

Perceptions of Hip Hop Artists

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### Abstract

Hip-hop artist are commonly associated with lacking intelligence and negative interpretations. However Late artist Tupac Shakur, who has been criticized as a thug, gangster and more, attended schools such as Baltimore school of The Arts before he started his rap career and was known to the world as the icon he is today stated by Amaru AWA Merchandising Inc. (2013). Hip-hop artist have evolved over the years and their lyrics have come from being simple school yard rhymes to hard core message sending words. Rap artist use their own perceptions of things to communicate with theirs fans. Anything from their clothes to the way they walk to the way the talk. Many hip-hop artists have been labeled as negative icons and although some deserve their label a lot of hip-hop artist now have switched from derogatory lyrics to knowledgeable lyrics about events throughout the world. The reason for me choosing this topic is because Perception is a general way we receive information about a person or a subject without knowing the full background on the subject or person (Igo, 2007, pg83). I used Hip-hop artist because they have the most mislead rep today's society.

*Keywords:* Perception

### **Literature Review**

Recent studies show that perceptions of hip hop artists tend to focus more on the negative topics surrounding the hip hop industry more than the positive influences. From critics on television to authors that are against hip hop, people set the tone of how hip hop is received in the media. This analysis will draw from both negative and positive perceptions of hip hop music in order to locate common misconceptions about the genre. This analysis will also discuss the evolution of hip hop over time and how it remains prevalent to the younger generations of today.

Hip Hop artists are often misunderstood. Society often views hip hop as a negative contributor to society's unresolved conflicts surrounding African Americans. Some of these conflicts include drug abuse, sex, and violence. While these conflicts are all a part of hip hop music, they are not the foundation of the art of hip hop. However, in "Spreading the Indigenous Gospel of Rap Music and Spoken Word Poetry: Critical Pedagogy in the Public Sphere as a Stratagem of Empowerment and Critique", Jabari Mahiri argues that rappers are "young, artistic voices and are not simply spasms of protest, but those bearing witness as an informative healing, and empowering agent based on lived experiences" (Mahiri, (2012) p.166). These "spasms of protest" (p. 166) that he speaks of are based on an everyday lifestyle. Conflicts such as drug abuse, sex, and violence are common in regions where rappers grow up. These regions are usually in lower-socioeconomics communities where people develop a different route to succeed. For instance, selling drugs is a large industry in lower socioeconomic regions because it allows majority young men quick cash with no tax. Rappers, or hip hop artist's rap about their experiences because it informs society about the "come up" from those lower socioeconomic areas.

Not only do rappers use hip hop to express where they come from, but also to influence others to do the same. Moreover, Professor Bettina Love argues this claim in an interview where we discussed the stereotypes surrounding the cultural hip hop of African Americans.

Professor Love compliments Mahiri's statement when she says hip-hop is about story-telling (Love, Bettina 2013) Hip-hop artists are always adapting to the issues within their communities and resort to violence to survive. Most hip-hop music stems from the artist's lower socioeconomic community. Hip hop artists are often misunderstood because of the negative image placed upon them by society. Most people believe that hip hop artists are uneducated, ruthless thugs, when in reality; their music speaks life into younger generations who are experiencing a similar lifestyle. In this review, I will explore whether or not hip hop artists negatively influence young adults through their music and overall lifestyle. In order to analyze the influence of hip hop music on young adults, this review will refer to critics who both support and oppose the hip hop music of today.

One major factor that contributes to the negative perceptions of hip-hop artists is the lyrics used to describe their lifestyle. Critics argue that hip-hop artists create negative perceptions around their music because they rap about derogatory things such as promiscuity, drugs, and sex. When in actuality, these issues existed long before the introduction of hip hop. For example, rapper Tupac Shakur argued that what he learned in school would not be the skills he would use in everyday life. For example, he wrote:

“There should be a class on drugs. There should be a class on sex education, a real sex education, not just pictures and diagrams. There should be a class on scams. There should be a class on religious cults. There should be a class on police brutality. There should be

a class on apartheid. There should be a class on racism in America. There should be a class on why people are hungry. ” (Dyson, 2001, p. 77)

That is not to say that hip – hop artists do not promote issues of promiscuity, drugs, and sex, but that they also express current cultural issues they have experienced in their neighborhoods. This is the larger cultural conflict among African Americans that continues to evolve from generation to generation.

