Impact of Rap Music Videos on African American & Latina Female Adolescents’
Sexual Identity
Respect And Protect (RAP)

Problem Statement

Adolescence is a time of self-discovery as well as physical and cognitive development (Feldmann & Middleman, 2002). It is within this framework that adolescent sexual development, exploration, behavior and the development of a sexual identity take place. Important decisions are made based on minimal life experiences and may in turn have lifelong consequences. Some of these decisions are related to sexual behavior. Sexual decisions that may have negative consequences include early initiation of sexual intercourse, having multiple partners, and practicing contraception sporadically as opposed to continuously (Feldmann & Middleman, 2002). These sexual risk behaviors place adolescents at risk for undesired consequences including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy (Feldmann & Middleman, 2002).

Studies have been conducted to show a link between the exposure of music videos and sexual risk behaviors, particularly among African American and Latina female adolescents (Wingood et al 2003; Fitts 2008). In one study, Mclean conducted qualitative interviews among African American and Latino youth examining the relationship between music consumption and sexual identity (1997). Notably, Latinas cited Rap music videos as a source for their sexual expression and education including contraception use and sexual positions.
Overtime, Rap music videos have been gaining considerable attention and concern regarding the impact that the sexual themes, images and stereotypes have on adolescent behaviors and attitudes (Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2007). Exposure to these sexually explicit videos has often been associated with more permissive attitudes, multiple sexual partners, and greater sexual experiences among young girls (Ward, 2005). African American and Latina female adolescents make up a large portion of willing and available participants as well as an audience of these particular videos. Since these female adolescents are at increased risk of engaging in unsafe behavior, including sexual behavior, it is imperative that there is closer examination of the impact that Rap music videos have on these girls.

There are many venues that allow adolescents to both view and listen to Rap music videos, including watching on the television, internet, or portable media players, such as iPods. Wingood et al reported on a study in which 522 African American female adolescents, with a median exposure to Rap music videos of 14 hours per week, completed a 12-month follow-up assessment (2003). Not only are these adolescents accessing these videos, but they are doing so in environments that are isolated from the supervision or guidance of parents or other adults (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2005). Rap music videos contain a variety of sexual stereotypes, particularly of young African American and Latina women, and the perception of these portrayals are often viewed to be normative, which in turn may motivate this population to model the sexual practices observed in these videos in their daily lives (Peterson et al., 2007).

As previously mentioned, listening to and viewing Rap music videos are likely to have an impact on the portrayal and perception of self-identity for these young girls. Research has shown that media effects on African American and Latina girls are largely dependent upon their ability
to identify with the models that they are viewing (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Peterson et al explained that Rap music videos have shown that African American women are often portrayed as the “jezebel” or hypersexual, materialistic and amoral (2007). The “jezebel” is characterized as the depraved and hypersexual whore whose single-minded obsession is sex of any kind (Taylor, 1999). African American women were labeled as “jezebels” during slavery to rationalize their sexual abuse by White slave owners and to alleviate these slave owners of any guilt (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). The historical context of African American women as “jezebel” in American culture continues today in a variety of media representations, particularly in the role of Rap music videos. Similarly, both traditional and modern representations of Latina sexuality often fall into the virgin-whore dichotomy in which Latina women are depicted as either chaste and honorable or disreputable whores (Kerl & Beatriz, 2003). These categorizations stem from both religious and cultural norms among Latina women and negate their complex sexual identity.

Across the Rap video landscape, the “booty video” persists as a predominate theme in which “women's posteriors, particularly those of black, Latina, and racially ambiguous women” are featured and reify preference for a scantily clad, curvy body (Fitts, 2008). While much of the research focusing on the objectification of female bodies in music videos centers on depictions of African American women, Brooks and Herbert extend the discussion to include the depictions of Latinas within media and music videos (2006). Videos that feature Latinas, including performers such as Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, highlight an exotic and foreign imager of the Latina with an emphasis on butt, hips, and breasts. Guzman and Valdivia highlight a particular depiction of Latina women in media termed “tropicalism” in which Latina women are associated with “bright colors, rhythmic music, and brown/olive skin” (2004). Moreover, specific national
or ethnic identities are homogenized into a panethnic representation of a sexually available and vivacious woman.

Rap music has also been characterized by the presence of hardcore sexual language (Council of Communications and Media, 2009). The portrayal of young women and the lyrics that the Rap songs contain are likely to lead to the belief that women are the weaker sex and that women’s bodies are decorative objects that are made to attract and to please men. The sexual objectification and defamation of young African American women as “jezebel” has continued overtime and has found a home in music videos, where the “sexualized Black woman has become an icon in hip-hop culture” (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 122). This is likely to be a regressive trend and may subconsciously serve as a form of derogating women.

