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From “My Block” to “Born on the Rez”: A Linguistic Analysis of Lyrics by 2PAC, Frank Waln, Litefoot, Nataanii Means, and Night Shield

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This research began with a conversation between two colleagues, Neely (African American) and Etsitty Dorame (Diné, Navajo). Neely expressed sadness and frustration at seeing so many stories on her Facebook feed and on the broadcast news showing of African American men, women and children dying violently and graphically at the hands of the police. In response, Etsitty Dorame replied, “It’s happening to us too but no one knows about it.” Neely is currently conducting research analyzing Tupac Shakur’s lyrics and wondered if Native American rappers were using their lyrics to promote awareness of the problems in their communities, like Shakur did about the communities he lived in. They conducted a quick comparison of the lyrics from Shakur’s “My Block” and the lyrics of Frank Waln’s “Born on the Rez” using a simple word cloud and they were astonished at the similarities, and, intrigued to learn more. To honor the people who inspired this research project we name and acknowledge them here.¹

Before embarking on the lyric analysis we wanted to see what, if anything, might already be written about research conducted about Native American hip hop and rap artists. There are some interdisciplinary scholarly articles from journals such as the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *Studies in American Indian Literatures* and the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*. They covered scholarly themes such as Aboriginal resistance (Manzo, 2013), identity (Amsterdam, 2013), historical trauma (Sheffield, 2011), and education (Gorlewski, 2012).

There is an abundance of research on African American hip hop and rap artists that can be found in numerous academic disciplines, ranging from Education to Women’s Studies and Sociology to Public Health to Musicology. Scholars in those respective fields are analyzing, and using hip hop in varied ways, some are utilizing the principles of hip hop in the classroom to engage young people (Emdin, 2010), others are looking at the representation of women of color in hip hop (Hunter & Soto, 2009), and some are tracking alcohol references in rap lyrics (Herd, 2014). By no means a complete overview of the research on hip hop, our limited scan of the literature suggested that our efforts would bring a new angle to the scholarly conversation. Due to the fact that we are not ethnomusicologists, our analysis is focused on the number of words used, types of words used and other factors rather than a strict focus on what the music means to the artists and listeners and what meanings the music conveys (Society for Ethnomusicology).

The theme of this conference is Indigenous Narrative, and we consider Native rap lyrics as another form of narrative. Rap lyrics preserve unique voices and perspectives and share a glimpse into a particular artists’ thoughts, beliefs and experiences. Lyrics can also include references to people, places and history that only people from those communities would know. Rap and hip hop music is also a medium that connects to youth and can be a way to educate and bring awareness of issues in the community. Rap and hip hop music can reach both Native and non-Native peoples and can be more accessible than other forms of information such as poetry or an academic article. These characteristics of rap as narrative apply to all rap and hip hop, not just Native/Indigenous artists.

About the Artists

To complement and perhaps, contrast with Shakur, we wanted to find young male socially conscious Native American rappers who might be rapping about their lived experiences like Tupac Shakur. As information professionals, we began with general literature and Google searches. In Sheffield’s (2011) “Native American Hip-Hop and Historical Trauma: Surviving and Healing Trauma on the “Rez,” ” she writes, “Artists such as . . . Night Shield use hip-hop to identify the historical traumas faced by Native Americans as well as to articulate new pathways toward healing and recovery. Both artists identify the sociopolitical problems that impact Native teenagers today as well as a means for those teens to rectify those problems and create positive change in their lives and the the lives of those around them” (p. 101).

