Real Rap, Does Authenticity Even Matter in Hip Hop?

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Abstract

Rap and Hip hop has evolved tremendously since its inception. The collective genre has been catapulted to global influence, where in the United States it represents the largest genre based on market share. After reviewing the history of rap music there is a perceived relationship between hip hop and authenticity. To which the question arose of whether hip hop could maintain authenticity in a commercial sphere. To explore this relationship, after reviewing the literature on authenticity, a model of analysis created by Newman and Smith was used to explore 5years worth of data dealing with the Billboard top 100 list. The finds suggest that hip hop has varying degrees of authenticity, but typically authenticity on the higher end coincides with commercial reception as artists who are more authentic boost sales prospects for later works. This relationship is important to explore as it paints a picture for how authentic voices are able to be heard.

Keywords: Hip hop, Rap, Authenticity

Growing up in Philadelphia Rap and Hip-Hop has been a central tenet of the local culture. In my lifetime I have been able to witness numerous artists such as Meek Mill, Lil Uzi Vert, and PNB Rock rise to the national stage of musical recognition. In my circles Hip Hop held supreme importance as we would listen to various artists and analyze their rhetoric, hear their stories, and take notes on messages which spoke to us. Nothing better summarizes our experience as listeners better than the final words of the movie Notorious, when Biggie's mother delivers a narration after his funeral saying, "My son, Christopher Wallace, told stories. Some of them were funny, some of them were sad, some of them were violent, (pausing for a moment) **but people listened**." (2009). It has always stuck with me the power of that statement. It is the very reason I asked myself, what made us listen?

Looking at the market environment of Rap/Hip-Hop sheds light to the overall conditions that are impactful in the commercialized space. In a study done by Statista, they found in 2018 that Rap/Hip-Hop held a majority of album consumption at 21.7%, making it the largest consumed genre in America, beating out Pop (Share of Total…2019). Statista also found 49% of its audience was white, and another 48% fell into the other category, meaning they do not identify as White, Hispanic, or Black (Public opinion on… 2018). Though, around 70% of its base consumers are black, which shows that the genre still speaks to the black consumer in America (Public opinion on… 2018). These Statistics show that rap has a broad audience stretching far beyond its base as compared to other genres. With such a wide group of listeners, it says something notable to the effect of the genre's influential uses of language, themes, and messages.

Rap has been given the unique advantage of spreading across the globe while maintaining core aesthetics and simultaneously bringing in characteristics of its participants localities

(Richardson and Pough, 2016). Themes present in Capitalism and popular culture have aided the wide commercial spread of the genre (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). This can be seen through the glorification of wealth, but also the portrayal of struggles in a society dealing with poverty as seen in Jeezy's album "The Recession" (Payne, 2016). Research into the relationship between gangs and rap music show a heavy emphasis on authenticity (I see death…, 2005). Furthering the point on authenticity, artists, namely the Roots, have railed against those who make exaggeratory claims in their music (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). In the Drill sub-genre of rap, many artists are gang members themselves, making themes of their music derived from their experiences and local affiliations. (Harkness, 2013). Scholars have noted, rappers are the exemplification of capitalistic values such as taking risk, obtaining wealth, and individualism in finding a correlation between the most violent gangs and their aspirations of materialism (Buccellato, 2014). With an apparent link to authenticity, an important question remains of what is authenticity, and how does it relate to music?

Using the literature on authenticity, this paper devises a methodology for examining the extent to which authenticity may be characterized in Hip Hop. The literature also provides scholars commentary on authentic views in music. While there are a range of ways to understand authenticity, following the review of the lit, this paper uses Newman and Smith's four categories of authenticity, namely the historical, categorical, value, and self models (2016). Newman and Smith's typology simplifies each prominent typology on authenticity contained within the literature review into a comprehensive model drawing on the similarities between each major scholars findings on the topic. Historical authenticity is the historical consistency of something. For the purpose of examining music this would mean looking into how a genre is designed to produce a certain sound or themes, and how close to the historical precedent does the music

come (Newman and Smith, 2016). Categorical authentic analysis tries to explain how close to a cultural association is the music (Newman and Smith, 2016). For example, if the music produced is gangster rap, whether the rapper is genuinely a gang member will be of prime importance to establishing categorical authenticity. Value authenticity examines whether an artists moral or held values are expressed in their music, or worse if they go against their values (Newman and Smith, 2016). An example of this would be an artist who is in favor of monogamy detailing their countless affairs. Self authenticity explores whether the music produced is a representation an artist's true self (Newman and Smith, 2016). For example, if a rappers platform is based on feminism they will be assessed on how or if they portray that message in their music. This model will be used as a condensed tool for analysis that takes into account the most notable characteristics of authenticity.

As a music genre that prides itself on authenticity, the comment made by the Roots implies there are artists who may be "selling out" or making music that sells with little authenticity. While it is clear authenticity hold value in Hip Hop, it is unclear to what extent. Marxist scholarship on the issue would contend that authenticity cannot be maintained within a commercial space, as an arts true intention will always be corrupted by capital motivation (Bridson, 2017). Others such as Van Leeuwen and Dutton show skepticism that authentic expressions can ever be empirically proven. However, Bridson and Tetzlaff seem to have a clear conception of authenticities applicability. With such a large disagreement in scholarship, this paper seeks to explore to what extent authenticity is a factor in commercial viability.

The data used will analyze lyrics of several prominent rappers for the determination of how and to what extent authenticity plays a role in Hip Hop. The lyrics will be analyzed on the 4-point scale taken from the work of Newman and Smith. The data ranges from years 2015-2020

and will use 2 samples for each given year. One sample will be a XXL freshman who ranks on the Billboard top 100 for that year. XXL is a Hip Hop magazine which every year compiles its nominees who are then deemed that year's freshman class. The second sample will be a Multi-Platinum award winning artist for that given year. The Multi-Platinum award is certified by the music body RIAA for the achievement of 2 million sales, and it was the highest musical certification until the recent unveiling of the Diamond award (Gold & Platinum). The 2 groups are selected for the purpose of taking into consideration up and coming artists who have yet to gain a foothold, versus those who have longevity in the industry.

This thesis will point to the context of Hip Hop, describing the history and cultural notations that make it such a significantly impactful genre. After the cultural significance of the artforms associations are made the literature on authenticity will be examined, leading to scale which will be operationalized in the methodology. Afterwards, the methodology will explain the how the data will be structured to explore the notions of authenticity in rap. To which the data explores the real the musical authenticity in relation to the artists relative success. Finally a reflection will foster a further conversation into researching this phenomenon.

Contextualizing Rap and Hip Hop

Exploring the relevant background of rap and hip-hop, it has made waves a global movement worthy of deep examination in academia. It has grown to become a global phenomenon stemming from urban black communities in the United States (Forman, 2000). As a decentralized art form, understanding its local and global relations are key to formulating a full understanding of the genre. While it has at times been criticized for its moral poverty, it is more useful to examine it in a sociological context (Oware, 2020). Inside rap themes, Nihilism has provided a tool for expression that has been misunderstood by outsiders (De Genova, 1995). To

understand the new generation of hip hop, this paper will examine its collective influences, and character traits.

Rap as a Global Phenomenon

Rap or hip hop culture has grown far and wide to become a global phenomenon with massive reach and involvement. Aided by the Internet rap has been given the unique advantage of spreading across the globe while maintaining core aesthetics and simultaneously bringing in characteristics of its participants localities (Richardson and Pough, 2016). To its most staunch supporters it often considered "a way of life, a lifestyle, and a worldview" (Alim et al, 2008). To understand how rap/hip-hop culture has become so expansive it is useful to examine the global aspects, local aspects, and its cultural ties.

For anything to be shared across cultures baring the same name, it must carry similar characteristics. For example, there are many sizes and shapes of TVs, but a TV's function is ultimately to project images. In the global view of hip-hop there is a similar understanding of an encompassing culture that revolves around the music. In a Chinese rap battle "One rapper spits out words in a distinctive Beijing accent, scolding the other for not speaking proper Mandarin," while "his opponent from Hong Kong snaps back to the beat in a trilingual torrent of Cantonese, English, and Mandarin, dissing the Beijing rapper for not representing the people" (Alim et al, 2008). Not only does the quote speak to rap music as a more effective tool wielded by the disenfranchised, but also leaves subtle hints to the broader culture. The rappers are dressed in baggy clothing and baseball caps, a standard cultural practice in hip-hop, displaying an international dress code that announces participants are seeking to be identified with the larger culture (Alim et al, 2008). On further analysis, the platform for their artistic expressions is a rap battle. Framing an understanding of rap as a competitive art form. Another global element of rap

culture features poetic verses that are intended to rhyme in some type of way. The evidence for such a claim is supported by the case of Japanese rap, in which Japanese rappers restructured their language in order to have rhyming features which are not common in traditional Japanese (Alim et al, 2008). Besides the few basic features of the musical genre, hip-hop grants citizens of its nation a platform to express their unique perspectives within its stylistic constraints.

Rap music and the hip-hop culture empowers individuals in their localities to speak out politically. In the example of the Chinese rap battle, the listeners were witnesses to a rejection of the Mandarin language in favor of the more localized dialects of Hong Kong. Thereby, the Hong Kong artist is making a clear rejection of not only the language, but the authority of those who seek to impose the language on the people of Hong Kong. Just as the rapper here uses his medium and platform to critique his society and his opponent, rap has fostered many of the same results worldwide, helping to create a culture of "organic intellectuals" (Morgan and Bennett, 2011).

This intellectualism can be seen in the case of the Arab Spring, when rappers in the Middle East and North Africa were arguably the drivers of a political revolution, rejecting long standing authoritarianism across the region (Morgan and Bennett, 2011). Considering hip hop is a genre that is heavily criticized in the west for being misogynistic, Moroccan and British rapper Master Mimz utilized rap in a feminist context taking aim at the Mubarak regime in Egypt when rapping, "First give me a job / Then let's talk about my hijab" (Morgan and Bennett, 2011). The reason these examples constitute organic intellectualism is that without becoming high level academics wielding P.H.D.s these rappers can identify problem areas in their societies and formulate a thought-provoking critique. These are just a few examples out of many in which the

global culture of rap and hip-hop has been utilized by local populations to express artistically their culture values, or societal grievances.

It is a well-established that while rap/hip-hop is a global phenomenon, it originates from the black struggle in the United States (Richardson and Pough, 2016). In light of the history relating to the oppression of Black people, rap culture became a way to "communicate, interact, and create new collective identities" (Richardson and Pough, 2016). These identities have not only resonated with non-blacks, but are the culmination of a worldwide African diaspora creating its own identity (Richardson and Pough, 2016).

Hip Hop also has religious ties to Islam and the Black Muslim movement in the US (Richardson and Pough, 2016). The modern legacies of which can be found through many artists lyrics. For example, in Dave East's song "It Was Written" he states in the hook "If you never been broke it's gon' be hard to feel me/ Only Allah get my vote, it's gon' be hard to kill me" (East, 2016). Using the Arabic word "Allah" in replacement of the English word "God", the rapper is at the very least espousing his approval of Islam in a largely white Christian nation. Looking out globally this localized phenomenon has also impacted Islam. Abroad artists such as Africa Bambaata and other groups have been using Islamic based themes in their rap to make cultural statements (Richardson and Pough, 2016). While rap and hip-hop has given many people the freedom of localized expression through a global medium, there is an underlying recognition and tonality that this is a black and Islamic rooted genre.

<u>The Sociology of Rap Music</u>

Beyond the functional attributes of the genre, rap music derives most of its content from societal drivers. These societal drivers can be seen in the music by using textual and contextual analysis as identified by Roy and Dowd (2020). The actual driving forces themselves vary from

an artist's perceived experiences. Some rappers will be concerned with notions of wealth, poverty, gangs, etc. What this portion will go on to explore is the strong interconnections between rap, society and the lenses to see

In the field of music scholars tend to take two approaches to assess music's meaning sociologically. The first approach being to view music as an object (textualism), and the second being to view it as an activity (contextualism) (Roy and Dowd, 2020). In the textual approach music is broken down by the meaning of the lyrics, structure, rhetoric, and relation to the artist (Roy and Dowd, 2020). In the contextualist approach the emphasis is on the audience and its effect (Roy and Dowd, 2020). Using the example of rap music Roy and Dowd write, "whether rap music foments violence or conciliation depends less on its lyrics or sounds than on what people do with it" (2020). Though, it is important to state academics are divided on the issue of how to properly view music, and it is best to assert both perspectives are valid (Roy and Dowd, 2020). Sociologists have noted that people use music as sources of identity (Roy and Dowd, 2020). Since "meaning does not simply reside in the content of media goods but in the interplay between audiences and content" it is a responsibility of academics to weigh both forces in analyzing the societal standing of rhetorical themes, and the societal framing.

Scholars who adopt the textual view have sought to understand the popular themes in rap, and more directly what they represent. Hunnicutt and Andrews do this by delving into "the complexity of homicide-related rap lyrics by exploring their style and hidden meaning" (2009). Further they add that every music genre has introduced some element of homicide in its content (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). Conveying that there is more to learn by analyzing rap music as opposed to fostering a moral panic. According to these authors part of the stylistic goal of rap is to be provocative in hopes of drawing attention (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). Addressing an

ongoing debate over whether raps message maintains its rooting in societal oppression (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). To which some believe the capitalist commercialization of the space has influenced the dominant content produced (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). They go on to add industry insiders have also brought commercialization to attention. One example being The Roots, who have spoken out against artists that portray a perception that is exaggeratory at best (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). In a study produced examining lyrics, Hunnicutt and Andrews come to the conclusion that homicide has played more of a rhetorical role in music (2009). Combating these claims, their argument follows from an understanding that homicide has been a pop-culture phenomenon before rap existed (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). In their analysis they derive that it plays the role lyrically of showing rhetorical skill, is used to combat power structures, portray masculinity, and maintain respect (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009).

Payne seeks to understand the work of Young Jeezy through a contextual model. Using a contextualist basis Payne seeks to extract from one album "The Recession" by Young Jeezy how the rapper utilizes gangster rap to illustrate "how blocked economic and educational opportunity, poor living and health conditions, a corrupt political system, and the insidious ways these forms of structural inequality shape the identity of street identified black men" (2016). In an introspective fashion Jeezy does the work of a street philosopher stating, "We (the streets) tired of (having to choose between) either-or money (blue collar work) or white squares (the sale of crack cocaine)" (Payne, 2016). Showing awareness of societal factors the gangster rapper is openly acknowledging the societal influences driving the content of rap music. The project title itself alludes to a realization by the rapper that the black community is in a constant state of recession.

Similarly, the work of Rudrow examines the struggles portrayed by Tupac, exemplifying what it means to be a black male in a white patriarchal society (Rudrow, 2019). Interestingly, Rudow uses both textualism and contextualism to make his points. Using songs like "Dear Mama" By Tupac, he points out the impact of having to learn what it means to be a man without other men to show them (Rudrow, 2019). In his analysis of the song he writes, "Black families are often without Black fathers for reasons such as death or incarceration, which may lead to resentment when Black mothers are left to laboriously compensate as single parents" (2019). Rudrow also cites the works of other academic works in this field such as Payne himself. Quoting from Payne that "Black American men understand their masculinity "in the face of perpetual social injustices"" (Rudrow, 2019). This helps Rudrow argue from all sides an analysis of not only what the music is saying, but what society is saying at large. The examples of both qualitative and quantitative data reveal a truth that art is always a reflection of a society and vice versa.

In the social framing of rap music using contextualist patterns scholars have sought to understand the genre in light of it criticism. A study conducted by researchers concluded that anti-rap sentiments stemmed from a larger prejudice of the black community (Reyna et al, 2009). Using 3 samples, they found anti-rap attitudes correlated to beliefs that black people were lazy or shared personal responsibility for their situation (Reyna et al, 2009). This provides another example of how attacks against hip hop are merely a reflection of disguised racism.

The same beliefs were not found in a sample conducted in the UK, thereby the researchers believed the relationship may be uniquely American (Reyna et al, 2009). In a paper by Richardson and Scott, they argued that violence in rap music is rather the result of an

entertainment culture in America which has glorified violence historically (Richardson and Scott, 2002). In their paper they go on to state,

> America's urban centers in general and low-income minority communities in particular, are replete with poverty, police brutality, drug abuse, educational inequality, high dropout rates, and violence. The very governmental and social systems theoretically established to protect the poor, have engendered distrust. A sense of powerlessness to change conditions grounded in complex social, political, and economic issues has led artists to seek ways to express their discontent. Rap music became a cathartic outlet. (Richardson and Scott, 2002).

Rather than examine rap for its moral proclivity, these academics collectively rather look to the plight of the black community. Just as Chinese rap artists may choose to focus on governmental oppression, the music of gangster rap has reflected a community struggling with the degradation of entire society.

While understanding rap through culture and identity lenses has been a useful tool to understand the greater movement, some have also pointed out form a philosophical perspective. Using nihilism, academics have found a greater understanding of the negative language that prevails thematically. In Kubrin's study of 632 songs he examined aspects of nihilism present based on his methodology, and found 3 major characteristics (Gangstas, Thugs, and… 2005). He lists these characteristics as, "(1) bleak surroundings with little hope, (2) pervasive violence in the ghetto, and (3) preoccupation with death and dying." (Gangstas, Thugs, and…, 2005). Using nihilistic themes in Hip Hop is found by this study to be a pervasive force in the genre. These characteristics fits a broader narrative of the gangster rap community as a group of intellectuals formulating a new era of nihilistic thought (Gangstas, Thugs, and…, 2005).

Other scholars such as De Genova have also noted the intellectual significance of nihilism as a powerful artistic tool. In seeking to argue favorably for the use of nihilism De Genova writes, "Where terror is a way of life, "life" itself entails a complicity with that terror; the challenge of self- preservation is itself inseparable from the conservative impulse to cut a pact with the devil, a series of compromises which reduce life in some sense to a protracted way of death" (1995). A proper understanding of nihilism as he argues is a firm understand that it comes from an enlightenment of life's harsh realities (De Genova, 1995). He shuns academics who misunderstand the greater intellectual basis for gangster themes in rap music. Unlike more upbeat genres of music, rap has always been a force of criticism in society. Leaving nihilistic themes to speak to the greater struggles of a community grappling with violence. For instance, a rapper may speak on murdering others as a signifier that murder is prevalent in their community and also as a self-preservation mechanism (De Genova, 1995). He explains that in a community which actors feel their lives are meaningless opposing the structure of meaning is a form of empowerment (De Genova, 1995).

Malone takes the approach of viewing these themes through the eyes of acclaimed rapper Biggie Smalls. He argues the gangster rapper is constantly at odds with these concepts of being willing to commit moral wrongs while simultaneously understanding it as a mode of self-preservation. He quotes Biggie stating, "I rob and steal because that money got that whip appeal / Kickin niggaz down the steps just for rep / Any repercussion lead to niggaz gettin wet" (Malone, 2015). As Malone explains the quote, Biggie sees money as a necessity, proclaiming he is willing to steal and kill to protect himself to the fullest extent (Malone, 2015). While in other verses, he reminisces on times when such violence wasn't apart of his life, acknowledging a psychological toll (Malone, 2015). This usage of violence as a legitimate means of conduct, mixed with a

realization of minimal hope, and the preoccupation of death all show how Biggie uses nihilism to convey his perspective of the African American struggle.

In the creative space of gangster rap music, the gang or gangster is a central focus. This has created an impacting influence on gang culture. Gangster rap is largely driven by a youth street code (I see death…, 2005). The street code is influenced by, "disadvantaged communities (that) have created a local social order complete with its own code and rituals of authenticity" (I see death…, 2005). A primary tenant of the street code is respect, which is seen as being earned through one's ability to commit to violence if necessary (I see death…, 2005). In Philadelphia researchers found that young men would instigate altercations as a means to build respect (I see death…, 2005). Similarly, in New York they found actors willing to commit robberies for the same purpose (I see death…, 2005). Thereby making the gun a powerful cultural symbol of enforcement and respect (I see death…, 2005). In essence the code has become a set of gang moralities that are used as a principal guide for conducting life in the streets (I see death…, 2005). Using the street code as a foundation for relations between gang culture and music scholars examine how media influences gangs, and how gangs relate to the music.

Being so directly tied to a gang culture, gangster rap is forced to appear authentic to its listeners (Van Hellermont and Densley, 2019). Though it has been noted by some academics that gangster rap is "hyper reality" constructed as a fantasy to escape reality in the same way an action movie is constructed (Van Hellermont and Densley, 2019). However, media perception has been utilized to inform gangs on operational information they had previously ignored (Van Hellermont and Densley, 2019). In the UK for instance, it was found that Tupac's aesthetic representations of the gangster has influenced the presentation of how gangsters are supposed to look and act in the UK (Hellermont and Densley, 2019). Today, these representations are strongly

associated to grime and drill rap in the UK (Hellermont and Densley, 2019). It is of important

notation that these rap genres are closely associated to gang culture, as they portray gang related

content (Hellermont and Densley, 2019). Meaning that although gangs may have their own

localized cultures and musical styles, gangster rap and its representations have in many ways

influenced the cultures of localized gangs creating a street code of what to wear, listen to, and

say.

Vice versa, gangs have had significant impacts on rap music and its content. The drill rap

genre coming out of Chicago is one strong example of this (Harkness, 2013). Harkness

associates this to the sheer number of rappers who gang bang, quoting one source saying,

> If seven out of ten rappers are motherfucking gang niggas, that's gonna come out
>
> in the music. Gang niggas are angry. Most of the time, motherfuckers feel like
>
> there's no way out. So you're gonna get gangsta music from a bunch of angry
>
> gangstas: young niggas that ain't got shit, they fathers are locked up. There's a lot
>
> of fathers that are in jail that were in a whole different gang than their son's in.
>
> That's the way Chicago is: there's family members that are in different gangs that
>
> beef with each other. Of course it's gonna come out in the music. (Harkness,
>
> 2013).

Conveying the message of internal struggle, these participants may utilize their social lives for

the cathartic relief of a violent society, or to merely project an actualization of experiences.

Utilizing the drill sub-genre creates an insular class of artists who are speaking directly to the

lived experiences of being a gang member. Allowing gang members to express their localized

street codes and heightening the sense of authenticity that some academics have claimed are

exaggerated. Harkness furthers this point by concluding that authenticity is one of the foundational appeals of gangster rap (2013).

Understanding that gangster rap and gangs tend to operate in a feedback loop. Leading Lonzon and Bensimon to explore the importance of rap functionally among gangs. In some ways rap functions as a marketing tool to expose the larger world via the internet to its culture (Lonza and Bensimon, 2017). Using rap music gangs can foster an identity, especially in the case of Chicago where gangster rap is directly tied to gangs (Lonza and Bensimon, 2017). This is furthered by the fact that rap is largely a youth driven movement, so identity is constructed through this lens at a young age (Lonza and Bensimon, 2017). With the combative nature of rap, rappers are often engaging in battles amongst other rappers (Lonza and Bensimon, 2017). In doing so through antagonistic references of murder, it normalizes gang culture in the public sphere (Lonza and Bensimon, 2017). This is evident with the playing of gangster rap music in non-gang related functions to a non-gang member audience (Lonza and Bensimon, 2017). These factors according to Lonza and Bensimon work to foster greater organization of gangs in general (2017).

While the socio-economic conditions of marginalized groups has been widely touched on in this study of academia, there is still much to say about capitalism and its impact in Hip Hop at large. Buccellato argues that gangs are simply a symptom of a neoliberal capitalism which has failed to address economic issues of urban poverty (2014). Gangs are primarily known to earn money through the sale of narcotics due factors like poverty and illusive opportunity (Buccellato, 2014). Rap music often illustrates the insecurity of poverty and the struggle to use narcotics as a means for social mobility (Buccellato, 2014). Buccellato directly cites the title of 50 Cent's album "Get Rich or Die Tryin'" as an example of resonating messages about the black

community's struggle to gain economic independence (2014). He further asserts gangs are not actually in conflict with societal values, rather they are the exemplification of capitalistic values such as taking risk, obtaining wealth, and individualism (Buccellato, 2014). There was also a connection between which gangs were most violent, which coincided with the ones that were most materialistic (Buccellato, 2014). The proliferation of capital investment in rap music has caused both rap and gangs share a common influence affected by capitalism (Buccellato, 2014). This analysis shines a light on the dichotomy found in rap lyrics which illustrate the injustice of poverty, while also using wealth as a means to distinguish the individual participant.

The connection between Rap/Hip Hops connection to the greater society are exemplified by the body of work given by these academics. In so they have shown rap to be a global influence but decentralized, focusing on local voices. As a force for resistance gangster rap has evolved from the 90's as a societal window to the socio-economic conditions. It now more closely portrays the involvement of gang actors, who are simultaneously influenced by the music. Utilizing nihilism rap focuses on negative connotations to create a revealing intellectualism of its artists and listeners alike. Creating its own sense of morality, it has become a guiding way of life for many. As a window into culture, rap conveys the societal struggle stemming from a capitalist system as a mechanism for severe inequality, and simultaneous praises accomplishments of those willing to engage in risks to overcome setbacks. Beyond its face value, art is a reflection of a society, and these factors all contribute to a provocative view of society that forces its listeners to acknowledge, empathize, and confront its encompassing content (McLaren, 1999).

