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GANGSTA EXPRESSIONS 1983-1993: EXPLORING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

by

ALEXZANDRA STRICKLAND

Under the Direction of Lia Bascomb, PhD

ABSTRACT

Limited research has been conducted on the mental health of urban Afro-American men and the context of their traumatic experiencing. In this study, the researcher is interested in discovering if gangsta rap music is an artistic expression of trauma within experiences of a sector within the population of African American men. Utilizing qualitative and ethnographic analysis, this study seeks to explore gangsta rap as a form of connection to and possible expression of the contextual trauma experienced by inner-city African American men in Los Angeles, California between 1983 and 1993. Lyrics of 30 songs from gangsta rap artists associated with this area are examined using qualitative research computer analysis software. A re-conceptualized framework of trauma is introduced and utilized as a lens to examine cultural expression. This study examines gangsta rap music as a window into the qualitative phenomenological experiencing of trauma through the voices of African American rappers.

INDEX WORDS: Gangsta Rap, African American Men, Trauma, Continuous Trauma, Historical Trauma, Race, Cultural Trauma, Intersectionality

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

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May 2018

DEDICATION

As a woman who has always lived and worked in close proximity to African American men as brothers, best friends, enemies, lovers, and everything in between, I have fostered a concern and love for the mental health of African American men. Men whose voices so often go unheard in the psychological field. I dedicate this work to all the African American men that helped in making me a strong, proud African American woman, before I even understood the power behind that term.

Thank you.

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Most importantly, thank you God.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....		IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		V
1 INTRODUCTION.....		1
1.1 Background		1
1.2 Problem.....		5
1.3 Operationalized Terms.....		6
1.4 Significance.....		8
1.5 Nature of Study		10
1.6 Conceptual Framework.....		10
1.7 Research Question		12
1.8 Assumptions, Limitations, Scope.....		12
1.9 Conclusion		13
2 GANGSTAFICATION: LITERATURE REVIEW		13
2.1 Exploring Rap Music.....		13
2.2 Los Angeles Introduces the Gangsta.....		17
2.3 Gangsta Protagonists and Anti-heroics		18
2.4 Stress and Trauma.....		21
2.5 Post-Traumatic Stress Symptomology and Disorder		24
2.6 Re-conceptualizing Trauma.....		26

2.7	Layers of Continuous Traumatic Stress	27
2.7.1	<i>African American Community and Trauma.....</i>	27
2.7.2	<i>Continuous Stress</i>	28
2.7.3	<i>Collective Trauma.....</i>	30
2.7.4	<i>Historical Trauma.....</i>	32
2.7.5	<i>Insidious Trauma and Microaggressions.....</i>	36
2.8	Intersectionality within Trauma.....	38
3	METHODOLOGY	41
3.1	Phenomenological Inquiry	43
3.2	Theoretical Framework.....	43
3.2.1	<i>Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)</i>	<i>43</i>
3.2.2	<i>Intersectionality.....</i>	<i>44</i>
3.3	Design.....	45
3.4	Research Questions.....	46
3.5	Data Collection	46
3.6	Data Analysis.....	47
3.7	Reliability, Validity, and Researcher Bias.....	47
3.8	Conclusion	48
4	FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	49
4.1	Data Analysis.....	49

4.2	Violence.....	52
4.3	Facing Own Death.....	55
4.4	Power Tools	62
4.5	Conclusion	67
5	DISCUSSION	68
5.1	Los Angeles and Violence through the Lens of Trauma	68
5.2	Directions for Future Research	71
5.2.1	<i>Importance of Policy</i>	71
5.2.2	<i>Effects of Violent State Intervention</i>	72
5.2.3	<i>Vicarious Trauma</i>	74
5.2.4	<i>Remembering Women in the Narrative</i>	75
5.2.5	<i>Mental Health</i>	76
5.3	Implications	77
5.4	Final Words	79
	APPENDICES	94
	Appendix A Songs included in Data Set.....	94
	Appendix B Songs Coded in Close Reading	96

1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, the researcher is interested in discovering if gangsta rap music is an artistic expression of trauma within experiences of a sector within the population of African American men. The introductory chapter of this work gives insight into the background of the research, as well as the problem, purpose and significance that the research addresses with the African American community. The nature and justification of the research design will also be discussed. This chapter will present the research questions and conceptual framework that guide this inquiry. Terms that are operationalized within the research are placed into a glossary. The chapter will conclude with the assumptions, scope, and limitations of this work.

1.1 Background

With the frequent, and well publicized, brutal killing of young African American men by law enforcement in recent years, the experience of African American men has been called into question by activists, researchers, and politicians alike such as Alicia Garza (Garza, 2014) and Barack Obama (Liptak & Athena, 2016). The tragic deaths of Freddy Gray (age 25, Baltimore, MD), Michael Brown (age 18, Ferguson, MO), and Tamir Rice (age 12, Cleveland, OH), among many other unspoken names that have lost their lives after encounters with local police, illustrates the complex reality that African American men still endure in their own neighborhoods (Smith & Patton, 2016). Altercations with police are just one of the contextually specific risk factors that leave low-income, urban Black men disproportionately susceptible to loss and trauma (Smith & Patton). Generally, trauma is an experience that produces overwhelmingly intense fear, distress, or emotional pain, that often resulting in long-term psychosocial and physiological effects due to an inability to resolve and heal from the event (Bowen & Murshid, 2016). These traumatic events can occur at multiple levels of ones's life. In

2002, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that 68% of its 3,642 racially motivated hate crimes were characterized as anti-African (Evans, et. al., 2016). Alongside the anti-African racism and discrimination African Americans are confronted with, they are also bombarded with the trauma within their own lives and communities. For example, the U.S. Census (2013) reports that African Americans represent 28.1% of individuals living in poverty and reflect a higher rate of unemployment (Evans, et. al., 2016). Due to their lack of resources, these African Americans are disproportionately susceptible to engaging with trauma such as polyvictimization and interactions with the criminal justice system (Bowen & Murshid, 2016).

Poverty and violence are two contextual risk factors that plague many urban communities and the men that inhabit them. Compared to residence in other contexts, residing in an urban environment is correlated with increased risk of exposure to assaultive traumatic events, violent injury, and pre-mature death (Lowe, et. al. 2014; Smith & Patton, 2016). Racism and discrimination, high unemployment rates, overcrowding, residential segregation, and poverty are all social determinants of violence that affect inner-city, underserved African American neighborhoods (Smith & Patton, 2016). These social determinants increase the propensity for both violence and crime in communities (Smith & Patton, 2016). Youth growing up in economically disadvantaged urban areas report a greater likelihood of witnessing shootings and stabbings in relation to higher socioeconomic communities (Perez, et. al, 2014; Smith & Patton). Homicide and suicide, which are found in high rates within African American communities, have been associated with stress, among other physical maladies (Bridges, 2016). Homicide remains the leading cause of death for Afro-youth aged 15 to 24 (CDC, 2015). These statistics exceed the homicide rates of young Hispanic/Latino men (13.5 per 100,000) and White men

(2.9per 100,000) combined (CDC, 2012). Making it a substantial risk from youth to adulthood in the lives of urban African American men, homicide continues to be the leading cause of death for African American men aged 25 to 34 (CDC, 2015). This high risk for traumatic experiencing is a clear disparity that disproportionately affects inner-city, underserved African American men and their quality of life.

The place of African American men within American society has been bitter, to say the least. Historically, African American men have continually been faced with the chronic threat and stress of residing within a systematically racist and oppressive society that has persisted since the period of African enslavement (Elligan & Utsey, 1999). In recent years, African American men are still confronted with educational and socio-political inequalities. This minority group is still marginalized within economic, political, and social contexts as it resides in a nation that adheres to the image of Eurocentric domination and superiority (White & Parham,1990). African American men experience frequent encounters with police harassment, violence, incarceration, and a lack of diverse images and opportunities within academia and the media (Harris, 1995). Being bombarded with such an intense amount of negativity increases African American men's susceptibility to stress and trauma (Bridges, 2011).

With this information, it is no surprise that African American men have a distinctive relationship with trauma. The intersectionality theory proposes the idea that African American hyper-masculine identities are framed by layers of the environmental ecosystem. Factors including, but not limited to, social, political, economic, and historical forces, such as structural racism, interact with and help structure hyper-masculine ideals in African American men.

Hyper-masculine ideals both draw boundaries around and police African American men's performance of identity and gender. Although the hegemonic ideal of masculinity is considered to be only truly accessible to middle aged white men, ideas and beliefs based around the performance have become engrained in African American culture (Lane-Steele, 2011). As described by Lane-Steele (2011), the inability to participate in white hegemonic masculinity has spawned a type of protest hyper-masculinity in the marginalized culture. This hegemonic ideal is so powerful and pervasive that its existence has reshaped generations of African American culture and expression. As hyper-masculinity has become somewhat of a generational consequence to the trauma of oppression, a culture was created (Lane-Steele, 2011). Men continue to be subject to this culture, way of thinking, and even a subconscious belief system about the performance of masculinity and the power and place associated with it.

Masculinity and racial identity are mutually constructed. They both affect one's relationship with stress and trauma (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). Despite the complexity of trauma's intersection with the assumed masculine identity, traditional male gender roles encourage men to avoid psychological issues, fix problems without help, and suppress emotional expression (Vogel, et. al., 2014). Both gender and racial disparities exist in the utilization and persistence of mental health services, suggesting that the psychological issues of African American men often go untreated (Evans, et. al., 2016). African American men are less likely to seek healthcare services than African American women and their White counterparts; they continue to be one of the most underserved populations within the mental health field (Evans, et. al., 2016).

Due to the limited or non-existent cooperation of so many African American men with the mental health field, this research suggests examining the complex mental state of some urban African American men within their own popularized cultural expression. In a world of growing social consciousness, there are still a plethora of cultures and social expressions that are unaccepted and misunderstood. The residents of many inner-city communities are faced with inequalities and hardships surpassing that of numerous other societies. The lifestyle and story of many inner-city African American men goes untold and unacknowledged in various mainstream forms from education to public policy. One form of expression that has always boasted representing the struggle and story of inner-city youth is gangsta rap. Gangsta rap is usually criticized for its violent lyricism and misogynistic views (Sullivan, 2003), but it is possible that this criticism comes with a lack of understanding by those unaffected by the lifestyle, among other things. Examining the craft from a different perspective, one can appreciate gangsta rap for the artistic expression that it is and use it as a tool to explore this population's cultural relationship with trauma. This study seeks to explore gangsta rap as a form of connection to and possible expression of the contextual trauma experienced by inner-city African American men.

1.2 Problem

Limited research has been conducted on the mental health of urban Afro- American men and the context of their traumatic experiencing. This population has to combat intense risk factors in their everyday environment. Yet, little is known about their experiences, mental health status, or the connections to be made from their past and for the future. Due to its connection to time and location, this study examines gangsta rap music as a window into the qualitative phenomenological experiencing of trauma through the voices of African American rappers of a

particular period. It inquires into what an analysis of gangsta rap music may reveal about the circumstances of urban African American men. Is it possible to learn anything about African American men's mental health from analyzing the specific art form of gangsta rap music? And if so, what? A qualitative analysis of gangsta rap lyrics from various artists is examined through the lens of trauma to learn more about the experiences of urban African American men.

1.3 Operationalized Terms

African American– term used in this work to describe people of African descent located within the United States

Black – persons or descendants of the African Diaspora, usually occupying a marginalized space in society

Collective trauma - emotional residue and scars on the collective cultural consciousness resulting from a shared traumatic event

Continuous trauma - environments of enduring threat and their psychological impacts

Gangsta - hustler protagonist central in African American storytelling tradition; ‘bad nigger’ or ‘baaadman’; used in reference to the LA’s historical street gangs and associated dominant, masculine identity

Historical trauma - cumulative psychological and emotional injuries that exist across generations

Intersectionality - A theoretical framework originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw rooted within Black feminist scholarship, which asserts that the layers of one's social identity is not additive nor independent, but compounded and mutually integral creating an interlocking system of oppression. These multiple social identities, such as gender, socioeconomic status (SES), race, disability, and sexual orientation, intersect as systemic structures of dominance affecting those with less power

Polyvictimization – having experienced different and multiple victimizations, or trauma, such as family violence, sexual abuse, hospitalization, police brutality, etc.

Post-traumatic stress symptomology or disorder (PTSS or PTSD) - mental condition triggered by a traumatic event; a consequence of one's inability to effectively cope with stress resulting in physiological disorganization. Although they share many similarities, PTS symptoms are common and may improve or resolve within a month. Alternately, PTSD symptoms are more persistent, severe, and can obstruct daily functioning, lasting more than a month.

Racism - behaviors and activities, such as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism, individuals engage in to suppress, oppress, and maintain global power, usually directed towards someone of a different race centered on the belief that one's own race is superior. Structural racism is encompassed in this definition, as the sum of social structures and institutions, which contain philosophical and ideological constructs and assumptions, that enforce white domination and Black subordination.

Racial discrimination - the physical, or behavioral, manifestation of racism

Stress - a particularly taxing relationship between individuals and their environment that surpasses available resources and endangers well-being, as theorized by Lazarus and Folkman

Trauma - measured as traumatic life experiences and experience with racial discrimination;

characterized by feelings of horror, helplessness, and terror due to the inability to protect against or reverse a harmful experience

1.4 Significance

The mental health of urban African American men is understudied in comparison to the rate of unemployment, discouraging media coverage, and other risk factors that have historically characterized this population. Alongside the gaps in empirical studies, there is a lack of first-hand discussion on and descriptions of the urban experience by African American men, especially within the context of trauma. In light of the lack of first-hand mental health accounts, this study analyzes the cultural expressions of gangsta rap as a possible window into qualitative, phenomenological experiencing with the hopes of gaining a clearer view of the mental health of urbanized African American men between 1983 and the mid-1990s. The intersectionality of African American men's experiences is explored through concern for race, class, and gender. Rappers were able to share themselves and their communities within their art to all those willing to listen.

