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Messages in the Music: A Lyrical Analysis of Rap, Country, Pop and Christian Music

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Abstract: Society is confronted with tremendous amounts of music each day and with current technological enhancements, we are able to control the types of music we often listen too. Previous research has demonstrated that by listening to music individuals identify life goals and the acceptable means for achieving those goals. In the present study we examine the top songs of 2013 across four genres; rap, country, pop, and Christian to examine the life goals and methods for obtaining these goals promoted within each. We find rap music continues to extoll deviant and criminal behavior. Although not identified in prior research we found underlying themes of narcissism interwoven within rap music and an unusual emphasis on prescription drug abuse. Country music largely endorses quality relationships; pop music is shallow and promotes a party lifestyle. Finally, Christian music encourages a relationship with God as the sole focus of life. These and other themes within each genre serve as the primary life goals identified which may influence an individual's behavior either negatively or positively. The present findings are evaluated through a lens of social learning theory to evaluate the messages presented and the potential criminal, deviant and pro-social behaviors they promote.

Keywords: Music, Lyrics, Learning Thoery, Pro-social, Narcissim, Prescription Drug Abuse

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INTRODUCTION

Music is a medium of human social expression and is as old as humankind. However, the popularity of music has dramatically increased in the last century, primarily due to availability. Music is played nearly everywhere in our society at stores, restaurants, elevators, sporting events, movies, television, church, and in many other public venues. Music has also captured much of our individual time. We listen to music when we drive, work, play, relax, exercise and to some degree, even while communicating with others. In fact, the average person in the U.S. listens to 2.5 hours of music a day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

This obsession with music has been accompanied by a vast expansion of available musical genres. A music genre refers to a grouping of popular music, which shares similar qualities (e.g. musical style, content, and message). *AllMusic*, which holds the largest depository of digital music in the world, has identified twenty-one primary genres each containing dozens of sub-genre categories. While many aspects of these genres may overlap, there are important differences between the genres of music. Bolstered by the advent of digital media, society is now, more than ever, able to shape and prioritize their listening habits to specific preferences.

This fixation and ability to fine-tune the type and frequency of music has powerful impacts on our life. According to Grossberg (1986) the consumption of music has three important aspects. First, one's music genre of choice helps to define who one is within culture. Second, listeners derive from their favorite music genre a system of meanings that help them structure and define their everyday sense of reality. In other words, the music we listen to is a socialization agent and an interpreter of culture and experience. Finally, music functions as a

sub-discourse in larger cultural context of which it is at one time, a product of social trends and a producer of social trends. With these significant and yet often subtle effects, Grossberg theorizes that adherence to a specific musical genre shapes a listener's identity. This theory has received wide empirical support (Frith, 1996a; Hargreaves, 1997; Kubrin, 2005; North, Hargreaves & McKendrick 1999; Schäfer & Sedlmeier, 2009; Whiteley, 2000).

Within this context it is vital to understand that music not only influences societal behavior, but is influenced by society. In other words, the lyrical content of music does not occur within a social vacuum, rather is influenced by those who create it (Grossberg, 1986; Kurbin, 2005; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). In effect music is a two way street. Music functions not only to influence individuals but individuals also influence music's content. Thus music must be understood within a social context of mutual influence. Understanding music in this manner highlights the importance of identifying the message within the music as they reflect the values and norms of those who created them but also serve to influence the ones who listen.

A person's preferred music genre functions to identify life goals and signal the acceptable means of achieving those goals for the listener. Many research studies have examined the interaction of specific genres and the listeners' actions, perceptions and views. Common genres of study include Teen Pop (Vannini & Myers, 2002), Rap (Lena, 2006; Wester, Crown, Quatman, Heesacker, 1997), Gangster Rap (Kubrin, 2005) and Country (Connors & Alpher, 1989; Lewis, 1989). Other researchers have focused on the negative effects of popular music across all genres identifying the messages of alcohol and drug usage (Market, 2001; Primack, Douglas, Fine,

Dalton, 2009; Primack, Nuzzo, Rice, Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks 2003; Fisher & Greitemeyer, 2006) and sex roles or misogynous views (Dukes, et. al., 2003; Hall, West, & Hill, 2012; Lewis, 1989; Primack, Gold, Schwarz, Dalton, 2008).