MTV’s “Rebel Music: Native America: 7th Generation Rises” documentary highlighted among other things, not only the Native Lives Matter movement, the 7th Generation, the Keystone XL Pipeline, the plight of missing and murdered Indigenous women, and Drag the Red, but also profiled the son of Native American activist Russell Means, Naát’áanii Nez Means (Oglala Lakota, Diné, Omaha, Dakota) from Chinle, AZ, and Indigenous hip hop artist Frank Waln from the Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota. Waln on living with the lessons of colonization from birth, “I can’t even describe to you the trauma that we’re born with, you can’t know, unless you live it.” Waln on the legacy of his ancestors who fought and died for the land they occupy today, “No matter where you are in America, you’re living on occupied land that Indigenous people were murdered for.” And on hip hop and its connection to Indigenous peoples, “I definitely think there’s a connection between traditional storytelling and hip hop. My people have been story tellers for thousands of years, and this is just another way for us to tell our story” (MTV, 2015).

¹ Michael Brown, (African American) Ferguson, MO, 2014; Eric Garner (African American), New York, 2014; Sandra Bland (African American), TX, 2015; Misty Upham (Blackfeet), WA, 2014; Rexdale Henry (Choctaw) MS, 2015; Christina Tahhahwah (Comanche) OK, 2015; Kee Thompson and Allison Gorman (both Navajo) NM, 2014

In the video, Means states, “I’m a rapper and I focus on social issues we as young American Indians face in the 21st century. Suicide is prevalent on American Indian Reservations. We have the highest rate of suicide in the country. Kids don’t feel like they can talk to anybody, and they just give up. With my music I’m trying to reach these kids. I’ll be successful if just one kid comes up to me that and tells me my music helped him.” On the Wounded Knee Walk, and the current situation of Native American men “Now we see cops killing our men, just like they hunted us down in the 1800’s. Nothing has changed between the cowboys and the Indians” (MTV, 2015).

In Barnes 2015 article “8 Songs by Native American Rappers that Deserve to Be Heard,” we learn more about Means and Waln, and also re-discover, Litefoot, previously known to us as Little Bear of *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1995) fame. In a 1995 interview with Litefoot, E. K. Caldwell reports that after being told he could have a record contract “as long as his lyrics weren’t “Indian ... because Indians don't buy tapes — they buy alcohol,” Mr. Foot founded Red Vinyl Records, his own record label (1999).

We did not realize that each of the Native American rappers selected for this study had been influenced by Tupac Shakur in some way until we were deep into their lyrics. Shakur’s name, lyrics, and song titles appear frequently throughout the work of Gary “Litefoot” Paul Davis, Nataanii Nez Means, Frank Waln, and Gabriel Night Shield. Additionally, Shakur’s selection of songs to sample has also been imitated by some of these Native American artists. Night Shield cites Shakur’s “Me Against the World” as a factor in influencing his career path and wrote poetry and short stories in high school, as did Shakur (Indigenous Music Awards, n.d.). We learn from their lyrics that Night Shield and Waln were also raised in single parent households, like Shakur. Shakur often rapped about the poverty in which he was raised in New York, Baltimore, MD, and later in Marin City, California. A 2013 article includes Night Shield and Frank Waln’s Rosebud Sioux Reservation, SD as one of fifteen tribes with unemployment rates exceeding 80% (Schilling, 2013).

In the introduction to the 1997 book *Tupac Shakur 1971-1996*, Danyel Smith wrote, “Tupac Shakur: A fiery, ferocious MC, an auspicious actor, a man so beautiful he made you wanna touch the screen, the photograph, him.... He made you wanna see those vanilla teeth, the wet sweet wild eyes, the fleshy lips, the lashes like fans like feathers on his fudgy skin. He made you want to kill him, defend him, make him your baby (Smith, 1997). Rapper, singer, dancer, actor, poet, writer, and recording artist Tupac Shakur was born on June 16, 1971 in Harlem, NY. Shakur is also known as, and has recorded under the stage names 2Pac and Makaveli. He began his musical career as a member of the group of Digital Underground and released his first solo album in 1991, the same year Mr. Litefoot began his rap career. In 1996 he released “All Eyez On Me,” believed to be the first ever double rap CD. All total, Shakur’s estate, and others, have released at least 20 albums posthumously, many of which are double CD’s. The majority of these releases have been compilation albums including two albums with artists and others performing Shakur’s poetry, most of which were published in *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* (MTV Books, 1999). Shakur was in the midst of a promising acting career when he was killed in 1996 at the age of 25. As a solo artist, Shakur formed, and recorded with, several groups of rappers and singers, mostly made up of his friends and relatives. The names of these groups changed over time from Dramacydal, Outlaw Immortalz, the Outlawz, and Thug Life, however, the group membership did not vary much.