Just as their experiences are complex, so is the nature of trauma. In an attempt to do an in-depth examination of multiple facets and expressions of trauma within this community, this work utilizes a re-conceptualized lens of trauma. Going beyond the flat conceptualization of post-traumatic stress disorder or symptomology (PTSD or PTSS) and deeper into to the facets of traumatic disorder, academic researchers have argued to move away from the Westernized understanding of the traumatic experience (Stevens, et. al., 2013). Since trauma is often decontextualized and tends to concentrate on the existence of safety in new spaces, literature has arisen to conceptualize more complex trauma (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). This phenomenological study explores gangsta rap and urban African American men's experiences through a framework of continual trauma, such as historical and collective trauma, alongside PTSS. By engaging different levels of traumatic experiencing, this researcher is able to further submerge herself and readers into the multifaceted lifestyle and environment of inner-city, underserved African American men.

Through the use of gangsta rap and continual trauma symptomology, this research hopes to uncover important information pertaining to the mental health of past generations, as well as implications for the future of African American men. Results of this analysis can greatly increase the field of psychology, both within and beyond the African American community. A better understanding of trauma and mental health within the African American community can broaden the field of African American Studies, Education, and Social Work, among many others. Beyond the men, those in close relation to them including family, friends, support systems, teachers, and service providers can be affected by this work.

1.5 Nature of Study

This qualitative study explores gangsta rap through phenomenological inquiry. With the desire to gain insight using the voices within the urban community, lyrics of 30 gangsta rap songs released between 1983 and 1993 from various artists connected to the Los Angeles area are examined qualitatively. Considered to be the birthplace of gangsta rap, focusing this research on a particular space enables connection to context and environment in production. Alongside the lyricism, the context, delivery, and use of colloquial terms are utilized to grasp the commonalities within the phenomena of urban African American male rappers' art and experiences, as well as other urban African American men. This phenomenon is explored through the lens of trauma. Continual trauma, historical trauma, and PTSS are used as a guiding framework to explore the intimate details of the artists' experiences and expression. These three forms of trauma are utilized to capture the complexity of trauma and polyvictimization in urban and oppressed communities. This research bases its investigation in the theoretical concept of the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST). This ecological framework seems to be the most effective for the evaluation of development in relation to identity and societal factors within the population of African American men. Additional contextual information is explored to create an ethnographic depiction of the culture at the time.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

Trauma-informed cultural analysis could reveal pertinent information for the Afro-community. In a broad context, trauma is defined as experiences that produce intense fear, distress, or emotional pain, that often resulting in long-term psychosocial and physiological effects (Bowen & Murshid, 2016). Trauma has no age, race, gender, or class boundaries

(SAMHSA, 2014), but how one interacts and integrates it into their life and identity varies (Smith & Patton, 2016). As trauma affects African American men, it interacts with multiple, intersecting levels of his being including self-perception, masculinity, and interpersonal relationships (Henfield, 2012). Although all populations are susceptible to trauma, certain types of trauma are disproportionately experienced by some groups due to deeply engrained structural and systematic inequalities within society (Bowen & Murshid, 2016). Manifestations of such inequalities include impoverished people, especially low-income racial minorities within the United States, disproportionately experiencing contact with the criminal justice system, police brutality, and excessive force (Bowen & Murshid, 2016).

These particular experiences, among others, are often traumatic and detrimental at the individual, family, and community level (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015; Bowen & Murshid, 2016). Reports on health, equity and disparities suggest that African Americans specifically, among other communities of color, are the most vulnerable to effects of social inequality on health (Pérez, et. al, 2014). Higher rates of stress from racism and associated social inequities, including poor quality in housing, unemployment, poverty, neighborhood and community underdevelopment, overcrowding, and violence all result in a sequela of health outcomes in African Americans such as: cancer, obesity, negative mental health outcomes, hypertension, heart disease, physical inactivity, diabetes, and overall premature mortality (Pérez, et. al, 2014). Trauma is increasingly being recognized as not just an important component of effective behavioral health services, but an imperative key to address in overall health and well-being (SAMHSA, 2014). The impact of trauma is not just long-lasting, but it can be both detrimental and fatal to African American men, as well as the African American community.

1.7 Research Question

For this thesis, I explore the possibility that gangsta rap artists were expressing signs of traumatic experiences in their music. I am interested in examining what trauma in the music may reveal about African American culture both at the time and in subsequent years. I am interested in focusing on African American men and the implications for that community.

- 1) What can an analysis of gangsta rap music reveal about the circumstances of urban African American men between 1983 and the mid 1990s?
- 2) Is it possible to learn anything about African American men's mental health from analyzing the specific art form of gangsta rap music? And if so, what?

1.8 Assumptions, Limitations, Scope

As far as limitations in the research, it is accepted that rappers may have exercised a degree of creative license in their lyrics. Literary, and other artistic techniques, may affect the interpretation of the data. The span of data collection affects the information, as well. A great deal can and did change within the context of gangsta rap over the 10-year period. Although this can affect results, the span of data speaks to the continual traumatic experiencing shared among urban African American men in the 'hood. The sample size and pool is also limited. Since only 30 songs were collected from popular sources, this study is just a small step in examining a full-faceted and deep genre. Also, the data may be missing more influential songs that were made popular in the African American community, but were cast aside in prevalent records for the mainstream. The sample also limits the scope of the research. With a sample size of 30 songs, the findings of this research are not meant to be completely generalizable. The study seeks to

explore trauma in the urban African American community to foster grounds for making connections and fostering insight in future research.

1.9 Conclusion

The contents of this chapter introduce the basic ideas behind this work. A brief background, purpose, and significance of the research question begin this chapter. The conceptual framework and terms used to operationalize the research, alongside the assumptions, limitations, and scope of the work are introduced. Continuing on from this introduction, the four following chapters will consist of the literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion. The literature review of chapter two introduces past and present literature related to expression through gangsta rap and possible trauma within the experiences of urban African American men. Chapter three describes the data collection and methodology of this research. The findings and results will be in chapter four. Chapter five will conclude with outcomes and recommendations for further research.

2 GANGSTAFICATION: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the researcher dives into gangsta rap music to assess the possible expression of trauma from the experiences of African American men. The literature review of chapter two introduces past and present literature related to the gangsta rap narrative, re-conceptualizing trauma, and possible trauma within the experiences of urban African American men.

2.1 Exploring Rap Music

Arguably one of the world's most popular music genres, hip hop and rap music have become a staple of expression and cultural transmission that embodies the power to share the

narratives of many voices from the margins of society (Kruse, 2016). In particular, many of the youth interact with hip hop as a familiar media that allows them to feel most free to express themselves (Travis, 2013). Beyond just hip hop music, street theatre, graffiti murals, newsletters, and even video, act as a form of validation and confirmation of value for some (Travis, 2013). A testament to its global popularity, there are varied representations of identity, culture, and coping mechanisms captured within the content of rap music (Travis, 2013). Hip hop and rap music may also voice emancipatory ideologies of social justice, as well as calls for corresponding activism both internationally and within the US (Travis, 2013). Similar to the youth of the Bronx in the 1970s, a number of marginalized communities have utilized hip hop as an avenue to find their voice. Multiple collective identities have excelled within this musical genre that, like other musical forms, has the power to connect groups and foster a unified social identity (Travis, 2013). In fact, Travis (2013) explains that rap music is comprised of community themes including community aspirations, value within community experiences, group-level realities, and community roles. Perhaps, the popularity of hip hop and rap music lies in its connection to the communities and experiences it represents. Therefore, the community that creates this musical artistic expression is as important of a factor to engage with as the music itself.

Hip hop and rap emerged as a party music in the 1970s South Bronx from the de-industrialized meltdown in New York City through an intersection of visionary ingenuity, social alienation, and longing (Malone, 2015). By the late 1980's, hip hop inhabited and embodied regional enclaves around the nation (Grant, 2002). It is known as a cultural music form that attempts to navigate and share the experiences of curtailed opportunity, oppression,

marginalization, and brutality that exist in the history, community, and identity of African American, as well as Caribbean, cultural stories (Malone, 2015). Although the list is not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, Lena (2006) found more than 10 tropes expressed and illustrated in rap music between 1979 and 1995, including gender roles, partying, money, violence, sex, comedy/parody, love, politics, and boasting. From these topics, one begins to witness hip hop's ability to extract tales from many different levels of life to paint a cultural picture of the humanity within the underclass, or silenced voices.

The power of rap music has resonated through multiple generations and forms of expression throughout the years. It is a synthesis of the blues joined with other Black ethnic traditions (Malone, 2015). Hip hop builds upon itself textually and rhythmically within a harmonically simple loop generating a singular space, which it shares with many musical traditions that descended from the African diaspora (Kruse, 2016). African Americans have been producing musical expression out of the belly of their hardship for years. For example, the blues was crafted by some of the most impoverished and marginalized African American people; the underclass of the Mississippi Delta (Malone, 2015). As early as the 1930s, author Wright expounds, "Our hunger for expression finds its form in our wild, raw music, in our invention of slang that winds its way all over America" (quoted in Malone, 2015, p. 307). Here, he states that as descendants of the diaspora, the craving for expression is so strong that it takes shape in uninhibited music and language that, once established, travels the nation. Stemming from Black preaching and rhythmic drumming, rap music studies, salvages, and combines elements of two chief, Black organic traditions: Black music and Black rhetoric (West, 1999). Reminiscent of the

blues, it utilizes these rhetorical strategies to provide a vehicle for the voice of the Black underclass.

As a part of African American musical lineage, rap music suggests connotations to space. It displays a strong association with predominately African American, poor communities within post-industrial American cities (Grant, 2002; Rose, 1994). In Lena's (2006) research article, "Social Context and Musical Content of Rap Music, 1979-1995," sub-genre groups from around the U.S. were designated by various mixtures of four musical attributes: rhythmic style, flow, musical style, and semantic content. A qualitative analysis of lyrics yields strong parallels across sub-genres before 1988 (Lena, 2006). Artists from rock rap to parody rap shared similar slang, lyric emphasis, and even specific events, places, personalities, and concerns (Lena, 2006). This illustrates a strong link between the content of rap music and the context of its production nationwide. The problems and pleasures of Black urban experiences have always been articulated in hip hop music, even across sub-genres (Rose, 1994). Topics spanning from the lyrical competition in MC Shan's "The Bridge" (1987), to the cautionary tales of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde's "Fast Life" (1981), and even the romantic affections in Biggie Small's "Me & My Bitch" (1994) were situated within particular surroundings and shed light on the physical and social deprivation present in the lives of many rappers and their communities (Lena, 2006). Representing urban space, keeping it real, and a ghetto identity were found to be deeply linked in these early rap lyrics (Lena, 2006). These artists were inspired by material and lifestyles within their own environment. Paradoxically, the majority of the literature on hip hop does not concern itself with attempting to empirically locate the reading formations and interpretive communities

represented within rap and its audience (Riley, 2005). This particularly affects the sub-genre of gangsta rap that emerged in Los Angeles, California (Riley, 2005).

2.2 Los Angeles Introduces the Gangsta

It has been suggested that the shift in rap's narrative and tonal style accompanied a geographical re-centering of Los Angeles as the capital of hip hop by 1990 (Grant, 2002). Similar to the conditions of New York, early hip hop in LA emerged from economically and politically neglected neighborhoods, housing predominately African American, Chicano, and Latino communities (Grant, 2002). Gangsta rap is a relatively new genre of music. Emerging between the mid-1970s and 1984, this form of music was a response to the changing economic climate and renewed focus on eradicating crime within African American communities. It emerged as a result of a shift in the American economy that left out the low-skilled workers. Uneducated, young African American men were particularly affected by this change, leading to increased joblessness, family disruption, and poverty in the inner cities. This also proved to widen the gap between and increase migration of middle-class African Americans. Inner-city communities are still plagued with subpar conditions that negatively affect the lifestyle, physical wellness, and mental health of its residents. (Kubrin, 2005). The level of disparity in these neighborhoods surpassed any levels seen in African American middle-class communities and White American communities (Kubrin, 2005).

Corresponding with rap's emphasis on localized identity and roots, LA's musical inspirations and urban structures flipped hip hop culture to form gangsta rap (Grant, 2002). The term gangsta is formed in reference to the LA's historical street gangs (Grant, 2002). Gangs were

active in LA's east side and south-central communities for more than thirty years (Grant, 2002; Chang, 2007; Brightwell, 2012). The violent imagery, lyrical mentions to gang allegations, explicit lyrics, and musical re-creation of drive by shootings and street weaponry stylized gang culture and gangsta rap (Grant, 2002). Kelly (1996) asserts that 'gang bangin' in lyricism functions more like a symbol than an actual central theme within the culture. Rappers may not have participated in all of these deviant acts, but the language of gang bangin' represented the context and neighborhoods rappers affiliated themselves with. Beyond violent behavior, stylized gang culture symbolized street knowledge, rhythmic skill, and lyrical authenticity in early hip hop (Kelly, 1996). Although influenced by stylized gang culture, the gangsta holds a form of identity in some urban African American communities.

2.3 Gangsta Protagonists and Anti-heroics

As hip hop established itself in the national arena, the market affected the artists and musical content (Lena, 2006). Research finds that most charted records owned by independent labels lyrically stressed discourse on local environments and animosity towards corporate music values and production in early rap (Lena, 2006). Some lyrics produced in the major label dominated market mixed the commercial sensation of the "hustler protagonist" with street credibility, which perpetuated and situated the gangsta in African American communities (Lena, 2006). By the late 1980s, musical reflections of the urban African American experience proved to be commercially successful as more artists became committed to merging African American identity, hip hop, and urban roots (Grant, 2002). Hip hop artists began to transform from mere performers to cultural and racial representatives, dubbed for their realism that rested upon African American and urban identifications (Grant, 2002). Moving into the 1990s, inner-city

origins, tales, sounds, and scenes from the ‘hood signified and validated urban identity (Grant, 2002). Blending this with pre-existing associations between African American identity and urban sites, a critical gangsta narrative from the African American, urban aspect of commercial rap contributed to the racialization of Los Angeles (LA) (Grant, 2002).

Gangsta rap is categorized as “hardcore rap,” due to its graphic lyrical depictions of violence and sex that centers the hustler as the featured protagonist (Lena, 2006; Rose, 1994). Scholars such as Malone (2015) and Lena (2006), connect the narrative of gangsta rappers to the African American storytelling traditional employment of the “bad nigger” or “baaadman.” The baaadman, gangsta, and hustler figure dominates, and even victimizes, persons through the use of seduction, intimidation, and force (Lena, 2006). Gangsta figures depict and represent an anti-hero; someone that is in control of others both verbally and physically, which may also encompass pimps, macks, and players (Lena, 2006). Expressed through the Blaxploitation era, performance of the baaadman, or anti-hero, trope was made popular and influential again during the 1970s (Guerrero, 2012). Inhabiting a context where the most oppressed are in power, he becomes the personification of success against all odds (Lena, 2006). Embodying the identity of a saleable, mainstream African American man, the gangsta maintains a comfortable association with material success and commercial culture (Lena, 2006). The gangsta became a symbol of power in the African American community that attracted young men to its unconventional triumph.

A substantial amount of respect is afforded to those that are able to successfully negotiate street life and other challenges; they are elevated to O.G., or original gangsta, status (Lena,

2006). Resembling tenure employment in the workplace, an O.G. is a seasoned role model and worthy mentor that often symbolizes a blueprint for achievement and wisdom for protégés (Lena, 2006).

An O.G. gains respect through their continual triumph over their risky environment and behaviors. The status of O.G. is linked to an assumed culture and lifestyle of struggle that once again emphasizes the localization of the gangsta within an impoverish, oppressed, and marginalized context. In the pursuit of empowerment, gangstas embody and illustrate risky behavior (Lena, 2006). High- risk themes and content reflect behaviors and attitudes that welcome substance abuse, violence, and unhealthy relationships, specifically towards women and girls (Lena, 2006). Risky patterns of behavior can impede pro-social empowerment through the exploitation of other community members and interference with proper judgment (Lena, 2006). Exploitation is just one of the esteem enhancing strategies lyrically depicted in gangsta rap music. A gangsta's desire for empowerment, happiness, respect, control, and a strong sense of self is often attained through materialism and the enactment of risky behaviors (DeGruy, 2017; Lena, 2006). As the gangsta rapper becomes the representation and embodiment of risky behavior in exchange for empowerment, one must wonder how this identity both affected and framed individual and community stress and trauma. What kind of trauma is illustrated in the gangsta narrative, and does it surface itself in the lives of African American men in Los Angeles during this era? How is it connected to other generations that have both preceded and followed it?

2.4 Stress and Trauma

For the purpose of this study, trauma is measured as traumatic life experiences and experience with racial discrimination. As theorized by Lazarus and Folkman, stress is defined as a particularly taxing relationship between individuals and their environment that surpasses one's resources and endangers their well-being (1984). This theory also states that one can be overwhelmed by the occurrence of stressors depending on their view of the threat and the resources available to handle the situation (Bridges, 2011). Stressful situations become traumatic when they overshadow serious injury or death. Even the perception of an event to this magnitude can be traumatizing (Danzer, 2012). Physical or sexual violation, physical injury or harm, as well as witnessing violence, death, and injury of another are all traumatic experiences. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5), which is employed by psychiatrists and psychologists to diagnose behavioral conditions, has expanded the definition of trauma to include vicarious exposure:

Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic event(s); witnessing, in person, the traumatic event(s) as it occurred to others; learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend (in case of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental); or experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (Development Services Group, Inc., 2016, p. 1)

Trauma is characterized by feelings of horror, helplessness, and terror due to the inability to protect against or reverse the harmful experience (Understanding Child Traumatic Stress). It

has been reported that negative mental health outcomes are better predicted by traumatic events experienced during childhood and adolescence compared to traumatic events that occur later in life. Greater effects of trauma occur when multiple traumatic events are experienced, which can be referred to as polyvictimization. Trauma related mental health symptoms during adolescence may increase the risk of future traumatic exposure (Andrews et. al., 2015).

Steele (2010) asserts that being overwhelmed by stressors increases an individual's risk of vulnerability to physical and psychological disorders. Actively deconstructing and dealing with a stressful or traumatic experience, as well as the shame or guilt that may be associated with the experience, can result in intense, sometime unbearable, emotional pain (Held, Owens, & Anderson, 2015). However, individuals that exhibit physiological signs of stress often do not report intensified emotional distress (Ellis, et. al., 2015). They often times misidentify their emotional responses and subconsciously attempt to alleviate their stress by utilizing common coping behaviors (Ellis, et. al., 2015). When coping is maladaptive or avoidant, survivors are unable to reconcile with the experience (McAndrews, et. al., 2016). Judith Herman (2015) states that "when the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery." She goes on, "But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom" (13). Herman (2015) speaks to the often voiceless nature of trauma and the silencing of its survivors into a prison of secrecy. The refusal or inability to verbalize and reconcile with traumatic experiences increases one's risk for future physical and psychological symptoms (An. et. al., 2013).

The severity of any traumatic threat can be too much for the mind and body to process. A traumatic situation can result in overwhelming terror, confusion, and feelings of helplessness

(Danzer, 2012). Threat arouses the sympathetic nervous system by causing a rush of adrenaline and concentration of attention to resolve the situation (Herman, 2015). Threat invokes intense feelings of anger and fear, in addition to possibly altering ordinary perceptions like hunger and fatigue (Herman, 2015). Neurobiologically, trauma overwhelms the emotional regulatory system, which allows individuals to address and interpret every day stimuli in ways that promote emotional regulation (Danzer, 2012). If a threat overwhelms the emotional regulatory system, the mind and body instinctually enter an automatic survival mode in which people become hyperaware, or hypervigilant (Danzer, 2012). Hypervigilance is a high level of arousal that allows one to protect themselves using quick and decisive action (Danzer, 2012). It assists individuals in recognizing subtle changes to their surroundings, including loud noises and speech, or physical proximity (Danzer, 2012; Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Such changes in arousal, emotion, perception, and attention are normal, adaptive reactions to mobilize a person to fight or flee (Herman 2015; Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996).

These high levels of arousal occur in the body for self-protection, but can also lead to health problems if they persist (Danzer, 2012; Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). When neither escape from nor resistance to the threat is possible, the sympathetic nervous system, or the human system of self-defense, becomes disorganized and overwhelmed (Herman, 2015). In this circumstance, each component of the ordinary reaction loses its utility and tends to persist in an exaggerated and altered state after the danger has ended (Herman, 2015). A significant amount of physiological energy, which would normally go into other vital systems, is re-routed by the mind and body to maintain a high level of arousal (Danzer, 2012). Trauma produces profound and long-lasting alteration in survivors' emotions, physiological arousal, memory, and cognition; it may sever normally integrated mental and physical functions (Herman, 2015).

Therefore, a traumatized person may forget an event, experience intense emotions, or find themselves in a constant state of vigilance and irritability without any perceivable reason (Herman, 2015).

2.5 Post-Traumatic Stress Symptomology and Disorder

The fragmentation of an integrated complex system of self-protection is central in the historic observation of post-traumatic stress (Herman, 2015). Individuals that are unable to cope with stress may develop physiological disorders including post-traumatic stress symptomology (PTSS). In fact, the lifetime prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is approximately 8% in the United States (Held, Owens, & Anderson, 2015). However, individuals who habitually participate in psychological avoidance, which includes substance abuse, often battle increased trauma-related guilt and shame (Held, Owens, & Anderson, 2015). Other psychological disorders often co-occur with PTSD, including major depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders (SUDs) (Held, Owens, & Anderson, 2015).

Long-term psychological adjustment to stressful and traumatic events is partly determined by one's coping behaviors. Researchers have found that avoidant coping strategies are a predictor for the development of PTSS and PTSD (An. et. al., 2013). Leiner, Kearns, Jackson, and Astin (2012) define avoidant coping as emotional and cognitive activity oriented away from a threatening situation. The Social Cognitive Processing Model proposes that reconciling the differences between one's view of self and the world prior to and following the trauma is an essential task (McAndrews, et. al., 2016). Actively deconstructing and dealing with

a stressful or traumatic experience, as well as the shame or guilt that may be associated with the experience, can result in intense, sometimes unbearable, emotional pain (Held, Owens, & Anderson, 2015). In an attempt to avoid this pain, avoidant coping is generally practiced to decrease the immediate levels of stress. The practice of avoidant coping may disrupt natural recovery and eventually create an emotional numbness (An. et. al., 2013). By avoiding the emotional and psychological consequences of the trauma, reconciliation of the personal world prior to and post trauma does not occur. A lack of reconciliation can lead to the development of intrusive thoughts. Intrusive thoughts interfere with discovering meaning in the traumatic experience and results in a difficulty regulating negative emotions (McAndrews, et. al., 2016).

Unfortunately, few studies have examined PTSD in the context of racial group status. The few studies that have conducted research on the topic have produced mixed findings. Some research has produced evidence suggesting that higher rates of PTSD may occur in the African American community in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups (Perez, et. al., 2014). Other studies have reported evidence of African Americans being exposed to more severe traumatic experiences than their White counterparts, including exposure to child maltreatment and assaultive violence (Perez, et. al., 2014). Individuals within the African American community also had fewer economic and mental health resources to assist in coping with these traumatic events (Perez, et. al., 2014). Evidence of a high likelihood of traumatic experiences, over representation in lower SES communities, and high levels of stress in traumatized individuals have been reported in this racial group (Perez, et. al., 2014). Due to the high levels of continuous, interlocking forms of stress experienced in some urban contexts, I propose an

analysis of trauma within the African American community that utilized a re-conceptualized form of trauma.

2.6 Re-conceptualizing Trauma

Academic debate has arisen in recent years on the re-conceptualization of trauma (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Since common conceptualizations of trauma are typically decontextualized, tending to focus on environments where safety now exists, broader conceptualizations of trauma are being explored in diverse environments (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Conceptualizations of trauma, stemming from more privileged contexts, often do not consider how trauma manifests in relations to ongoing adversity and inequality in low-income environments (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). This notion of temporary, past trauma exposure leaves many individuals and communities across the world that experience everyday conflict, violence, and trauma out of the conversation (Stevens, et. al., 2013). Trauma re-conceptualization work has been used in contexts like South African apartheid, amongst endemic community violence, civil conflict, as well as within communities of millions of asylum-seekers and refugees (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015; Stevens, et. al., 2013). These survivors are affected by realistic expectations of ongoing danger, often without safe spaces to acquire protection and experience recovery (Stevens, et. al., 2013).

In fact, mental health professionals are often equipped with skills and expertise applicable to post-trauma environments; they are less equipped for contexts where violence and conflict are continuous (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). These environments and contexts are still not safe, in some cases humane, enough for the individual. The PTSD diagnosis

characterized trauma as being in the past (Stevens, et. al., 2013). In the book *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, researchers recite a metaphor likening trauma to the flooding of land (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). When the water covers the land, one cannot know the consequences or damage that will result from the flooding. Here, there are two options when the water recedes. The land reemerges, the pre-flood community reappears, and the damage can be quickly corrected. In another scenario, the flood waters recede and leave lasting damage to the land and community. Within a re-conceptualized notion of trauma, we must ask, “What if the waters do not recede? What if the water level lowers, but never goes away?” Stevens et. al. (2013) accuse the concepts of PTSD (and complex PTSD) of assuming that traumatic exposure is finite and of the past. With trauma conceptualized as a past event, enduring traumatic stress symptoms are considered to be maladaptive “false alarms” that must be re-worked in a comparatively safe, present environment for proper recovery (Stevens, et. al., 2013).

2.7 Layers of Continuous Traumatic Stress

2.7.1 African American Community and Trauma

The effects of trauma in African American communities continually extend across multiple systems and generations (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). This changes their experience with the world and degree of exposure to trauma (Danzer, 2012). Aligning with this idea, the field of Black psychology functions within the premise that African Americans have a different value system and world-view when compared to their white American counterparts (Danzer, 2012). Afrocentric values include direct communication, interdependence with nature and other living things, emotional expression, a deep sense of spirituality, and the expression of self

through music, dance, and other creative arts (Danzer, 2012). Concerning trauma, Black psychology differs from mainstream theories because of its conceptualization without safe spaces to acquire protection and experience recovery (Danzer, 2012). Afrocentric theories expand on the scope of context and environment by including larger systemic forces such as poverty and racism, as well as how these forces increase traumatic risk (Danzer, 2012). A re-conceptualized framework of trauma relates to the idea that different cultures experience the world in diverse ways due to differing world views and value systems, alongside systemic deficiencies.

2.7.2 Continuous Stress

Numerous authors have proposed other models that conceptualize trauma to address its broader ecological and historical impact (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). For the purpose of this study, this research will introduce continuous, collective, and historical trauma forms in relation to African American trauma exposure. The concept of continuous stress originated from the work of mental health professionals that were attempting to provide psychological support for survivors of political violence within a context of unceasing state repression, during the apartheid era of South Africa in the 1980s (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Since the original documentation of the idea, scholars within diverse settings have utilized terms such as continuous trauma, chronic threat, ongoing traumatic stress, continuous threat, and continuous fluctuating conflict to illustrate environments of enduring threat and their psychological impacts (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Stevenson and colleagues (2013) note an interesting, yet speculative, observation concerning descriptive elaborations on continuous traumatic stress's impacts: they appear to cluster in two different formulations of expression. One is characterized

by “externalizing responses,” such as active demonstrations of aggression (Stevens, et. al. 2013). The other embodies more “internalizing responses,” which may include withdrawal, fear, anxiety, and somatization (Stevens, et. al. 2013).

As an alternative to experiencing traumatic events in the past, continuous stress offers another route to describing the psychological impact of existing in a context with the realistic threat of present and future risk (Stevens, et. al. 2013; Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). The term also highlights difficulties in properly addressing past traumatic exposure in relation to accurate evaluation of the potential for current and future harm (Stevens, et. al. 2013). It allows for an alternate vantage point directed toward some of the potential limitations and consequences coupled with current trends in trauma inspired research and practice (Stevens, et. al. 2013). The study of continuous traumatic stress includes the pertinence of current and future contextual dangers to one’s well-being by permitting prospects for an alternative, or complimentary, formulation of trauma exceeding a traditional emphasis on mainly discrete trauma (Stevens, et. al. 2013). Furthermore, a concentration on social contexts in promoting danger counterbalances the historical emphasis on individual, and potentially pathological, reactions to such dangers (Stevens, et. al. 2013). Ultimately, this research adopts a continuous construction of trauma in respect to exposures to violence, conflict, and harm inflicted by humans (Stevens, et. al. 2013; Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Subsequently, intervention practices can also be extended to social fabric initiatives, more consistent with communal peacemaking and building, reparative systems of justice and social redress, as well as a refocusing of this form of trauma to being genuinely psycho-political in nature (Stevens, et. al. 2013). Continuous trauma acknowledges and describes a particular context of traumatization which resonates in many low-income communities (Stevens, et. al. 2013).

2.7.3 Collective Trauma

Another conceptualization of trauma that resonates in at risk communities is collective trauma (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Historically termed “chosen trauma” by scholar Volkan or cultural trauma from Alexander’s sociological perspective (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015), collective trauma was first conceptualized by Erickson in 1976 (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Volkan takes a psychological perspective and incorporates the individual into the large scale societal trauma experienced by the group (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Here, individual victims internalize unprocessed and unresolved traumas; carrying these trauma through life and ultimately transmitting them across generations (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Removing the individual, Alexander focuses on the social construction of collective trauma (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). In this construction, the shared traumatic event leaves emotional residue in and scars on the collective cultural consciousness, which fundamentally affects future identities (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Somewhat engulfing the two, Erikson’s original formation of this trauma emphasizes the unremitting damage to the social fabric of communities after tragedy, as well as the difficulties it creates in the individual healing process (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Erikson acknowledges that although the trauma is experienced collectively, its effects are still present on the individual level. Systemic collective trauma can derive from colonization and oppressive experiences such as the Rwandan genocide, the Nazi Holocaust, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and resulting enslavement, and the Indian Ocean tsunami (Stevens, et. al. 2013; Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Scholars have even begun to examine collective trauma in relation to national terror (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017).

Acknowledging the current and historical political context is essential when considering any specific collective traumatic event (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Possick and colleagues surmise that in some sense collective trauma is always complex. Trauma within a collective involves interactions among and between many levels of the ecosystems or culture, community, family, and self (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Prolonged periods of exposures to trauma, from weeks to decades, within the home insert an additional element of complexity in collective traumas (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Post-traumatic reactions at multiple ecosystem levels is a principal feature of collective trauma (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017).

In past conceptualizations, concentric circles of vulnerability have been used to represent and illustrate multiple ecosystem levels in which individuals directly affected, or those closest to them, were placed at the center of the circle (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Incorporating witnesses of trauma, like close friends and relatives, is imperative, especially when we consider vicarious trauma in a community context. The topic of vicarious trauma is discussed from a personal perspective in McPhillips' (2017) work. We are reminded that, whether we engage and experience guilt, grief, and fury or shut down and dissociate, no one is immune to vicarious trauma. Whether as a conscious member or witness, entering a meaningful collective event will invoke some level of vicarious trauma that will be threatening and painful (McPhillips, 2017). The immersion into objectification or "otherness" of particular individuals and groups will be a constant risk (McPhillips, 2017). Different scholars have situated these concentric circles in varying formations. Another model was formulated that included only three concentric circles of vulnerability: social vulnerability, physical vulnerability, and risk connected to prior experiences (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). Finally, one paradigm utilizes an all-encompassing circle

that includes the general context of the traumatic event and multiple elements that the whole community was exposed to (Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017).

Psychoanalytical literature has thoroughly discussed the particularities of individual trauma, but unfortunately collective trauma is much less explored and understood (McPhillips, 2017; Possick, Shapira, & Shalman, 2017). McPhillips (2017) attests that it is clear that whole communities suffer from a multitude of traumatic consequences. She demonstrates this in her research on the Royal Commission hearings concerning allegations of child sexual abuse over decades by Catholic clerical officials in Victoria, Australia. Within the article, she recounts her friend, a victim, shares with her that the suburbs surrounding Marist College, where the high school ages boys in his area were abused, are “a disaster area” filled with traumatized families where abuse has been internalized and become intergenerational. Newcastle is infamous for its high levels of domestic violence, substance abuse, and addiction problems (McPhillips, 2017). To this McPhillips states, “...and the causes of this now made deep sense to me” (178). In her opinion there is little doubt the impact of the abuse on these adolescent boys has had major, documented consequences for the community, such as: career interruption, financial ruin, dependence on alcohol and drugs, and relationship dysfunction.

2.7.4 Historical Trauma

Lastly, historical trauma (HT) conceptualizes the intergenerational traumatic consequences witnessed within disadvantaged communities. The definition describes historical trauma as cumulative psychological and emotional injuries that exist across generations (Stevens, et. al. 2013). These injuries lead to unresolved trauma that develops into grief and consequently affect the lives of survivors and future generations (Grayshield, et. al., 2015). It can be

characterized as patterns of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that negatively impact the psychological, social, and physical well-being of a person or group in successive generations (Grayshield, et. al., (2015). Collective traumatic experiences, such as the Middle Passage and the removal of Native American people, take shape as the root of these injuries (Stevens, et. al. 2013). Likened to cultural beliefs, knowledge, and values, collective historical trauma is passed down through generations and becomes normalized. It becomes implanted in the cultural memory and disseminates through subsequent generations (Stevens, et. al. 2013). In Nutton and Fast's (2015) research on the colonization of Native American people, the authors utilize the term historic trauma transmission to conceptualize the transgenerational context and consequences of colonialism, or what they referred to as the Big Event. Historical trauma transmission defines a cluster of traumatic events that result in a catastrophic collapse of social functioning (Nutton & Fast, 2015).

In recent years, scholars have begun taking interest in historic intergenerational trauma. Sotero (2006) offers a model of historical trauma from a public health perspective. This model consists of four elements: (i) overwhelming physical and psychological violence, (ii) segregation and/or displacement, (iii) economic deprivation, and (iv) cultural dispossession (Sotero, 2006). Scholars have crafted a model that extends to levels of individual, family, and community, as well as suggested diagnostic measures for HT (Nutton & Fast, 2015). Kirmayer and colleagues (2014) reference a similar conceptualization referred to as the "Four C's": (i) Colonial injury by European settlers; (ii) collective experience of injury by the community that alters ideals, interactions, and identities; (iii) cumulative effects as the consequences of subjugation, marginalization, and oppression due to settler societies' historical and continual adverse policies and practices; lastly, the (iv) cross-generational impacts of injuries leave legacies of vulnerability

and risk to be inherited from ancestors to descendants incessantly until healing disrupts these detrimental cycles. This model of HT captures the collective oppression experienced by generations, associates past traumatic events with current risks to health and wellbeing, and also communicates the use of resiliency and healing to alleviate the negative effects of colonialization and oppression over generations.

The study of historical trauma has been further conceptualized by the development of an empirically measureable construct to assess historical loss and the emotional stress accompanying it, in order to assist in validating its impact (Grayshield, et. al, 2015). For instance, a correlation has been identified between HT and PTSD symptoms, substance use, and depression in recent research that utilizes the historical loss scale (Grayshield, et. al, 2015). In their work with Native American elders, Grayshield and colleagues' (2015) four themes of HT's impact surfaced: a) substance abuse, including drugs, alcohol, and food; b) disharmony within the community; c) loss of language and culture; and d) misuse of technology among younger generations. All of the participants associated historically traumatic experiences with modern individual and community troubles, as well as the intergenerational transmission of traumatic symptomology (Grayshield, et. al, 2015). Problems with anger and depression were also noted (Grayshield, et. al, 2015).

Additional trauma would also increase symptom complexity amidst the generational progression of collective and historical trauma (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). In comparison to discrete incidents of trauma, environments of ongoing danger, violence, and trauma may manifest in notably different and significantly more severe affects over generations (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). For example, Abrams (2011) goes beyond only Apartheid to South Africa's

350-year history, which Benjamin and Carolissen (2015) assert is “characterized by a repetition of violence, brutality, oppression, and injustice” (416). The unprocessed trauma is often communicated from one generation to the next through repetitive trauma, avoidance, and silence. Chronic somatic illness has been highlighted as a result of this unprocessed and ongoing trauma (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). An association between the two is reflected in the state of physical health of multiple affected populations with high rates of hypertension, gastrointestinal problems, diabetes, headaches, and other illnesses (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015).

Beyond the systemic effects of transgenerational trauma that can be seen somatically, cumulative historical trauma also has negative effects on attachment relationships (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Parents, as survivors of ongoing high levels of distress and trauma themselves, are less capable to deliver proper nurture and care for their children (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Children growing up in contexts defined by violent behavior and poor attachment relationships may internalize the use of violence as common place interaction and accepted behavior as the primary strategy for conflict resolution (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). To adequately explore how discrimination and victimization by an unfamiliar stranger or group could directly inform the transformation of the victim into a perpetrator, one can look towards mimetic theory (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015).

When violent behavior is demonstrated by perpetrators in both the community and family, mimetic theory offers that this is where children learn this behavior (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). They will mimic persons or groups in power, whether they maintain distal or proximal relationships with the victims (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). The results of this cyclical trauma have been devastating in communities, manufacturing aggression, apathy, a

culture of marginalization, belittling of the trauma, and loss of trust. In a context where trust is never learned due to parents' hindered ability to deliver a nurturing environment spawning healthy attachment, there was little space for the rebuilding of trust after repeated trauma over the lifespan (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). This generally pertains to everyone in the community, even friends and family members (Smith & Patton, 2016). In a violent urban context, witnessing family and friends being killed sends a painfully obvious message to young people that everyone is a potential threat to emotional and physical safety; therefore, no one can be trusted (Smith & Patton, 2016).

2.7.5 Insidious Trauma and Microaggressions

Innate within certain formulations of collective and historical trauma, specifically that the African-American experience, is insidious trauma, commonly referred to as microaggressions and often characterized by racial discriminations (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Racial discrimination is the physical, or behavioral, manifestation of racism. Usually on an interpersonal level, racial discrimination is comparable to negative life occurrences and is commonly experienced by ethnic and racial minorities, particularly during early adulthood (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016). Bridges (2011) defines racism as the behaviors and activities individuals who categorize themselves as White engaged in to suppress, oppress, and maintain global power. These activities can be witnessed in nine areas: economics, religion, education, law, entertainment, war, sex, labor, and politics. Polanco-Roman, Danies, and Anglin (2016) state that there is a well-documented relationship between racial discrimination and negative mental-health that may be associated to both the experience and the coping behavior

utilized in response to the stress (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015; Lowe, Okubu, & Reilly, 2012).

In comparison to overt acts of prejudice, or racial macroaggressions, racially discriminatory microaggressions are a covert display of unjust treatment based on one's race. Scholars have suggested that it may be better to conceptualize racial discrimination as a race-based traumatic stressor instead of a benign negative experience (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016). Victims of racial discrimination may perceive the behaviors as threatening to their safety and integrity. These experiences may elicit psychological and emotional injury that negatively affects mental health (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016). Since they are often perceived as negative, repeated, ambiguous, unexpected, and out of one's control, these injuries can yield traumatic stress (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016). Victims have been noted to be plagued with vivid re-experiencing triggered by both observing and encountering related situation (Lowe, Okubu, & Reilly, 2012). Other observed reactions include avoidance of people or places related to the incident, avoiding thoughts of the event, detachment, inability to recall aspects of the experience, anger, hypervigilance, and estrangement from others (Lowe, Okubu, & Reilly, 2012). Confronting racial discrimination during emerging adulthood is exceptionally challenging for African American males seeking to actively locate and/or construct their identity as well as conceptualize self-definitions of race (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015).

Concurrent with their oppressed position in society, marginalized communities experienced continual, cumulative stress, such as the harmful effects of harassment or profuse exposure to stereotypical jokes or beliefs about their ethnic group (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). For these reasons, insidious trauma suggests that decontextualizing trauma is insufficient

in conceptualizing trauma, because it does not account for daily experiences of oppressed individuals and communities (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Continuous interaction with insidious trauma progressively erodes sense of self, creating feelings of disconnection, alienation, then ultimately reducing resiliency, increasing risk, and reinforcing violent behavior (Sue et al., 2007). Systemic white racism fosters socioenvironmental contexts that intensify rates of social problems that may be either traumatic in nature or traumatic risk factors. In one example, Danzer (2012) noted the financially-related stress experienced by African American inner-city families that continued to be discriminated against in education and employment. This stress also contributes to family violence (Danzer, 2012). In 2000, urban planners' research on American inner-city communities discovered that a high concentrations of the underclass in any one location inevitably resulted in rising levels of these social problems (Danzer, 2012). The systemic structure and institutionalized conditions of urban inner-city Black communities proliferates discriminatory socio-environments. Research conducted by Grogan and Proscios (2000) supports the position of multiple Afro-centric theories that suggest that White racism fulfills the criteria of trauma for urban, lower-class African-Americans. The usefulness of insidious trauma lies in its integration of the influence of the culture and history of a society as it pertains to the experiencing of trauma in the present.

2.8 Intersectionality within Trauma

Although intersectionality has historically been associated with Black women's experiences, literature focusing on intersectionality within African American men's experiences has arisen (Bowleg, et. at., 2016). At the intersection of African American men's social identity

lays a juxtaposition of oppression and privilege (Bowleg, et. at., 2016). Although they are privileged by their male gender, African American men are oppressed through their race (Bowleg, et. at., 2016). In the case of many urban African American men, class intersects as another form of repression. For these men, gender, race, and class mutually construct psychosocial, structural, and health outcomes within their intersection with other social identities. With such a complex network of interlocking identities, the mental health of urban African American men becomes substantially more layered and complex.

African American men must cope with the reality of their social identity compounded by racism, and its associated stressors, within the United States for the betterment of their overall health. Although it is understudied, racism is harmful to those that it attacks. It takes a major toll on its victims whether it is an isolated incident or a collection of microaggressions accumulated over a lifespan (Lowe, Okubo & Reilly, 2012). Racism and discrimination can have lasting effects on one's psychological and physiological well-being including, PTSD, major depression, and low self-esteem (Lowe, Okubo & Reilly, 2012). Lower life satisfaction, in addition to symptoms of trauma, helplessness, and loss have been associated with chronic exposure to racism (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). Racism is also linked to many stress related diseases including cancer, coronary heart disease, cirrhosis of the liver, and hypertension (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). With such pronounced and grave effects of racism and its implications on stress and coping, the need for increased research on the topic is immense (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). Evidence shows that racist events may trigger strong negative emotion. Individuals that experience these negative emotions demonstrate characteristics of racism-based trauma, similar to the classical symptoms of trauma (Lowe, Okubo & Reilly, 2012).

High degrees of societal conflict can create intense tribulations within the experiences of African American men. African American men have faced historical attacks on their masculinity such as castration, lynching, police brutality and educational tracking due to their race and ethnic background (Stevenson, 2002). Due to their continued status as marginalized members of American society, Phinney, Lockner, and Murphy (1990) suggest that African American men must still resolve two primary conflicts with the society dictated by their race. These men are challenged with answering the society's prejudicial attitudes towards them, as well as adapting to two sets of cultural values; the Eurocentric values they are forced to assimilate to and their own cultural values. (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015).

Prior research suggests that stress and coping are socially patterned and contextual phenomena. These phenomena are prompted by sociocultural and economic factors and frameworks (Ellis, et. al., 2015). The personal meaning and significance of a stressor represents one's cognitive appraisal of the experience. Individual internal and external resources, as well as cognitive appraisals of the stressful experience, are connected to specific stressors and coping responses. An example of internal resources includes individual factors such as personality traits, social class, racial identity, and cultural beliefs. External factors can be classified as work relationships, familial relationships, church affiliations, and social ties. Incorporating all of this information, adaptive or maladaptive outcomes to coping responses are created by the combination of stressors, cognitive appraisal of the stressor, and one's internal and external resources. All of these factors combine to create a sense of stress or trauma within an individual and their community (Bridges, 2011). Therefore, to accurately assess the integration and practice of trauma in the lives of African American men, one must take into concern both the context and identity of the survivor.

Trauma interacts with the intersectional levels of identity for African American men. In alignment with this research, race and gender must be acknowledged when participating in discourse on the African American man. As previously explained, race delicately intertwines with a man's trauma, but masculinity does as well (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). In fact, racial identity can be an additional coping resource for ethnic groups, but the hyper-masculine identity of African American males may negate the positive coping benefits of racial identity (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). Commonly, the standard of masculinity is related to achievements associated with the hegemonic Eurocentric male standard of success (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). Now, the literature considers masculine identity development to be specific to the individual and the context of development (Henfield, 2012; Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). An emphasis has been placed on the context in which associations between individual conceptions of experiences and individual characteristics occur. Most masculinity literature highlights the individual characteristics of race, sexuality, generation, and social class (Henfield, 2012; Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2015). Due to their history of oppression associated with multiple characteristics of their identity, especially race and gender, African American males conceptualize masculinity differently (Henfield, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to utilize a framework and re-conceptualization of trauma that considers both identity and societal factors.

3 METHODOLOGY

Utilizing gangsta rap lyrics, this research seeks to understand more about the mental health of African American men in Los Angeles, California from 1983 to 1993 through the lens of trauma. In particular, this qualitative research will work to interpret the context, consequences, and even coping mechanisms among men in this urban community. Going

beyond objective and media interpretations, this research is based on the descriptions, metaphors, and narratives of African American men that are localized within this particular area and boast their connection to the community during this time period. The voices and expressions of gangsta rappers provide a more authentic and intimate interpretation of trauma within their personal lives, ecosystem, and mental state. I believe that this interdisciplinary study can provide more clarity and insight into the experiences of African American men in Los Angeles during the mid 1980s and into the 1990s. This study critically analyzes the words and actions of African American male artists. This research gives African American men a tool to analyze their creative expressions and experiences from a psychoanalytical lens. Also, it allows counselors, mentors, teachers, and others that work and live closely with African American men to consider a very intimate part of the African American men experience, both past and present, through creative expressions and cultural tropes.

With the purpose of conducting an exploratory interpretive study of gangsta rap music, a phenomenological qualitative research design is employed and described in this chapter. This methodology will begin with an explanation and justification of a phenomenological design and theory for this research. Details pertaining to how the song lyrics were chosen to be a part of the data set and the criteria for analysis follows. Next, this chapter discusses the reliability and validity of the data analysis. The limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and researcher bias are also addressed.

3.1 Phenomenological Inquiry

To adequately capture the aims of this study, researchers will use a phenomenological approach to the research. When describing the phenomenological study, Creswell (2013) reports a “use of systematic data analysis procedures of significant statements, meanings, themes, and exhaustive descriptions” (89). The significant statements, meanings, themes, and exhaustive descriptions are used to articulate the essence of an experience from the perspective of multiple individuals and their realities. Oftentimes, researchers will take a biographical approach to research that focuses on one individual to examine a particular reality. Conversations and stories pertaining to the individual’s recollection of a specific event was collected as data. This particular biographical form of research could have been a viable method for this topic as well. Although narrative research can involve multiple participants, the focus of the data collected is always on the individual; which is contrary to the proposed goal of this research. Creswell proposes that forms of narrative research, “may not contain the strong cultural issues of metaphors of self and self-image of cultural groups...” (87). Utilizing this phenomenological methodology, the researcher aims to collect significant data to analyze, and possibly connect, the opinions on and relationships between trauma, African American men, and gangsta rap. Through the use of lyrics and context, themes and meanings was collected to illustrate the experience from different realities.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)

An ecological framework seems to be the most effective for the evaluation of development within African American men’s community due to their intersectional identity. An

ecological perspective presumes that human behavior is the product of individual interactions between different aspects of ecosystems, or different personal environments (Henfield, 2012). Originally formulated by Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, the Ecological Systems Theory is used to rationalize how the intrinsic qualities of a child and his environment interact to impact how he will develop and grow (Christensen, 2016). Bronfenbrenner emphasized the importance of examining a child in the context of multiple environments, also known as ecological systems in the effort to comprehend his development (Christensen, 2016). Developed by Spencer in 1995, the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) expands upon Bronfenbrenner and stems from the fields of sociology, human development and psychology (Smith & Patton, 2016). The concept is empirically established on the developmental experiences of ethnic youth and consists of five interconnected components: (a) risk contributors, (b) stress engagement, (c) reactive coping strategies, (d) emergent identities, and (e) coping outcomes. Using these components, African American men establish meaning within, and possibly resolve, stressful situations (Smith & Patton, 2016). These factors are important in understanding the environment, mental state, and resiliency of this section of the population.

3.2.2 Intersectionality

As a theoretical framework originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw rooted within Black feminist scholarship, intersectionality asserts that one's social identity is not additive nor independent, but compounded and mutually integral (Bowleg, et. at., 2016). These multiple social identities, such as gender, socioeconomic status (SES), race, disability, and sexual orientation, intersect as systemic structures of dominance affecting those with less power

(Bowleg, et. at., 2016). These layers of identity overlap on an individual micro level producing these interlocking systems of oppression; sexism, racism, privilege, classism, and heterosexism (Bowleg, et. at., 2016). The different layers of intersecting identity work together within the experiences of African American men as moderators of mental health and trauma interaction.

3.3 Design

This research study has a non-experimental design. This design was conducted without random assignment or control groups. This study seeks to analyze a relationship between trauma within the personal lives, ecosystem, and mental states of African American gangsta rappers during the period of 1983 to 1993. Acting as a historical, ethnographic study that utilizes the voices and experiences of high profile members of the African American community, this research draws on past situations and language to examine the traumatic circumstances of urban African American men during this decade. This music is collected as data to incorporate voices from the community into the discussion on gangsta rap and mental health. Experience with trauma, which includes perceived racial discrimination, cultural wounds, gender, race, and coping style are all independent variables. Researchers cannot manipulate traumatic events, race, gender, or the coping style habitually practiced by gangsta rappers; therefore, a non-experimental method can best capture the desired data. As a non-experimental design, this research does not intend to prove a cause and effect relationship with any of the independent variables. The purpose of this research is to collect information for the field that can be further explored and supplemented by future research.

3.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to explore gangsta rap as a form of connection to and expression of the contextual trauma experienced by inner-city African American men. Little is known about African American men's experiences, mental health status, or the connections to be made from their past and for the future. For this work, the researcher explored the possibility that gangsta rap artist express signs of mental health in their music. The researcher is interested in examining what mental health status and trauma in the music may reveal about African American culture both at the time and in subsequent years. This research focusing on African American men and the implications for that community in relation to trauma.

- 1) What can an analysis of gangsta rap music reveal about the circumstances of African American men between 1983 and the mid 1990s?
- 2) Is it possible to learn anything about African American men's mental health from analyzing the specific art form of gangsta rap music? And if so, what?

3.5 Data Collection

The data set consists of 30 songs from gangsta rap artists between the years of 1983 and 1993. The songs were obtained by browsing online content such as websites, search engines, digital applications, and discovering lists or links. Local and satellite radio stations were also monitor for songs that coincided with the gangsta rap label, themes, artists, and the overall anti-hero trope. Songs pertaining to the everyday interactions between the protagonist and the community were utilized in the data set. Lyrics were then acquired from online or transcribed before being evaluated for accuracy and stored in a digital data file. For this data set, only three

songs are feature from any particular gangsta rapper in the attempt to avoid over-representation or skewed data.

3.6 Data Analysis

Lyrics of the sampled songs were explored using the qualitative research computer analyzing software, Dedoose. This data analysis process is loosely based on methodology employed by Jason, William, and Shock's (2013) research on the gendering among truck driving songs. The work of gangsta rappers was examined for semblances of the characteristics and consequences of the levels of trauma previously distinguished in Chapter 2. In the first round of analysis, nuanced lyrical themes were generated and organized into representative categories. Themes that arose were documented and compared. These initial codes were then amassed into clusters of over-arching schemata. Due to the small sample size, a theme was considered significant when the researcher witnesses 10 instances or references in the data. For saturation, 20 documented references were considered significant, since that accounts for more than half of the sample size.

3.7 Reliability, Validity, and Researcher Bias

This research has been peer-reviewed in the attempted to increase the reliability and validity. Codes were reviewed by peers for accuracy and consistency. The lyrics were also including in the review process to ensure that all information was properly interpreted. Research was also collected on the history, policies, contexts and environments that produced the lyrics to gain better understanding of this artistic expression, as well as situate it within the African

American narrative. These techniques also worked as tools to mitigate researcher bias that may have surfaced. Although I acknowledge the inevitability of bias in research, I choose to confront that bias in the creation of this work.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter characterized the methodology of the research study. A justification for the use of phenomenological qualitative research to explore the expression of mental health and trauma within gangsta rap music is highlighted in this chapter. The criteria utilized to find and select the data collected from song lyrics is also described. Limitations, as well as delimitations and scope, are given to inspire ideas for further research. Finally, the reliability, validity, and researcher's bias are addressed.

4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In the following chapter, detailed information pertaining to the workings of this research's exploration into gangsta rap music will be reported. Themes related to the lyrical expression of the speaker in relation to his ecosystem and layers of being are evaluated as a window into intersectional, phenomenological, and possibly traumatic experiencing. Utilizing close reading and two coding cycles, the creation, evaluation, and re-structuring of the information into valuable descriptors of experience will be reported. This chapter presents the major categories and patterns of information discovered within the lyrics of the songs. These findings are interpreted within the context of an intersectional experience and analyzed through the lens of re-conceptualized, or continuous collective trauma.

