like "girl I think my butt gettin big"

[Hook x2]

(Nelly hang all out)
Mix a little bit a ah, ah
With a little bit a ah, ah
(Nelly just fall out)
Give a little bit a ah, ah
With a little bit a ah, ah

(Nelly hang all out)
With a little bit a ah, ah
And a sprinkle a that ah, ah
(Nelly just fall out)
I like it when ya ah, ah
Girl, Baby make it ah, ah

[Nelly]
Stop placin, time wastin
I gotta a friend with a pole in the basement (What?)
I'm just kiddin like Jason (Oh)
Unless you gon' do it
Extra, extra eh, spread the news
Nelly took a trip from the Lunner to Neptune
Came back with somethin thicker than fittin in sasoons
Say she like to think about cuttin in restrooms

[Hook x4]

(Nelly hang all out)
Mix a little bit of ah, ah
With a little bit of ah, ah
(Nelly just fall out)
Give a little bit of ah, ah
With a little bit of ah, ah
(Nelly hang all out)
With a little bit of ah, ah
And a sprinkle of that ah, ah
(Nelly just fall out)
I like it when ya ah, ah
Girl, Baby make it ah, ah

2001 – Missy Elliot: Get Ur Freak On

hit me, hit me
gimme some new shit
gimme some new shit
gimme some new shit
gimme some new shit

[Missy]

Missy be puttin it down
Im the hottest round
Ill told yall mutha (skurt)
Yall can stop me now
Listen to me now
Im lastin twenty rounds
And if you want me (nigga)
Then come and get me now (bounce)
Is you with me now (bounce)
The biggie biggie bounce (bounce)
I kno you dig the way I sw..sw...switched ma style
(Holla) People sing around
Now people gather round
Now people jump around

[Chorus]

Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcha Getcha Getcha Getcha Getcha freak on
[2x]

[Missy]

(who's that bitch?)
People you know
Me and Timbaland been hot since twenty years ago
What da dilly yo
Now what da drilly yo
If you wanna battle me then (nigga) lemme know
(Holla) Got the feeling son
Lemme throw you some
People here I come
Now sweat me when im done
We got the radio shook like we got a gun

[Chorus]

Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)
Getcho freak on..(go)

Getcha Getcha Getcha Getcha Getcha freak on
[2x]

[Missy]

Quiet !!!

Shh, hush yo mouth

Silence when I, spit it out

In yo face

Open yo mouth, Give you a taste

(Holla) Aint no stoppin me

Copywritten so, dont copy me

Yall do it, sloppily

And yall cant come, close to me (yes)

I know you feel me now (yes)

I know you hear me loud (yes)

I scream it loud and proud (yes)

Missy gon blow it down (yes)

People gon play me now (yes)

In and outa town (yes)

Cuz im the best around (yes)

With the crazy style (go)

[Chorus]

Getcha freak on..(go)

Getcha freak on..(go)

Getcha freak on..(go)

Getcha freak on..(go)

Getcha freak on..(go)

Getcha freak on..(go)

Getcha Getcha Getcha Getcha Getcha freak on

[2x]

2000 – Missy Elliot: *Hot Boyz*

[Missy]

This is for my ghetto motherfuckers
Uh hey, are you really a hot boy?
Oh, check me

[Lil' Mo]

What's your name, cause I'm impressed
Can you treat me good, I won't settle for less
You a hot boy, a rock boy
A fun toy, tote a glock boy
Where you live, is it by yourself
Can I move wit' you, do you need some help
I cook boy, I'll give you more
I'mma fly girl, and I like those

[Missy & Lil' Mo]

Hot boyz
Baby you got what I want
See cuz y'all be drivin' Lexus jeeps
And the Benz jeeps, and the Lincoln jeeps
Nothin' cheaper, got them Platinum Visa's

Hot boyz

Baby you got what I want
See cuz y'all be drivin' Jaguars
And the Bentley's, and the Rolls Royce
Playin' hardballs wit' them Platinum Visa's

[Lil' Mo]

Is that your car, the SK-8
Are you riding alone, can I be your date
Come get me, gimmie, don't dis me, don't trick me
Got some friends, can they come too
Can you hook them up wit' some boyz like you
A hot boy, a rock boy, on top boy
And I like those

[Missy & Lil' Mo]

Hot boyz
Baby you got what I want
See cuz y'all be drivin' Lexus jeeps
And the Benz jeeps, and the Lincoln jeeps
Nothin' cheaper, wit' them Platinum Visa's

Hot boyz

Baby you got what I want
See cuz y'all be drivin' Jaguars
And the Bentley's, and the Rolls Royce
Playin' hardball wit' them Platinum Visa's

[Missy]

Yo, I'mma dig in yo' pockets

Dig in yo' wallets
Is there money unfounded
Yeah, you got my heart poundin'
You a hot boy, drive a drop boy
With alot boy, and you tote a glock boy
Give me no reason, I know that you treatin'
These diamonds I'm needin', make you believe it
I want alot boy, with a hot boy
Got a fun toy and you tote a glock boy

[Missy & Lil' Mo']

Hot boy
Baby you got what I want
Won't you really come and satisfy me
I be lovin' you like endlessly
(Everyday all day)

Hot boy
Baby you got what I want
Won't you really come and satisfy me
I be lovin' you like endlessly
(Oh, yes I will)

[Missy]

Where the Lexus jeeps, and the Benz jeeps
And the Lincoln jeeps, and the Bentley's
And the Jaguars, and the fly cars
Where you at?

Where your Lexus jeeps, and the Benz jeeps
And the Lincoln jeeps, and the Bentley's
And the Jaguars, and the fly cars
Where you at?

[Lil' Mo']

Yeah yeah, yeah yeah
Hot boyz, hot boyz (I'm out)
Hot boyz, I like 'em like that

APPENDIX B

Urban Dictionary Definitions

Bad – dope, good, tight

Bub – “bub” or bubbly, also known as champagne.

GT – It means Grand Touring, usually the highest model of a car, can be found on many cars including the Mustang, and the Grand Am, also in Italian can be translated into Gran Turismo, a famous racing game for PS2

Jays – Short for Jordan brand shoes

Niggaz – Also can be used to describe ur true Friends and homies and ur boys for Life. Can't be someone u just talk to or know fer like only year but someone u know for awhile

Sick – something a lot of people are using to describe something in a positive manner.

Stunting – This is used in ethnic neighborhoods or the ghetto where the term simply is a short way of saying; to exalt, or to pretend; or to exaggerate on something or someone when it's not really that important or of actual value

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