However, little, if any, research has been conducted examining the general goals and values or the idealized methods of attaining those goals represented across more than one genre. Understanding what the primary messages are in music is important as music shapes identities, filters worldviews, provides reinforcement to norms, values and ideologies and indicates societal norms of those who create it. Understanding the way music supports thematic life goals and implies methods for acquiring those goals within various genres is important for all who wish to understand how identities (and associated behaviors) are shaped, or wish to identify means to shape, reshape or direct identity formation and behavior. If the music to which one listens provides continual messages that extoll the value of deviant behavior (e.g., violence, drug usage) listeners are likely to internalize such values, and behave in similar ways. Conversely listening to pro-social messages (e.g., helping others), which encourage socially acceptable activities, should encourage listeners to engage in those behaviors. The present study will examine the lyrical content of the top songs in four genres to identify and evaluate themes within each genre that listeners are exposed to.

Rap music has been the most frequently, and most critically, studied music genre of the past two decades. Scholars have pointed to rap's messages as aggressive and violent (Kubrin, 2005; Richardson & Scott, 2002), sexually violent (Barongan & Magayama Hall, 1995; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009; Wester, et al., 1997), and endorsing drug and alcohol usage

(Sargent, 2012), aggression and violence (Christenson, Roberts, & Bjork, 2012; Primack, Dalton, Carroll, Agarwal, & Fine, 2008). In this review of 2013's most popular rap songs, we find these types of messages are still present. While not studied as thoroughly as rap music a number of researchers have focused on examining country and pop music's general goals, values and the idealized methods of attaining those goals. They have reported consistent themes evolving alcohol usage (Christenson, et al., 2012), leading to increased sexual activity among adolescents (Martino, et al., 2006; Primack, et al., 2009), general problematic behavior (Mulder, Ter Bogt, Raaijmakers, & Vollebergh, 2007) and negativity (George, Stickle, Rashid, & Wopnford, 2007). Some of these negative themes are identified in the present study, others are not.

Despite the plethora of available research on rap, country and pop, we are unable to locate a substantial body of work evaluating Christian music. Even when evaluating mixed genres, Christian is not included. This is surprising given the body of research, which demonstrates that listening to calm, pro-social or neutral music (e.g., classical, instrumental) evokes positive emotions (Ali & Peynircioğlu, 2006), positive attitudes (Greitemeyer, Hollingdale, & Traut-Mattausch, 2015), decreases aggression (Greitemeyer, 2011) and enhances a sense of general wellbeing (Egrmann, et al., 2011; George et al., 2007). While the research is bereft of an exclusive examination of Christian music, we are also unable to locate a single instance where it is directly compared to other genres in relation to goals, values and the idealized methods of attaining those goals.

The socialization of an individual through music can be viewed by means of several theoretical lenses. However, Social learning theory by Ronald Akers (1973;

1977; 1985) appears to provide the most complete perspective with which to evaluate lyrical content in music and its influence on behavior. Akers believes that behavior is learned through associations, definitions, reinforcement and imitation. Social learning theory has been utilized to examine music lyrics (Greitemeyer, 2009; Martino et al., 2006), music videos (Brown, 2002; Gruber, Thau, Hill, Fisher, & Grube, 2005), and other social mediums (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Higgins & Makin, 2004). The messages learned through musical lyrics may reflect societal culture and influence an individual's behavior. Music lyrics may promote in-group and out-group definitions and affiliations for individuals. Moreover, lyrics may simply provide a means by which individuals develop a sense of what constitutes justice, injustice and appropriate responses to perceived injustices. Music is created socially, representing the social beliefs of its creator and also influencing those who listen. Hence, the messages contained in popular music are of great importance when considering deviant, criminal or pro-social behavior.

METHODS

Song Selection

We utilized *Billboard Magazine* to identify the twenty-five most popular songs in each of four genres (Christian, Country, Rap and Pop) in the U.S. during 2013. *Billboard Magazine* incorporates data from sales, airplay and streaming music to ascertain the top songs. Nielsen SoundScan compiles sales data from merchants representing more than 90% of the U.S. music market including internet sales, direct-to-consumer transactions and music store sales. Nielsen Broadcast Data Systems monitors radio stations in more than 120 representative markets and tracks streaming plays from sources such as YouTube and Spotify. By integrating these data, *Billboard*

reported the following popular song titles in 2013: the 'Christian Songs Imprints' ($n = 25$), the 'Hot Country Songs' ($n = 25$), 'Rap Songs' ($n = 25$), and 'Pop'² ($n = 25$). Each of these charts is year-end findings, meaning the top songs for all of 2013 are represented. Several song titles were listed on more than one chart, resulting in 95 unique songs in this sample³.