4.1 Data Analysis

With the purpose of examining what traumatic expressions in gangsta rap music may reveal about African American culture both at the time and in subsequent years, the researcher will be focusing her analysis of the lyrics on two research questions. First, what can an analysis of gangsta rap music reveal about the circumstances of urban African American men between 1983 and 1993? As well as, is it possible to learn anything about African American men's mental health from analyzing the specific art form of gangsta rap music? And if so, what? To begin the data collection process, the researcher studied and pinpointed gangsta rap artists that were either from or adopted Los Angeles, California as their homes and primary place of production. After collecting a range of artists from the area, songs and albums released from particular artists between 1983 and 1993 were examined for relevance to this project. Songs with detailed lyrics

pertaining to common lifestyle interactions and relations were specified. No skit tracks were utilized in this data set. Amongst the songs examined, the lyrics of 40 tracks were selected from various artists and compiled.

Once 40 gangsta rap songs were compiled, the researcher completed an initial reading to grasp overarching idea and theme behind each song. Tracks detailing the everyday happenings of the protagonist involving a variety of interactions with the environment and community were favored. Of those 40 compiled tracks, 30 songs were selected for further exploration (See Appendix A). To increase variation and enable different voices in the data set, no more than four songs per artist were included in the final data set. From these 30 songs, 10 songs were randomly selected for close reading (See Appendix B). Although the songs were randomly selected, each artist or group was only allotted one song in the pool of 10. For the close reading, songs were examined line by line for emerging themes related to the protagonists' various layers of being and interaction with their ecosystem, including but not limited to self-concept, family, policing, and violence. All of this information was recorded in an Excel workbook in which each song was represented by its own page. The line-by-line close reading of the lyrics allowed the researcher to examine and consider the words, metaphors, colloquial expressions, and intercommunal relations of Los Angeles neighborhoods.

The line-by-line close reading of 10 songs from the initial data set of 30 constituted the first cycle of coding. Saldaña (2013) explains this second order coding strategy as a path to move from codes to categories, themes, and concepts, ultimately connecting us to theory. After closely reading the 10 songs, a code book was produced to both explain the emerging ideas in greater

detail and cluster the topics by theme. At this second level of coding, these clusters were absorbed and sorted into 10 categories, some with subsets allowing more focused coding within the categories. All 44 categories and subsets were then inputted into the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose, alongside the 30 songs of the initial data set to be coded.

Although the software analysis yielded a profuse amount of information, this research will focus on the occurrences and contexts relating to the initial themes and intersectional experiences of gangsta culture. Beginning the axial coding process, codes were divided into categories by three dimensions of experience, individual, environmental, and intersectional. Individual experiencing categories pertain to one's distinct identity and emotions. Within the themes constructed as templates for exploration from the initial round of coding, subcategories such as personal drug use, mental haunting, self-concept, and facing own death were included in the dimension of individual experiencing. Subcategories that were applied to the environmental experiencing dimension involved codes related to layers of the ecosystem such as inter-communal relations, state/national intervention, and others drug use. Supporting the intersectional framework at work in this research, some subcategories detailed intersectional experiences that characterize an overlap between the individual and their environment. In this dimension, the individual is affecting the environment as the environment is affecting the individual.

In total, there are 1,352 code occurrences. When the subcategories were divided into dimensions of experiencing, the number of occurrences were added together. Within the lyrics, individual experiencing has the least amount of references ($n = 311$), representing 23% of the

data set. References to intersectional experiencing (n = 376) made up 28% of the codes occurrences. The remaining 49% of the data set consists of references to environmental experiencing described by the artists. Categories represented in this dimension include condition, state/national intervention, drugs, family, location, racial narrative, and violence. The category with the most occurrences represented in the environmental dimension are violence (n = 243). Violence represented in the lyrics is coded into five subcategories detailing the direction, tools, and personal consequence of the violence. This code is explored further through the lens of re-conceptualized trauma to connect this analysis to theory.

4.2 Violence

Dem wonder why me violent and no really understand

For de reason why me take me law in me own hand

Me not out for peace and me not Rodney King

De gun goes click, me gun goes bang

“The Day The Niggaz Took Over”

Dr. Dre (1992, track 4)

One of the largest critiques of gangsta rap music is the level and detail of violence referenced within the lyrics. As Daz Dillinger indicates, the many occurrences of violence lyrics in the data set inspired wonder. What made violence such an accepted avenue of expression in Los Angeles and other high risk cultural environments? Utilizing further research, one can see that level of disparity in these neighborhoods surpassed levels seen in black middle-class communities and white communities (Kubrin, 2005). A lack of recognition and assistance from

the larger society leaves inhabitants feeling isolated and searching for justice in a justice-less society (Kubrin, 2005). Daz Dillinger alludes to this reasoning and desire to take the law into his own hands without a desire for peace or the compliance of other institutionally abused African American men, such as Rodney King. In an attempt to obtain and maintain control in this environment of disparity, a new code of behavior, or street code, was ascribed (Kubrin, 2005). A street code provides a principle of governing for interpersonal public behavior similar to that explained in Benjamin and Carolissen's (2015) article that examines the response to the trauma of oppression within marginalized societies. In the song "Pops was a Rolla," LV of South Central Cartel illustrates how the street code became a model of behavior transferred from one generation to the next.

I heard pops used to hang out
 On the corner gettin drunk and beatin niggas' brains out
 I got a name to uphold, so I hit the streets
 Broke as hell to take what belongs to me
 "Pops was a Rolla"
 South Central Cartel (1992, track 10)

As young men construct their identity, prominent men in their lives, like fathers, uncles, and bothers, serve as models. Young men inherit constructed ideas of identity performance. Therefore, as the men in their lives adhere to the street code, they inherently teach this behavior to boys in their community.

This street code is a result of collective continuous trauma that has been normalized and inherited from generation to generation, creating boundaries in both the community and masculine ideals. Baron (2017) suggests that the street code has a stronger relationship with violence in environments where individuals report higher levels of self-centeredness, anger, and nerve, or fearlessness. Less familiarity with parental warmth coupled with lengthier periods of homelessness, more involvement with physical abuse and additional negative orientations toward the police also reported a strong relationship with violence in context (Baron, 2017). The ideal behavioral street code encompasses the need to display self-reliance in settling disputes, to overtly express violence to evade further victimization, and to punish disrespect, with the goal of maintaining a frightening, formidable, or hard reputation (Bennett & Brookman, 2011). Benjamin and Carolissen (2015) explain that social defenses such as denial, detachment, anxiety, depersonalization, and avoidance become embedded in culture through this practice of normalizing hard, or authentic, behavior. These defenses become embedded in the society as normative culture which is inherited by the next generation. The performance of authentic masculinity is equated to hardened, hyper-masculine behavior policed by the boundaries of the street code in this data. As represented in the data set, the reputation of being hard, upheld by values of the street code, is expressed as a part of many African American men's ideal, authentic masculinity. In fact, authenticity co-occurs with both self-concept (n = 19) and violence (n = 14). LV tells of a protagonist that has a desire to model stories of his father's strict adherence to the authenticity of the code, as well as the notoriety that it brings. As violence becomes an accepted performance passed down over generations, violence is normalized and acknowledged as a continuous part of life. In an excerpt from the data set, Ice-T clearly correlates life with violence, relinquishing peace as an option in the protagonist's reality.

Any problem I got I just put my fist in

My life is violent but violent is life

Peace is a dream, reality is a knife

“Colors” Ice-T

Ice-T & Afrika Islam (1988, track B)

Ice T reiterates the complexities of living within a context of continuous violence and interactions with traumatic stress or injury. The life of a gangsta is expressed as violent. Problems are often resolved with violence, while peace is just a dream. Living in a world of such intense trauma and violence can leave young men searching for their identity and meaning in life (Smith & Patton, 2016). Like all youth, young black men search for their identity in the world around them (Henfield, 2012; Riley, 2005). Unfortunately, with such high levels of trauma, families possess poor attachment relationships and violent behavior is accepted through the mimetic theory, or modeling by members of the family or community (Craig & Sprang, 2007). With such an intense crack down on criminal activity, residents of these impoverished inner-city communities have become targets of police brutality (Smith & Patton, 2016). Coming as no surprise, this has led to increased tension between and distrust of governing authority (Smith & Patton, 2016). Violent behavior becomes a part of the protocol and an identity young men associate with, and it is utilized as a tool for peer group acceptance (Kubrin, 2005).

4.3 Facing Own Death

As I look up at the sky

My mind starts tripping, a tear drops my eye
 My body temperature falls
 I'm shaking and they breaking trying to save the Dogg
 Pumping on my chest and I'm screaming
 I stop breathing, damn I see demons
 Dear God, I wonder can you save me
 I can't die my boo boo's bout to have my baby
 I think it's too late for praying, hold up
 A voice spoke to me and it slowly started saying
 (Bring your lifestyle to me, I'll make it better)
 How long will I live? (Eternal life and forever)
 And will I be the G that I was?
 (I'll make your life better than you can imagine or even dreamed of
 So relax your soul, let me take control
 Close your eyes my son) my eyes are closed
 "Murder was the Case" Snoop Dogg
 Broadus (1993, track 8)

One of the more fascinating topics involving continuous states of trauma and violence in Los Angeles is the need for residents to accept and cope with the possibility of their own death. Snoop Dogg begins "Murder was the Case" by painting a very detailed, intimate picture of the death of a gangsta. Within the data set, there are over 20 instances of protagonists explicitly facing and discussing the possibility or reality of their own death, and concerns with the afterlife.

Inner-city communities are plagued with sub-par conditions that negatively affect the lifestyle, physical wellness, and mental health of their residents. Some categorize gangsta rap as “ghettocentric” (Kubrin, 2005). It is the “construction of the ghetto as a living nightmare and gangstas as products of that nightmare” (Kubrin, 2005). Although stereotypical assumptions say gangsta rap praises the ghetto, many rappers, like Too \$hort, speak rather negatively about the experience:

Even though the streets are bumpy, lights burned out

Dope fiends die with a pipe in their mouth

Old school buddies not doing it right

Every day it's the same and it's the same every night

I wouldn't shoot you bro but I'd shoot that fool

If he played me close and tried to test my cool

Every day I wonder just how I'll die

Only thing I know is how to survive

There's only one rule in the real world

And that's to take care of you

“The Ghetto” Too \$hort

Shaw (1990, track 3)

As Too \$hort discusses the condition of the streets, friends, and interactions of a particular neighborhood, he reminds us of the inconsistent security of the streets. Here, the protagonist references a need to protect himself by shooting any adversary that attempts to disrespect or harm him. Professing “every day it's the same and it's the same every night,” he

shares the continuous nature of these conditions that cause him to wonder about his safety every day. Even the perception of an event to this magnitude can be traumatizing (Danzer, 2012). Since stressful situations become traumatic when they impend serious injury or death, the protagonist must live and perform within the context of trauma, knowing that their death is both unpredictable and very likely.

Gangsta rappers describe coping with such intense levels of personal trauma in many ways. Over and over again, rappers tell of being tired of and overwhelmed by their experiences, anxiety, and mindset towards life (“Mind Playin Tricks on Me”, “Streetz are Deathrow”, etc.). One very creative form of coping with their environment is the acceptance of mental illness or distortion. Rappers such as 2Pac and Bushwick Bill claimed to be labeled as crazy by their community. The protagonists in 2 Pac’s “Streetz are Deathrow” acknowledges other’s perceptions of him as a lunatic and relates it to his fearlessness.

I'm tired of being a nice guy

I've been poor all my life, but don't know quite why

So they label me a lunatic

Could care less death or success

Is what I quest cause I'm fearless

Now the streets are deathrow

“Streetz are Deathrow” 2Pac

Shakur (1993, track 13)

The protagonist in this lyric is labeled as crazy due to his lack of fear and choice to walk away from the life of a nice guy. Nice guys have little place or power in contexts of conflict. By the codes of the street, nice guys are at an even higher risk of being victimized. Therefore, to survive one must confront the cognitive dissonance associated with complex moral situations. This claim to mental illness can be seen as either an acceptance or avoidance of a system of violence and traumatic experiencing that many inner-city young men do not know how to get out of (Smith & Patton, 2016). The protagonist in Bushwick Bill's "Chuckie" seems to be conflicted with this reality and creates an alternate, crazy identity that takes over, wreaking havoc throughout the community.

Half my body is Chuckie

The other half is Bushwick

A short nigga, Always pumpin' some lead

... Some say I'm crazy, Some say I'm on crack

Before I die, Cut off my leg and let me die in Iraq

"Chuckie" Geto Boys

Shaw (1991, track 5)

Mental illness takes the place of an acceptable explanation for the things that many of the young men feel and take part in while attempting to survive. Although men abiding by the street code in high-risk environments may feel as if they are going crazy, they may actually be describing cognitive dissonance related to their performance of authenticity and survival. Cognitive dissonance, as described by Festinger (1957), is the perception of inconsistency pertaining to one's cognitions that produces an undesirable interpersonal state, or psychological discomfort.

The presence of this discomfort motivates individuals to engage in strategies to relieve the uncomfortable state (Festinger, 1957). Many gangstas may ineffectively label their discomfort with the moral complexity of their actions and identity within the context of continually traumatic environments. Bushwick Bill takes this dissonance one step further to disengagement and dissociation. In effort to morally disengage from the consequences of violence, Bushwick dissociates from his identity to create an alter-ego of sorts. Chuckie, the protagonist's crazy alter-ego, symbolizes a dissociation from both self, performance, and the possibility of his own demise.

Other popular forms of escape are nihilism and learned helplessness (Kubrin, 2005). In Smith and Patton's (2016) article on posttraumatic stress symptomology among inner-city young men, one young man states, "I ain't got no fear of dying right now, forreal. Cause see, the things I see around my block it's normal now. If you see a body, it's normal. If you hear gunshots, it's normal... Yeah, it is" (218). This young man goes on to explain how seeing death and despair everyday has become normal. Like many other young gangstas, he has accepted that at any time his life can be taken. Although this young man is located in Baltimore, MD and is alive decades after the songs being explored in this research, his sentiment is echoed throughout the data set (nihilism, n = 11; hopelessness, n = 13). Ice-T, 2Pac, and NWA, share stories of exhaustion and hopelessness with their lifestyles, illustrating frustration due to a lack of control.

The batter rams rollin' rocks are the thing

Life has no meaning and money is king

"6'n the Mornin'" Ice-T

Pierre (1986, track B2)

Sick of the sirens, body bags, and the gun firing

Tell Bush, "Push the button!" cause I'm fed

Tired of hearin' these voices in my head

“Streetz are Deathrow” 2Pac

Shakur (1993, track 13)

See, I don't give a fuck, that's the problem

I see a motherfucking cop, I don't dodge him

“Straight Outta Compton” NWA

Jackson, Patterson, & Curry (1988, track B)

Alexander Riley (2005) would consider these excerpts as an acceptance of the tragic. The tragic vision of existence concludes that there is no true, comfortable resolution to human suffering and conflict (Riley, 2005). Due to the permanency of this eternal condition of human destiny, the only way to supremacy in this context is through confronting and overcoming the fear of the condition (Riley, 2005). In “6’n the Mornin’”, the protagonist’s friend enlightens him on this new way of existence after he returns to the community after being incarcerated for almost a decade. Even in the face of national ruling bodies, gangstas show no fear and confront the dangers of state intervention. Policies and excessive policing leave little room for redemption. Accepting that there is “no happy ending, no sense that something else could have been done, and no belief that the future could, or can, necessarily be changed” meet threat,

injury, and death with little to no fear or concern for continuing their lives as they know them (Alexander 2003, p. 53). Many gangsta rap narratives contain this perspective, in which the protagonist overtly grasps the inevitability of his suffering and/or demise. A part of the gangsta performance involves embracing the environment and lifestyle in which this belief system is constructed.

4.4 Power Tools

My pants are saggin braided hair
 suckers stare but I don't care
 my game ain't knowledge my game's fear

“Colors” Ice-T

Ice-T & Afrika Islam (1988, track B)

Reoccurring themes of respect and identity were shown as manifestations of the collective trauma inherited within the street code and culture of survival. As illustrated in “Colors”, even the appearance of a gangsta contributes to their ability to garner respect and induce fear into others. Fear and respect become currency; outweighing things like knowledge and education. Within gangsta subculture, respect and identity run parallel to one another in the performance of authenticity (Kubrin, 2005). The lack of either usually leads to severe penalties both socially and personally. In “Fuck wit’ Dre Day,” we witness confrontation associated with disrespect:

Yeah, Mista Busta, where the fuck ya at?
 Can't scrap a lick, so I know ya got your gat

Your dick on hard, from fuckin your road dogs
 The hood you threw up with, niggaz you grew up with
 Don't even respect your ass
 That's why it's time for the doctor, to check your ass, nigga
 “Fuck wit’ Dre Day” Dr. Dre
 Young & Broadus (1992, track 2)

As Dr. Dre verbally accosts and challenges his former friends and colleagues, listeners witness how a lack of respect can easily lead to death, for both the disrupter and the disrespected. Accompanying a loss of the friendship, unresolved feelings inspire Dr. Dre and his new companions, Snoop Dogg and RBX, to publicly bash and embarrass Eazy-E and his affiliates. In the above lyric, Dr. Dre calls out Eazy-E. He even goes on to insult his sexuality, health, friends, ability to protect himself, and the overall authenticity of his hard demeanor.

In relation to the streets, respect is seen as being treated fairly or receiving what one deserves, and often ties into personal self-esteem (Kubrin, 2005). Amongst the street code, respectability and authenticity act as an alternate form of power within underserved populations (Bennett & Brookman, 2011). As a gangsta himself, Eazy-E must retaliate to this brazen act of public disrespect to protect both his identity and reputation in the community. Young African American men especially, had to create a sense of respect for themselves, which was usually achieved through violence. Preventing and retaliating to disrespect were rather apparent in the lyrical analysis and data set (disrespect as catalyst, $n = 22$). Disrespect becomes a catalyst to violence in contexts where it is perceived as an attack on one’s attempt at garnering and

maintaining power. If a person in this context of continuous threat does not portray the sense that they can protect themselves, they may easily fall victim to violence as well other forms of polyvictimization. Dr. Dre expresses a need for hypervigilance and weapons for protection against those that would attempt to challenge this character.

Creepin' down the back street on these
I got my glock cocked 'cause niggas want these
Now soon as I said it, seems I got sweated
By some nigga with a tech 9 tryin' to take mine

“Let Me Ride” Dr. Dre

Young & Broadus (1992, track 3)

With guns being so prevalent in the lyrics of Los Angeles gangsta rap during the 1980s, they can easily be recognized as a prominent weapon in the dealings of the gangsta narrative and community context. Mentioning guns in gangsta rap music is a common occurrence. For example, the analysis of the data set yielded 58 references to guns, which places it in the top six most mentioned subcategories after friends/gang (n=60). The protagonist in *Let Me Ride* keeps his gun on him while he’s traveling through the neighborhood just in case someone approaches him. Cukier and Eagen (2018) report several situational, individual, and contextual factors to gun use and gun violence. It is suggested that the availability of guns raise rates of lethal violence, including homicide and suicide, which is characterized as a contagious disease that sweeps through social networks (Cukier & Eagen, 2018). Coincidentally, the United States has the highest rate of gun ownership per capita among industrialized countries (Cukier & Eagen, 2018). The

use and ownership of guns is commonplace in the U.S.; therefore, reference to and utilization of guns in gangsta rap music becomes rather fathomable.

Although guns are a part of the American narrative, men in the African American community are still disproportionately affected by gun violence. Partially due to the intersection of racial and socio-economic factors, African American men are the most likely to experience violence in general, as well as gun violence in particular (Cukier & Eagen, 2018). Contextual factors can act as contributing societal elements to rates of violence, such as: instability, inequality, health and socioeconomic disparity, social and educational policies, and the availability of alcohol, drugs, and weapons (Cukier & Eagen, 2018). NWA shares both the victimization and emancipation of gun accessibility in African American neighborhoods.

Without a gun and a badge, what do ya got?

A sucker in a uniform waiting to get shot

by me or another nigga

And with a gat it don't matter if he's smaller or bigger

“Fuck the Police” NWA

Jackson & Patterson (1988, track 2)

Considering the lack of state, communal, and individual resources in Los Angeles throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, these social elements of violence had both the time and space to shape ideas towards gun use and gun violence. Within institutional violence towards individuals, gun power is used to oppress and control communities. The above lyric illustrates

the use of guns by the state against the community, which is directly followed by the community's desire to use guns as protection from the state. The state's heavy reliance on gun use is echoed through action, policy, and hierarchical community structure. At a time when policing was both rampant and aggressive, it is of little surprise that the community would mimic the use of guns as an avenue to power and oppression. Enhancing factors of gun use, Cukier and Eagen (2018) also explore the social construction of guns and their deep connection to media violence, notions of masculinity, and the socialization of young men in the United States. "Guns are an important signifier of virility and power and hence an important way violent masculinity is constructed and then sold to audiences" (Katz, 2003). The way guns are socially constructed shape culture, values, and policy, which in turn reinforces social behavior. In another track by NWA, gun violence is clearly correlated to the reputation of a gangsta.

Straight outta Compton, another crazy ass nigga

More punks I smoke, yo, my rep gets bigger

I'm a bad motherfucker, and you know this

"Straight Outta Compton" NWA

Jackson & Patterson (1988, track 1)

The gangsta uses the gun's ability to protect self and destroy others as a means to obtain stereotypical ideals of power and authenticity. Although research suggests that these constructed stereotypes are particularly robust among disempowered White working-class men (Cukier & Eagen, 2018), the researcher would argue that the importance of solidifying virility and power is boosted in disenfranchised communities and subcultures. Due to the intersectional subjugation

through contextual boundaries and deficits, young underserved African American men would be more susceptible to the appeal of power reinforced by the social construction of gun use. The protagonist in “Straight Outta Compton” admits to the correlation between gun violence and maintaining a reputation within the performance of the street code. Throughout gangsta rap lyrics, guns are a tool for protection, utilized to even the playing field between battling parties. Therefore, boasting about guns is boasting about one’s authenticity, masculinity, security, and access to power.

In a place where one is often forgotten and put under the authority of abusive police officers, oppressive systems, and even scarred parents, the desire for control is intense. With so many people succumbing to poverty and violence, the idea of power and safety within the traumatic experience is coveted by many.

4.5 Conclusion

Violence in high-risk, underserved environments is both layered and contextual. Both the application of violence and the tools used to enact, and cope with it, are connected to the intersectional nature of the gangsta narrative. In this chapter, different avenues to explore and understand the utility of contextual violence are detailed and connected to the lyrics of gangsta rap song from the data set. Chapter five will begin with an examination of both the U.S. and Los Angeles environment of the early 1980s in relation to the findings. Implications and future research directions for this study will conclude the chapter.

5 DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this work examines the context of both the United States and Los Angeles through the lens of continuous traumatic stress during the 1980s and into the 1990s. Directions for future research related to the data set, communal relations, and mental health of African Americans are detailed. Finally, implications for this research are multidimensional and multidisciplinary.

5.1 Los Angeles and Violence through the Lens of Trauma

Mama cried, tryin to stop me in my ignorance

But I was grown, I didn't have sense

All I knew was I was poor, black, broke and hungry

And the streets, they were callin me

“Pops was a Rolla”

South Central Cartel (1992, track 10)

Since the mid-1970s, the number of Americans living in poverty steadily rose (Fewer Living in Poverty, 1985). In 1983, thirty-five million people were living below the poverty line (Fewer Living in Poverty, 1985). Over one year, the number of African Americans in poverty declined from 35.7% to 33.8%, in comparison to their White American counterparts at 12.2% to 11.5%, in that same year (Fewer Living in Poverty, 1985). As the country's poverty rate rose to 14% by 1987, unemployment spiked alongside welfare rolls (Wolch, et. al., 2007). State action to curtail welfare assistance resulted in 48,000 recipients suffering benefit reductions, 38,000 being dropped entirely, about 12,000 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) families

lost Medi-Cal coverage, and almost 8,000 lost access to food stamp (Wolch, et. al., 2007). As both the AIDS and cocaine epidemics spread across the nation, President Reagan decreased federal expenditures for low-cost housing from \$32 billion to \$7 billion in 1987 (Brightwell, 2012). As imagined, the country's homeless population radically increased, mercilessly discarding mentally ill Americans onto the streets (Brightwell, 2012).

In the years leading up to and throughout the Black Power movement of the 1960's, many African Americans migrated from the South to the Los Angeles area (Brightwell, 2012). By 1970, there were 763,000 African American Angelenos, and many former White American inhabitants fled the now predominantly Black American neighborhoods (Brightwell, 2012). With an increase in population of 128,000 to 3,096,668 inhabitants, Los Angeles city had the largest population in California in 1983 (Where Did the Money Go?, 1986). Los Angeles city's population density had very little effect on its county's per capita income of \$10,510; significantly less than the second most populated county (Orange county, \$12,382) (Where Did the Money Go?, 1986). Los Angeles county was filled with millions of people, but these people retained a significantly low income. Among African American men, between 1975 and 1983, only one in four of those in the labor force was between the ages of 16 and 24 (Spriggs, 2013). Within the county of Los Angeles, 75,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1978 and 1982 assisting in the shift in local wage distribution (Wolch, et. al., 2007). Job prospects for the African American youth were dismal. The nation was in an economic downturn leaving one of its most marginalized groups to fight against an even stronger current of poverty compounded by a lack of generational resources in cities across the country.

Racism and discrimination, high unemployment rates, overcrowding, residential segregation, and poverty are all social determinants of violence that affect urban African American neighborhoods (Smith & Patton, 2016). These social determinants are evident in both the national and local narrative. Specifically, in Los Angeles the level of poverty was compounded by overcrowding and communal isolation. Unfortunately, funding was also cut for health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment, as punishment began to replace rehabilitation in the criminal justice system (Wolch, et. al., 2007). Introducing stricter sentencing and 'three-strikes' laws dramatically enlarged the number of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people (Wolch, et. al., 2007). As Los Angeles county's population tripled during the 1980s, its prison population mimicked its growth; rapidly worsening over the decade (Wolch, et. al., 2007). Creating even more deficits, jail administered training programs intended to coach ex-offenders and secure future employment basically evaporated (Wolch, et. al., 2007). Low hiring rates of former inmates reflect a reduction in employer willingness to hire ex-offenders without rehabilitation and preparation (Wolch, et. al., 2007). Consequently, Los Angeles became home to a growing population of ex-offenders with little to no job prospects, rehabilitation, or state assistance.

Los Angeles, California between the years of 1983 and 1993 was a community filled with risk factors for stress, traumatization, and polyvictimization. Living on top of each other in the scarcity of communal or state resources, including housing and employment, can invoke continuous experiences with overwhelming stress. Surveying the environment, one can see that gangsta rap music is as intense as the community that it was developed within. Rappers tell all of those willing to listen about the everyday struggles of young men in high-risk, underserved

inner-cities; a struggle that some of these men once lived. Gangsta rap is an expression of the trauma intertwined within the lives and communities of inner-city residence that often go unheard and unseen within the United States. It stemmed from unequal opportunity, distrust, early death, and learned hopelessness within a sector of the nation (Richardson & Scott, 2002).

5.2 Directions for Future Research

5.2.1 Importance of Policy

The intersectional and contextual nature of African American men's experience and mental health in Los Angeles, California during the 1980s through the 1990s inspires many ideas and yields a breadth of information. As it relates to this time period, this research has implications towards addressing, reviewing, and enacting policy in underserved populations. Cutting funding for various programs and resources, from food to mental health care, severely damaged the community, and arguably, the generation. This highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining relevant programs for all communities. Although we can argue about the responsibility of individual success, the national policies could be established to fairly and adequately allocate funds for the betterment of its citizens.

State policy could also be enacted and enforced to protect its inhabitants in the housing market. Housing in Los Angeles for African Americans in the 1980s was sub-par, scarce, and often nonexistent for the many homeless people (Wolch, et. al., 2007). Homelessness remains a problem in major cities and among African Americans (Wolch, et. al., 2007). This could be connected to generational disparities. How does home insecurity and homelessness in past

generations affect and echo through not just a population, but a culture? Lack of housing opportunities could affect generational wealth and ownership, as well as discourage future attempts to gain and maintain property.

5.2.2 Effects of Violent State Intervention

The presence of violent policing and its effect on communities continues to have relevance in today's society. Although policing has always been an exhaustive source of trauma in many African American communities, excessive, abusive state intervention increased during the 1980s war on drugs, and remains a problem. Recent murders of unarmed African Americans stand as a reminder of the history of police brutality and oppression in marginalized communities. Since before 1983 and even now in 2018, the importance of improving police practices within communities and re-evaluating the impact of police presences on individuals remains. The American policing system has been the country's tool of subjugation and humiliation against the African American community. From slave wrangling to Rodney King, many African Americans recall a history of police brutality, even as young men and women stand in cities like Ferguson and Baltimore to protest and react to the continual killing of unarmed Black humans in recent the years (Butler, 2017).

The vicious behavior of state and national governing bodies enhances to the cycle of violence in neighborhoods like those within Los Angeles, California. Stop and frisk and the chokehold are two popular tools of racialized policing (Butler, 2017). To many, the sight of one or more African American men with their hands out, pinned against an object being ceremonially touched over their bodies by men in blue is far from uncommon. Before the program's end in the

early 2000s, this intrusive and questionable act was adopted in the 1950s and eventually protected by the Supreme Court and American judicial system (Butler, 2017). At any time for any reason, a police officer can force physical and mental violation on African Americans, coercing submission in this chokehold system (Butler, 2017). Butler (2017) refers to this system, in collusion with many other limiting factors still practiced, as the chokehold utilized to inspire feelings of fear and entrapment. These actions perpetuate a cycle of violence to be modeled and mimicked within communities.

Decades after the emergence of gangsta rap, police violence and brutality remain a problem in African American communities. These serve as tactics of fear with the intent of making African American men afraid to leave their homes (Butler, 2017). Since at any time and for any action, one or multiple police officers can approach, corner, harass, and even sexually abuse these people within their own communities (Butler, 2017). In fact, sporadic, random, and uncontrollable abuse is often the most traumatizing. The reports of men being sexually fondled in public by police officers is appalling, and no other work space would allow such intrusive, demoralizing sexual conduct. Since stop and frisk is legal and only permissible in low income areas, it is clear that this racialized torture is a tool of both physical and mental abuse and control (Butler, 2017). We cannot continue to witness the overwhelming presence of policing in marginalized neighborhoods and ignore its impact on the level of violence, polyvictimization and traumatic stress.

5.2.3 Vicarious Trauma

Gangstas are not just susceptible to violent injury, but they are also vulnerable to the injuries of their loved ones. Witnessing the trauma of another can leave traumatic residue to intertwine with one's intersectional being. Looking back at the data set, the condition category reported the second most occurrences (n = 204). The condition subcategories are related to the state of and relationships within the neighborhood, or streets. Within that category, friends/gang yielded the second highest number of references (n = 61). Listeners hear the importance of friendships when reviewing lyrics like, "I live by the sword, I take my boys everywhere I go" from "Mind Playin' Tricks on Me" or, "She has to understand S.C.C. is family... it's a fact, my homies always get my back" in "U Gotta Deal wit Dis (Gangsta Love)". The gangsta rap narrative is deeply intertwined with communal relationships. The relationship that a gangsta has with his friends is beneficial and enjoyed in many facets. They become a source of protection and power in the streets. Many familiar relationships constructed in traumatic environments can be rather strained; a young man may receive the most support and influence from his friends (Benjamin and Carolissen, 2015; Smith & Patton, 2016). Often meeting for both business and leisure, many ever day interactions are shared amongst this group. Friends now become first and second-hand witnesses to disparity, injury, death, horror, and overwhelming circumstance.

Future research can explore the importance of creating supportive relationships in dealing with traumatic stress. Friends in the gangsta narrative serve as physical and mental support to the young men they associated with. It is clear that this relationship created a reciprocal form of protection and power, but could it also have increased resiliency among the men in the community?

Being in such close community with friends, young men had to mentally and physically endure police brutality and oppression together in their Los Angeles neighborhoods. Lyrics such as, “Seen my homeboys cooling way way out, told 'em bout my morning cold bugged' em out,” from “6’n the Mornin” stand as example. Even as the gangsta protagonist shares stories of his interaction with the police, his friends grew mentally uncomfortable. During the Reaganomics era of individuality, economic redistribution, and aggressive criminal justice, the national war on drugs encompassed a war on the gangs of inner-city neighborhood (Chang, 2007). Adopting California penal code’s definition of gang as a tool to profile suspects based on their appearance and company, the war on drugs became a means to excuse excessive policing and force towards African American men (Grant, 2002).

5.2.4 Remembering Women in the Narrative

Although it is the choice of the researcher to explore the experiences of underserved African American men in Los Angeles, it would be detrimental to the condition of all sectors of African American community to completely ignore the experiences of African American women in that time and space. The men certainly did not. Women was the most present subcategory within the condition theme (n = 76). As many may recognize, women in the gangsta narrative are often narrowly cast. They are regularly sexualized, stereotyped, and demeaned; predominantly only mentioned in reference to prowess (women x manhood co-occurrence, n = 17), disloyalty, motherhood, and violence. The intersection of African American women’s identities must intertwine with continuous traumatic stress and the historical trauma of their communities. Historically, in the Blaxploitation genre for example, women like Foxy Brown

and Cleopatra Jones also take on the anti-hero protagonist trope. As rap music listeners are often reminded, African American woman must interact with African American man in these socially and physically high-risk contexts. The lyrics point towards a need to explore the mental health of women and how generational trauma interacts with their gender. Future research can move towards examining the internalization and inter-generational transfer of patriarchy and misogynoir, coupled with the toxic hyper-masculine ideal of the period.

5.2.5 Mental Health

Specifically, this research highlights a need for mental health research for African Americans individually, but also as a unit. African American families could benefit from diverse, culturally informed research and practice around familiar relationships. Strained familial ties are a common consequence of stressful and traumatic situations (Smith & Patton, 2016). Beliefs about and practices of family are passed through generations (Benjamin & Carolissen, 2015). Periods in African American communities, specifically for the lower-class, have added on to the historical nature of trauma within family structure and relationships. How did the lack of proper housing and resources affect parent child relationships of the time? Have the practices of these relationships repeated themselves over generations? Of these practices, how do we separate the toxic from the adaptive? Throughout the data set, there are just a few mentions of fatherhood. Researching African American men's changing ideas on fatherhood could shed insight on developing ideas towards and performances of African American masculinity and identity. Revisiting traditional ideas of family may prove to be beneficial. Recognizing the existence of a cultural narrative and historical trauma can also enhance relationships between mental health practitioners and African American patients.

Acknowledging the role that culture and family have in the intersectional nature of mental health could open doors to connect mental health practitioners and patients.

Literature on the trauma of African American men in particular is very lacking. Little research has been done on how this population is both living with and coping with the unfortunate circumstances that they were born into. More research needs to be done on trauma within these communities and how it affects all residents. Hopefully, further research will be conducted on how to counsel residents and alleviate the problems within the communities. The current view of trauma and stress as single-disciplined and individual is a hindrance to advancement on the subject (Kira et al., 2014). Researchers will not be able to understand trauma of inner-city inhabitation until it is seen from all aspects and angles. Exploring trauma through gangsta rap music is just one of those angles.

5.3 Implications

There is much more to know and understand about African American men and their relationship with continual stress and trauma. What are some of the leading causes of stress and trauma in African American men's communities? What factors have contributed to the resiliency in the community? How does race interact with coping style in men? At what age should the discussion of stress management be introduced to young men? When do they start to integrate these practices into their personality? How does the support of African American women affect African American male stress and coping? Is there a relationship between stress, trauma, and personal expression among men, specifically those in the African American community? Would alternative forms of therapy, such as music, dance, spoken word, and visual art, be better

received as coping strategies for African American men? How effective could these forms of therapy be in managing or reducing stress and trauma? Coping within this population can be a vital tool in increasing the overall health of African American men's communities. The African American experience is a unique phenomenon that deserves to be properly understood. By investigating the different factors and layers concerning intersectional stress and trauma within the community, one can begin to deconstruct and transform this same community. Researchers, counselors, academic faculty and administration, as well as other mental health and community resource providers should take African American men's trauma and coping into consideration.

This research is multidisciplinary. With its basis in an ecological framework, this research can benefit the fields of psychology, sociology, African American studies, family studies, gender studies, hip hop studies, and education. Improved mental health treatments related to depression, dissociative disorder, PTSD, conduct disorders, and anxiety can be established for African American men. The study is also related to health care, policy administration, and social justice. There are gaps within this study that the researcher suggests addressing. This research did not account for past interactions with the health care system or varying sexual orientations, which both may have connections to one's relationship with stress and trauma. Other unexplored variables include religiosity, spirituality, social support systems, mentorship, and ideas of nationality. All of these factors can intensify or alleviate stress and trauma, as well as dictate the habitual use of particular coping strategies. This study even relates to research connecting hip hop to musical therapy practices.

Furthering the reach of this research, it also brings another lens to hip hop studies. African Americans have a history of practicing expression through the means of artistic

production. How does culture and expression mix to create a historical narrative for the continuously underserved and at-risk sectors of this community? How is mental health acknowledged or ignored in music? Does this community have a trauma song? If so, who has written it? What experiences have molded it? What can we gather about this experience through the production and reproduction of the baaadman, or gangsta, trope? Although some may write their pain in it, the gangsta narrative is also a story of resiliency. An ability to survive and create in a context of continuous, generational traumatic stress; therefore, the music could correlate to communal coping practices. What does gangsta rap and hip hop culture suggest about mental health practices?

5.4 Final Words

This work is a comment on the performance of a cultural narrative, the gangsta or historical baaadman, as contrived and expressed in a context of continual trauma in Los Angeles, California. As a qualitative, ethnographic analysis of a phenomenon, this research does not prove causation or correlation. It does however stretch the conversation of African American mental health and its expression through art form. It attempts to explore the connection between mythoform and cultural consciousness. It also supports and adds to the literature on re-conceptualized trauma, relocating it to rethink marginalized communities stationed within the country of their colonizer and oppressor over generations.

Overall, analyzing gangsta rap highlighted parallels between the production of the music, and both the communal and historical context. This study yielded a considerable amount of information that connects the environment to the mental health and behaviors of African American men in inner-city, underserved contexts. Surveying the environment, one can see that

gangsta rap music is as intense as the community and era that it was developed within. In this research, we see how time and space connect to individual, collective, and historical interactions with mental health.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Songs included in Data Set

Title	Artist
Late Night Hype	South Central Cartel
Mind Playin Tricks On Me	Geto Boys
The Streetz R Deathrow	2 Pac
The Ghetto	Too Short
Boyz N The Hood	Eazy E
Nuthin but a G Thang	Dr. Dre
Batterram	Toddy Tee
A Bird In The Hand	Ice Cube
Fuck The Police	NWA
The Day the Niggaz Took Over	Dr. Dre
Straight Outta Compton	NWA
Young Black Male	2 Pac
Murder was the Case	Snoop Dogg
A Gangsta's Fairytale	Ice Cube
L.A. Is the Place	NWA
Colors	Ice-T
Gin and Juice	Snoop Dogg

Wild, Wild West	Too Short
It was a Good Day	Ice Cube
Fuck wit Dre Day (And Everybody's Celebratin')	Dr. Dre
Part Time Mutha	2 Pac
Pump Pump	Snoop Dogg
Peel Their Caps Back	Ice-T
Real Niggaz Don't Die	NWA
U Gotta Deal wit Dis (Gangsta Luv)	South Central Cartel
Pops Was a Rolla	South Central Cartel
6'n The Mornin'.docx	Ice-T
Chuckie	Geto Boys
Final Frontier	MC Ren
Let Me Ride	Dr. Dre

Appendix B Songs Coded in Close Reading

Song Title	Primary Artist	Year
Late Night Hype	Compton's Most Wanted	1983
Fuck The Police	NWA	1988
Batterram	Toddy Tee	1985
A Bird In The Hand	Ice Cube	1991
6'n The Mornin'	Ice-T	1987
Nuthin' But A G Thang	Dr. Dre	1992
Boyz N The Hood	Eazy E	1988
The Ghetto	Too Short	1990
The Streetz R Deathrow	2 Pac	1993
Mind Playin Tricks On Me	Geto Boyz	1991