Literature on Authenticity

To propose a test of authenticity in Hip Hop, it must first be established what authenticity is and how it functions. There is a sense that people have an intuitive understanding of authenticity in the same way they understand when they feel cold. As it is known from years of research cold is just the absence of heat, yet feeling cold is a relative experience to an individual. With that paradox in mind, this portion aims to uncover the literature on authenticity to provide not only a definition, but a framework to characterize and analyze it in music.

Authenticity and Commercialization

Understanding the intuitive dimension of authenticity Tetzlaff and Bridson provide analyses of the conception of authenticity as it relates to a commercial space. Tetzlaff uses rock music to explain the critiques that claim it has lost its authenticity. This provides a historical parallel to hip hop because rock was essentially the predecessor to hip hop before it was overtaken in popular culture. Bridson studies the relationship between authenticity and commercialization in music, particularly examining the counterculture. Both authors focus on authentic relations in commercial spaces, which provides a scholarly understanding of the conversation about whether authenticity can be maintained at all in a commercial space.

The idea of authentic music is one that has been widely debated in the context of rock as Tetzlaff would testify. In his writing on the debate, he addresses the ideas of authenticity as perceived by participants, and whether rock has truly died as a genre that stands for authenticity (Tetzlaff, 1994). He defines rock as it relates in opposition to pop, describing its original value system to be based on authenticity, anti-commercialism, personal autonomy, poetic, and being a force for political and cultural change (Tetzlaff, 1994). All of which are not too different than what Rap is founded on. By contrast pop is seen as artificial, and commercialized (Tetzlaff 1994). Tezlaff discusses how the change from the 60's rock towards the 80's fundamentally

changed the genre making it more commercialized, and some scholars notably Frith began to write about Rock being dead, saying it has lost its authentic nature (Tetzlaff, 1994).

Tetzlaff however confronts these notions, dealing initially with the concept of Commercialization. He asserts that commercialization is only seen as a negative because it is assumed that the artists have bent the knee to their supposed employers and no longer maintain autonomy over their art (Tetzlaff, 1994). This assumption is one that Tetzlaff refutes by arguing that it is not necessarily a given that one will cease autonomy once achieving commercial success (Tetzlaff, 1994). He furthers this claim arguing a separate point, "The issue is not whether performers themselves are actually authentic subordinates or rich, powerful stars, but whether the fans can use the performers' music and imagery to articulate their own authentic responses to their conditions." (Tetzlaff, 1994). Similar to ideas of *value* or *categorical* authenticity, this statement indicates he sees the audience and its relation to the value system as a central grouping of authenticity.

Viewing the industry dynamics surrounding music, Bridson delves into how music which challenges societal structures functions in a commercialized climate. She claims counterculture music has been overall attributed to having more authenticity because it goes against what is popularly produced, or as Tetzlaff would call it, Pop music (Bridson, 2017). Doing what Capitalism does it sought to bring in anti-establishment artists like Kurt Cobain and Tupac into the mainstream (Bridson, 2017). She ads that these artists maintained their authenticity by living non-mainstream lifestyles (Bridson, 2017). Furthering this claim, Bridson provides the paradox that "art tries to be at a distance from the everyday life of commerce and yet mirrors it" (2017). The paradox explains the contradictory behavior of how an artist might engage in a power structure they seek to criticize.

Selling out in the music industry is associated with inauthenticity (Bridson, 2017). When fans of Hip Hop saw Will Smith as having a largely white suburban fan base, he was accused of being an inauthentic sellout (Bridson, 2017). Bridson attributes this as a response to the community rejecting commercialization (2017). Another element is fans expect the artist to live up to the value system they perceive them to have adopted (Bridson, 2017). She also notes that leftist scholars Boltanski and Chiapello have stated

> "while undergoing a process of coding and calculation of profitability,
> they are bound to disappoint at least some of the expectations people had of
> them". For authenticity to be achieved, goods should be outside the commodity
> sphere but capitalism colonises and reduces every offering to capitalist relations
> which eventually results in the loss of authenticity" (Bridson, 2017).

From their viewpoint authenticity is unable to stand the test of time as a result of capitalist pressures. Given these conditions she seeks to explore how artists are impacted by notions of selling out.

Bridson through her data sees selling out as the relinquishment of authenticity as one gravitates towards commercialized material as seen in the case of Will Smith (Bridson, 2017). However, in the case of Pop stars like Britney Spears it is noted that fans do not always expect an artist to be authentic (Bridson, 2017). The reason such a reaction holds is because Spear's never claimed to represent any counterculture or hard values, so her fans didn't expect it of her. Whereas artists who rise on a platform of authenticity may face various reactions from their fan base (Bridson, 2017). Often these fans will evaluate whether an artists commercial success has affected their art using metrics such as rarity and originality (Bridson, 2017). Noted by Bridson is that rarity cannot be helped if an artist receives critical acclaim (2017). Though in a situation

where an artist loses their rarity value they may increase in originality or even market exposure will draw them new fans with a revitalized concept of that artists authenticity, thereby potentially offsetting any possible negative results. The dynamic between fans and artists is complicated, but given Bridson's work, she makes it clear fans are willing to make many compromises to continue supporting an artist who may have lost some sort of indexed authenticity (2017).   The Bridson work highlights the result of *self-authenticity* because it seems from her findings fans seem to be willing to accept an artist at their self-proposed values.

Operationalizing Authenticity

Turning to establish a framework to assess musical authenticity, this portion focuses on the scholarly debate of what such an abstract concept truly is. Several of the most prominent academics of recent years to provide scholarship on this topic will be used to pin down this first question. They will also expand upon how authenticity may or may not be able to be quantified, examined, judged. Using the final results of the scholarship, an operationalized test will emerge for the purpose of testing out data.

In Van Leeuwen's publishing "What is authenticity?" he seeks to pin down exactly what is the underpinnings of this broad abstract concept of authenticity. He highlights common problems in locating it, such is the example given that if one were to consider authenticity to be something genuine, unique, or original they would never find the end to the rabbit hole of what constitutes original (Van Leeuwen, 2001). The definition that Leeuwen suggests most applies to peoples understanding of authenticity reads,

> "the essence of something, to a revealed truth, a deeply felt sentiment, or the way
>
> these are worded or otherwise expressed. One such essence is the 'self, construed

as a constant and unified 'character', which at best slowly 'evolves' or 'matures'.

Another is an internalized conscience or life goal" (Van Leeuwen, 2001). This principal of the self as a character is said by Van Leeuwen to be established by the media as an expectation for the audience (Van Leeuwen, 2001). For example, the news will bring on guests who have some credentials the area of interest, this functions as a projection of the authentic self. The Harvard law professor on the news explaining the implications of a particular law is not seen as an average lay person, but rather his title projects him into an authentic category of scholarship.

Just as the example of the Harvard law Professor goes, Leeuwen argues that people make characterizations of authenticity based on a given principal (2001). Specifically dissecting the topic of authentic speech, he elaborates stating, "Authentic talk, whether broadcast or otherwise, is talk which can be accepted as a source of truth, beauty, sincerity, and so on." (Leeuwen, 2001). As the paper concludes, Leeuwen uses the word "we" quite a bit, which indicates authenticity is something that seems to need wide recognition. For something to be deemed sincere and truthful there is an indication that the wider group which consists of "we" is the determinant. For this reason, Leeuwen argues that authenticity through speech cannot be scientifically proven (2001).

Erikson takes a different approach in her thesis on "The importance of Authenticity for self and society" viewing authenticity as it relates to sociology. She rejects the claim sincerity is related to authenticity, but rather choosing to understand it to "exist wholly by the laws of its own being, which include the right to embody painful, ignoble, or socially inacceptable subject-matters" (Erikson, 1995). This is because sincerity is an interpretation of a another's truthfulness in a sense, where as by this view authenticity can exist outside of the social principals that Leeuwen describes (Erikson, 1995). To better understand authenticity, she provides that

inauthentic expressions seek "hide themselves not merely from others, but from themselves" (Erikson, 1995). The reverse connotation the author seeks to argue is that authenticity is rather more related to an individual understanding of their own social identity as it relates to society (Erikson, 1995). Erikson argues that it is the individual who places the values on themselves as a representation of who they are, and only when these values are perceived to be violated does one experience the emotional feeling of inauthenticity (1995). The main drivers of authenticity according to Erikson are the values people place on themselves, which may be motivated by a given social construction, and the resulting feeling of authenticity results from a determination of whether these values hold true (1995). The most important take away from this reading is that authenticity is regarded as an emotional response, and from her perspective distinguishing authenticity should come from an analysis of what values a given person applies to themself.

Applying authenticity to music Dennis Dutton discusses how it applies in a typological framework. He provides two major types of authenticity nominal and expressive (Dutton, 2003). Nominal authenticity deals directly with the concept of origin (Dutton, 2003). The example given of Shakespeare highlights this by providing that back in his day the female roles would be played by men (Dutton, 2003). Therefore, nominal authenticity would exhibit authenticity based on the closest aspects of the original basis for the piece of art, or even what that art stands to represent (Dutton, 2003). The link here which is problematic is that by today's standards people would see women playing women as the natural authentic decision. However, using the same example nominal authenticity would be a useful tool to determine historical context of a Shakespearean play, which gives a proper cultural understanding of the art (Dutton, 2003). Without a baseline understanding of the society which produces the art there is no sociological measure to

authenticate it (Dutton, 2003). The problem with such a ridged nominal standard is it may in turn

sacrifice the expressive authenticity found in a performance.

On the other hand, expressive authenticity focuses on the expression. For a medium like

music, nominal authenticity would aid in an analysis of common characteristics and where they

draw from, but would ignore its progressive nature (Dutton, 2003). Supporting this idea Dutton

writes, "even close-knit tribal cultures produce idiosyncratic artists who pursue unexpectedly

personal visions within a socially determined aesthetic language." (Dutton, 2003). To unpack all

of this, he's saying that even when the rules of a cultural framework are set, people still innovate

and make changes. Which Dutton acknowledges the only reason we can use nominal authenticity

to track historical origin is because culture ultimately evolves (2003). Similarly, to the argument

given by Erikson, Dutton sees expressive authenticity as something rooted within its own set of

rules (2003). This goes back to the Shakespeare analogy, if one of his plays were put on today it

would likely be cast with female actresses to represent the authentic courting relations between

men and women. While the rules of the play might largely be confined to the same time period,

etc. Maybe those female characters play the parts differently than intended by Shakespeare, or

maybe the language used is modernized for a current audience. These changes would all be

expressive authenticity because the new authenticity is designed enhance the self as it relates to

the art, and also relate to the society in which the art is now trying to reflect.

Dutton argues that both forms of authenticity are important and applicable at different

times. He gives the example of the Opera, to say that had mankind not known what the opera

was, would merely watching a performance allow a viewer to hold a critical view of

authenticating the performance, which he makes clear, of course not (Dutton 2003). He compares

this to the tourist industry which seeks to put on performances for tourists without them being

aware of whether it was authentic (Dutton 2003). For these purposes nominal authenticity which focuses on tracing history is useful, it would tell a reader about how the opera is organized, and that tourist about the where the performance he saw came from. From the nominal aspect one can decern the expressive authenticity of its actors in their performance.

Expanding on typologies of authenticity, Newman and Smith compile the literature on authentic categorizations. They state from broad level "authenticity is a concept aimed at capturing dimensions of truth or verification" and the scholarship seems to focus on referring to "a process of verifying whether (or the extent to which) entities are what they are purported to be." (Newman and Smith, 2016). The first typologies discussed is Dutton's expressive and nominal authentic models (Newman and Smith, 2016). The second is *type* and *moral* authenticity, primarily used to characterize people's evaluations of food (Newman and Smith, 2016). The researchers found that people were most likely to judge a dish's quality based on the moral or ethical values of its producer known as *moral authenticity*, rather than how true it is to its associated type, *type authenticity.* (Newman and Smith, 2016).

Wang describes authenticity through the lenses of *objective*, *constructed*, and *existential* authenticity (Newman and Smith, 2016). Objective authenticity parallels Dutton's nominal authentic model in explanation of what it is (Newman and Smith, 2016). *Constructed* authenticity relies on the constructions of authentic perceptions by a group of people such as "imagery, expectations, preference, beliefs, powers" (Newman and Smith, 2016). Existential authenticity also known to be the ideal authenticity according to wang focuses on the self as a center of authentic measure, which also mirrors arguments made by Erikson and Dutton (Newman and Smith, 2016).

Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink examine consumer response to authenticity's impact in their purchasing decisions (Newman and Smith, 2016). They derived 3 forms of authentic observations. *Pure authenticity*- relating to tradition and a location of origin which parallels nominal authenticity (Newman and Smith, 2016). *Approximate authenticity*- produces a feeling of tradition and age, regardless of if it has any (Newman and Smith, 2016). Moral authenticity- a belief that the producers craft their product with quality in mind as opposed to profits (Newman and Smith, 2016). These qualities found interestingly indicate that at least in the space tested, consumers wanted to believe that the product they were buying had some unique quality of authentic location.

Compiling the major typologies of authenticity Newman and Smith put together the table shown below to illustrate their perceived correlations of all the different types.

Table 1. Two dimensions of authenticity judgments.

		Target	
		Object	**Agent**
Information Source	External Reference	**Historical Authenticity**	**Value Authenticity**
		Assessment of spatiotemporal history	*Assessment of values*
		cf: Indexical, Nominal, Objective, Pure Authenticity	cf: Expressive, Moral Authenticity
	Internal Reference	**Categorical Authenticity**	**Self Authenticity**
		Assessment of category membership	Assessment with respect to the self
		cf: Iconic, Type, Constructed, Approximate Authenticity	cf: Existential Authenticity, Self-Authentication

(Newman and Smith, 2016)

In the chart, each discussed model of authenticity is presented based on a common characteristic or trait. Historical authenticity relies on the history to tell viewers how they should

interpret the given art based on the historical traditions of that art or culture the art seeks to express. Categorical ties more into cultural aspects, for instance youth culture can be a sub-culture of a larger American culture. These kinds of cultural membership are constantly appearing and changing, therefore artistic aesthetics may vary amongst cultural groups(Newman and Smith, 2016). Value authenticity provides a value as the interpretation into whether the art holds to its proposed value system (Newman and Smith, 2016). Value tends to have overlaps with the indicated *self-authenticity* primarily because the values of the self are often projected into the art as Dutton, Erikson, and Van Leeuwen have indicated. The distinction of the self authentically can be interpreted by ether an assumption based on titles held by the self, or a self-identification of values (Newman and Smith, 2016). Similar overlaps could exist between the historical and categorical models due to the strong cultural link. The authors utilize External and Internal drivers to differentiate personal cognitive authentic drivers from those which operate at large in the society (Newman and Smith, 2016). In the object and agent headers, they separate the object being scrutinized from the producer to display which models more so explain an authentic phenomenon (Newman and Smith, 2016). Newman and Smith end their work calling for more discussion into the psychology of music (2016).

An important element of authenticity discussed so far is that authenticity tied to emotional cognition. Conducting a study on the psychological aspects of music, Juslin and Petri come to some findings that should be taken into account (2004). In a study given by rank choice respondents had to order the most important aspects of music to them (Juslin and Petri, 2004). In the ranking respondents said they found "Good Songs", and "Expressive Performances" to be the most important, with trained listeners reporting "Technical Skills" as the most important (Juslin and Petri, 2004). As a follow up question, listeners "were required to tick items that seemed

reasonable from a list of alternatives", and the results showed that 100% of respondents checked of "emotions" as a reason they listen to music (Juslin and Petri, 2004). Given that the scholarship at large, but in particular of Erikson, she regards authenticity as related to emotion which the study appears to provide support for a link between the two. Furthermore, Another Study showed that listening to sad music does not always make people sad, but rather they experience feelings of romance or blithe (Kawakami, al. 2014). Conferring both studies, it can be concluded that people are gaining vicarious pleasure from music through the expression of authentic emotions in the music itself.

A group of researchers seeking to learn more about human evaluations of music devised a study comparing a Chopin piece played by a pianist and one played by a computer (Ziv et al. 2006). The results showed the Pianist was rated higher on metrics pertaining to good, expressive, precise, flowing, warm, connect, and tenderness (Ziv et al. 2006). Meanwhile, it was too close to distinguish in the surveyed categories of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear (Ziv et al. 2006). However, given the Kawakami study, their conclusions show that just because a song is supposed to evoke a particular emotion does not mean it will (2004). The study here indicates a significant occurrence, that people are able to intuitively decipher expressed feelings from an artist's music, especially considering 45% of listeners in the study were not familiar with the classical music genre (Ziv et al. 2006). Ultimately, the expressed feelings an artists puts out through subtle notes and sounds are implementations of *self-authenticity*, as it seeks to express the emotional caveats of an individual actor with the structured music.

From the literature discussed authenticity can be broadly categorized, and even disputed on the grounds of its pertaining factors. Bridson and Tetzlaff seem to agree on an intuitive understanding of authenticity that places a central role on the audience to determine authenticity.

Both also seem to agree that commercial interests do not make or break an artist, rather it depends on how that artist portrays their relation to the commercial, and even then they may only be affected variably. The remaining scholars seek to devise a typology to classify and potentially measure certain forms of authenticity. Each typology was framed based on a bias towards a certain observable phenomenon such as art, music, or store goods. In collecting the sum of each typological determination Newman and Smith provide the most comprehensive typology to examining authenticity. With that determination the data section shall apply a 4-point test based on the 4 collective categories identified by Newman and Smith.

Methodology

The thesis will examine how authenticity functions in the context of a commercialized hip hop space in the data section. Rap as a genre has the largest and most diverse market share of the music industry (Share of Total…2019) (Public opinion on… 2018). Historically stemming from the African American culture as an artform of resistance, and a large emphasis is perceived to exists on the importance of authenticity in its content (Richardson and Pough, 2016) (Hunnicutt and Andrews, 2009). With that being said, it has become widely commercialized especially in the American context, and Marxist scholars have suggested that may take away from hip hops authentic messages which made it so impactful as protest music (Bridson, 2017). Using this section a methodology for evaluating the data will be provided in order to explore the central question of whether authenticity is present in at the highest commercialized form of the genre.

I will illustrate the link between consumer demand and authenticity by providing a contextual and textual examination of authentic or inauthentic rap lyrics (Roy and Dowd, 2020). Contextualism is the approach of taking the context surrounding a piece of art into consideration. While the textual analysis is an understanding of the lyrics meaning as it is derived from the text

itself (Roy and Dowd, 2020). A textual analysis will be given of the lyrics of artists selected from a sample size. It will include a brief biography about the artist, using it as a platform to assess whether their music speaks to their experiences. Rap music typically has different messages depending on its audience, some music may be for protest and some may be to party, depending on its desired use can rapidly change its purpose. With that in mind, the data seeks to draw an understanding of how authenticity functions within the larger context of commercial pressures.

In evaluating commercial pressures, a look into the scholarship on authenticity shows a widely different opinion on what are the primary factors of authenticity. Newman and Smith offer a collective typology based on a 4-point measure utilizing all of the concurrent themes of the literature on authenticity. Therefore, for the purpose of textual and contextual analysis the data will be examined against these 4 points: historical, categorical, self and value authenticity (Newman and Smith, 2016). The historical point serves to examine the art through historical precedents. The categorical point serves to view how the art functions within the cultural expectations of a type of hip hop. The value authenticity point serves to examine how an artists values are portrayed in their music. The self authenticity point functions to evaluate whether the artist is portraying their unique experiences, and not just recycling historically relevant themes. While these points may not be completely accurate in evaluating authenticity, they provide a focus which can be used to better understand a qualitive data set in a more quantitative manner. These Data points will be utilized in charts for the sole purpose of creating a visual context to the analysis provided.

8 artists are grouped in total based on the following criteria. The first group consists of artists who have been nominated as XXL freshman since 2015. XXL nominates artists for attracting a sizable audience in a given year and are expected to become mainstream successes

over the coming years. The second group consists of established artists who have achieved

earned RIAA Multi-Platinum awards since 2015. Viewing artists who have maintained success

from their freshman days will be a useful window into what themes and concepts they have used

to maintain national status. Furthermore, the use of Multi-Platinum artists will highlight themes

and devices used by the most commercially capitalized artists. Multi-platinum artists are

characterized by RIAA as having been certified selling 2 million copies. Since there are simply

too many artists to examine, the artists will be narrowed to just the XXL freshman to just the

ones who ranked within the top 100 albums of each year under the R&B/Hip Hop section

respectively. For the Multi-platinum group the artists will be randomly selected, using one artist

in each given year who may be a representative choice, and using their respective albums to

measure over time. The particular songs used will be the most popular songs of each artist's

project in that given year as indicated by a star on Apple Music. This will act as a gage for what

kind of content the market is demanding. Which in turn could help to pin down authenticity as a

potential metric.

After selecting artists to focus on, the most popular songs of each selected album has

been listened to about 5 times over to understand the various messages, themes, and rhetorical

devices being implored. A textual and contextual approach will be utilized to make sense of the

larger question of authenticity. A contextual approach takes into account the relevant history and

context surrounding the actual work itself primarily coming from the authors background. This

can be especially important in deciphering whether the music is meant for gang culture, or if its

designed for a night club. A textual approach is equally as important, it takes the words at face

value and interprets the meaning for what it is. Both methods are just as important to fully

analyzing the art because in the case of lines having to do with murder, a contextual approach

may understand them to be rhetorical, while a textual examination may reveal deep hatred for a

certain group or individual. A chart will be issued under each artist comparing their authenticity

score versus percentile ranking on the billboard for comparison purposes. These charts will not

be discussed until the findings since they are only relevant as they compare to one another.

Data Analysis

The data to be analyzed will explore a possible link between authenticity and commercial

success in Hip Hop. The data will explore the artist in relation to their value and self-

authentication metrics (Newman and Smith, 2016). To do this, articles will be used to uncover

interviews or biographical statements of the artist. Furthermore, the data will examine albums

listed on the top 100 list under the category of R&B/Hip Hop and juxtapose it to the

certifications of RIAA Multi-Platinum albums of the same category. Each album selected will be

tested against the 4 point authenticity indicators identified in the methodology to show whether

the authenticity of the work holds true to the artists intent (Newman and Smith, 2016). Each

artist and their album will receive a point for meeting the criteria of historical, categorical, self,

and value authenticity as outlined by Newman and Smith (2016). This will allow for the charting

of this data. The songs selected will be the most popular as given by Apple music, since these

songs are the most listened to on an album, they stand most representative of the entire project.

Since the already finely narrowed grouping is far too large, this paper will include samples

representative of each spectrum of authenticity in a given year if possible. Based on the analysis,

a rough gauge should emerge of how impactful authenticity is on the wider success of Hip Hop

artists.

If the data shows that authenticity holds supreme value, then the analysis of these popular

works will have met all 4 points from each of the indicated metrics. This is where the contextual

data becomes helpful in using the lived experiences of the artist to evaluate their music's

authentication (Roy and Dowd, 2020). The contextual approach as advocated by Roy and Dowd

argues that for something to be understood it must take the relevant context around it, which will

be done by taking artist's biographical information into account (2020). Using the same

recommendation, the textual analysis remains the final word for how artists are conveying that

message in their lyrics (Roy and Dowd, 2020). the textual analysis will examine how/what ideas

are presented into the actual music (Roy and Dowd, 2020). On the other hand, if the music is

inauthentic there will be a link that authenticity plays a less significant role in Hip Hop

Commercial success. If authenticity plays a moderate role the data will show to what extent

authenticity plays these artists commercial success.

The data is organized from years 2015 ending in 2020. The years represented will be

displayed as headers to outline each section. The data will display an analysis of an artist to

represent the data for a given section of a year. This will follow with the chosen XXL artist and

then the Multi-Platinum selection following. For example, 2015 will discuss the analysis of one

artist from the XXL pool, and one from the Multi-Platinum pool. This gives the rational for how

artists are being examined across the board.

Fetty Wap

Fetty Wap was born in Patterson New Jersey and rose to critical acclaim with hit single

Trap Queen (Bio, 2021). The song first aired on SoundCloud and became an instant hit (Bio,

2021). The song became so popular he was nominated as a XXL freshman in 2015, and placed

himself firmly on the top 100 chart in the same year with the release of his first studio album

Fetty Wap (Year-End Charts…) (Bio). He modeled his sound off of the trap beats used by other

artists such as Gucci Mane, Juicy J, and Project Pat (Bio).