Coding Procedures

Through the internet, we downloaded the lyrics for all 95 unique songs. Next we contextually analyzed each song looking for predominate lyrical themes of goals and acceptable means to achieve those goals within each genre. Once initial findings had been recorded for all genres, the authors reviewed each song again to confirm their findings and explore additional goals/values and idealized methods of attaining those goals. When in doubt of the lyrics meaning, the author's listened to the music or utilized music videos (when available) to ensure the lyrical context was correctly interpreted.

Findings

In examining the lyrical content of the four genres of popular music there are very clearly defined sets of content, stated or implied goals for life being transferred from the singers to the listeners, and observable patterns and themes expression of ideas. Keeping in mind the knowledge that music can be a powerful socialization and cultural interpretation tool, we examine the content of the most popular rap, county, pop and Christian songs of 2013.

² *Billboard* discontinued the 'Pop 100' chart in 2009 favoring the 'Hot 100' chart instead indicating the two had largely mirrored each other (Trust, 2009). For the present study, the 'Pop' genre will be represented via the 'Hot 100' chart.

³ The authors decided to remove duplicates from the 'Pop' chart, as this genre is generally more inclusive and not as distinct as the other genres.

Rap

The most prominent themes of 2013's popular rap songs are instances of misogynistic and violent views toward women, where women are frequently referred to as, "bitches" and "hoes", or as Lil Wayne in "Love Me" identified women, "pussy craters". Specifically, sexual violence against women is celebrated by Rocko in "Uoen" when he described raping women signing, "Put Molly⁴ all in her champagne, she ain't even know it, I took her home and I enjoyed that, she ain't even know it". However, the strong misogynistic attitude toward women is deeper than the mere words crafted to identify them and is at the core of much of rap music. Very few of the rap songs specifically identified or referred to women as having any worth beyond that of satisfying the sexual impulses of the singers. This is exemplified in "Bugatti" by Ace Hood who sings, "I fuck bitches from different races...Hit her and go, I won't call her again". Further, in "I'm Different" by 2 Chaniz, "I fuck her so good it's a badd habit, bitch shit down, you got a bad atti', gave her the wrong number and a bad addy". Even when women are not referred to negatively or in a sexual manner their worth and equality is clearly second to men. For example, in "Bitch Don't Kill My Vibe", Kendrick sings an entire song advising women not to interfere with his "vibe" and closes by telling women, "Talk too motherfucking much, I got my drink I got my music, I say bitch don't kill my vibe".

Also, consistent with previous findings, drug and alcohol usage or a celebrated state of intoxication is commonplace with rap music. This is evident, especially in "Swimming Pools" by Kendrick, "...I'm a get fucked up, fillin' up my cup...freedom is

⁴ Molly is a common street name identifying MDMA or ecstasy, which is often used to drug victims prior to sexual assault.

granted as soon as the damage of vodka arrive" or in Lil Wayne's "Rich as Fuck" when he sings, "Light that shit then pass that shit, we gona get so smoked out". Surprisingly, the present study identified references to prescription drugs at nearly the same rate as illicit drugs. For instance, songs such as "Rich as Fuck" by Lil Wayne included the lyrics, "...I got Xanax, Percocet, promethazine with codeine". Additionally, "Berzerk" by Eminem celebrates love by comparing it with, "cough syrup in Styrofoam⁵...I done did enough Codeine to knock the future into tomorrow". Moreover, Codeine is the most commonly mentioned prescription drug.

Although not identified or discussed in prior research we found underlying themes of narcissism interwoven within a significant portion of rap music. This concept is evident when rappers discuss other rappers and famous individuals; often comparing themselves with them or assuming they are better than others were. For example, "Berzerk" by Eminem identifies several individuals who he claims to be superior too including, "like K-Fed...let yourself go", "ugly Kardashian", "Lamar" and others. Moreover, specific examples of narcissistic ideology is expressed in "Clique" when Kanye West sings, "I'm the shit" and "we top of the totem pole" as he describes how he and his "clique" are better than others or when Drake sings, "I'ma worry about me, give a fuck about you" in "Started From the Bottom". Other symbols of a narcissistic identity involved money, as evident by Lil Wayne's song, "Rich as Fuck", women identified in, "Long as my bitches love me, I can give a fuck about haters (Lil Wayne in "Bitches Love Me") and partying as exemplified in Pitbull's "Don't Stop the Party". Finally, narcissism is expressed

⁵ A common depiction of consuming large amounts of liquid prescription codeine and promethazine.

through identifying the importance of being known as someone who is famous as epitomized by Pitbul's song "Feel This Moment" which boasts of his fame.