Few studies have focused on the sexual content and imagery of music, particularly in Rap music videos. Peterson et al mentioned that exposure to the stereotypes of sexual imagery in Rap music videos is linked to the development of adolescents’ sexual identity, sexual behaviors and sexual experiences (2007). They also found that African American girls who reported greater exposure to Rap music videos were more prone than those with limited exposure to have multiple sexual partners and test positive for an STD (Peterson et al., 2007). The combination of visual, sexual images and lyrics in Rap music videos enhances the idea of normality and perpetuates sexual risk behaviors.

Sexual identity can be developed through positive Rap music videos such as Queen Latifah’s “Who you calling a Bitch? U.N.I.T.Y.” and Angie Martinez’ “Every Little Girl”, which serve as counter advertising/alternative media representations of young women. These videos aim to get rid of the social and sexual inequalities of African American and Latina women. Since the identity of these young women in Rap music videos continues to encompass degrading
sexual identities such as “jezebel”, “bitch”, and “ho”, it is imperative that public health practitioners educate these women and their parents about the potential effect that these videos have on sexual risk behaviors. The most promising strategy for transforming the negative representation of black female sexuality is to eradicate the persistent social inequalities that enable the oppression of black women and adolescents (Stokes, 2007). While gaps exist within the literature relating to Latina sexual identity and the impact of Rap music videos, public health practitioners can also provide preventative efforts, such as media literacy interventions, to encourage both African American and Latina adolescents to negotiate the sexually explicit content and develop positive identities in contrast to the sexualized images.

**Overview of Respect and Protect (RAP)**

The internet has continued to become a major source for online health information, discussion, and more recently, health interventions (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Respect and Protect (RAP) is a media literacy intervention that uses a social media platform to empower African American and Latina girls to transform the negative stereotypes of female sexuality within Rap music videos. This website will give users the opportunity to voice their opinions on Rap music videos and also provide tools for them to develop self-esteem and self-respect. For liability issues we will obtain IRB approval.

**Target Audience**

The specific target audience for RAP will be African American and Latina female adolescents, who are between the ages of 13-17, and who consume Rap music videos, however we will not restrict access to other adolescents who would like to join. The marketing, imagery and language on the website will be culturally appropriate to these groups.

**Theoretical Frameworks**
Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Studies have shown that there is a connection between exposure to Rap music videos and sexual risk behavior of African American and Latina female adolescents (Wingood et al, 2003; Fitts, 2008). The theoretical framework used in addressing this phenomenon is Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This theory emphasizes the importance of enhancing a person’s behavioral capability (knowledge and skills) and self-confidence (self-efficacy) to engage in a particular health behavior (Glanz, Rimer, & Lewis, 2002). According to SCT, human behavior is dependent on environmental factors and personal factors (Bandura, 1986). SCT is useful in explaining, on an individual level, how the influence of these Rap music videos affects the sexual behavior of adolescents. It also describes how their environment (i.e. heavy exposure to Rap music videos and lack of parental involvement), and their personal characteristics (i.e. being naive and searching for answers about themselves) influence their sexual behaviors through reciprocal determinism. Since African American female adolescents are often portrayed as sexual objects in Rap music videos, they are more likely to perceive these images to be normative and model what they see. In order to combat this, intervention efforts, like the RAP website, must focus on positive media literacy training and teaching these young females to identify and deconstruct negative sexual stereotypes (Peterson et al., 2007).

Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP)

In developing interventions to address the impact of media on sexuality, the APA encourages culturally appropriate interventions that both appeal to adolescent’s preference and taste while providing constructive messaging (Council on Communications and Media, 2010). Akom’s Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP) will be used within the Respect and Protect (RAP) intervention as a tool that utilizes the culture of hip hop (i.e. music, graffiti, dance, fashion) to
challenge traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of communities of color (2009). Since Rap music is a central component of our target audience’s youth culture, embracing rather than demonizing Rap culture provides an avenue for our audience to more readily engage in this media literacy intervention.

CHHP emerged in the field of education as a tool to cultivate critical consciousness through the development of counter-narratives for urban youth of color (Akom, 2009). The central components of CHHP are:

1. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression;
2. Challenging traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color;
3. The centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color;
4. The commitment to social justice; and finally
5. A transdisciplinary approach.