Examining Fetty Wap's first studio album 5 songs held an Apple star rating, Trap Queen, 679, Again, My Way, and RGF Island (Fetty Wap 2015). What distinguished Fetty Wap is his usage of melodies and a singing style of rap, mixing serenades with the strong impact of trap beats. In the song "Trap Queen" he narrates the relationship he has with his "trap queen" with lines like,

Married to the money

Introduced her to my stove

Showed her how to whip now she remix it for low

She my trap queen let her hit the bando

(Fetty Wap 2015).

The song emphasizes a mix between getting rich through drug sales and the support Fetty places on his queen. He continues this theme on the song "Again" in which the hook states, "I go out of my way to please you/I go out of my way to see you/ And I want you to be mine again baby" (Fetty Wap 2015). Furthermore, the song "My Way" the song lyrics follow the trend as the rapper sings in a high pitch, "Baby won't you come my way/ Got something I want to say/ Cannot keep you out my brain" (Fetty Wap 2015). '679" goes on to serenade "I'm like yeah she's fine/ Wonder when she'll be mine/ She walk past I press rewind" (Fetty Wap 2015). In these 4 songs we see an emphasis on relationships. These lines were all chosen because they show the similarities between his use of a hip hop style to show his affection for his significant other. Simultaneously, as exhibited on songs like "Trap Queen" he uses rap themes like preparing drugs for sale as a way of highlighting his relationships of endearment.

However, the theme changes in RGF Island where the hook states

My Niggas stack their money just to spend it

> Cause when you die you cannot take it wit you
>
> if you ain't beefing bout the money what's the problem
>
> Don't worry bout my niggas cause I got em
>
> (Fetty Wap 2015).

The major themes that emerge is from these lyrics are the concept of money being an objective, however ultimately only useful for the enjoyment of life. There also is an emphasis on fraternity in stating "Don't worry bout my niggas cause I got em" (Fetty Wap 2015). The focus on his personal relationships as a central focus display authentically what Fetty Wap desires to expound to an audience.

Drawing the themes together, it seems Fetty Wap grasps authenticity through relationships giving him a full point for the value category. An artists use of beats can also be impactful in their delivery, as certain musical notes convey certain emotions (Kawakami et al, 2014). He uses up tempo trap beats, the kind that would be ideal for a party situation rather than thoughtful contemplation, which is likely why he mixes in references of drugs to capture his audience. Fetty Wap utilizes themes of rap culture such as drugs on occasion with romantic serenades, which earns him a full point on categorical authenticity. Especially considering hie only highlights drugs more as a cultural reference on this project than as an espousal of a life he doesn't live. Rather than focusing the bulk of his music on typical trap themes, he focuses on relationships either with the women in his life or friends. These concepts are largely grounded in the human experience, and it is considered a positive moral trait to look out for those around you. Since these characteristics are clearly stated and expressed throughout the whole project he maintains the value authenticity point. This project stays true to this theme and so he is awarded a full point. However, on historical grounds it seems difficult to give him a full point. Fetty Wap

shows little substance dealing with historical themes of issues relating to the Hip Hop genre as identified in the context and uses a style that is more Pop and melodic for its time. While there is nothing wrong with changing things, his style was unique at its time and thus inconsistent with Hip Hop historically, leaving him unable to be awarded points for historical authenticity.

It is worthy of note Fetty Wap would receive several accolades for his album peaking with his multi-platinum award in 2018 (Gold & Platinum). It goes to show he maintained an audience, but lost momentum on the top charts (Year-End Charts).

FETTY WAP RANKING V.S. AUTHENTCITY SCORE
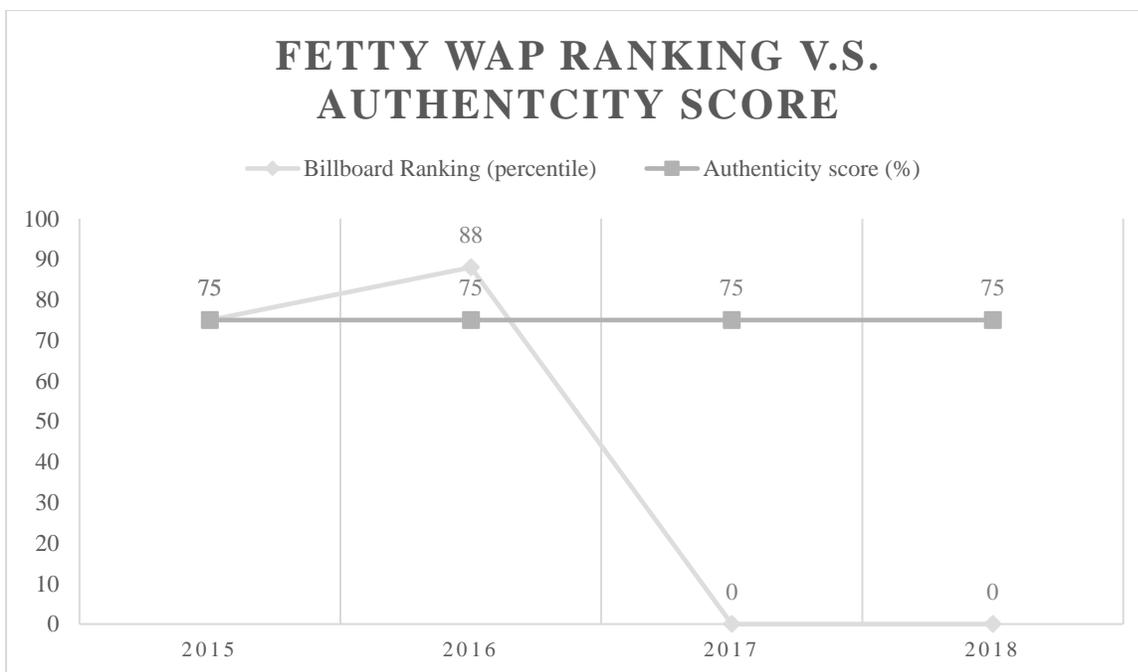
Lil Dicky

Lil Dicky may be one of the most interesting cases of authentic analysis is Hip Hop, maybe ever. On his Album *Professional Rapper* he is quick to acknowledge his differences in the industry (Lil Dicky, 2015). On his song "Professional Rapper" he gives so much personal information that a biography is not need. Lil Dicky comes from Cheltenham, right outside of Philadelphia, PA (Lil Dicky, 2015) (Jeffries, 2020). Lil Dicky would go on to the University of Richmond Business school where he would graduate the top of his class (Jeffries, 2020).

Furthermore, Lil Dicky's album *Professional Rapper* has the art work of a resume showing the same details of his educational stature including a G.P.A. of a 3.93 detailing he ranked number 12 in his graduating class (Lil Dicky, 2015). The cover includes other monotonous details such study abroad experience, but notes his most recent experience as the "Professional Rapper" people know him as today.

The most pronounced song on Lil Dicky's album has to be "Professional Rapper" where a prelude begins in what feels like a waiting room as he waits to receive an interview from Snoop Dogg (2015).. The verses of the song are structured as an interview with Snoop Dogg asking questions for Lil Dicky to respond. The opening question is about his back ground to which he responds, "I was born out of Philly, grew up in a silly little old called Cheltenham/ It was in the suburbs, upper-middle wealth around" (Lil Dicky, 2015). He and Snoop Dogg go back and forth, as Lil Dicky makes the point that he is Jewish, White, and Privileged, but most importantly wants nothing more than to pursue his passion of rapping (Lil Dicky, 2015). He uses this conversation to insert that he gave up the option of living a normal life to purse his passions, and therefore has something to prove (Lil Dicky 2020). Snoop Dogg then asks, him why rap? To which he makes clear to be free to express himself is the most important value he holds.

It becomes clear from the next lines that Lil Dicky finds himself very aware of his own authenticity as he shares this exchange with Snoop Dogg,

Cool, now let me put you through a couple of hypotheticals

Sure

 In a club and a couple niggas threaten you

Uh, I wouldn't do shit, and I don't even get what's that got to do with this

Shut the fuck up, raps like life

If you wanna do this, then you won't get far acting like a little bitch

Nah, that's my niche

Don't get offended by this, but that's the market y'all missed

That's the target I'll hit

…Traditionally people have been doing the job, you know, the same kind of way

for a long time

But traditionally speaking, this shit works, right?

… I'm Just saying I have a different background
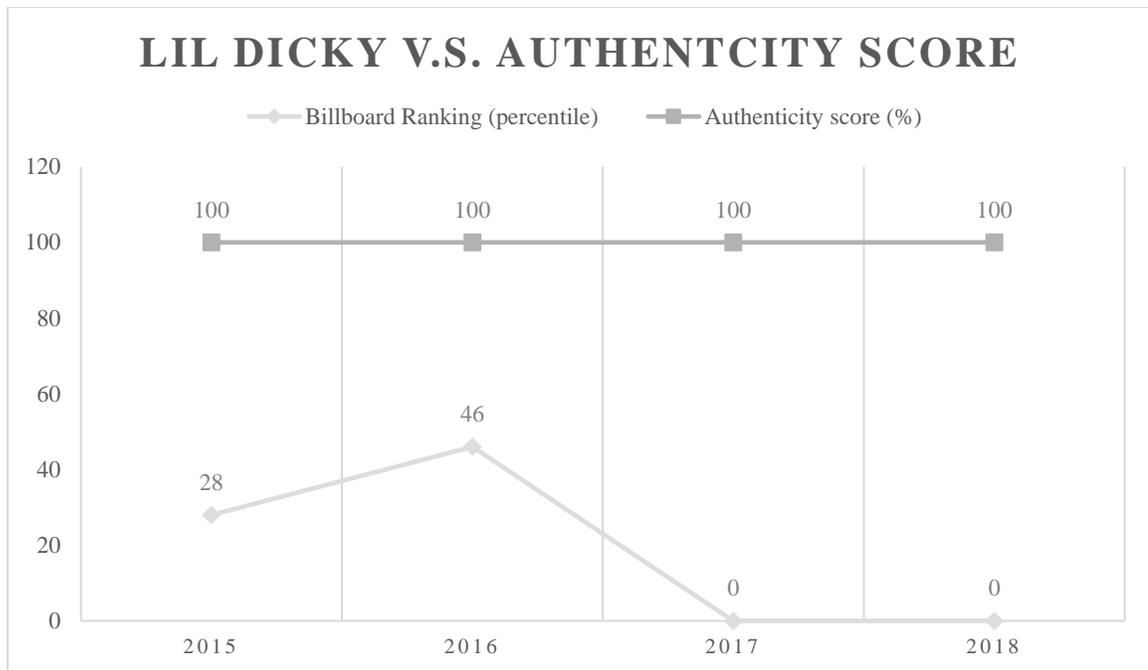
… So what are your biggest strengths

… Well, I wanna be the dude that came in and made that stand up rap

Put the random rap in demand for the people that was anti-rap

Yet, the fans of rap start to recognize that anti-rap

Is ironically one of the real brands of rap left" (Lil Dicky, 2015).

The quote from the song displays Lil Dicky's understanding of his audience message, and who he is as a person conveying through rap. He also discusses tradition in rap music in a way where he seems to be suggesting the authentic model such as Dutton describes has moved towards a desire for new themes and content. Lil Dicky makes it clear in the final lines of the quote he plans to be a parody rapper, but insists a paradox exists in which although he is directed towards more comedic content, at least he is genuine. Historically he gains a point as being fundamentally sound as a rapper. He isn't changing much about raps format. Categorically he maintains his associations to his whiteness throughout his music. Lil Dickey seems to value comedy, and he uses parody in his music to achieve the value aspect. Finally, he seems very conscious about how he is expressing himself authentically, meeting all 4 criteria.

LIL DICKY V.S. AUTHENTCITY SCORE

◆ Billboard Ranking (percentile)　　■ Authenticity score (%)

Authenticity score: 100 (2015), 100 (2016), 100 (2017), 100 (2018)

Billboard Ranking (percentile): 28 (2015), 46 (2016), 0 (2017), 0 (2018)

Big Sean

Big Sean begins his journey in Detroit Michigan the former heart of the auto industry (Big Sean Biography). Growing up he had an affinity towards music creating and selling copies in grade school (Big Sean Biography). His parents are said to have placed a heavy emphasis on hard work and dedication (Big Sean Biography). He would certainly put this to the test in approaching Kanye West at his local radio station where he would freestyle for him, and in the coming months continue to send Mr. West copies of his songs (Big Sean Biography). Eventually, Kanye West would call Big Sean to let him know that he has decided to sign him to a deal (Big Sean Biography).

That deal was clearly a good decision based on Big Sean receiving the Multi-Platinum Certification in 2016 for his 2015 album (Gold & Platinum). The album focuses on two main themes, hard work translating to benefits, and difficulty with relationships (Big Sean, 2015). The song "Blessings" illustrates this in practically every line but especially highlighted when he states, "You mad at me, this ain't what I want, man, this what it had to be/ This is that late night

workin' after three/ Man this why my old girl was mad at me" (Big Sean, 2015). The main

message being that his blessings have come at the high cost of his drive for success which has at

times sacrificed relationships with those around him. Coming back to that old girlfriend, he

makes his feelings more clear on the song "I Don't F**k With You" with the hook being the

same title of the song (Big Sean, 2015). The most telling lines of his frustrations almost go

unnoticed as the sheer provocative degrading of this individual is what grabs the audience. The

lines indicative of his frustrations read, "And I wake up Celebrating shit/ Why?/ Cause I just

dodged a bullet from a crazy bitch/ I, stuck to my guns/ That's what made me rich/ That's what

got me here/ That's what made me this" (Big Sean 2015). The downfall of this relationship in

question seems to be connected to the sacrifices Sean seems to be illuding to in his admissions of

his work ethic.

Sean's Authentic level received full marks. Historically his music falls in line with the

notions of hard work as a means for obtaining wealth. Categorically, he structures his lyrics and

punchlines within the format expected by the genre, and thus his music categorizes within Hip

Hop. Sean's personal beliefs seem to be that he values hard work well inline with the Steel city

in which he was raised. Thus by expressing that in his music he is keep true to his values. His

values being an extension of himself his music also discusses how these values have caused

problems for him especially in his relationships. In the chart below it is shown that surprisingly

Sean would rank in the 90th percentile the year this album was released, but has dropped off the

100 chart only a year after. Interestingly enough, he would still see enough total sales to go

Multi-platinum by the following year (Gold & Platinum). It would also be worthy of note that

Big Sean would place back on the 100 chart at the 11th spot in 2017 with a new album titled *I

Decided* (Year-End Charts…). While an array of factors could have caused that, it is clear that

the artist maintained market demand for new content beyond his Multi-Platinum album.

BIG SEAN V.S. AUTHENTCITY SCORE

◆ Billboard Ranking (percentile)   ■ Authenticity score (%)
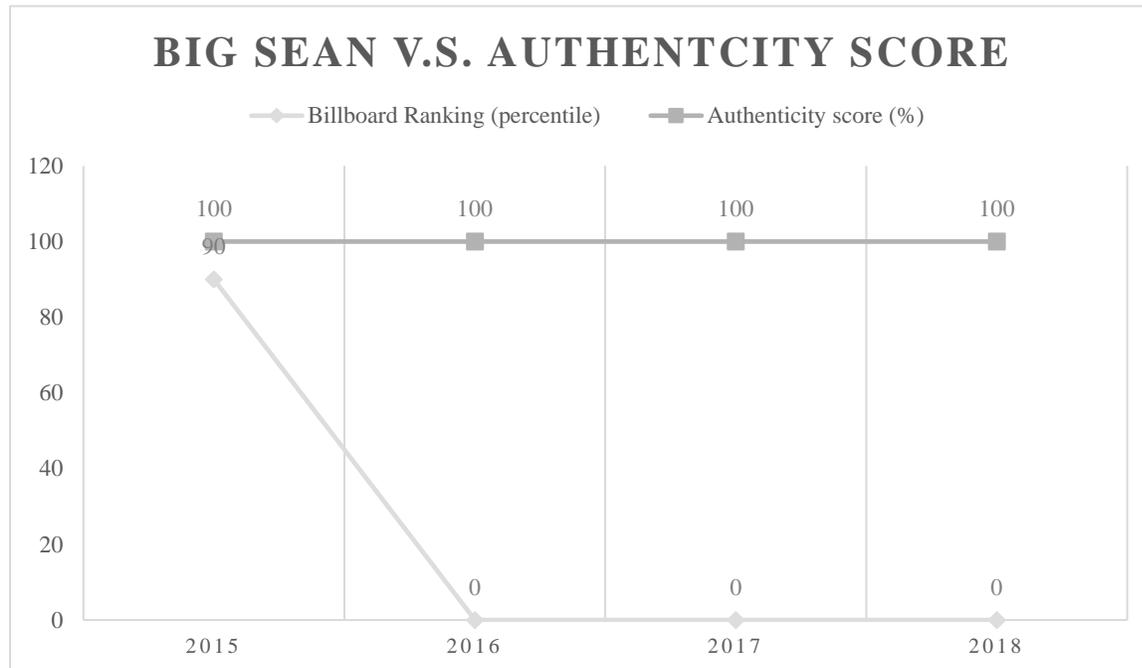
A Boogie Wit da Hoodie

A Boogie wit da Hoodie was born in Highbridge, in the Bronx, New York by the first name Artist (A Boogie Wit…). At a young age he was practicing his rapping skills and earned his name after a character from the movie Paid in Full, A Boogie (A Boogie Wit…). His albums for this given year are an example of a play on words by his birth name.

The 2016 album *Artist* was A Boogie's first high level album which likely to his selection as a XXL freshman for the year 2017. 3 songs would gain a star rating "Still Think About You", "My Sh*t", and "Jungle" (A Boogie wit…2016). A Boogie wit da Hoodie uses this album to rap soulfully about his struggles and success. The song "I Still Think About You" follows Boogie lamenting a past relationship that he has not gotten over and still holds resentment over as given in the lines, "Even you feel like you really love her/ Don't ever tell that bitch that you really love her/ Cause that's when she gon' make you feel like you really nothing/ And that's when you gon' feel like you really bugging" (A Boogie wit… 2016). He continues this lamenting on the song

"Jungle" when discussing the death of his friend, "Man, I can't believe they killed my fucking

bro Quado/ Shit was so deep, I had to say that with my eyes closed" (A Boogie wit…2016). "My

Sh*t" takes a different turn focusing on how Boogie's life has changed for the better stating,

"This is all I ever wanted, you can't take it from me/ Now every time they play this song she say

"this is my shit"" (A Boogie wit… 2016). This project shows that the rapper is stuck between

morning what he has lost compared to the status he has gained.

His Studio album *The Bigger Artist* Comes focuses on A Boogie's attainment of success

and wealth (2017). Most representative of the album is his hit song "Drowning" (A Boogie wit…

2017). The song lyrics are a metaphor comparing his jewelry to water by describing it as

drowning as described in the hook, "I just bought a Cuban link and dipped it in a fountain/ Chain

so heavy it feels like I'm holding up a mountain/ Everywhere that I go it's a light show I'm

surrounded/ bust down, bust down, bust down bitch I'm drownin'" (A Boogie wit… 2017). In

Jewelry slang having a piece that is completely filled with diamonds is known as a flooded piece,

making his metaphor a play on words to give the descriptive imagery that all of his jewelry is

flooded to the point he is drowning. The song and his album re-introduces this sense of

materialism as a central focus.

Both projects highlight unique sides of A Boogie. In one sense he is morning the loses he

has taken in life. While the next project forgoes many of those pains for a celebration of the

success he has become accustomed to. Although some may say materialism is vain, it still does

not take away from assessing whether that is a genuine expression of the artist himself. It is

consistent through his projects his goal is to obtain success which he finds through materialism,

which constitutes him being authentic to himself. This can also constitute within each albums

values as they reflect on the self. Each project can be viewed in a different lens and since people

are not stagnant, he shows his authenticity through his growth as a person. Historically, this is in line with the ethos of Hip Hop. It fits within the Categorical definition of broadly reflecting on the plight of experiences while paradoxically expressing his success. He maintains some of this plight in his second project *The Bigger Artist*, but based on popularity ratings by Apple Music the wider audience is more concerned with the expression of attained success rather than the focal point of struggle in the first project. Thereby showing that fans may want to see an artists express their authentic evolution as opposed to reiterating the same themes and concepts that may not be indicative of their current situation.
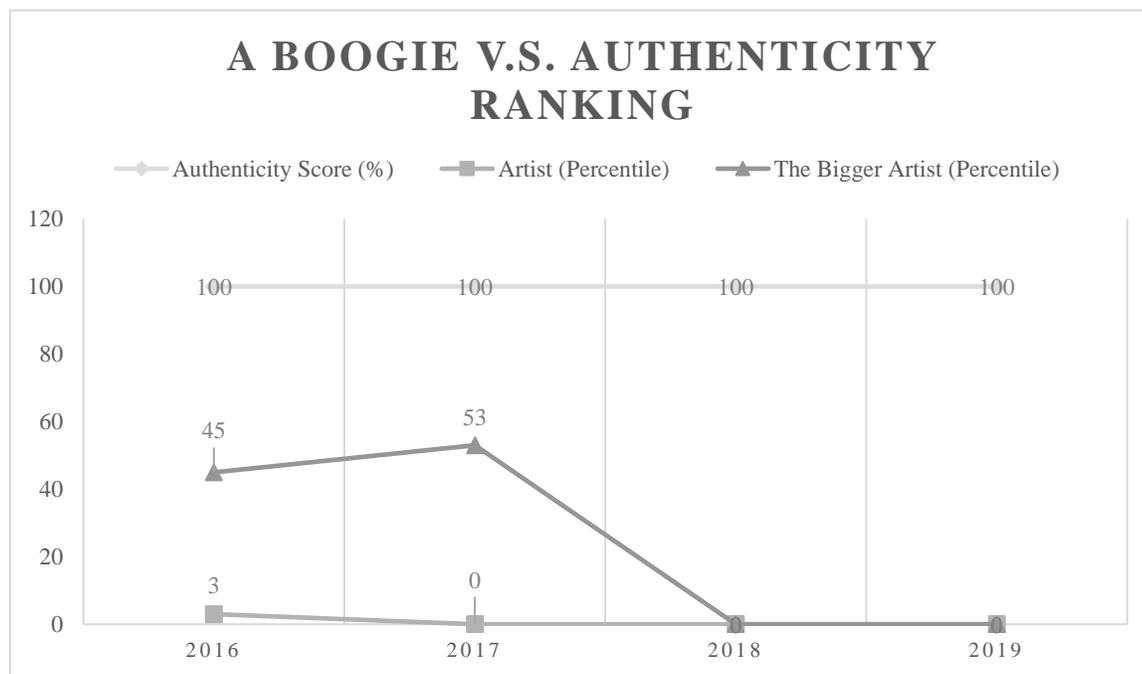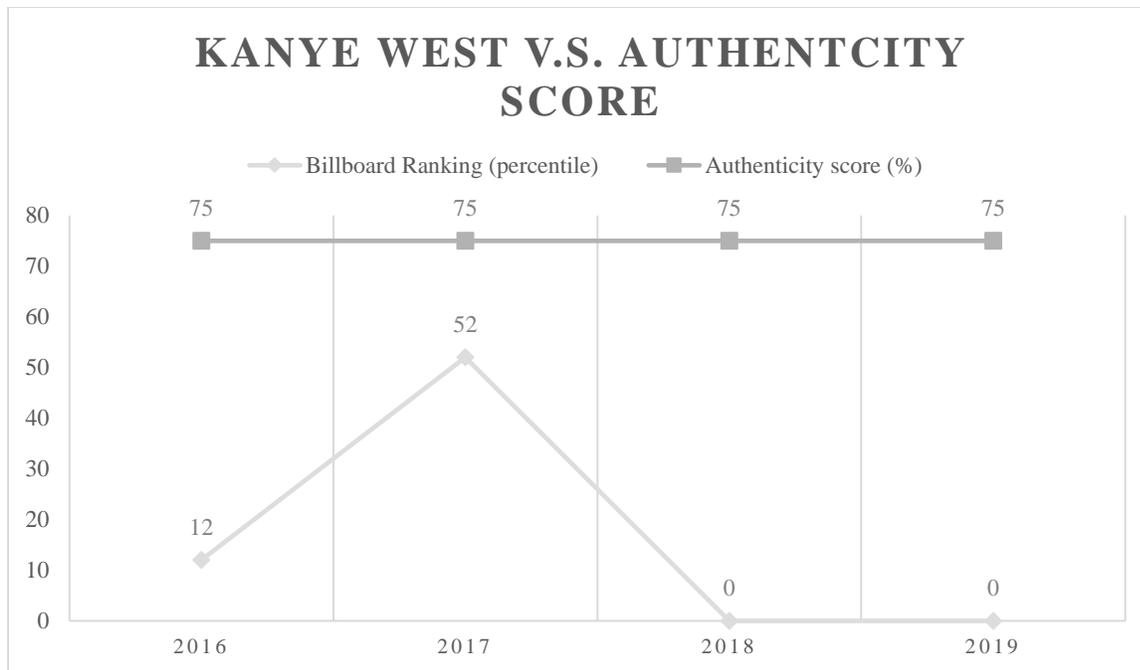

Kanye West

The only Artist to obtain a Multi-Platinum award was Kanye West with his album *The Life of Pablo* (Gold & Platinum). Kanye West hardly needs an introduction, born in Atlanta, Georgia but spending most of his formative years in Chicago, his father was a former Black Panther turned Christian counselor, and his mother was a University professor (Kanye West

Bibliography, 2014). Having won 21 Grammy awards by 2017 Mr. West hardly needs an introduction (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). Briefly attending the American Academy of Art, he dropped out to pursue music production utilizing soul music samples to distinguish himself (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). He would find himself notably producing beats for Jay-Z, Alicia Keys, Ludiacris and Beyonce (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). Deciding he wanted to Rap labels were hesitant to sign him as he didn't fit the mold of a street rapper, but Roc-A-Fella decided it was worth a go (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). Surprisingly Kanye West's debut album *The College Drop Out* would go Multi-Platinum breaking the mold with themes such as consumerism, racism, higher education, and God (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). Kanye would be known off the scenes for his outbursts against other artists like Taylor Swift, and his political statements notably saying "George Bush doesn't care about Black people" (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). He has also been vocal in recent years about his struggles with Bipolar disorder which he has attributed to some of his music (Kanye West Bibliography, 2014). This all makes Kanye West unpredictable; he sees himself as a true artist who is unafraid to express his true self regardless of what people think publicly or in the music industry.

The Life of Pablo carries a tribute to the renowned abstractionist artists Pablo Picasso as evident by the cover art of the project. As a former producer Kanye brings many features on this album including the Taylor Swift herself (Kanye West 2016). The most popular songs of the track seem to follow this abstract theme. The song "Ultralight Beam" begins win Kanye singing about God with a choir in the background giving his praise (Kanye West 2016). Passing the torch to Chance the Rapper, gives his praise to God and Kanye West passionately stating, "I made Sunday Candy, I'm never going to hell/ I met Kanye West I'm never going to fail" (Kanye West 2016). On the following song Kanye mixes soul with trap beats serenading, "I just want to be

liberated", before going into a monotonous verse seemingly unrelated to the theme altogether (Kanye West 2016). This kind of random verses continue on "Waves" where he says, "Sun don't shine in the shade/ Bird don't fly in a cage" (Kanye West 2016). With so many features Kanye makes his own voice very scarce, and the few verses he does have little to do with the actual themes and focuses of the songs at all. In this way he is embodying the abstract goal set out in the project, to say something without really saying anything important at all.

This tribute to Pablo Picasso may also be Kanye hinting at his Bi-Polar disorder. It is hard to make a claim that Kanye is anything but authentic. He stays true to himself, to the point he's willing to rant whatever is on his mind and directs most of the focusing message to those featured on the album. Historically, this is not in line with Hip Hop at all and is what maybe draws most of his criticism. Categorically, he maintains Hip Hop themes by using the soul mix with trap beats and bar structures provided by his features. Being that this project values abstractionist art, it would be difficult to say that he hasn't lived up to that goal. As a side note, the drop of year of the album that occurred in 2018 was replaced by Kanye's *ye* which would place in the 70th percentile (Year-End Charts…).

KANYE WEST V.S. AUTHENTCITY SCORE

Billboard Ranking (percentile)   Authenticity score (%)

75   75   75   75

12   52   0   0

2016   2017   2018   2019

Lil Pump

Lil Pump grew up in Miami, Florida with a Cuban father and Mexican mother (Lil Pump, latino… 2018). Taking a nonmainstream approach, he stood out as a 17 year-old wearing multicolored curly hair (Lil Pump, latino… 2018). He has been known to have a wild public persona, claiming to have put 500 pills in a Xanax shaped cake (Lil Pump, latino… 2018). By now it should be clear where this is going.

Musically, his album *Lil Pump* breaks the Hip Hop mold in all of the bad ways. His most popular song on the album Gucci Gang, uses the repetitive style that he has rinsed, washed, and repeated. The song has lyrics go like this, "Gucci Gang, Gucci gang, Gucci gang/ Spent three racks (thousand) on a new chain/ My bitch love do cocaine" (Lil Pump 2017). The song goes on like this with only references glorifying drugs, misogyny, and spending lots of money, all admirable traits. The rest of the album incudes extreme hyperboles that do not reflect the experiences of this artist, except maybe the drug usage. Though, there isn't much nuance to expect from a 17-year-old.

Pump fails to identify any values except for spending money and doing drugs, which are not verifiable as his background shows he is one to exaggerate. He lack of attempt to even express any of the categorical themes of Hip Hop leave him a man with no country. Historically, the repetitive nature of his verses are used so heavily it does not meet historical criteria. The only benefit of doubt is that maybe in his mind he is being true to himself, because what does a 17-year-old really know about life, therefore he makes the cut of a half a point on the self-scale. Although releasing a second studio album in 2019, he would never see the top 100 chart again (Year-End Charts…).
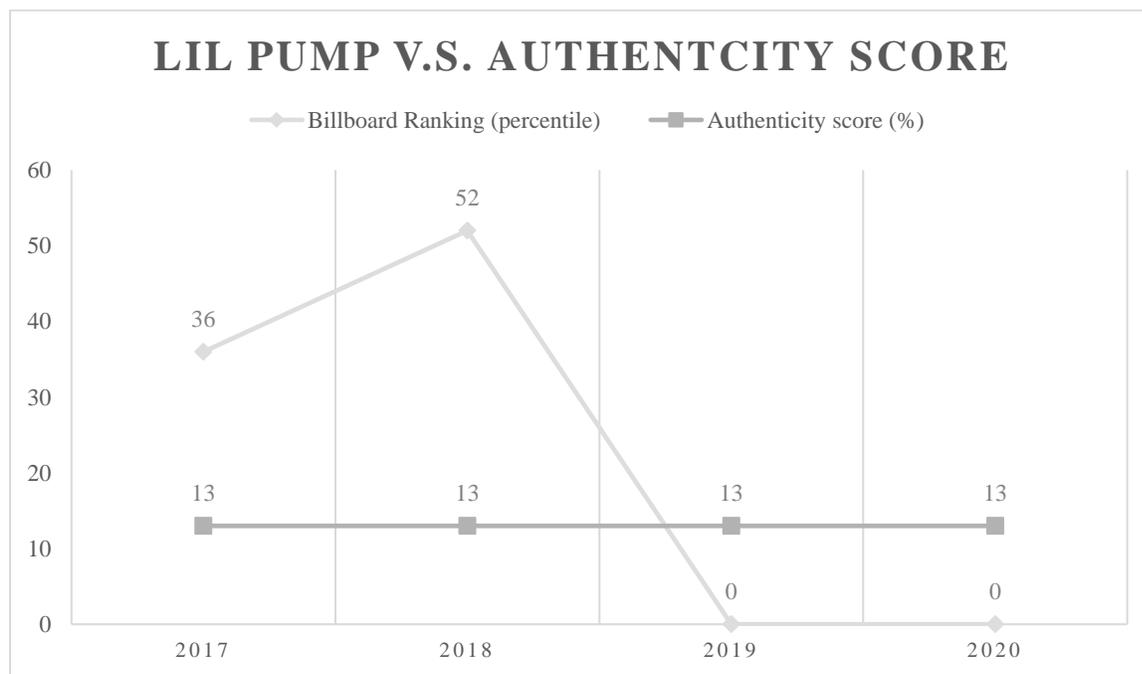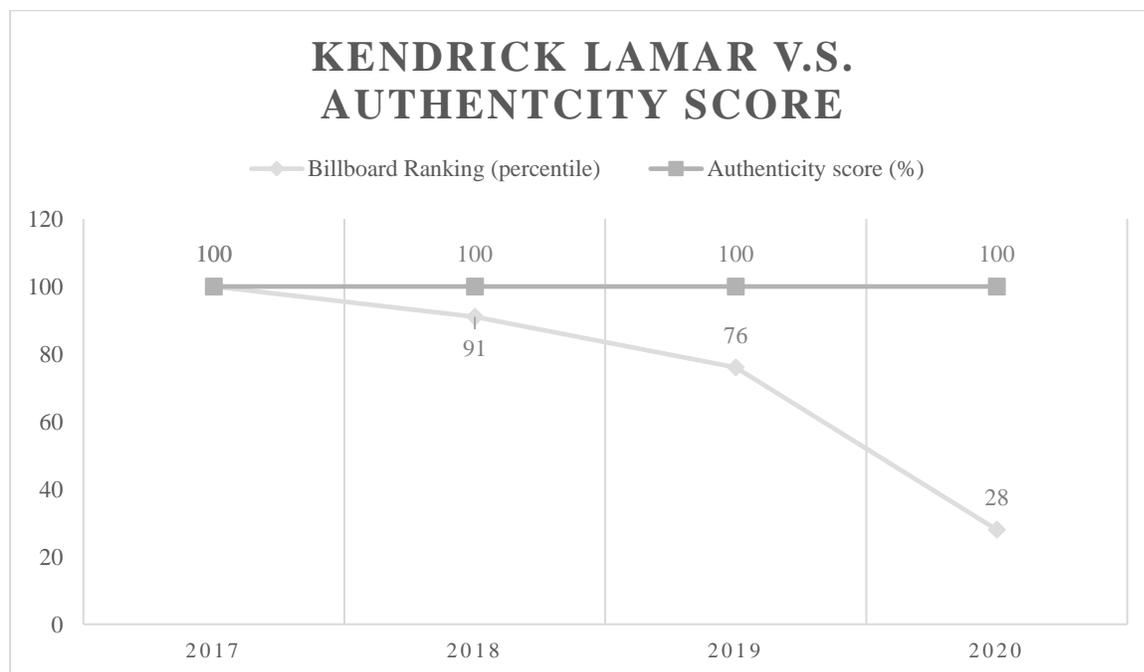

Kendrick Lamar

Kendrick Lamar was born in Compton, California the son of a former Chicago gang member (Kendrick Lamar Biography, 2014). His family moved to California to avoid gang violence, but inevitably Lamar grew up around a lot of it (Kendrick Lamar Biography, 2014). Rhater than being a participant he studied the cultural dynamics of his surroundings and grew up writing stories, poems, lyrics (Kendrick Lamar Biography, 2014). This style would become

evident on his first studio album *Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City* which would certify Multi-Platinum with 3 million copies sold as each track of the project contributed to a larger story (Gold & Platinum). By the time Kendrick was set to drop his Pulitzer prize winning album *DAMN.* he was already recognized for his deep introspective lyrics and themes of poverty, racism, and gang violence (Kendrick Lamar Biography, 2014).

The album *DAMN.* is a culmination of Kendricks reflections of his career at the age of 29, and the concepts that been impactful to him (Kendrick Lamar, 2017). The most popular songs on the album are "DNA.", "LOYALTY.", "HUMBLE.", and "LOVE." (Kendrick Lamar, 2017). The song "DNA." Is a testament to the experiences that have shaped Lamar and others, see them so ingrained that they are akin to genetic traits. In the song he states he has, "Loyalty, got Royalty inside my DNA/ Cocaine quarter piece inside my DNA/ I got powder, poison, pain and joy inside my DNA/ I got hustle through, ambition, flow inside my DNA" (Kendrick Lamar, 2017). He then displays these traits against some of those undesirable traits of those who have turned their backs on positive traits. The song "LOYALTY." asks question of those around him stating, "Tell me who you loyal to/ is it love for the streets when the lights get dark/ Is it unconditional when the Rari (Ferrari) don't start" (Kendrick Lamar, 2017). He follows this up on the song "LOVE." stating, "If I minimized my net worth, would you still love me?/ Keep it a hunnid (100%), rather you trust me than to love me" (Kendrick Lamar, 2017). These songs show that at this stage in Kendricks life having won fame and fortune he finds it hard to maneuver relationships as it may be the case people only want him for his status. The song "HUMBLE." takes a view of his status in light of his up bringing and the fakeness of commercial culture. He states, "I'm so fuckin' sick and tired of the photoshop/ show me somethin' natural like afro on Richard Pryor/ Show me somethin' natural like ass with some stretch marks" (Kendrick Lamar,

2017). Lamar is reacting throughout the album to a struggle to be have authentic relations and depictions in a world that seeks superficial materialism and unrealistic images of beauty.

If anything Kendrick Lamar is crying out for authenticity as an artist who has always strived to portray the world for what it is instead of glamorizing drugs and violence. Just the use of his real name instead of an alias similar to artists like Kanye West is a subconscious way of providing that he intends to give the real authentic version of himself. Kendrick also uses verse structures and West Coast style sounds as a way of maintaining historical and categorical authenticity. The entire album is a display of Lamar's values and a reflection of himself. From this it is clear he is 100% authentic. The chart below shows strong for Lamar, as he is the only artist discussed to hold an album on the charts for so long with such consistency (Year-End Charts…). It is also impressive to note that the same time *DAMN.* was released his first studio album *Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City* which was released in 2012 was still holding on the charts in the 70th percentile (Year-End Charts…). This signals that the more values are found within an artist's music affects a projects longevity, and demand for future projects.

KENDRICK LAMAR V.S. AUTHENTCITY SCORE

Legend: Billboard Ranking (percentile) — Authenticity score (%)

| Year	Authenticity score (%)	Billboard Ranking (percentile)
2017	100	100
2018	100	91
2019	100	76
2020	100	28

Megan Thee Stallion

Megan Thee Stallion hails from Houston, Texas whose mother was a rapper, and father was incarcerated for most of her childhood (Walters, 2020). Her mother was a gangster rapper, and this would inspire Megan's provocative rap lyrics she is known for (Walters, 2020). Growing up she was bullied, and her mother taught her to never let another person demean her (Walters, 2020). Megan used rap as an outlet to express herself and her uniqueness growing up (Walters, 2020). Megan's music style is influenced by her being a woman in a male dominated industry, as some perspective she was the first woman ever signed to her label 300 entertainment (Walters, 2020). Challenging Misogyny her music is tailored towards female empowerment in her sexually explicit lyrics, flipping the script on the male dominated perspective on who holds the power in sexual encounters.

In her album *Fever* she takes the female empowerment role as a central theme to her music. The most popular song on the album "Cash Sh*t" focuses on her independence as wealthy artist who has sexual encounters on her conditions. In a few lines she raps, "yeah that's my dog, he gon' sit down and listen/ Call him a trick and he don't get offended" (Megan Thee Stallion, 2019). A trick is a hoe or a prostitute, implying she is the domineer in the relationship. Especially, when describing the male subject as an obedient dog. In doing so she is holding the torch for feminism in Hip Hop showing that women can be provocative, rich, and in control.

Historically, women have had a place in rap music going back to the 90's, and like them she uses sexuality as a means of empowerment. Categorically, her verses have witty punch lines and hit many of the themes of rap music such as wealth, sex, and power. Her values of female empowerment are of primary focus, and this project does not waver from that. In taking charge and speaking her mind no matter how provocative her message is she is being true to herself. The

chart shows a drop off in 2020, however Megan released a new project in that year which ranked in the 62nd percentile (Year-End Charts…).
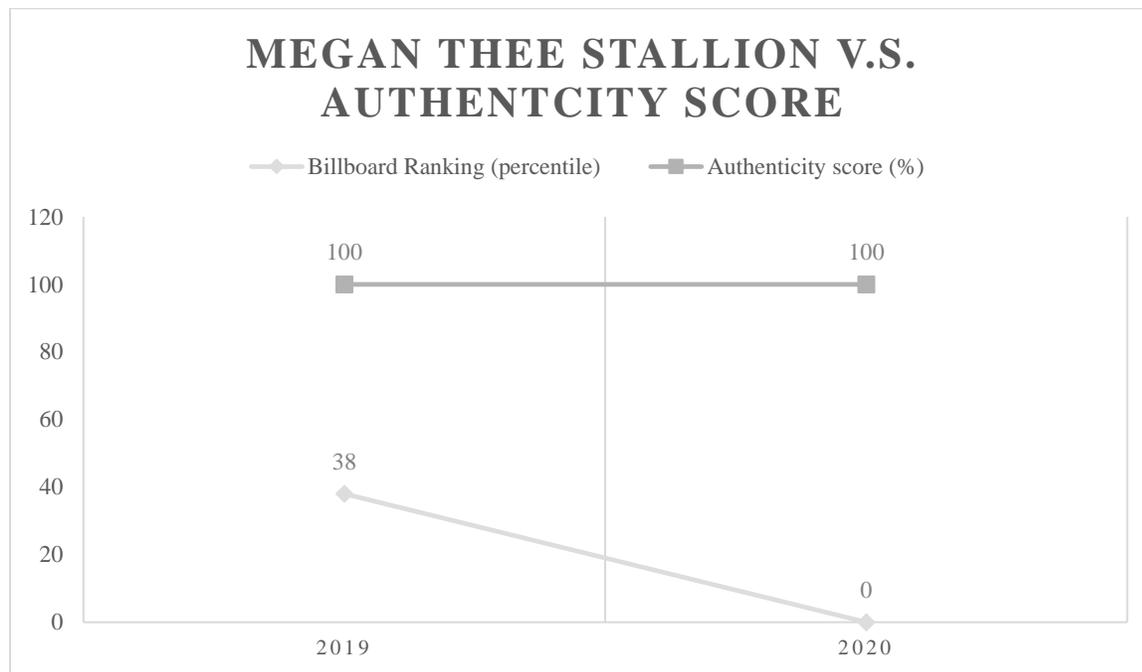

Drake

Drake hails from Toronto, Canada and at a young age was an actor on the show Degrassi in 2001 (Drake Biography, 2014). After the conclusion of his acting career Drake made the move into rap finally making it big with his 3rd mixtape after linking with the legendary Lil Wayne (Drake Biography, 2014). Drake is also of mixed background, being Black, White, and Jewish presenting cultural challenges (Drake Biography, 2014). To which Drake has responded, "At the end of the day, I consider myself a Black man because I'm more immersed in Black culture than any other" (Drake Biography, 2014). which has presented challenges to In essence, Drake had a nontraditional start in rap, he didn't come from the streets, but found a lane in soulful raps that would make him a Grammy winner (Drake Biography, 2014).

The Multi-Platinum certified *Views* takes on tropical beats and Jamaican slang as evidenced by the Jamaican samples found throughout the album (Drake, 2016). In the song "One

Dance" he says, "I need a one dance" in the hook incorporating Jamaican slang to the heavily

tropical beat (Drake, 2016). In the song this continues with Drake when he adopts a Jamaican

accent stating right after a Jamaican sample, "But you can't just diss and come tell man sorry"

(Drake, 2016). The use of man is largely Jamaican slang phase for "me" or someone else, also

used in the UK by the Jamaican descended population. The album follows with Drake detailing

the struggles of love, lust, and commitment issues (Drake, 2016).

     Drake draws most of his criticism from espousing cultural identities that are not related to

his background. Categorically, his music is authentic in that it expresses the struggles of

relationships which have become ingrained as a major theme in the genre. Historically, Drake

follows many of the stylistic patterns found in Hip Hop, such as witty rhetoric and expressive

vocals. The category he fails to meet is the self, as it seems Drake just like his background his in

between expressing his true self and an image he thinks is expected of him. Drake is an outlier,

in that his lack of self-authenticity seems to be compensated by a series of factors as his music

consistently ranks in the top tier, however it does not hold the same chart strength Kendrick

Lamar is able to command.

DRAKE V.S. AUTHENTCITY SCORE

◆ Billboard Ranking (percentile) ■ Authenticity score (%)
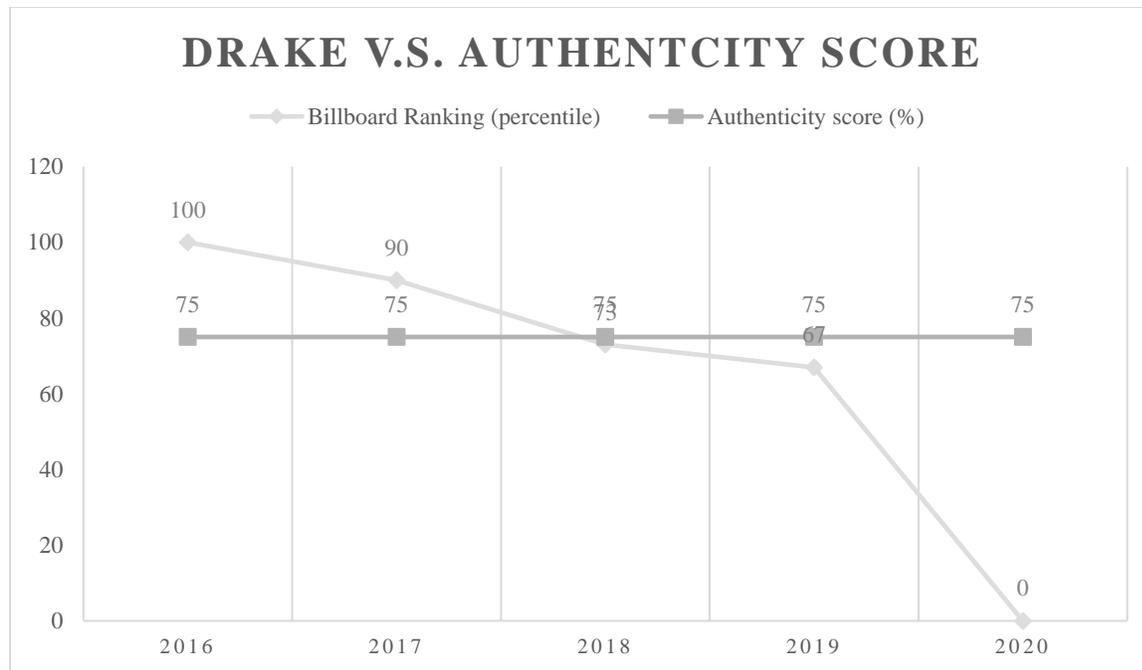
Findings

Looking at the results of the data samples there are several conclusions that can be made about authenticity and commercial success. When thinking about commercial success there is both long term and short-term success, and the data seems to provide a more accurate account of long term success. The data results also reflect which types of authenticity seem to be the most valuable. While many factors can affect commercial success, overall, the data shows there is a correlation to higher levels of authenticity and sustained commercial success.

A key finding was that in the long run, sustained commercial success coincided with higher levels of authenticity. High ranking within the self and value types resulted in higher performance on the top 100 chart for follow up albums (Year-End Charts…). This shows that greater authenticity in one album is likely to result in creating increased demand for future content, thus sustaining commercial success over the long run. Due to many factors being at play in the commercial space there were outliers like Lil Pump, who was able to increase his ranking over the short run despite having a low authenticity score. This is likely attributed to his odd

style bringing a shock to the status quo and may have been supported as a counter culture reaction to the norm. However, with no genuine nature to it these artists are unable to maintain long term success as is in the case of Lil Pump. In almost every case of high authenticity, it is more impactful in the artists longevity. High factors of expressing the self and values resulted in every artist making a return on the top 100 chart after the release of a new album (Year-End Charts…).

Another Key finding was that historical authenticity seems to have little or no impact on the receptiveness of an album's popularity. A possible reason maybe the paradox outlined by Dutton, that for something to become a historical precedent, someone has to create that precedent (2003). In cases with artists who break historical precedent in favor being more authentic to the self appear to gain more reception as in the case of Kanye West. Therefore, future studies may seek to eliminate the category altogether. This would make a rating of 75% considered relatively high authenticity for analytical purposes. The most impactful categories were self and value. Moreover, the more values a project displays increases its receptiveness and longevity such as works by Kendrick Lamar show.

Socialist scholars have highlighted that authenticity cannot be maintained within a commercial sphere (Bridson, 2017). However, this paper proves Hip Hop does provide authentic content. This is because a person can authentically articulate their relationship to commercialism without compromising their values. As touched on by Bridson the music industry has sought to bring in the counterculture, and Hip Hop embraces it as a driver of content (2017). It would be inauthentic to try and hide commercial motivations as Rock and Roll had tried so hard to do in the past (Tetzlaff, 1994). If a person values commercial aspects, and is open about those motivations, it cannot be inauthentic of them to place that within their art. An attempt to conflate

one's notions of what is right or healthy for society has no place in a discussion of authenticity and should find itself in a separate argument.

For the same reasons people have sought to discredit the genre on moral grounds provides the same basis for what makes it so popular (Richardson and Scott, 2002). Hip Hop can be crude and provocative, and that creates greater authenticity because artists are using their chosen words to express themselves. In a world of cancel culture, where certain speech is sanctioned from the public sphere, Hip Hop allows artists to express their true authentic selves without any restraints on language under the premise of entertainment. Hip Hop has many diverse messengers who speak about poverty, sex, racism, wealth, power, love, hate, and freedom. Therefore, it makes sense the artists who maintain the most longevity have an authentic experience to share. It also makes sense that they adapt and change their art to portray their experiences as they grow. Making the answer to whether Hip Hop maintains authenticity in a commercialized space as an unabashed affirmation that it does.

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