It is also important to note that within the rap genre there are two very distinctive groupings of songs. Those that emphasize negative behaviors and objectionable methods for obtaining them, and a smaller yet large (at least among the top 25 rap songs of 2013) group that, generally, is positive or at a minimum benign in content. As discussed previously the negative collection of rap songs clearly reflects the long acknowledged violent, misogynistic, drug promoting ideals. However, many of the top rap songs of 2013 present a very different type of message, and in a very different way. For instance, Macklemore's entire song "Same Love" decries the way society, and specifically the rap culture, looks down on and mistreats homosexuals by proudly proclaiming, "Human rights for everybody, No freedom 'til we're equal and Underneath it's all the same love". Flo Rida's song "I Cry" is about finding strength to overcome the troubles he had growing up in a rough neighborhood. Other's such as Macklemore's "Thrift Store" extols shopping at Good Will.

Perhaps most interesting is the stark differences in the way women are referred within these pro-social rap songs. For instance, "Gangnam Style" by PSY praises the virtues of, "A girl who covers herself, but is more sexy than a girl who bares it all, a sensible girl like that". Rap artist Wale seems conflicted with his intimate relationships when he sings, "...bad girls ain't no good", after the female co-vocalist laments, "It's bad that I never made love, no I never did, But I sure now how to fuck ya". This is not the only song that signified that love is more important than simply satisfying sexual urges. Rather, J. Cole in "Power Trip" describes his love, admiration

and, "longest crush ever" for a women he desires to date, however, when a friend sings, "For Pete's sake, homie pull it together, just fuck her one time and be through it forever" J. Cole responds, "Would you believe me if I said I'm in Love? Baby, I want you to want me". Finally, "Crooked Smile", again by J. Cole spends the entire song actually promoting women and encouraging them not to find value in men, "You wonder why you're lonely and your man's not calling, You keep falling victim cause you're insecure...Take if from a man that loves what you got, And baby girl you're a star, don't let 'em tell you you're not". While songs that identify the value of women were represented in rap music they were rare.

Country

Country music is perhaps one of the more difficult genre's to classify due to its significant use of innuendos and conflicting messages. For example, nearly all the chart topping country songs of 2013 refer to women as "baby" or "girl". Florida Georgia Line identifies them as, "Little sugar shakers" while Easton Corbin refers to woman in his song, "All Over the Road" as, "Sweet thing" and "Little hot mess". However, unlike the majority of rap music these monikers are not exclusively used to demean women but rather are often utilized as a quasi-pet name with the singers applying other endearing comments toward women, which tend to empower rather than objectify women. In fact, nearly the entire genre focuses on the relationship between a man and woman and overall, conveys empowering messages. While there are several songs, which seem to focus on the physical attributes of women such as in "Cruise" when Florida Georgia Line sings, "When I first saw that bikini top on her" and "Oh, good lord, she had them long tanned lags". A majority of artists described a

woman's beauty in non-sexual terms such as, "Your hair, is it pulled up or fallin' down, oh, I just have to see it now" ("Crash My Party" by Luke Brian), or in "I Want Crazy" by Hunter Hayes who sings, "I gotta see the color in your eyes". Finally, several songwriters sing of a woman's, "sweet smile".

It seems clear, that in a majority of the songs the singers (both men and women) desire a relationship, which is deeper than a physical attraction. The singers tend to identify a beauty both outwardly such as in "Runnin' Outta Moonlight" by Randy Houser, "Don't you worry 'bout getting' fixed up, When you wake up, you're pretty enough" but also identify a deep appreciation of a relationship with women. For example, "Wanted" by Hunter Hayes selflessly says, "I wanna call you mine, Wanna hold your hand forever, and never let you forget it. Yeah, I, I wanna make you feel wanted...As good as you make me feel, I wanna make you feel better". Other examples include the concept that life is not satisfying without a relationship when Hunter Hayes sings, "Without you baby is a waste of time" in "I Want Crazy" or in "Highway Don't Care" by Tim McGraw when he says, "I can't live without you, baby".

Several of the songs even expressed the concept of long-standing relationships such as in "Hey Pretty Girl" by Kip Moore. Throughout the song Kip Moore relays the story of meeting a woman, "Hey pretty girl, can I have this dance and the next one after that", and imagines introducing her to his mother, "Hey pretty girl, wanna take you home, my momma's gonna love you, she'll make me sleep on the couch, I know, but hey pretty girl, wanna take you home". The song continues and depicts various stages of a relationship, even to the point of death, "Hey pretty girl when I see the light when it's my time to go, I'm gonna thank the Lord for

a real good life, Pretty little girl and a beautiful wife...Life's a lonely, winding ride, Better have the right one by your side."