The RAP website incorporates CHHP by allowing youth participants to actively critique popular music videos that objectify and degrade African American and Latina women. In addition, the intervention will be entirely participant driven and youth-based in which participants will be encouraged to freely raise their own opinions and beliefs and incorporate their own experiences in relation to these music videos.

Core Principles of Media Literacy Education (MLE)

One of the most important skills that we are hoping to develop within the RAP website is media literacy. Media literacy education is defined as, “building an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education that provides a framework
to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms - from print to video to the Internet” (Glik, 2010). Developed by the National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), MLE provides a framework dedicated to ensuring that all people have the skills needed to critically analyze and create messages using the wide variety of communication tools now available (NAMLE, 2009). The 6 Core Principles are:

1. *Media Literacy Education* requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.

2. *Media Literacy Education* expands the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media.

3. *Media Literacy Education* builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.

4. *Media Literacy Education* develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.

5. *Media Literacy Education* recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.

6. *Media Literacy Education* affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

The RAP website will encourage users to critically think about the negative portrayals of women in Rap videos. Also, the social media platform of our media literacy intervention allows youth to express themselves in an interactive setting. This intervention will also engage youth to reflect on their exposure and interpretation of these Rap videos. The website will highlight how Rap music is an integral part of our target population’s culture and the ways in which these music videos dictate norms, values, behaviors, and social skills.

**Formative Research**

For the purposes of our research, we will conduct focus groups, key informant interviews and perform a content analysis to ensure that our website is innovative. In order to develop site
content that will be appropriate and relevant to our target audience, we will conduct several 60-minute focus groups with African American and Latina adolescents who participate in youth development groups in the Los Angeles area. These groups will include, the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA and Planned Parenthood to name a few. Round 1 of the focus groups will determine what type of content and the kind of approach that adolescents feel would be most effective on the website. Round 2 of the focus groups will invite youth to review the specific design and components of the website to obtain overall feedback. Key informant interviews will be conducted among groups that are associated with youth and/or the music industry, including youth development and media literacy groups. The purpose of these interviews will be to explore adolescent sexual identity and Rap music video consumption from the perspectives of these groups. Lastly, a content analysis will be performed to understand popular Rap music trends, such as popular artists, lyrics, implicit vs. explicit messages, portrayals of women and stereotypes associated with the videos.

**RAP- Media Literacy Intervention**

The RAP website will be a media literacy and social network hybrid that is youth driven and action oriented. The elements of the website will include: User Profiles, Video of the Week, “What’s in a Lyric”, Trivia Polls & Quizzes, Peer Video Blogs (Vlogs), Media Literacy for Parents, and Surveys & Prizes.
**User Profiles:**

Site participants will be able to create a unique profile where they can upload videos that feature positive messages in the form of a poem or Rap song. They would also be able to upload pictures, lyrics from their favorite songs, an “about me” section, and add friends to their profiles.

**Video of the Week:**

The homepage of the RAP website will feature a popular Rap music video and allow users to ask questions, post comments and/or short video responses (30 seconds maximum) on the portrayal of women within the music videos and the overall messages and themes. To encourage participation, users will gain “points” for interacting with and giving their opinions on the *Video of the Week*.

---

**Video of the Week Feature: Users post comments and questions about a music video**

**VIDEO OF THE WEEK:** What are your opinions about this video?

- *Girly 101 says...*
  - I love Jay-Z’s new song “Run This Town” though...

- *Linda123 says...*
  - I don’t get what’s so bad about dancing in bikinis

- *Musiclover says...*
  - The beat is tight but I mean he’s pouring drinks on them, I don’t like that

---

**What’s in a Lyric?**

One of the sidebars of the website will have a space for a question and answer comment box where users can respond to the meaning and significance of popular song lyrics and gain a critical understanding of the sexual messages.
**Trivia Polls and Quizzes:**

The RAP website will integrate social activities to make the site more interactive, stimulate usage, and help develop new content. Links to Trivia Polls and Quizzes will be posted on the homepage banner, which will incorporate the MLE principles and test users on their understanding of messages in the Vlogs and Video of the Week. These components will help the Site Directors track the effectiveness of the RAP intervention on user’s attitudes, beliefs, and opinions.

**Peer Video Blogs (Vlogs):**

A separate page of the website will contain Vlogs from influential women in the music industry that would discuss the messages and lyrics in their videos and female empowerment. These Vlogs will represent counter-education techniques that show that a positive sexual identity can be developed through Rap music videos.

---

**Female Rappers Queen Latifah & Angie Martinez**

*Instinct leads me to another flow*
*Everytime I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho*
*Trying to make a sister feel low*
*You know all of that gots to go*

-U.N.I.T.Y, Queen Latifah

*To every little girl, on every block*
*That's comin of age tryin to reach the top*
*I said no matter who you are, you can reach the stars*

-Every Little Girl, Angie Martinez

---

**Media Literacy for Parents:**

Since our target audience oftentimes listens to and watches these music videos without parental supervision or guidance, the RAP intervention would try to encourage parents to involve themselves in and influence their children’s choice of entertainment. A separate page for parents would teach
them that adolescents’ beliefs, attitudes, norms and behaviors are easily influenced at this stage in their life. In addition, the site would provide tools to teach parents how to engage in discussion with their children about these messages and lyrics. We believe this is important in reducing the negative effects of Rap music video exposure by educating parents about the influence of these videos. Other topics that we would like to include are explaining the detrimental effects of unchallenged media messages on the mentality of adolescents and informing parents of the real messages within the music videos and how to access lyrics.

**Site Marketing and Collaborators**

*Marketing:*

In order to promote outreach and publicity we will feature RAP advertisements on popular social media and pop culture sites that provide a link to our website. The websites we would advertise on include Youtube, Pandora, Facebook, and Myspace, which are frequently visited sites by our target audience. Youtube allows both banner and short video advertisements that play before video content, which are promotion strategies that we intend to use. We would also play audio advertisements between songs on Pandora and target their youth users who have a Rap channel. Lastly, we would place banner advertisements on social networking websites such as Facebook and Myspace. These sites allow advertisers to select the types of users that would see their advertisements based on user’s demographic data, which would allow us to then select 13-17 year old African American and Latina female site users for RAP marketing.

*Site Collaborators:*

While the majority of our marketing focuses on internet advertisement, we would also network and collaborate with youth development groups in order to publicize the RAP website among educators, counselors, public health practitioners, and specifically parents. During our key informant
interviews, we would establish the agreement of mutually advertising each other’s websites. The purpose of collaborating with these youth development groups is because they involve a large majority of parents.

**Process and Summative Research**

In order to track the type of individuals that are visiting the site regularly, users would be required to set up a profile before utilizing the website. These profiles would collect demographic information including age, gender, race, etc. This would allow us to determine whether there has been a change in the characteristics of our site population. When users set up their profiles, they will also be asked to complete a baseline survey assessing their attitudes and perceptions toward Rap videos. Every three months, when users log into the site, they will be invited to participate in a follow-up survey to track changes in their attitudes and perceptions. Incentives will be provided to users who complete these surveys in the form of an entry into a random drawing for prizes.

To determine which elements of the RAP website are most popular and utilized among participants, we would collect usage data on the following: how frequent users visit the site, duration of time spent on the site, and types of pathways taken throughout the site. In addition, the site will integrate a review system where users can comment on content, submit questions, or request information. This data will allow us to tailor the site content to user preferences and needs.

In order to externally evaluate the popularity of the RAP website, we would utilize internet tracking software such as Google Analytics to evaluate the following:

1) How often users share the website with their friends
2) Ranking of the RAP website in relation to other social marketing websites
3) Whether the RAP website is mentioned on popular news media, other websites, and blogs
4) Whether individuals are searching for the website using internet search engines
5) The ease of navigation for website users.

**Website Management Plan**

As a youth driven website, the RAP management team will consist of both adults and adolescent staff. The Site Directors will serve as the Principle Investigators for the research aspects of the RAP intervention. In addition they will provide direction for the website staff and ensure that it is functioning properly. If the website proves to be successful, the Site Directors would further conduct a variety of focus groups throughout the United States in order to strengthen the content of the website to include multiple perspectives from youth. The Teen and Program Managers will work together to develop new site content and implement new strategies to direct traffic to the website. Finally teams of 5-10 adolescents from the abovementioned youth development groups as well as UCLA graduate students will research and track emerging trends in Rap music, Fashion/Graffiti/Art, Potential Vloggers, and Social Networking. These teams will work in collaboration with the Site Directors to pitch new ideas for the website users. Finally, within the site, users will have the opportunity to gain points and levels as they interact with site features. Community members who demonstrate passion and active involvement in the RAP website will have the opportunity to also become staff members by suggesting new site features and activities.

**Conclusion**

While studies have demonstrated the effects of media exposure on adolescents’ sexual risk behavior, there have been very few interventions that implement media literacy education
specifically for African American and Latina female adolescents. Existing interventions include brief workshops and presentations that target small numbers of adolescents (Bergsma & Carney, 2008). Resources that are available on the internet for adolescents usually lack a sense of collaboration and normally just display information. The Respect and Protect (RAP) website is unique in that it provides an innovative tool for adolescents, parents, and youth development groups to engage in a collaborative effort to challenge and change negative perceptions of young African American and Latina women in Rap videos. This website focuses on the empowerment of these young women and allows them to become leaders through this social media network. This intervention is also timely with the passage of the Healthy Media for Youth Act which supports efforts to “review, synthesize, and conduct or support research on the role and impact of depictions of girls and women in the media on the psychological, sexual, physical, and interpersonal development of youth” (H.R. 4925, 2010). If this media literacy website proves to be successful in affecting our target audiences’ attitudes and behaviors, the strategies of our website can be adopted and implemented within other media literacy campaigns.

Limitations

Despite the strengths of our intervention, some limitations include not having access to the internet and confidentiality and internet safety issues. In addition, as an internet based intervention, RAP cannot accurately measure or control for environmental and social factors that may impact our user’s attitudes toward Rap videos such as music industry marketing, pressure from peers, etc.

Future Implications & Recommendations

As we have discussed, there are potential public health risks associated with exposure to Rap music videos among African American and Latina female adolescents (Wingood et al, 2003).
Future media literacy interventions should not only address the connection of adolescent sexual behavior and exposure to Rap music video content but should also suggest ways to mitigate adverse outcomes (Martino et al, 2006).

Ultimately the responsibility for these explicit and implicit messages within Rap music videos lies within the music industry. In order to transform the negative representation of African American and Latina female sexuality, “the music-video industry should produce videos with more positive themes about relationships, racial harmony, drug avoidance, non-violent conflict resolution, sexual abstinence, pregnancy prevention, and avoidance of promiscuity” (Council on Communications and Media, 2009). Future intervention efforts, like the RAP website must focus on positive media literacy training where adolescents can gain a sense of empowerment and express an overall healthy sexual identity.
References


Appendix A

Timeline (Approximately 6 months to get it up and running)

- Formative Research: 1-2 Months
- Content & Site Development: 3-6 Months
- Test Launch: 1 Month
- Full Site Launch
- Ongoing Monthly Monitoring
- Quarterly Follow-Up Surveys
Appendix B

Budget (Approximately $300,000 for the first year)

- 1st Year: $300,000
  - Site Programming
  - Graphics
  - Seeding & Usage Incentives
  - Incentives for Focus Group Participants
  - Social Networking Tracking Software
  - Project Staff
  - Marketing and Advertising
Appendix C: Respect and Protect (RAP) Logic Model

### Inputs
- Website Staff
- Focus Groups
- Content Analysis
- Key Informant Interviews
- Development of Website Infrastructure
- Website Funding

### Activities
- Provide interactive RAP website that offers media literacy tools and skills for African American and Latina female adolescents.
- Publicize website on popular websites among adolescents; Provide incentives and prizes for users who interact with site regularly.
- Provide page and resources for parents; outreach to youth development groups to publicize site to parents.
- Users engage with the Video of the Week, What's in a Lyric, and Trivia Polls & Quizzes within the website.
- Users watch and interact with the Peer Video Blogs (Vlogs) and Trivia.
- Parents visit website and engage with resources on the Media Literacy for Parents page.

### Outputs
- Users recognize the negative representations of Latina and African American women in music videos.
- Through the Vlogs, users learn to appreciate positive African American and Latina role models as opposed to the negative portrayals of women in music videos.
- Parents learn about the effects of media on youth's attitudes and behaviors.

### Participation
- Users critically consume Rap videos and other media, recognizing the biased messages present within the media.
- Users develop positive self-esteem and healthy identities based on examples from positive role models.
- Parents engage in dialogue with their children about the messages within the media they consume.

### Short
- Users critically consume Rap videos and other media, recognizing the biased messages present within the media.

### Medium
- Users critically consume Rap videos and other media, recognizing the biased messages present within the media.

### Long
- Transform the negative representations of African American and Latina women in Rap videos to more positive and realistic depictions of young women.
- African American and Latina girls gain a sense of empowerment and express an overall healthy sexual identity.
- Parents and children mutually learn to critically consume media with biased messages.

### Assumptions
- Target Audience: 13-17 year old African American and Latina female adolescents

### External Factors:
- Counter marketing from Music Industry
- Peer & Family Influence
- Social and Environmental Factors