Another factor that greatly influences negative perceptions of hip-hop artists is their cultural background. Hip-hop artists often express their poverty and pain from which they have experienced before becoming famous. Critic and historian, Rebollo-Gil and Moras explained the origin of rap music and how its culture has progressively changed. Because it originated shedding light on issues that Black and Latinos faced, it focused on the hurt and pain of their situations. Thus, there is substance and value behind the lyrics and evolved into a popular genre of music favored by people who had experienced similar situations (Rebollo-Gil & Moras 2012 p. 119). Moreover, rapper Tupac Shakur argued that this is an environment that he was a part of. In some way, Tupac had a personal encounter with these situations and felt that the government is overlooking the problems of lower-class Americans. Poverty, racial brutality, and scams are all things that he felt should be acknowledged more than they were. Tupac’s approach to rap clearly demonstrates how he chooses to inform the youth about the truth of politics in America.

A third factor to be considered is the lifestyle in which they live daily. Once hip-hop artists become famous and commercially popularized, they often boast in their increased income. For example, fans of rap music can often observe a hip-hop artist’s newfound lavish lifestyle from their music videos which most frequently include beautiful, but scantily dressed women,

expensive foreign cars, and exclusive mansions. However, not all famous artists boast about their new income once they become popular. Consider rap artists, Lupe Fiasco who raps about current social, cultural and political issues. For example in his song, “Words I Never Said” he says:

“I really think the war on terror is a bunch of bullshit. Just a poor excuse for you to use up all your bullets. How much money does it take to really make a full clip 9/11 building 7 did they really pull it. Uhh, And a bunch of other cover ups. Your child's future was the first to go with budget cuts. If you think that hurts then, wait here comes the uppercut. The school was garbage in the first place, that's on the up and up. Keep you at the bottom but tease you with the uppercrust...”

When Lupe Fiasco states that he thinks the “war on terror is a bunch of bullshit” he stated this in a post interview where he expressed that the war is a cover up to get more money than the government really needed. That also explains his next comments about the amount of money it takes to make a full clip and the 9/11 situation. He also targets the government’s budget cuts. He says that a child’s future was to first to go with the budget cuts. His meaning of this is that American school system sucks and people always preach that education is the key to success yet they lower the funds for equal opportunity of that success.

In these lyrics, Lupe Fiasco clearly takes a stance on current political issues that are relevant to his generation. For example, when he says “your child’s future was the first to go with the budget cuts,” he is referring to the current state of public education and how federal funding for schools is decreasing annually. This line elaborates on Fiasco’s opinion of students not receiving the proper education they rightfully deserve.

In closing these research articles have shown a glimpse on major factors that contribute to the negative perceptions of hip-hop artists. However not all perceptions of hip-hop artist are negative. These articles have also explained that hip-hop artists use music as a form of expressing their points of view. For example, Mahiri's article can attest to rappers using music as an outlet to express their lived experiences. Whether that experience be from living in lower socioeconomic communities or dealing with the daily perils of violence in these neighborhoods, rappers speak powerfully based upon their experiences. A third factor to be considered is the lifestyle in which they live daily. While these lyrics can create negative perceptions of promiscuity, drugs, and sex, these are not the only elements behind the music. Another factor that greatly influences negative perceptions of hip-hop artists is the cultural background of the hip-hop artists. Most critics prejudge the hip-hop artist on the publicized action they see rather than actually viewing the cultural background of the artist, asking the question why is the artist that way. Most hip-hop artist is from a struggling cultural background that causes developed actions that are adapted. Hip-hop artists attribute more than negative perceptions and stereotypes to today's culture. A question that still deserves further investigation is the limited quantitative research on the relationship between hip hop music and minorities. Perhaps this will lead to further connections of positive perceptions of hip hop music.

## References

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