In 1994, the day before he was found guilty and later sentenced to 4 ½ years in prison for sexual abuse allegations, Shakur was attacked, shot 5 times, and robbed outside of the Quad Recording Studios in Manhattan, NY. On September 7, 1996, in Las Vegas, NV, Shakur was the victim of a drive by shooting while riding in the passenger side of a car driven by Marion “Suge” Knight, CEO of Death Row records. He was pronounced dead at 4:03 pm on September 13, 1996 at the University Medical Center’s Intensive Care Unit (Clark County, NV Office of Coroner, 2006). Shakur was 25 years old at the time of his death and was not married and had no children.

In 2009, The Tupac Amaru Shakur Collection was created and deposited at the Robert W. Woodruff Library Archives Center, Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA. The collection has been digitized however, it can only be accessed via computers in the Archives Center. During her sabbatical from November 2014-May 2015, Neely discovered 88 original lyrics written in Shakur’s hand, and an additional 77 untitled handwritten lyrics.

I been American before there were Americans (Litefoot, 1996)

With the July 11, 1996 release (interestingly, almost exactly three months before the death of Shakur) of his first full length album, *Good Day to Die*, Litefoot, announced his music arrival to the dominant culture. Even though he had been paying his dues for eight plus years in music circles, he went largely unnoticed until his breakthrough role of Little Bear in the 1995 film *The Indian in the Cupboard*. The film positioned him to spread his message and increase his visibility. Having already established, three years prior in 1992, Red Vinyl Records, he had a formal outlet for his musical expressions and, to date, his label has released all seven of his full length albums, *The Life and Times* (1998), *Rez Affiliated* (1999), *The Messenger* (2002), *Native American Me* (2003), *Redvolution* (2004), and *Relentless Pursuit* (2008), as well as other artists (Johansen, 2015; Caldwell, 1999; Litefoot, 2016).

Born in Upland, California on March 1, 1969, Gary Paul Davis was raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, he also identifies as Chichimeca, Indigenous peoples of northern Mexico. Influenced by the hip hop groups, Run DMC, and Public Enemy, Litefoot's involvement in hip hop began in the late 80's. Early on he made the intentional move to put Native American before rap artist, signifying his identity, its importance, and putting his peoples first (Johansen, 2015; Caldwell, 1999).

Continuing the tradition of the social and political nature of hip hop, Litefoot's lyrics cover a wide range of topics: identity, community, family, and Native pride. Throughout his body of lyrics, one can hear references to historical events, current injustices, and cultural empowerment. Always progressing and looking for new opportunities, Litefoot has expressed his creativity through many avenues. In addition to recording, performing, acting, and starting a clothing label, Native Style, his first book *The Medicine of Prayer* was published in 2012. Regardless of what he is involved in, his communities remain the focus. Since 2013, Litefoot has been President and CEO of the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED).

2015 was a busy year for Litefoot, in addition to being named one of *The 50 Faces of Indian Country 2015* by Indian Country Today Media Network, co-hosting the Indigenous Music Awards, last fall he received a National Director's Special Recognition Award from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA). He also continues to act, most recently in the Netflix series, *House of Cards* (Litefoot, 2016).

Currently residing in Bellevue, Washington, with his wife Carmen and their three children Quannah, Qwnuseia, and Sequoyah, 2016 hopes to bring a book of his complete lyrics, a new album, and much more (Johansen, 2015; Litefoot, 2016).

Nataanii Nez Means is a 25 year old rapper. He is the son of activist Russell Means, well known for his work with the American Indian Movement. Nataanii has been writing songs since he was 12 years old but started to focus on his music after starting college at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe in 2009 (ICTMN 2013). In 2011 he released his first song on YouTube and has been performing ever since. He is part of the True Pride Music collaborative which includes Melodic-Soul and Ty Milly. Nataanii cites his rap influences as NAS, Wu-Tang Clan, A Tribe called Quest, J. Cole, 2Pac and Bone Thugs-N-Harmony. His album *2 Worlds* was released on October 3, 2013. In 2015 he was selected by Native Trailblazers, a blog and weekly podcast, as one of the June Jamz Top 5 musicians, voted on by podcast listeners (Native Trailblazers,n.d.).

As his father was before him, Nataanii is dedicated to bringing attention and action to issues affecting Native American communities and describes himself as "an activist who raps" (Means, 2013). He has performed at many protests and activist movements including in Paris in October 2015 as part of the Indigenous Peoples movement, at a protest in Oak Flats, AZ in support of San Carlos Apache tribe (Thompson Reuters Foundation News, n.d.) and at Our Climate, Our Future in Anchorage, AK (Our Climate! Our Future!, n.d.). Nataanii released a video titled "Revelations" on YouTube in March 2016 and is performing in Albuquerque New Mexico on April 30, 2016 as part of "Rezilience Indigenous Arts Experience".

Francis (Frank) Waln is a 26 year old Sicangu Lakota, born and raised on the Rosebud Sioux reservation in South Dakota. He is a well known Native American hip hop artist, producer, performer, and activist. He is considered one of the most influential people in Indian country today (ICTMN, 2015).

In Randy Ericksen's 2012 documentary, *Frank Waln, Common Man, Nake Nula Waun*, Waln's mother says his music career began when his elementary school teacher recognized his musical talent and began piano giving him piano lessons. Waln adds that his career began when he was in the sixth grade and remembers when he and his mother went for one of their evening walks and he saw something sparkling on the side of the road. It was a CD, scratched up and completely white on one side with a backwards E on the other. He never owned a CD or a player but he found someone with one and he played it. It was Eminem's 2000 LP, *Marshall Mathers*. It was the first time he fell in love with hip hop music. He identified and related to everything Eminem spoke of—his troubled childhood from how he was filtering out all that pain and emotion through his lyrics, to the way he was presenting the lyrics over hypnotic, aggressive beats. Like Eminem, Waln experienced a troubled childhood and violence. He recalled a time when he was 4 years old and his mother had taken him to see his father during the Christmas holidays. She caught his father cheating with another woman who came out of the house and punched her in the face, and then threw his Christmas presents at him. This was just the beginning of his life struggles. Growing up in a female dominated single parent household, on a poor reservation, he struggled with depression and suicide (Ericksen, 2012). In a 2016 Vocolo radio interview, Waln reported that Native American youth are ten times more likely to commit suicide than the national average. He spoke of a time when at 19 years of age, he wrote "2 Live & Die on the Plains." The first two lines he recalls writing... "Today I don't wanna wake up; I just want to die." Waln survived and never abused drugs or alcohol. As a spiritual person, he connects to his culture, traditional ceremonies, and traditional ways through sundances, and prayers, all of which help him to overcome his hardships. Otherwise, he believes he would have died by suicide (Ericksen, 2012).

Despite the struggles, Waln received the Gates Millennium scholarship and graduated as valedictorian of his high school. He left home, the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, for the first time to attend Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Waln left believing he wanted to be a doctor so he could return to help his people, but after two years he wanted to create music and decided that was how he was going to help his people instead, through his words, his message, his songs, and his music. He later received his degree in Audio Arts and Acoustics from Columbia College Chicago in May 2014.

According to ICTMN, Waln went on to form his group *Nake Nula Waun* in 2010 and their first album, *Scars and Bars* won Best Rap/Hip Hop Recording at the 2011 Native American Music Awards (NAMA). In 2011, they won the ROCKWiRED Radio Music Award for Best Group and 2013 for Best Male Artist and Best Recording by an American Indian Artist/Band, and in 2013 Waln and *Nake Nula Waun* were nominated for five awards (WMCND, 2013).

In 2015, Waln was recognized as one of the top 50 influential people by Indian Country Today Media Network. Since then, he has been traveling the world spreading his message of inspiration through his music and performances empowering people especially Native youth. Waln tells audiences that education is imperative and to take advantage of opportunities and that it's ok to fail but get back up and live your passion and dreams. Despite his popularity, fortune, and fame, he firmly believes in his traditional ways and culture and stands by his Lakota motto *ikce wicaca* meaning "I am a common man" coupled with another Lakota phrase, a Lakota warrior phrase, *Nake Nula Waun* meaning, "I am always ready, at all times, for anything" (Ericksen, 2012).

Gabriel Night Shield (1967-) is a Lakota Sioux Native American rapper and businessman. Also known by the alias *Shizzle*, he was raised on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. He graduated from high school in 1985, and received a degree in audio production from the Art Institute of Seattle in 1999. He began his career as a DJ, and in 2001, established the *Night Shield Entertainment (N.S.E.)* record label where he has released sixteen albums including six solo albums. In addition to *Shakur*, he lists *Krayzie Bone (Bone Thugs-Harmony)* as one of his favorite all time artists. *Night Shield* has one daughter, *Lyric*, who we hear as an infant on "Baby Girl" which appears on *Sex, Drunks & Hip Hop II: The Hangover* released in 2012. In an interview with *PowWows.com* (2013), *Night Shield* was asked about the stories he tells in his music given there's a storytelling element in every Indigenous culture that also appears to be present in hip hop.

I tell the stories of my everyday life. I pride myself in my writing and lyrical ability so my songs are basically my way of telling "My Story." Everything I talk about is something that I've gone through and lived. Every album and song is a reflection of a different period of my life, whether it be a day of my life or a month or a relationship. I use my songs as a way to vent and get things off my chest. I guess we can use the old "Music is my therapy" saying here (PowWows, 2013).

Night Shield has won two Native American Music Awards (NAMA) and an Indian Summer Music Award. He is proud to be named as "One of Vibe Magazine's Top 51 Unsigned Artists," "because I had no prior knowledge about it and it literally came out of nowhere" (PowWows, 2013).

Methodology

Once the artists had been identified, we needed to determine which albums they would be including in the study. Music could not be solely available as streaming or in a visual format. Each song needed to be purchased so that all of us had local access for listening, categorization, transcription, and quality control purposes. Album selection quantity was also slightly impacted by the realization that a considerable amount of transcription to transform the lyrics from audio to a machine readable format would need to take place prior to any digital analysis of the text. Erring on the side of easy accessibility, we made the decision to limit inclusion to solo albums by the artists, available for purchase and download via iTunes. This medium also made it easy to create playlists for each category for simple organization. Transcription, Categories and Compiling the Data Set

Categorization and Coding of each song could have been conducted without transcription, but we found it easier to listen, categorize and transcribe simultaneously. We began with the research already begun by Neely in her sabbatical project analyzing the text of *Tupac Shakur's* lyrics. The categories she described placed each song in *Shakur's* catalog into four primary categories. Each category was titled with a song title from one of *Shakur's* albums, with the exception of "Thug Life." There is no song titled "Thug Life," however, *Shakur* frequently referred to this phrase throughout his catalog, formed and named a group *Thug Life* which released an album called "Thug Life" in 1995, and he had the words tattooed across his torso. The original four categories created for *Tupac Shakur's* songs were "My Block," "Thug Life," "Me and My Girlfriend," and "Mama's Just a Little Girl." The original intent was to use the same categories for the Native American rap lyrics, however, we soon found that these lyrics did not translate to these categories. Additional categories, using song titles from the Native American songs were identified and the listening and transcription got underway.

“My Block” is a Shakur song on the posthumous *Better Dayz* (2002). In this song, he raps about Black on Black crime, three strikes laws, frequent funerals (“teardrops and closed caskets”), and arrests and incarcerations of “us ghetto bastardz.” He wonders “if the Lord still cares for us niggaz on welfare,” and laments that “the only time they notice a nigga is when he’s clutching on a 4-5” [.45 caliber handgun]. This category captures songs that address the hopelessness and rage and despair of life in the hood, on his block; however, they also highlight the hopes and dreams of the next generations as the children sing in the chorus of “My Block,”

Living life is but a dream
Hard times is all we seen, on my block
Every block is kinda mean
But on our block we still play, my block
But on our block we still play (Shakur, 2002)

“Born on the Rez” by Frank Waln captures similar dire conditions on American Indian Reservations. Waln is from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, where a 2013 report noted “The highest estimated rate of poverty is in South Dakota, with 43-47% of Native American families in 2010 earning incomes below the poverty line.” (Schilling, 2013). Songs in this category include references to border towns, extreme poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, Indigenous people treated as 2nd class citizens, and other third world conditions.

The “Thug Life” category represents nearly two-thirds of the songs in Shakur’s catalog, thereby inspiring major subcategories. Overall, these songs address and celebrate the benefits and trappings of living the thug lifestyle including partying and rolling with the Outlawz or Shakur’s “Closest Roaddogz.” Although incarcerations are included in “My Block,” songs in this category address prisons and prison life as a place one is surely headed, but doesn’t really want to go (“Out on Bail”). God and the concepts of death and dying (“Is There Heaven for a G”?) are treated similarly as incarceration in this category, and for Shakur, songs appearing here vividly describe the transition from rapping about being a thug to proclaiming his intent to cause his enemies and foes harm stemming from his sense of betrayal, anger, and need for revenge (“When We Ride”).

“Rez Affiliated” is a song from Litefoot’s 1999 album of the same name. Songs in this category identify up front and center that these are Native issues chronicled by Native American artists. They address activism, social issues, the education of Native Americans, CIB’s (Certificate of Indian Birth), identity as a Native American within the larger U.S. community, and cultural appropriation, the latter with, surprisingly, anger directed largely toward the African American rap community.

The remaining categories will not be addressed here, but are: “Me and My Girlfriend” and “A Song For Her” which address the artist’s relationships with women; and “Mama’s Just a Little Girl,” and “My Ancestors,” which address familial and tribal relationships.

Transcription

Although Shakur’s catalog was by far the largest within the data identified to analyze for this study, approximately 99% of it is currently transcribed and freely available on various websites. Overwhelmingly, 99% of those lyrics found needed to be corrected for spelling and context errors, for example, in “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” he raps, “She didn’t know what to throw away and what to keep, she wrapped the baby up and threw ‘em in a trash HEEP,” needed to be corrected to “HEAP,” even though “heep” does technically rhyme with “keep.” And content wise, in “International,” “Hartsville” International Airport was incorrectly transcribed as “Heartsville” by one site. In contrast, very few of the lyrics for the Native American artists were found by using Google. Each artist was contacted to request electronic copies of the lyrics, however, only one complied. And although we asked for lyrics for multiple albums, they were only able to provide lyrics for one album.

Transcribing hip hop lyrics is not easy. There are a number of elements that contribute to the making this particular task difficult, however the most challenging for us were 1) when the artist speaks directly to the listener. Oftentimes, the words are masked by music or laughter or other artist(s), making it more difficult to discern what is being said; 2) when the artist uses words and phrasings that we are not familiar with, in another language, vernacular or dialect, or pronunciation (to insure rhyming conventions are maintained); and 3) when the artist displays vocal dexterity that is not of a normal cadence and, extremely fast. Litefoot’s “Native 2K” from his 1999 album, *Rez Affiliated*, is an excellent example of all three of these elements (Litefoot, 1999). Thus, we spent quite a bit of time on compiling the data set and checking each other’s work for quality control so that it could be analyzed. The resulting data set summary is shown in Figure 1. Night Shield albums will be categorized at a later stage in this research project.

Figure 1. Data Set Summary.

	2Pac	%	Litefoot	%	Nataanii Means	%	Frank Waln	%	Night Shield	Totals
Albums	19		7		1				6	33
Total Tracks	326		76		13		6		107	528
Unique Tracks	220	67.48466	76	100	13	100	6	100		315
My Block	54	24.54545	0	0	0	0	0	0		54
Born on the Rez	0	0	7	9.210526	4	30.76923	3	50		14
Thug Life	105	47.72727	0	0	0	0	0	0		105
Out on Bail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Is There Heaven for a G?	13	5.909091	0	0	0	0		0		13
When We Ride	11	5	0	0	0	0	0	0		11
Rez Affiliated	0	0	48	63.15789	7	53.84615	1	16.66667		56
Mama's Just a Little Girl	4	1.818182	0	0	0	0	0	0		4
My Ancestors	0	0	13	17.10526	0	0	2	33.33333		15
Me and My Girlfriend	8	3.636364	0	0	0	0	0	0		8
Thug Passion	16	2	0	0	0	0	0	0		16
Skandalouz	9	4.090909	1	1.315789	0	0	0	0		10
A Song For Her	0	0	7	9.210526	2	15.38462	0	0		9

Text Analysis & Visualization Tools

Part of our methodology was to first identify software, applications, and web-based tools that could assist in the analysis and visualization of our text data set, then experiment with the tools to assess how appropriate they were for the research. In the early stages of seeking out digital scholarship tools, two online portals, DiRt Directory and TAPoR 2.0, were extremely helpful in identifying available tools that would allow us to analyze their data set.

We were familiar with two common qualitative data analysis programs and software used in the social sciences, ATLAS.ti and NVivo, which are frequently used at similar educational institutions. Though both of those tools are excellent options for this type of research, the cost (high) and learning curve (steep) for both were hindrances at this stage, thus we went for options that were inexpensive, accessible, and fairly straightforward. In addition to cost and efforts to learn new programs and software, some tools required the researchers to consent to upload their data sets to the tool, which could lead to copyright issues. We wanted to find a tool for text analysis and visualization and identified Voyant Tools as a resource that can perform both. However, we decided to use two separate resources, one for visualization, Wordle, a word cloud tool, and LIWC2015 (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) 2015, a text analysis tool.

Wordle is a free online visualization tool, which creates word clouds from text. The more often a word appears in a text, the larger it will occur in the word cloud. Additionally, there are numerous options to tailor the word cloud. One can remove numbers and common English, or any language, words; there are thirty-three different fonts to select from; fourteen different color combinations as well as the option to create customized colors; and one can select the layout of the words, vertically, horizontally, or a mix (Wordle, 2014).



LIWC 2015 is an economical software that has commonly been used in psychology and linguistic areas of study. According to LIWC, “it reads a given [source] text and counts the percentage of words that reflect different emotions, thinking styles, social concerns, and even parts of speech” (LIWC, 2016). The software was developed by researchers in various psychology fields, and the categories, which are associated with built-in dictionaries, are intended to represent an individual's psychological and social condition (LIWC, 2016; Petrie, Pennebaker, & Sivertsen, 2008).

The LIWC2015 includes four summary variables not available in previous versions: analytical thinking (the degree that words suggest formal, logical and hierarchical thinking patterns), clout (relative social status, confidence, or leadership displayed), authenticity (personal, humble, and vulnerable), and emotional tone (the higher the number, the more positive the tone; numbers under 50 suggest a more negative tone”) (PC, