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# GET INTO IT: UNPACKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEGEMONIC NORMS AND THE RACE AND GENDER OF POP ARTISTS

Bailey Shelton

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GET INTO IT: UNPACKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEGEMONIC  
NORMS AND RACE AND GENDER OF POP ARTISTS

by

Bailey Shelton

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School,  
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and the School of Communication  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

Many contemporary popular musical artists are victims of media controversy while they simultaneously make musical chat history. As a culture founded and sustained by a white supremacist capitalistic patriarchy, race and sex appear to influence the way hegemonic in-groups treat minorities and the way minorities are perceived and live within the confines of said hegemony. With the context of understanding feminist theories, hegemonic norms, parasocial relationships, celebrity appeal, and norms, the researcher wanted to understand if there are clear relationship among these frameworks in modern society. This study employed a 2x2 2between subjects factorial design method to gather information about the relationships between hegemonic norms, race, gender, celebrity parasocial interactions, celebrity appeal, affect, and norms. There were no significant findings from the resulting data, and this experiment consequently did not reveal any significant interactions among the variables. There are several limitations that contributed to these results, and these results do not appear to reflect true attitudes regarding race in pop culture and beyond.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the dedication and patience that not only my committee, but Southern Miss staff Jo Ann Johnson and Tracy Barnhill, provided for me throughout this research process.

## DEDICATION

My family deserves the highest of acclaims for their unconditional love and support of all of my personal and academic interests- I could only be so lucky to have a dad who can sing along to Hannah Montana albums, a mother who has never said no to buying a One Direction concert ticket, and a sister with whom I share a Spotify account. Only the brave can endure and survive decades of being subject to the highs and lows of teenage hyper pop.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

On March 26, 2021, in a now-deleted tweet, white, heterosexual, self-described former marine, recovering alcoholic, and thriller writer Matthew Betley tweeted, "it's just sick and depraved and an attempt to destroy our society" as a reaction to the release of Lil Nas X's new music video for his single *Call Me By Your Name* (Betley, 2021). Lil Nas X, a gay, black pop artist with the given name Montero Lamar Hill, replied to Betley's criticism in the following tweet: "There is a mass shooting every week that our government does nothing to stop. Me sliding down a CGI pole isn't what's destroying society" (Hill, 2021).

Hill spent the day replying to more criticisms while also promoting the video, and a few hours later, Hill returned to Twitter to state, "y'all saying a gay (explicit) twerking on a CGI satan is the end of times like slavery and the holocaust didn't happen" (Hill, 2021). The following day, while continuing to both stand up for himself and market his video, Hill made another statement in a Tweet:

I spent my entire teenage years hating myself because of the shit y'all preached would happen to me because I was gay. So I hope u (sic) are mad, stay mad, feel the same anger you teach us to have towards ourselves (Hill, 2021).

When Hill initially tweeted the video, he included a note that said:

This [video] will open doors for many other queer people to simply exist. you see this is very scary for me, people will be angry, they will say i'm pushing an agenda. but the truth is, I am. The agenda to make people stay the f--- out of other people's lives and stop dictating who they should be. Sending you love from the future (Hill, 2021).

This online exchange is an example of a member of a hegemonic group projecting their own values and ideals onto an oppressed minority; Betley's response reflects attitudes that he finds normal and acceptable, and Hill's responses show the hypocrisies and dangers that these attitudes can create. And as a popular figure in the media right now, with 6.9 million Twitter followers, 9.9 million Instagram followers, and over 55 million monthly listeners on Spotify, Hill is publicly reconciling his lifelong oppression as a minority and attempting to create safer spaces for those like him who exist in spaces that do not accept them.

Like many modern countries, the United States of America was undoubtedly formed and controlled by white, male, heterosexual, Christians, and many of our modern cultural systems and structures still function under this hegemony (Gardiner, 2009). For centuries, the "popular" and important spaces were occupied only by white men; from political spaces to economic spaces to music and film in Hollywood, women and people of color have not been properly acknowledged or accepted at the same magnitude or speed as white men. There were no female presidential cabinet members until 1933, no female Fortune 500 CEOs until 1972, and no female winners for Best Director at the Oscars until 2010 (Onion et al., 2010); comparatively, there were no black presidential cabinet members until 1966 (Onion et al., 2009), no black Fortune 500 CEOs until 1987 ("Black Fortune 500 CEOs," 2021), and no black person has thus far won Best Director at the Oscars (Geier, 2021). These examples reflect the larger hegemony in America; although people of color first lived on American soil, since the colonization of the land, straight, white male supremacists have created, implemented, and ruled the social systems and structures of our society.

The dominant group has been creating exclusive organizations, groups, and societies that favor and promote their own wants, desires, and goals, leaving women and minorities to create safe spaces and identities of their own. In many cases, particularly in music and media, white communities have appropriated components of black culture, and in some instances, have invaded and whitewashed these minority spaces (Inwood & Martin, 2008); for example, Elvis Presley is credited widely as the most well-known, influential Rock N Roll artist in America, but his sound and style was directly influenced by black gospel, blues, and R&B, which are inherently black genres of music (Newfield, 2004); although Elvis' sound was by no means novel as he was preceded by many artists of color, his position in a hegemonic society allowed him to gain far more acclaim than the black artists whose style he modeled. And with Elvis, Rock N Roll, and the newfound mass consumption of music, the advent of pop music was birthed as an economic and cultural force (Dolfsma, 1999). And now today, pop music has multi-dimensional definitions due to the continuous evolution of the genre as it relates to society- socially, culturally, and economically (Rojek, 2011).

Making and executing music, a universally practiced, natural human instinct, has long since been used as a tool for understanding and recognizing cultural values and norms, along with creating distinctions between interests, tastes, judgments, and primary activities of different groups (Booth & Kuhn, 1990). There are long-standing views that music is an integral element of cultural behavior, and a person's tastes, opinions, and consumption of relevant cultural artifacts can mirror the wider scope of the relevant moral, social, and cultural values (van Eijck, 2001). Many would argue that pop music is defined as music that expresses these norms and relevant cultural values and was birthed

through and because of the economic and institutional changes that were associated with the newfound widespread impressionism that Rock N Roll was making in the 1950s (Dolfsma, 1999). And since there is research-backed evidence of pop music, as a genre itself, having a specific, formulaic distinguishable sound (Li et al., 2003), pop music's identifiability as a sound must coexist with the colloquial definition that exists today, one more associated with widespread acclaim and success due to recognizability and popularity as it relates to mass culture (Hirsch, 1971). These particular successes are curated and detailed by commercial music chart organizations and streaming services such as Billboard, YouTube, and Spotify (Cole, 2019). These charts are categorized by genre, which usually presents no problem due to most genres having identifiable sounds (Trust & Caulfield, 2019). But since pop music changes as time progresses, in both sound and image and definition, the displacement of black pop singers and the repackaging of their songs in another genre effectively leaves them out of the systems that would allow their music to gain traction. Simply due to an artist being black, they are likely labeled as R&B or hip-hop, rendering them ineligible to receive the same marketing and promotion their white pop counterparts receive (Leight, 2020a).

Historically, white artists mostly controlled the rock, country, and pop charts, while black musicians have been the primary consumers and performers of R&B and [hip-hop](#) (Leight, 2020b). Although white artists like Post Malone and G-Eazy have been charted and acknowledged as pop and hip-hop crossover artists, black artists have not been allowed to shift as easily into white-dominated genres (Leight, 2020b). In 2019, popstar Lil Nas X made his chart debut with his record-breaking hit, "Old Town Road." The song, a rap-country crossover sung by a gay black pop artist, was removed from the

Billboard country charts after they determined it did not embody the sound of modern country music (Levy, 2021). However, once country music veteran Billy Ray Cyrus was recruited to sing a verse on the remix, the song sprung to instant popularity and became the fastest song ever to be certified diamond. The song later won two Grammys, but only after it was publicly affirmed and was recognized as "fitting" within the criteria of modern country music. Prior to Cyrus's contribution to the remix, the song was not permitted into the popular spaces of pop-country music; it was only accepted when a trusted, white, straight male veteran was added to the song (Ahlgren, 2020; Murphy, 2019).

Just as Lil Nas X was excluded from respectable acclaim until a straight, white man joined his song, the gender of successful artists is also reflected in the hegemony of the music industry; even though women listen, buy, and stream pop music more than men, there are fewer women than men who occupy the spotlight as successful artists (Karp, 2015). In 2017, no solo woman performer topped the *Billboard* Hot 100 until Taylor Swift hit number one in September (Lorusso, 2018). Further, for the first eight months of 2017, only 14% of songs in the top 10 of the Hot 100 were performed solely by women (Lorusso, 2018); Youngs (2019) revealed that from 2012 to 2017, not even 12% of songwriters credited on the top songs on the Hot 100 were women, and unfortunately, there is clear evidence that songs performed solely by women do not typically gain the same chart-topping success as do songs with a male feature (Lorusso, 2018). Stacy L. Smith, founder and director of the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, further describes this relegation of female artists:

What the experiences of women reveal is that the biggest barrier they face is the way the music industry thinks about women.... The perception of women is highly stereotypical, sexualized, and without skill. Until those core beliefs are altered, women will continue to face a roadblock as they navigate their careers. (Staff, 2019, para. 10)

Women in the music industry are constantly confronted with these confounding and contradictory standards; Billie Eilish has been told she does not show enough skin (Bate, 2019), Lizzo is told she is too fat to be sexy (Park, 2021), and Cardi B has been accused of trying to intentionally degrade our modern culture (Legaspi, 2021). There are specific standards and expectations for women, and celebrities are frequent targets of criticism when they do not fit within the parameters of those standards, and even more so, when they challenge them.

The current study aims to understand if there are noticeable differences in attitudes toward pop musicians based on the sex and race of the musician. By obtaining this information, the obtained data can contribute to larger discussions of cultural norms as they relate to race, sex, and entertainment.

## Literature Review

### *Racism, Sexism, and the White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy*

Feminist theorist bell hooks describes America as having “interlocking systems of classism, racism, and sexism work to keep women exploited and oppressed” and coined our society as a “White supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2000, p. 109). As hooks states, the social hierarchy in this current White supremacist capitalist patriarchy is built up of white, adult men at the very top and, anyone who digresses from these characteristics falls to the bottom (hooks, 2000, p. 118). Because of this long

withstanding societal hierarchy, there is an obvious relationship between engrained white masculine privilege as it relates to power and oppression (Rodino-Colocino, 2014), which can be seen through internalized racism and misogyny as they relate to societal norms; in 2007, Speight notes that:

Internalized racism is all about the cultural imperialism, the domination, the structure, the normalcy of the “way things are” in our racialized society.... The modern version of racism is... contained in media images, language, expectations, and the stuff of daily encounters that might be more easily introjected by the oppressed group. The institutionalization and the normalization of oppression in daily life necessarily involve the internalization of the dominant group’s values, norms, and ideas. The dominant group has the power to define and name reality, determining what is “normal,” “real,” and “correct.” Through its hegemony, the dominant group denigrates, ignores, discounts, misrepresents, or eradicates the target group’s culture, language, and history. (pp. 129-130).

Similarly, internalized misogyny contributes to said hegemonic oppressive state, especially as it relates to beauty standards. Internalized misogyny manifests in the same day-to-day manner internalized racism and homophobia are projected, and it “refers to the level of sexism and patriarchy that individuals take in and endorse themselves” (Johnson, 201, p. 4).

Darnell (2018) notes that “Women of Color with fuller bodies are valued less, since Western culture values thin women,” and that there are “rewards to conforming to Western beauty standards, and ... consequences to not conforming.... Women who face

intersectional oppression... face more consequences for not achieving tradition[al] 'beauty'" (p. 28).

Inherent within a hegemony are values and practices so ingrained within the social fabric, such as aforementioned internalized racism and misogyny, that those who belong to the dominant group are often unaware of the cultural pressures that influence their behavior and decisions (Butler, 1999). These hegemonic pressures are examples of normative beliefs/societal norms, which "indicate the perception of social pressure from an important person or group of people (e.g., family, friends, or colleagues) to behave (or not) in a certain way in a given situation" (Lefringhausen et al., 2019, p. 1103). In other words, norms are psychological structures that predispose individuals to reflect consistent, physical, and emotional patterns, creating boundaries around what is considered appropriate, standard, or acceptable patterns of thought and behaviors (Ramirez Marin et al., 2019).

There are two types of norms that scientists distinguish between: descriptive and injunctive norms. Norms are descriptive when they refer to what the majority of people actually do, while norms are injunctive when they refer to what the majority of people approve or disapprove (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) (Ramirez Marin et al., 2019); descriptive norms reflect a person's personal perceptions about the prevalence of a behavior in a setting, while injunctive norms reflect a person's perceptions about what other people determine appropriate behavior (Rimal & Yilma, 2021). The conceptual combination of these two types of norms is called perceived norms, which is the concept for behavioral and belief shaping (Rimal & Real, 2003).

Norms are present in every system and can be a tool of oppression and limit societal progression. People might adhere to norms as small and simple as giving a handshake in a professional setting to some more extreme, such as developing an eating disorder due to an attempt to reach a certain body standard (Garner et al., 1980). Such extreme norms, particularly concerning gender, beauty, race, and economic norms are just a few examples of systems that can limit progression or cause harm to individuals (Pounders & Mabry, 2016; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020). For example, white conservative Christians have developed a cultural norm in their religious circles of saving sexual intimacy for marriage (Garcia & Kruger, 2010), thereby stigmatizing anyone whose practices do not align with the strict behavioral code. Many studies have investigated how conservative gender norms are harmful to adolescents' physical, mental, and sexual health; those who adhere to traditional standards of masculinity and femininity are at greater risk of violence and unsafe sexual situations (u et al., 2021).

When it comes to race, long-term wealth gaps between black and white people reflect years of racist norms (Darity et al., 2006). The usage of code-switching reflects a strategy that black people have had to implement in white, particularly professional, settings in order to fit both descriptive and injunctive norms and be successful (McCluney et al., 2021). While there is evidence of some positive advancement regarding negative attitudes toward minorities, there is also still evidence that some attitudes have remained unchanged or plateaued, with one example being the financial inequalities that minority public schools face post-integration (Krysan & Moberg, 2016). These examples shed light on the way systems are interconnected in our society and how those who dictate the norms have created and are still creating oppressed environments for

those who do not fall within the hegemonic group. In summary, norms establish societal behavioral standards, and the influence of these standards can be very far-reaching.

Understanding the hegemony and norms of society creates room to understand how and why some groups are represented positively or included in powerful and safe spaces, and some are not, which in the case of this research, allows insight into why certain artists may be generally preferred or marketed. When people in the in-group begin to have positive reactions to those who fall outside of what they consider normative, it paves a space for the oppressed to exist more comfortably within society. When a celebrity is dismissed because of a characteristic that varies from the norms, it reflects what the wider hegemony considers acceptable.

### *Parasocial Relationships*

When considering the success of modern celebrities, their social media platforms reflect not only the ways they want their audiences to perceive them, but the comments, likes, replies, and other engagements from fans enable viewers to understand the content fans actively engage with. On many social media platforms, everyday citizens can directly interact with celebrities without the celebrities ever having to share private or personal information (Stever & Lawson, 2013). This is an example of parasocial interaction, which is relevant to this research because this topic sets a groundwork for understanding the cultural significance of the online relationships between celebrities and fans. Parasocial Interaction:

examines the relationship between celebrities, who are well known to their fans, and fans, who are known very little, if at all, by celebrities. Twitter appears to be a new forum for PSI that allows for the possibility that fans, both individually and as a group,

might become better known to the celebrities whom they follow” (Stever & Lawson, 2013, p. 341).

While the concept was initially created to look at the relationships between television celebrities and their fans at home (Rubin et al., 1985), sites like Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram have allowed the concept to be even more relevant than ever as it can help with understanding how the public affects the media, how the media affects the public, and the roles that fans and celebrities play in each other’s lives. Horton and Wohl (1956) initially described parasocial relationships between media personalities and viewers as giving the illusion of a head-on relationship that creates a feeling of interpersonal connection for the viewer (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Parasocial relationships are what create fandoms, and are stronger and more intense based on the levels of attraction toward the celebrity persona (Stever, 2009, 1994).

A parasocial interaction serves to fulfill intimacy needs, create a network of a social community, helps with feelings of loneliness, entertainment, identification with others, and reflects and shapes our personalities (Auter & Lane Jr., 1999; Rubin et al., 1985). Consequently, if fan and celebrity interactions are viewed through this lens, one can say that when a fan comments negatively on a celebrity’s posts, it is more of a reflection of the person’s values and needs, and less of an attack on exactly what the celebrity is doing. Once people have formed an intense connection with a celebrity, their identities and personalities can often be affected as a result, thus leading to behavioral changes- for example, the death of Princess Diana and her impact on others while she was alive led to humanitarian and social changes based on her influence (Brown & Basil, 2010). Therefore, media interactions with celebrities, both negative and positive, not only

reflect cultural values and desires, but can also have an effect on the society itself. This is important, especially when looking at how people project their values and what they consider normative, and also when taking into consideration the discrepancies and controversies that exist within pop itself, particularly when it comes to discourse surrounding genre placement and racism.

Understanding parasocial interaction also provides a lens for understanding why different artists are received and perceived differently; these relationships are not real relationships that were curated between two people, they are relationships that fans curate for themselves in order to feel connected in some way. The term “Celebrity Appeal” is used when trying to quantify and understand individuals’ parasocial relationships, and only one primary questionnaire exists to measure such parasocial relationships (Stever, 1991), and serves as a guide for understanding how to assess the components of a parasocial relationship.

Acknowledging parasocial interaction provides a better vantage for understanding how fans view celebrities and the discrepancies in rhetoric and treatment toward artists who do not adhere to norms or are not considered part of the societal in-group. Something to note here is that oftentimes parasocial relationships are formed because the fan or viewer feels attached or connected to elements of the artist that elicit strong personal memories, feelings, tastes, or values, (Stever, 2009). Cohen (2001) notes that simply identifying with a character or artist is not the same as the parasocial relationship; the attachment and consequential feelings and actions after the identification are directly correlated with the development of the parasocial relationship. And when tastes and behaviors change, consumer habits change as well. The parasocial relationship is

powerful because there is evidence of mass media and parasocial relationships having an effect on the economic developments and shifts of a culture (Papa et al., 2000). And regarding pop music, there is evidence of artists whose success derives from the attachment and support that their fans have developed and curated for them, as opposed to a label promoting the work.

For example, Doja Cat, a 25-year-old biracial woman, is one of the hottest artists of 2021. She rose to stardom not through promotion by her label, but from going viral on platforms like Twitter and Tik Tok for satirical yet captivating songs in as early as 2018, thus cultivating a large fan base that identifies with and is entertained by the personae she has created (Denis, 2021). The personae and its manifestations of a celebrity, according to Horton and Whol, “are not prominent in any of the social spheres beyond the media. They exist for their audiences only in the parasocial relation” (1956, p. 216).

Doja Cat has been nominated for three Grammy awards, six Billboard Music Awards, has won two American Music Awards, an MTV award, and hosted MTV’s Video Music Awards this year while simultaneously being nominated for five of the awards (Grein, 2021). Her first tour sold out completely in ten minutes (Garvey, 2021). These accolades would classify her as one of today’s biggest pop stars, and since she was propelled to stardom from an organic fanbase due to curating fans on Tik Tok and Twitter, she is a modern representation of the effect of a parasocial relationship having an effect on culture. This is important to note for this research because the parasocial relationships people form with celebrities can clearly be one of the reasons an artist is propelled to stardom. Similarly to Lil Nas X, who independently put his first music out and then rose to acclaim (Tenbarga, 2020), these parasocial relationships can also be the

reasons for extreme negativity to surround an artist. Her unique sense of humor, style, and musical voice has been described as “camp,” making her stand out even more from the crowd and creating more controversy and discourse around her (Spanos, 2021). Thus, Doja Cat and Lil Nas X provide examples of confounding attitudes among social and cultural groups- while they are both widely successful, they are also victim to more criticism.

The unique positive and negative effects that parasocial relationships can create are important to note when observing data that reflects attitudes toward pop stars. Understanding the negatives and positives of a parasocial interaction propels the need for questioning; does the hegemony, as reflected through parasocial relationships, propel them to stardom, or does the hegemony continue to negatively tamper with these stars, as seen through the use of negative parasocial interaction online? What can parasocial relationships with celebrities reveal about cultural biases? Does financial and media success of a pop star indicate that they are now part of the hegemonic in-group, or are they just simply a vessel for entertainment for the hegemonic in-group?

### *Framing Theory*

Communication, particularly within text, requires some form of a narrative structure, which gives the receiver a small frame of reference and a limited reality of a topic or situation; any communication from a human comes from their specific perspective or opinion on the thought and an individual’s reception of the message and reaction to it is determined by their perspective or opinion on the subject as well (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Humans naturally have opinions, and they can naturally change over time as well. Though many opinions can be shallow, surface level, and have little to

no effect on others, our opinions help us define and identify ourselves, along with creating unification or division with others when opinions differ (Chong & Druckman, 2007). While opinions are human nature and arguably essential to our well-being, the nature of opinions and the way they flux and change is a topic scholars from all disciplines have looked at, particularly when it comes to politics and ideology since so many opinions can end up being harmful or detrimental when used as a weapon or in self-serving situations (Zaller, 2006). For example, Chong and Druckman (2007) have noted the dangerous effects of shallow, uneducated, or fickle opinions on political discourse and government systems, and have noted how easy it can be to sway someone's opinion when the language revolving around a scenario or topic is slightly changed or skewed.

To make sense of the ways language structures can impact behavior, it is relevant to discuss framing theory. For purposes of this research, framing can be best described with Entman's (1993) definition:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 54).

Framing theory can help researchers understand the way things are packaged and molded in order to influence others. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a specific approach to an issue, or by which it reorients someone's attitude or perception about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) argues that "frames draw attention to some aspects of reality at the expense of others, so in order to

define them we must take into account what is described and what is left out” (p. 424). Framing can help further develop the understanding of the media’s role in creating and distributing normative forms of power and communication, particularly as it relates to cultural biases (Entman, 2007). Framing is frequently compared with the concepts of agenda setting and persuasion as well due to the way it can have a psychological and physical effect on decision making (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

Understanding what framing is and how it works is important for this research because it helps rationalize why participants may react a certain way to a certain message. While a group of artists all may sing about the same things, the way they present the message makes an impact on the way someone decodes a message. Similarly, framing can help understand the reasoning behind why and how someone has a specific attitude about an artist; they perceive the artist’s reality through the lens of their own reality, then produce their version of discourse about the perceived reality they then decode from the artists.

### *Confirmation Bias*

Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothsos, Polavin (2017), and Van Swol (2001) detail that consumers primarily choose which messages they adhere to or consume, thus, individuals shape their own personal information environments by not only selectively deciding what channels they will consume information from, but also selectively deciding what messages they want to adhere to and which they will choose to ignore. Confirmation bias can be defined as an “individuals’ commitment to a categorical proposition on certain issues or a course of action that biases the subsequent decision-making,” (Zhou & Shen, 2021, p. 3) or more simply put, people tend to prefer information that confirms or

supports prior initial beliefs, thus affecting the choices they make. On a broader social level, there is evidence that confirmation bias can lead to the gathering of like-minded individuals and create more group polarization, thus altering the public sphere (Michel & Peters, 2020).

When one knows that groups and previous knowledge have such an influence on opinion and attitude, one can understand why and how people of different demographics, backgrounds, and ideologies tend to say or think one thing as a collective, even if they are not committed to the idea. And more specifically, for this research, it allows us to gauge who is the “in-group” in this society and who is not; someone’s identity within or among a group or due to their environment might directly affect how and why they consume the media they do, and why they might react to different artists in different ways. Unique, new, or confounding information can be overlooked or diminished if the group as a whole ignores it, thus making individuals within the group deem it unimportant (Van Swol, 2007).

Studying the phenomenon of confirmation bias is important because those who seek out channels to confirm their own dispositions, instead of being open to information beyond what they are familiar with, they are repetitively confirming their beliefs and behaviors, thus leading to a cloud in judgment (Dunne, n.d.).

Therefore, when thinking through this framework, one can see how individuals in privileged in-groups choose to stay in a hegemonic bubble if their group as a whole tends to ignore the negative repercussions of their privilege, thus hindering positive, progressive social change that stems from new or controversial ideas that the in-group might deem dangerous to their power or identity. In this context there is little incentive

for those in the in-group to financially or socially support artists who they believe cannot positively benefit them within their circles as well.

### Rationale

Considered holistically, all of these frameworks fit together: Norms tell individuals how one should be, thus creating within either a feeling of acceptance or not or somewhere in-between, thus leading us to figure out our own identities within society, and once one has claimed such an identity within a group, confirmation bias allows them to continue to reaffirm these identities. This cycle is why it seems so hard to disrupt hegemonic systems of oppression-- the systems are frequently reaffirmed for those who benefit from being within them, thus giving them no reason to need to broaden or change their opinions or identities. Therefore, this research can help us begin to see what variables are accepted within these norms and what are still considered unacceptable in this society; this can help us create a framework for understanding how minorities fit within these systems right now and how cyclical systems that create oppression or outcasts can be disrupted in order to improve minority acceptance in current society. And as noted, many modern pop stars seem to be simultaneously disrupting hegemonic norms in media while also falling victim to criticism that results from those norms. This researcher was interested in trying to find a relationship between attitudes about pop stars and the sex and race of the pop star in order to see if traditional hegemonic norms are reflected in these perceptions or if general attitudes about pop stars are not determined by the artist's sex and race. More simply put, this researcher was interested in seeing if the public values celebrities that fit into traditional hegemonic norms more than they do minority artists. Therefore, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: What is the interaction between gender and race on celebrity persona parasocial interaction?

RQ2: What is the interaction between gender and race on celebrity appeal?

RQ3: What is the interaction between gender and race on affect?

RQ4: Will perceived norms affect all of the above?

## CHAPTER II - METHODS

### Participants

An a priori power analysis using G\*Power was conducted to identify the appropriate number of participants, with the minimum necessary being 200. We asked that the minimum age of participants are 18 years of age and that they live within the recognized borders of the United States at the time of questionnaire completion. Participants were enlisted through Amazon's online crowdsourcing platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). There was a \$0.25 incentive for participating. MTurk has been recognized as an appropriate data collection tool because of its ability to obtain high-quality and demographically diverse samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Sheehan, 2017).

Between October 18, 2021, and October 29, 2021, the researcher gathered 251 original responses through MTurk. However, not all responses were included in the final data set. Surveys that were completed in under two minutes or had more than 25% of the questionnaire incomplete were removed from the data set, leaving the final data set with 200 participants.

Of the 200 participants, 53.5% (n=107) were male, 43.5% (n=87) were female, 2% (n=4) chose not to disclose, and 1% (n=2) reported "other." 71% (n=142) identified as White, 11% (n= 22) identified as Black or African American, 13% (n=26) identified as Asian, .5% (n=1 ) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4.5% (n= 9) identified as "other." 52.5% (n=105) were between 25-34 years of age, 20% (n=40) were between 35-44 years of age, 14% (n=28) were between 18-24 years of age, 10% (n=20) were between 45-54 years of age, and 3.5% (n=7) were between 55-65 years of age.

## Experimental Design

Since the main objective of this experiment was to discover the way participant's attitudes toward race and gender were manifested in response to different messages, a 2x2 between-subjects factorial design method was selected for the study. In this method, independent variables (race and gender) were manipulated in the form of four different music videos (conditions), which were the message types. Since the first factor is race and the second is gender, each randomly assigned condition was a manipulation of such; condition one was a video from a black female, condition two was a video from a black male, condition three was a video from a white female, and condition four was a video from a white male.

## Data Collection Procedure

Once participants were assigned the questionnaire via MTurk and given instructions on how to complete the questionnaire and receive the \$0.25 incentive, they were asked to give consent to participate in the study. Once a participant gave informed consent, they completed a short questionnaire on demographics and norms. They were then taken to a page with one of four music videos, which were randomly assigned to participants.

In condition one, randomly assigned participants watched the official music video for "The Weekend" by SZA, a black female. In condition two, randomly assigned participants watched the music video for "L\$D" by A\$AP Rocky, a black male. In condition three, randomly assigned participants watched the music video for "National Anthem" by Lana Del Rey, a white female. In condition four, randomly assigned participants watched the music video for "Marvin Gaye," by Charlie Puth, a white male.

These four artists were chosen because they are easily comparable by age (29-36 years old), monthly listeners on Spotify (average of 25 million streams), Instagram followers (average of 15 million), and Billboard chart statistics (average of 12.5 weeks on the Hot 100 list), in order to ensure fair comparisons. These numbers were found from their respective individual Spotify, Instagram, and Billboard pages. Each video is the official video as released from their verified YouTube accounts, and all of the songs are thematically similar, with lyrics that allude to sex and intimacy.

After they watched their given video, they completed modified versions of the Celebrity Persona Parasocial Interaction scale (Brown & Bocarnea 2007), Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire (Stever, 1991), and Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), in order to collect data regarding attitudes about the artist they just watched. The scales were modified in order to fit the parameters of this study. Once they finished the questionnaire, they were given a code to input on Mturk so they could receive compensation.

## Measures

### *Norms*

Individual perceptions of norms were measured with one item modified from Bizer, Magin, and Levine's Social Norm Espousal Scale (2013). The 7 point, Likert-type scale asks participants to evaluate the following question: "Most people would agree that there is an accepted standard of beauty for celebrities in our culture." Participants were asked to respond on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Initially, this scale had ten questions, but it proved unreliable and had to be adjusted to a one-item scale. This researcher believes that the language used in the questions did not

differentiate between injunctive and descriptive norms well, nor did the questions seem to be as relevant to each other and the study as initially believed. Therefore, one question was chosen that best encompassed the goals of the study.

#### *Parasocial interaction scale*

Parasocial interaction was measured with a modified version of Brown and Bocarnea's (2006) Celebrity Persona Parasocial Interaction scale. The 7-point, Likert-type scale asked participants to indicate whether they agree or disagree with nine statements. Example items include: "If [celebrity or persona] appeared on a TV program, I would watch that program" and "If I saw a newspaper or magazine story about [celebrity or persona], I would read it." The Cronbach's alpha reliability score for the scale was .92.

#### *Celebrity appeal*

Celebrity appeal was measured with a modified version of Stever's Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire (1991). The 7-point, Likert-type scale asked participants to give responses to 13 statements that describe how appealing a celebrity is to them. Example items include: "How dedicated a [celebrity or persona] fan are you?" and "Do the following words describe [celebrity or persona]?" The reliability score of the scale was .94.

#### *Affect*

This was measured with a modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Scale by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988). Participants rated each item on a 7 point Likert-type scale between 1 (not at all) and 7 (a great deal). Each item is a single adjective describing a feeling or emotion that falls under either positive affect (e.g.,

interested) or negative affect (e.g., distressed). There were ten items to respond to. The reliability for this scale was .89.

### CHAPTER III - RESULTS

The researcher conducted univariate tests to first understand the nature of the relationships of the independent and dependent variables. In a one way ANOVA test between perceived celebrity parasocial relationship and the gender of the musician, there was not a statistically significant relationship,  $F(1, 196) = 1.47, p < .23$ . In a second one-way ANOVA test between perceived celebrity parasocial relationship and the race of the musician, there was not a statistically significant relationship,  $F(1, 196) = .53, p < .47$ .

Next, when considering celebrity appeal, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA test between perceived celebrity appeal and the race of the musician. There was not a statistically significant relationship between these two variables  $F(1, 197) = 2.46, p > .12$ . Additionally, the researcher conducted an ANOVA test between perceived celebrity appeal and the gender of the musician. This analysis did reveal a significant relationship  $F(1, 197) = 10.24, p < .002$ . However, this statistical relationship did not pass the homogeneity of variances test ( $p < .001$ ).

Next, when considering celebrity affect, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA test between perceived celebrity affect and the gender of the musician. There was not a statistically significant relationship between these two variables  $F(1, 194) = 1.88, p < .17$ . Additionally, in an ANOVA between perceived celebrity affect and the race of the musician, there was not a statistically significant relationship  $F(1, 194) = .49, p > .49$ .

Finally, in a one-way ANOVA test between perceived celebrity norms and the gender of the musician, there was not a statistically significant relationship,  $F(1, 196) = 1.47, p > .23$ . In a second one-way ANOVA test between perceived celebrity parasocial

relationship and the race of the musician, there was not a statistically significant relationship,  $F(1, 198) = .001, p < .97$ .

Then, when considering whether or not there were any significant differences between the four messages, the scholar conducted an ANOVA test between perceived celebrity affect, perceived celebrity parasocial relationship, and perceived celebrity appeal by the four messages. While most of the statistics were insignificant, there was a significant relationship between celebrity appeal and message type:  $F(3, 195) = 4.47, p < .01$ . After conducting a Bonferroni post hoc analysis, the test revealed a significant difference between Message 2 (A\$AP Rocky) and Message 3 (Lana Del Rey), with a mean difference of .88 ( $p < .004$ ) rating Lana Del Rey higher in celebrity appeal than A\$AP Rocky.

*RQ 1: What is the interaction between gender and race on celebrity persona parasocial interaction?*

To answer Research question one, the researcher employed General Linear Model (GLM) to compare participants' responses to the messages. When assessing celebrity parasocial relationships by message, message one (Sza) had a mean of 3.69 ( $SD = 1.36$ ), message two (A\$AP Rocky) had a mean of 3.78 ( $SD = 1.61$ ), message three (Lana Del Rey) had a mean of 4.15 ( $SD = 1.34$ ), and finally message four (Charlie Puth) had a mean of 3.56 ( $SD = 1.43$ ). These differences were not significant  $F(1, 198) = 2.7; p = .10$ . Thus, the message did not reflect any significant celebrity parasocial interaction between viewers and the given artist.

Table 1

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on Celebrity Parasocial Interaction*

| Source                           | Type III Sum of Squares | DF  | Mean Square | F        | Significance |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|--------------|
| Corrected Model                  | 9.762 <sup>a</sup>      | 3   | 3.254       | 1.601    | .191         |
| Intercept                        | 2804.532                | 1   | 2804.532    | 1379.487 | .000         |
| Message Gender x<br>Message Race | 5.508                   | 1   | 5.508       | 2.709    | .101         |
| Message Gender                   | 3.165                   | 1   | 3.165       | 1.557    | .214         |
| Message Race                     | .677                    | 1   | .677        | .333     | .565         |
| Error                            | 394.407                 | 194 | 2.033       |          |              |
| Total                            | 3267.090                | 198 |             |          |              |
| Corrected Total                  | 404.169                 | 197 |             |          |              |

To test whether celebrity persona interacted with gender and race, an ANCOVA was conducted. In the ANCOVA, there was no significant relationship between the gender of the musician and celebrity parasocial interaction  $F(1, 198) = 1.56; p < .21$ . Additionally, there was no significant relationship between the race of the musician and perceived celebrity parasocial relationship  $F(1, 198) = .33; p < .57$ . Finally, in considering the interaction between race and gender, there again was no significant

interaction effect between race and gender on celebrity parasocial interaction  $F(1, 198) = 2.71; p < .101$ . Therefore, Research Question One revealed no interaction between gender and race on celebrity parasocial interaction.

*RQ2: What is the interaction between gender and race on celebrity appeal?*

To answer Research question two, the researcher employed GLM to compare participants' responses to the messages. When assessing celebrity appeal by message, message one (SZA) had a mean of 4.95 ( $SD = 1.00$ ), message two (A\$AP Rocky) had a mean of 4.30 ( $SD = 1.55$ ), message three (Lana Del Rey) had a mean of 5.19 ( $SD = 1.08$ ), message four (Charlie Puth) had a mean of 4.69 ( $SD = 1.3$ ). Thus there was no significant difference between conditions  $F(1, 199) = .18; p = .68$ . Thus, the message did not reflect any significant celebrity appeal between viewers and their given artist.

Table 2

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on Celebrity Appeal*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | DF | Mean Square | F        | Significance |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|
| Corrected Model | 20.168 <sup>a</sup>     | 3  | 6.723       | 4.473    | .005         |
| Intercept       | 4472.415                | 1  | 4472.415    | 2975.881 | .000         |

Table 2 (continued).

|  |          |     |        |        |      |
|--|----------|-----|--------|--------|------|
| Message<br>Gender x<br>Message<br>Race | .264     | 1   | .264   | .175   | .676 |
| Message<br>Gender                      | 16.051   | 1   | 16.051 | 10.680 | .001 |
| Message<br>Race                        | 4.635    | 1   | 4.635  | 3.084  | .081 |
| Error                                  | 293.063  | 195 | 1.503  |        |      |
| Total                                  | 4932.679 | 199 |        |        |      |
| Corrected<br>Total                     | 313.231  | 198 |        |        |      |

In the ANCOVA, there was a significant difference in celebrity appeal based on gender  $F(1, 199) = 10.7; p = .001$ . However, there was also a significant Levene's test of homogeneity of variance observed. This means that there was not enough overlap in the observed celebrity appeal to be sure that we are observing a valid difference.

Next, there was no significant difference in celebrity appeal based on race  $F(1, 199) = 3.08; p = .08$ .

Finally, when looking at the interaction between race and gender, there again was no significant interaction effect between race and gender on celebrity appeal  $F(1, 198) = .175; p = .676$ . Therefore, Research Question Two did reveal a significant finding

between gender and race on celebrity appeal. However, it must be interpreted carefully and with the knowledge that a significant Levene's test of homogeneity of variance observed.

*RQ3: What is the interaction between gender and race on affect?*

To answer research question three, the researcher employed GLM to compare participants' responses to the messages. When assessing affect by message, message one (SZA) had a mean of 2.92 ( $SD = 1.24$ ), message two (A\$AP Rocky) had a mean of 2.77 ( $SD = 1.37$ ), message three (Lana Del Rey) had a mean of 3.17 ( $SD = 1.34$ ), message four (Charlie Puth) had a mean of 2.78 ( $SD = 11.39$ ). Thus, the message did not reflect any significant positive or negative affect for viewers after watching the given artist.

Table 3

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on Affect*

| Source                           | Type III Sum of Squares | DF | Mean Square | F       | Significance |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Corrected Model                  | 5.018 <sup>a</sup>      | 3  | 1.673       | .947    | .419         |
| Intercept                        | 1635.079                | 1  | 1635.079    | 925.531 | .000         |
| Message Gender x<br>Message Race | .761                    | 1  | .761        | .431    | .512         |
| Message Gender                   | 3.442                   | 1  | 3.442       | 1.948   | .164         |

Table 3 (continued).

|                 |          |     |       |      |      |
|-----------------|----------|-----|-------|------|------|
| Message Race    | .768     | 1   | .768  | .435 | .510 |
| Error           | 339.195  | 192 | 1.767 |      |      |
| Total           | 2015.270 | 196 |       |      |      |
| Corrected Total | 344.212  | 195 |       |      |      |

In the ANCOVA, there was no significant relationship between gender and affect  $F(1, 196) = 1.95; p = .16$ . Additionally, there was no significant relationship between celebrity race and affect  $F(1, 196) = .44; p = .51$ . Finally, when observing the interaction between race and gender, there again was no significant interaction effect between race and gender on affect  $F(1, 198) = .43; p = .51$ . Therefore, Research Question Three did not reveal any interaction between race and gender on affect.

*RQ4: Will perceived norms affect all of the above?*

Three correlational tests were performed to understand the relationship between one's perceived norms and resulting celebrity parasocial relationships, their positive and negative emotions towards celebrities, and one's celebrity appeal. There was no significant correlational relationship between perceived norms and the various dependent variables. No significant relationship was found between perceived norms and celebrity appeal.  $r(197) = .11, p = .11$ . No significant relationship was found between perceived norms and parasocial relationships  $r(196) = -.001, p = .99$ . No significant relationship was found between perceived norms and affect  $r(194) = .03, p = .70$  (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Correlations among variables*

| Variable                         | Norms |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Celebrity Parasocial Interaction | -.001 |
|                                  | .992  |
|                                  | 198   |
| Affect                           | -.027 |
|                                  | .705  |
|                                  | 196   |
| Celebrity Appeal                 | .114  |
|                                  | .109  |
|                                  | 199   |
|                                  | 200   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RQ4 asked if perceived norms acted as a covariate between the message components and the dependent variables. Three separate ANCOVA's were analyzed to assess whether perceived norms served as covariates in the relationships between the celebrity gender and race on celebrity parasocial relationships, celebrity appeal, and affect.

There was no significant relationship between perceived norms and the dependent variables. No significant interaction occurred between perceived norms, the messages, and resulting celebrity parasocial relationships  $F(3, 198) = .52; p = .67$ .

There was no significant univariate relationship between gender and parasocial relationships  $F(1, 198) = .15; p = .70$  or race and parasocial relationships  $F(1, 198) = .59; p = .45$ . Additionally, there was no significant univariate relationship between one's perceived norms and parasocial  $F(1, 198) = .004; p = .95$ . Additionally, there was no significant univariate relationship in the interaction between race and gender and perceived celebrity parasocial interaction  $F(1, 198) = .15; p = .7$ . Finally, there was no significant interaction term between race, gender, and norms concerning perceived parasocial interaction  $F(1, 198) = .52; p = .67$ .

There was no significant univariate relationship between gender and celebrity appeal  $F(1, 199) = 2.01; p = .16$  or race and celebrity appeal  $F(1, 199) = .90; p = .34$ . Additionally, there was no significant univariate relationship between one's perceived norms and celebrity appeal. Additionally, there was no significant univariate relationship in the interaction between race and gender and perceived celebrity appeal  $F(1, 199) = 1.25; p = .27$ . Finally, there was no significant interaction term between race, gender, and norms concerning celebrity appeal  $F(1, 199) = 1.62; p = 1.7$ .

There was no significant univariate relationship between gender and affect  $F(1, 196) = .01; p = .92$  or race and affect  $F(1, 196) = .19; p = .67$ . Additionally, there was no significant univariate relationship in the interaction between race and gender and perceived celebrity affect  $F(1, 196) = .51; p = .47$ . Finally, there was no significant

interaction term between race, gender, and norms concerning celebrity affect  $F(1, 196) = .35; p = .85$ .

Ultimately, research question four did not yield any results that perceived norms affected the relationships between message gender and race on any of the dependent variables.

## CHAPTER 1V - DISCUSSION

At face value, the lack of significant statistical findings may seem notable in the context of the broader implications, especially for feminist and critical cultural communication studies. Since participants seemingly did not have largely differing opinions or attitudes about each artist, one might hope that this study could potentially reflect positive social trends that concern equity for minorities as they relate to the relative hegemony, or at the very least, that traditional white supremacist hegemonic systems are potentially being actively challenged right now. Unfortunately, this optimism does not reflect such, as there are still very visible inequalities that non-white, non-male people experience daily; studies find that black people still experience institutional and individual racism regularly, and white people have a more clearly received advantage in many facets. ("On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart," 2016). The American public's perception of racism has not changed much over time, and people of color are more likely to acknowledge institutional racism, while white people are more likely to place blame on individual beliefs (Kaiser Family Foundation/CNN, 2015)- a small example of confirmation bias as it relates to internalized racism.

Beyond the speculative sociological and cultural explanations for the lack of significant findings, there are also numerous limitations that were revealed during and after the experiment that could contribute to said results. Thus, this experiment likely does not substantively or reasonably reflect present attitudes toward racism and sexism, especially in a subtopic as complex as pop music. Therefore, the following discussion of this study's outcomes innately results in coinciding limitations and future recommendations.

### *Internalized and Institutional Racism*

While the participants' responses presented no evidence of either generally negative or generally positive attitudes toward a presented race or gender, it is apparent that the post-modern American society does still function under systems, structures, laws, and sociological beliefs that were or are running on innately discriminatory principles. For example, Barack Obama is a biracial man who served as President of the United States for two full terms, which externally appears progressive for a country that has only been led by white men since its founding. Yet, individuals responded more favorably to President Obama's dog when they were told it belonged to a different, previously serving white president, as opposed to those who knew that it belonged to President Obama (Tesler, 2016). This seemingly trivial piece of information, though, is evidence of internalized racism that exists on a bigger, broader scope; there are several disciplines and societal ideologies that, on the surface, have a positive or neutral relationship with minority groups, but are or were built on and still operate within the boundaries or conditions of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

One such example comes from when female suffragists finally won the "right" to vote in America. The "right" to vote was only extended to white women and explicitly excluded black women (Waxman, 2020). Black women were not granted the right to vote until 1965 (White, 2021). This conquest is an illustration of racist principles winning and being actively communicated on a national level, alongside what were already visibly sexist attitudes (hooks, 1981). Similarly, in the healthcare industry, there are a number of disconcerting statistics: black people have a lower life expectancy at birth,, a higher

mortality rate than white people, disproportionately more cancer deaths, and are less likely to receive the same standard of treatment as white people (Almomani, 2021). In higher education, standardized tests help promote the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy proving to be of more harm than help to students who are part of minority groups and/or are at financial disadvantages (Barber et al., 2020), (Rosales and Walker, 2021). These institutions, among others, represent the way white supremacy is entangled with capitalism. It has been argued that “there is no capitalism without racism,” with the police and prison systems being the most prominent examples of “structural racism,” and in order to truly eliminate racism, we must “eradicate racial-capitalism” (Mosley and Hagan, 2020).

#### *Beauty Standards in a White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy*

The male gaze and internalized sexism and racism, more products of a white supremacist patriarchal society, might be the explanation for the few significant findings this experiment did have. A gaze is considered male “whenever it directs itself at, and takes pleasure in, women, where women function as erotic object,” (Devereaux, 1990, p. 337) or rather, the act of depicting images in an objective and sexual way that is curated specifically for the desire of a masculine, heterosexual man. And even when or if part of an institution or system feels like it is not being observed through the lens of the male gaze, or does not feel sexualized, or feels progressive, it likely still functions under a larger, still innately racist system. For example, a group of women could form a sports team with only female players and coaches, but they would still be participating in an inherently sexist system, as athletics have always been not only sexist but actively contributed to a patriarchal, capitalistic society (Hextrum, 2019). Similarly, Lil Nas X

may be a homosexual person of color, but he is still a masculine-presenting male working in a male-dominated industry, which gives him an advantage at success over his female counterparts. However, he still objectively faces more discrimination due to his race. These notions help show that racism and sexism run complexly through the inner workings of modern society, and the way most of these systems function would have to be largely adjusted in order to show true racial progress. Thus, modern racist and sexist attitudes must still exist, and this experiment is not a valid reflection of such.

In modern magazines, the male gaze pervades through hegemonic beauty standards that can be observed by the way marketing platforms such as magazines consistently uphold a white standard of beauty, thus perpetuating a norm of white women as the highest standard of beauty in a society (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019). In fact, platforms have been exposed before as lightening the skin of darker cover models in order to make them more marketable (Gordon, 2015). Beauty in the "western world" has historically been associated with being white and upper-class, and there is a common association between what is deemed beautiful and how much something costs, which is why body modifications are commonly associated with a certain beauty standard (Donnella, 2019). One's level of attractiveness is difficult to measure quantitatively because the members of society decide what they find attractive, and then the standards thus derive from the collective attitudes, which has created a clear relationship between capitalism, racism, sexism, colonialism, and power in America (Kelsey-Sugg, 2018).

As these examples suggest, there is a clear relationship between being white and being beautiful and being powerful. This evidence is applicable to the few pieces of data that suggested Lana Del Ray had more appeal over A\$AP Rocky; a group of white men

would likely be most attracted to someone who fits idealistically into their standard of beauty, as seen through the male gaze. Even further, in a population of seemingly progressive people, there are still clear racial preferences, where individuals tend to prefer partners of the same race (Fisman et al., 2008). In fact, racial preferences in dating have a clear connection to inherent institutional racism and economic racism, as some even some black women have reported not finding many black men desirable as partners due to a perception of black men being of a lower social, economic, and less educated (Wilson et al., 2007). When taking all of these notions into consideration, there are consequential explanations for why Lana Del Rey may have had more celebrity appeal than A\$AP Rocky in this study. In an experiment where the participants ended up being a pool of primarily white middle-aged men, one might consider the trickle-down effects that a white supremacist patriarchal society may have on how a celebrity may appeal to a group of white men, and how a black man may appear to a group of white men.

#### *Confirmation Bias and Framing Theory*

When looking through the lens of aforementioned notions of feminist theory, one can take confirmation bias into consideration as well with this data, which would suggest that it is rational to believe a pool of individuals whose demographics are most similar to Lana Del Rey would innately be drawn to her, while the same said pool of respondents may negatively perceive A\$AP Rocky, particularly if they have never seen him or been exposed to music by him or by similar artists.

Similarly, there may have been a lack of significant results in this specific study due to the way the messages were encoded via music video and individually decoded from participants. By changing the messages to represent other demographics, types of

celebrities, categorized institutions, or various other variables, there could be a differing result. This researcher acknowledges that framing the variables of race and sex through the message of a music video may not accurately reflect how a participant feels about the specific variables this researcher was looking for. Another interesting correlation to observe for future studies would be looking into if participants attitudes toward certain demographics change as the nature and setting of the message changes; for example, perhaps a participant does not care how race and gender affect the music they listen to, but inherent hegemonic ideals might make them take race and gender into account when voting on politicians or picking a favorite athlete. Since this study neglected to find an interaction among race and gender and attitudes about the specific artists chosen for this pool of research, applying similar studies to other disciplines or institutions beyond pop music may reveal other attitudes; while attitudes toward pop culture have the potential to reflect overall cultural attitudes or societal identity (Delaney, 2007), it does not go unacknowledged that one's attitudes toward race and gender of individuals within of the subculture of pop music may not represent overall attitudes toward race and gender on a broader cultural scale.

*Limitations by experimental design and further recommendations*

As mentioned, one finding was that Lana Del Rey (white female) had significantly more celebrity appeal than A\$AP Rocky (black male), but the lack of overlap is so extreme that the significance could not be validated. The previously noted implications of this small finding could still mean various things, and if this study were to be duplicated or expanded upon, it would be fair to replace Lana Del Rey with another white female to see if this specific question has the same result. Since Lana Del Rey and

A\$AP Rocky represent different demographics and veer into opposing genres, the responses may have been as such due to Lana Del Rey having more general popularity and recognizability among this batch of participants than A\$AP Rocky did.

Similarly, this researcher recognizes that the route of an experiment may be an ineffective way to measure abstract sociological ideals, permanent feelings, or inherent internal biases, as experiments only capture one moment in time. The nature of the overall purpose of the research might be explored better through another method of data collection- one that can observe actions or feelings over time or more in-depth.

This researcher must also note that the questionnaire for norms was reduced from its original length to a singular question due to reliability issues. Therefore, the lack of correlations between norms and attitudes is likely due to the ineffective way of measuring norms. In future research, when exploring societal norms, a more detailed questionnaire that encompasses both injunctive and descriptive norms questions with content that focuses on behavioral and social norms and internalized bigotry may give a clearer understanding of a participant's relationship to their responded attitudes.

As understood by framing theory, the way a message is encoded makes a difference in how it will be decoded. Therefore, this researcher acknowledges that the attitudes regarding each artist may exist simply based on who the artist is, and race and sex may not play an important factor. In fact, a recommendation would be to perform a similar experiment with other artists and compare correlations between the independent variables being manipulated and the demographics of the participants, allowing insight into how race and sex of the participant might affect their attitude about an artist.

Similarly, another limitation of this study was the number of participants as combined with demographics. In a group of 200, when the majority are of one gender and one race, the data is more representative of that one group. Future studies could observe previously stated correlations, along with variables that acknowledge geographical differences as well, to look at how responses would vary on a physically larger scale. A recommendation for a future study could be intentionally splitting the conditions or participant pools up by participant race and sex and seeing the way the participants' race or sex has an effect on each of the different conditions, as opposed to just viewing one condition.

It is also important to acknowledge that this study is relative to pop music and the way hegemonic ideals may or may not affect pop culture and artistry. Therefore the same general findings may not be applicable in other niche systems. While the structure of the experiment could be replicated for other disciplines, one must acknowledge that the dependent variables were specifically chosen to reflect how a participant feels after watching a music video. As previously mentioned, some participants may have little to no feelings toward anything pop music-related, but they perhaps may feel more affect or appeal toward someone who fits into the realm of what their interests are.

Another limitation to acknowledge that has been briefly touched on is the chosen artists. Though they all broadly fall within the pop category, they each veer into other genres as well, meaning their general target audiences or most relevant listeners may not overlap, leaving some to be more recognizable to others. Therefore, if the artists were changed out, the responses may be different due to recognition or personal opinion of the given artist. By changing out the artists, adding more in, or having multiple messages for

one condition or that represents one variable, one may have the potential to get more insight on what exactly the celebrity appeal is from the most popular artists. Studying more or other artists might give a researcher insight as to what artists have the most celebrity appeal right now, and then data from such could provide a brief insight as to what norms, characteristics, or traits are currently most accepted or desirable in the current society.

A final limitation to note is the timespan of data collection. The data was only collected within a span of eleven days. With more time to get more participants and data, again, the results may have varied due to an increase in responses.

## CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION

This study attempted to explore attitudes regarding race and gender through the use of pop music. This researcher was interested in trying to find a relationship between attitudes about pop stars and the sex and race of the pop star in order to see if traditional hegemonic norms are reflected in these perceptions or if general attitudes about pop stars are not determined by the artist's sex and race. A 2x2 factorial design experiment was used to manipulate variables of sex and gender in four different conditions, with the aim of seeing if the responses to the different conditions had significantly varied attitudes. Overall, there were no outstanding significant findings; the attitudes remained relatively the same across all conditions from participants. Perceived norms did not have any effect on attitudes. The lack of significant findings and the potential implications of performing a similar experiment with more variables gives communication studies scholars, especially those who study feminist theory or critical cultural studies, a foundation for exploring how hegemonic norms may or may not have an effect on the way different groups of people perceive other groups of people, beyond just those in the realm of popular culture.

APPENDIX A - Survey Design Instrument

Demographics

What best describes your sex?

Male Female Other or prefer not to disclose

What best describes your race?

White Black or African American Asian American  
Indian or Alaska Native Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Other

What best describes your age?

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65-74 75+

Modified Social Norm Espousal Scale

Please rate the extent to which these items are characteristic of you or what you believe. For each, please use the following scale:

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral  
Somewhat agree

6 7  
Agree Strongly agree

1. Most people would agree that there is an accepted standard of beauty for celebrities in our culture.

### Modified Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale

Think about the musical artist in the video you just watched, then please read the following questions carefully. Once you have read a question, choose the appropriate response from the 1-7 scale, where:

|                   |                |                   |         |   |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------|---|
| 1                 | 2              | 3                 | 4       | 5 |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree       | Somewhat Disagree | Neutral |   |
|                   | Somewhat agree |                   |         |   |
| 6                 | 7              |                   |         |   |
| Agree             | Strongly agree |                   |         |   |

2. If [artist] appeared on a TV program, I would watch that program.
3. If I saw a social media or news story about [artist], I would read it.
4. I would like to meet [artist] in person.
5. I feel that I understand the emotions [artist] experiences.
6. I do not have any feelings about [artist].
7. I like to watch [artist] videos when I come across them.
8. I sometimes go to the Internet to obtain more information about [artist].
9. [Artist] understands the kinds of things I want to know.
10. I feel like I have very little understanding of [artist] as a person.
11. I am not really interested in [cartist].

### Modified Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire

Do the following words describe the artist you just watched? Circle your personal rating for each item using this scale:

|               |      |              |         |   |
|---------------|------|--------------|---------|---|
|               | 1    | 2            | 3       | 4 |
| Very Low      | Low  | Somewhat Low | Neutral |   |
| 5             | 6    | 7            |         |   |
| Somewhat High | High | Very High    |         |   |

12. Entertainer

13. Creative

14. Hard-working

15. Sexy

16. Charismatic

17. Attractive

18. Talented

19. Well-dressed

20. Appealing

21. Mysterious

Think about the artist you just watched. For each of the following statements, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, where:

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Strongly disagree    Disagree    Somewhat Disagree    Neutral  
Somewhat agree

6                      7

Agree    Strongly agree

22. [Artist] is an important entertainer who has significant contributions to pop music.
23. [Artist] is more than just an entertainer. [Artist] is a role model for those who look up to them.
24. [Artist] is a sex symbol.

#### Modified Affect Scale

This scale consists of a number of words that describe feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way RIGHT NOW, that is, AT THE PRESENT MOMENT, after watching your given music video. Use the following scale to record your answers.

|            |               |          |         |            |             |
|------------|---------------|----------|---------|------------|-------------|
| 1          | 2             | 3        | 4       | 5          | 6           |
| 7          |               |          |         |            |             |
| Not at all | Very slightly | A little | Neutral | Moderately | Quite a bit |
| Extremely  |               |          |         |            |             |

25. \_\_\_\_\_ interested
26. \_\_\_\_\_ distressed
27. \_\_\_\_\_ excited
28. \_\_\_\_\_ upset
29. \_\_\_\_\_ scared
30. \_\_\_\_\_ enthusiastic
31. \_\_\_\_\_ irritable
32. \_\_\_\_\_ ashamed
33. \_\_\_\_\_ inspired
34. \_\_\_\_\_ motivated

## APPENDIX B – IRB APPROVAL LETTER

### Office of Research Integrity



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#### NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 21-005  
PROJECT TITLE: GET INTO IT: ANALYZING THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTIONS OF POP STARS  
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: Communication Studies  
RESEARCHERS: PI: Bailey Shelton  
Investigators: Shelton, Bailey-Maxwell, Lindsey~  
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved  
CATEGORY: Expedited Category  
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 13-Oct-2021 to 12-Oct-2022

*Donald Sacco*

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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