In a similar concept The Band Perry in "Better Dig Two" sings, "I told you on the day we wed, I was gonna love you 'til I's dead, made you wait 'til our wedding night, That's the first and last time that I'll wear white".

Despite many of the songs depicting the importance of a relationship there is also plenty of sexual innuendos such as in "That's My Kind of Night" by Luke Bryan when he sings, "Gonna sound like a winner, when I lay you down and love you right". Another example in "Boys 'Round Here" by Blake Shelton, which says, "Lay a blanket on the ground, kissing and the crickets is the only sound...Have you ever got down with a redneck?" Yet, far from the sexual violence promoted in rap music there is a tender and respectful side to country, even when implying sexual activity. Such as when Brett Eldredge in "Don't Ya" sings, "Wanna get outta here and let me show ya, how good it would feel to hold ya. Put your pretty little head on my shoulder, oh yea". Other singers imply a sexual desire and admiration for a woman such as "It Goes Like This" by Thomas Rhett, "Yea it starts with a smile and it ends with an all night long slow kiss...hey girl, you make me wanna drive you home, get you outta here and get you all alone...but you make me wanna write a song".

Alcohol plays a significant role in country music and is mentioned in nearly every song to one degree or another. However, it is treated differently than in other genres. While many other genres celebrate intoxication country, overall, seems to promote responsible drinking and has few positive messages regarding intoxication. For example, in "Night Train" Jason Aldean he sings, "Got a blanket and a fifth of comfort a little something to knock

off the edge” or in “Crash My Party” Luke Bryan elevates love above intoxication saying, “Ain’t a bar that can make me buzz the way that you do”. Many of the songs identify bars and drinking as methods for meeting women such as when Billy Currington in “Hey Girl” says, “Hey girl, whatcha think girl, you look a little thirsty lemme go getcha something to drink girl”. However, drinking is not an end to itself.

Perhaps the only country song which appeared to promote intoxication is “Get Your Shine On” by Florida Georgia Line when they sing, “Homemade jar, lemon drop, take a sip, Don’t stop girl, you know I love it when you get your shine on!”, referring to drinking moonshine. Conversely, several songs appeared to outright condemn intoxication such as in “Mama’s Broken Heart” by Miranda Lambert, where the singer bemoans how, “I numbed the pain at the expense of my liver”. She continues to describe how her intoxication, spurred by a “broken heart”, began to give her a bad reputation. The singer is encouraged in the song by her mother to, “Run and hid your crazy and start actin’ like a lady ‘cause I raised you better, gotta keep it together even when your life is falling apart”. Moreover, “Better Dig Two” by The Band Perry, identifies that “It won’t be wiskey, won’t be meth, It’ll be your name on my last breath”, confirming they will not allow those substances to damage the relationship.

In addition to singing about women and alcohol, nearly every top country song of 2013 mentioned trucks. This near universal theme is more prevalent in some songs than others, however, the concept of having or riding in a truck in the “countryside” carries significant importance in most songs. Often the truck is status symbol for example, “...my big black jacked up truck, rollin’ on 35s...sit down on my diamond plate tailgate” (“That’s My

Kind of Night” by Luke Bryan). In the same way, Tyler Farr in “Redneck Crazy” criticized a competing lover singing, “Nah, he can’t amount to much by the look of the little truck”. However, a truck represented more than just a status symbol.

The attitude toward a pickup truck seems to follow a logical progression across country music. First, the pick-up truck is also often seen as a method to attract women, such as when Florida Georgia Line in “Cruise” sings, “...In this brand new Chevy with a lift kit, It’d look a hell lot better with you up in it”. Second, trucks are often used to romanticize women such as in “Runnin’ Outta Moonlight” by Randy Houser who sings, “Come on baby let me take you on a night ride”. This leads to a common final goal to, “Meet me in the middle of a moonlit Chevy bench seat”, according to Blake Shelton in “Sure Be Cool If You Did”. This meeting often implies some type of physical romance or sexual activity. This entire concept is succinctly presented in “Boys ‘Round Here” who identifies the purpose of work is, “To get paid, to get the girl, in your 4 wheel drive, [so] A country by can survive”.

Pop

Pop music covers a wide variety of songs and is the most nondescript of the genres studied. In fact, this category contained five duplicates from other genres. Of the four genres examined in the present study, pop music proved to be the most ambiguous, containing underdeveloped lyrics, and concepts. It is difficult to describe the superficial and non-descript lyrics of the music, however the extreme example is “Harlem Shake” by Baauer, which consist of the following words for over three minutes, “Con los terroristas⁶, Ey,

⁶ Con lo terroristas, translated means “with the terrorists”. It is widely accepted this has no meaning or

Ta, Shake, And do the Harlem Shake”. While this may be the only example of a pop song whose lyrics are complete nonsense, there are certainly others, which demonstrated a lack of development. For example, “Get Lucky” by Draft Punk contains six unique lines at the beginning of the song and then continues with variations of, “We’re up all night ‘till the sun, we’re up all night to get some, we’re up all night for good fun, we’re up all night to get lucky”. Similarly, “Sail” by Awolnation discusses four disparate concepts such as, “How an angel dies”, how I show my love” and others which appear to have no logical connection with each verse concluding, “Blame it on my A-D-D baby”. The remainder of the song repeats the word, “sail”.

When the lyrics are sensical, a high percentage of the top pop songs of 2013 tend to focus on damaged relationships. For example, “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke is about trying to take a woman from another man when he sings, “That man is not your mate and that’s why I’m gon’ take you”. Further, Justin Timberlake in “Mirrors” sings of returning to a romantic relationship when he says, “Comin’ back here to you once I figured it out, you were right here all along”. Others, such as Pink in “Just Give Me a Reason” indicates a relationship is, “not broken just bent” and suggests, “...we can learn to love again”. Of the broken relationships, two strong categories are apparent. Songs, which bemoaning a break in the relationship, such as “I Knew You Were Trouble” by Taylor Swift who sings, “A new notch in your belt is all I’ll ever be, and now I see, he was long gone when he met me” and songs celebrating what came from the separation, as demonstrated in “Roar” by Katie Perry. Perry’s lyrics tell a story of a domineering relationship she is able to overcome, and in

relevance to the song and may have been chosen by the writer simply because the phrase sounded pleasing.

the process, discovered she can be her own “champion” singing, “you’re gonna hear me ROAR!” Overall, the quality of the relationships identified in pop music is superficial. While not as sexually oriented as rap music the relationships are generally not presented in a meaningful way, such as with country.

The pop genre tends to be high energy with catchy lyrics. This is most certainly true for the significant portion of songs, which applaud partying or celebrating life. For instance, “Wake Me Up” by Avicii concludes their song singing, “Life’s a game made for everyone and love is the prize” while the choirs in “We Can’t Stop” by Miley Cyrus is, “It’s our party we can do what we want to”. Moreover, Lorde in “Royals” concludes, she will never be, “royals” but “Life is great without a care” and describes how they party despite their circumstances.

Christian

The Christian genre is entirely different from the others examined in this study. Moreover, the authors are unable to identify any previous research examining the lyrical content of Christian music. Perhaps as should be expected, as the most popular Christian songs of 2013 universally contain pro-social messages, show a strong emphasis on the singer’s admiration and worship of God, and place the singer in a subservient role. Consistent with the common message of the Christian gospel, there are repeated themes and exaltations of ones feeling of low worth and incomplete or spiritually empty unless they can establish a relationship with God. For example, The Afters in “Every Good Thing” sing, “There will be days that give me more than I can take, but I know that You always make beauty from my heartache”. Big Daddy Weave in “Redeemed” says, “Seems like all I can see was the struggle, haunted by ghosts

that lived in my past, bound up in shackles of all my failures...I am redeemed, You set me free". Several of the songs not only identified low self-worth in relation to God but also encouraged abandonment of other life goals in pursuit of a singular relationship with God.

Chasing after this world makes me tired, praisin' my own name leaves me dry. There's gotta be so much more to life than this, a higher calling that I missed, I want my life to count every breath, I wanna live with abandon, give you all that I am, every part of my heart Jesus, I place in Your hands, I wanna live with abandon. (News Boys in "Live With Abandon").

Also included are messages of adversities and struggles, which are more easily, if not only, possible to overcome with the guidance and assistance of God. In some instances, specific forms of adversity are identified, such as in Third Day's song "I Need a Miracle" which portrays a struggling family relationship shattered by unemployment, mounting financial burdens and thoughts of suicide. This adversity is overcome just prior to a suicide attempt when the character listens to a song and is reminded, "In your hour of desperation, know you're not the only one, praying, Lord above, I need a miracle" and is strengthened to pray to God for help.

In other cases, adversity is a more generally presented concept, identified as "avoiding temptation", "regret", "failure" or "relationship heartaches". Regardless the circumstances or the form of adversity, the messages presented is that with God, and only with God, can one expect to overcome such issues. This message is apparent in "Need You Now" by Plumb, when they sing, "How many times have you heard me cry out, 'God, please take this'? How many times have you given me strength to just

keep breathing?" and when Tenth Avenue North in "Worn" sings, "I've made mistakes, I've let my hope fail, My soul feels crushed by the weight of this world and I now that you can give me rest, so I cry out with all that I have left".

The language used in popular Christian music is, again not surprisingly, wholesome, innocent, encouraging and absent of destructive thoughts and actions. Also differing from rap, country and popular music, this genre is devoid of mentions or innuendos of sex, sexuality, intoxication, aggressive behavior, or misogynous concepts. Rather, the content of the most popular Christian songs is narrow and focused on praising God, his works and his value in life while orienting the singers' life toward imitating God. This is exemplified by The Afters in "Every Good Thing", "This is a beautiful life You give, You're the reason for every good thing, every heartbeat, every day we get to breath...I'm not gonna miss the moments like this, this is a beautiful life You give".

DISCUSSION

Of the four genres examined, rap music clearly contains the most negative messages. This is consistent with the significant amounts of previous research, which has evaluated raps lyrics and its effects on listeners. Frequent misogynistic messages and images of violence against women are prevalent along with a common image of women serving only to fulfill the sexual desires of men. A significant portion of songs celebrate alcohol and drugs. This is especially true for prescription drug abuse. Previous research has found 25% of rap songs contain references to illicit drug usage (Primack et al., 2008). However, we are unable to locate research examining the promotion or abuse of prescription drugs in any genre of music. The U.S. is currently experiencing a growing trend of prescription

drug abuse (CDC, 2012; Hernandez & Nelson, 2010), especially among adolescents (Zosel, Bartelson, Beiley, Lowenstein & Dart, 2013), which may coincide with the increase in the celebration or suggestion of prescription drug abuse in rap music. However, it is difficult to know if the culture trends of prescription drug abuse are influencing the lyrics in rap music or if individuals are influenced by the lyrics. Further study on this important topic is needed to determine the direction of effect.

Another under researched theme discovered in the present study is narcissism. A significant portion of the rap songs can be identified as expressing narcissistic behaviors (e.g., when singers glorify and build up only themselves while degrading all others). Despite these negative messages, there is a portion of rap music that does not fit neatly into the negative category. These songs are largely positive in nature, extolling virtues of hard work, human rights and love. Once again, this is an area where little if any research has been conducted. Despite this broad divide in rap music, the majority of the genre is negative and tends to promote behaviors and methods to obtain life goals, which are inconsistent with a majority of societal norms.

The present study demonstrates that pop music covers a wide variety of disparate topics and styles, some of them more developed than others, and that they generally contained week or adolescent concepts compared to other genres. Some of the songs in pop music are bereft of any logical content and their popularity appears to be based solely on upbeat tempos or other musical qualities. When topics are discussed they tended to center on parties, failed relationships, occasionally promote alcohol and display some negligible misogynistic concepts. Pop music often represents a hedonistic lifestyle of luxury, partying and relationships. Since it lacks the singular

focus of other genres, Pop music may have limited influence on individuals' life goals.

Despite the variations in country music, the sexual innuendos and conflicting messages the ideas that it promotes are clear. The country music genre identifies the primary purpose in life as having a meaningful relationship with someone of the opposite sex. The music expresses a physical attraction for the other partner, yet usually avoids objectification. In other words, the relationship is what appears to be important and emphasized while sexuality, although clearly present, is not the primary focus. This stands in stark contrast with other genres which suggest the only proper relationship for individuals to have is with God (e.g., Christian music) or that relationships are superficial (e.g., pop) and typically only sexual in nature (e.g., rap). Country music promotes alcohol usage, but does not celebrate intoxication. Moreover, the values, objectives and messages presented in a majority of the songs appear to be pro-social, attainable and common to a significant portion of the population.

Christian music is very clear in the vision it presents. Christian music promotes ideas of overcoming adversity, living well and developing a relationship with God, which lowers the self-worth of an individual and highlights the love and grace of God. These messages are the antithesis of rap music. Furthermore, Christian music is singular in purpose, developing a deep relationship with God, which is unlike the superficial partying promotion of pop music. Moreover, country music is drastically different from Christian music in that the focus of a meaningful relationship is on a partner of the opposite sex and Christian music focuses on a relationship with God. Unlike the other genres evaluated in the present study there is no cursing, hint of sexuality, intoxication, aggressive behavior or misogynous behavior expressed in

Christian music. In some ways, the very narrow range of messages, highly concentrated and highly repetitive statements of similar content and context may offer the most influential of the four musical genres examined herein. In this regard, popular Christian music may be the most unified and most easily demarcated genre of popular music.

Whereas music serves as a socialization agent and a communicator of culturally acceptable (and unacceptable) values, norms, beliefs and behaviors it is vitally important to understand what messages are being promoted in the music listened to. The present study has identified the primary life goals and acceptable means for attaining those goals for the 100 chart-topping songs of 2013 in rap, country, pop and Christian music. What we found is that rap music continues to promote and celebrate negative behaviors such as drug and alcohol usage, violence, misogynistic attitudes, narcissism and other negative cultural behaviors and attitudes. Based on previous research we would expect listening to rap music would likely promote these activities and encourage deviant and criminal behavior (Lennings & Warburton, 2011; Gray, 2010; Miranda & Claes, 2004).

However, the present study has also identified positive or pro-social lyrical content in a high percentage of country, all of Christian and relatively neutral messages in pop. Based on social learning theory these messages may serve as a socializing mechanism, which function to inhibit deviance, crime and encourage pro-social behavior. Research is emerging, which suggests that listening to pro-social or relatively neutral messages in music may lead to a decrease in aggression (Greitemeyer, 2011), increased relaxation (Boothby & Robbins, 2011; Labbé, Schmidt, Babin, & Pharr, 2007; Smith & Joyce, 2004) and actually increase pro-social thoughts

and behavior (George et al., 2007; Greitemeyer, 2009). Unfortunately, current research has not utilized music genres, other than classical, to examine positive and pro-social actions which may be encouraged by pop, country and Christian genres. Future research should examine the pro-social and positive behavioral effects of pop, country and Christian to evaluate the effects they have on society. If current research trends continue in their findings, these developments may indicate that listening to country, pop and Christian music may function as inhibitors to antisocial, criminal and deviant behaviors while promoting positive and pro-social behaviors.

The present study is noteworthy because it evaluates the primary messages of life goals and methods for attaining those goals across four diverse musical genres. Due to the amount of music society listens to each day and the ability to fine-tune music to individual preferences society must be cognizant of the effects that music has on behavior. Social learning theory implies that frequently listening and internalizing the life goals expressed in music may serve to expose individuals to normative associations which may be favorable to law-abiding (as in the case of Christian) or illegal and criminal behavior (as frequently identified in rap). These associations lead to definitions, which allow the listener to attach meanings and orient themselves to particular acts such as partying (pop), drug usage (rap), self-denial (Christian) or developing deep relationships with women (country). Once these definitions are established, reinforcement of these life goals and the process by which to obtain them occurs when songs celebrate the success and celebrity status of the singers (as is common in pop and rap). The reinforcement can occur in positive ways such as in country music when work is frequently identified as a method to attain a goal (purchasing a

truck) or in negative methods when rappers celebrate their wealth, status and success by promoting criminal activity, intoxication and abuse of women.

This process of social learning often leads to imitation, whereby the listeners of music internalize the goals presented, methods for obtaining these goals and proceed to imitate the singers. Clearly, in some genres this is a positive idea, such as in Christian music, which is clearly pro-social and may reduce the likelihood of criminal activity. In other genres, such as rap, the majority of messages are criminal in nature. However, pop and country music tend to promote lifestyles, which may be difficult to obtain (partying, relationships with beautiful women, success and alcohol usage). With their ambiguous nature, innuendos, or conflicting messages country and pop music may create an unclear method of obtaining the goals they espouse. This gap in goals and the methods to obtain them may be filled when the listener imitates to a point of criminality. For example, the consistent focus of meeting beautiful women in a bar (country music) and the difficulty of obtaining that goal may create a situation where the listener misconstrues the message in the music and drinks to intoxication and then illegally drives home.

Music influences values, beliefs and behaviors, both those that are deviant and those that are pro-social. This influence is occurring with greater and greater frequency in our society and has the potential to dramatically affect behavior. Moreover, research indicates society may influence the contents of music (Kurbin, 2005; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012) in the same way music content influences individuals. Thus, it is vital that the social goals which music promotes as well as the methods songs espouse to obtain those goals be understood. Music that promotes deviant behavior (e.g.,

primarily rap) poses a concern in society; whereas, Christian music, which solely promotes pro-social norms and behaviors, is a positive influence discouraging deviant behavior. Country and pop music can, and often do, fall into either category (pro-social and deviant). The findings in the present study enhance our understanding of a music genres role in promoting deviant, antisocial and pro-social behavior.

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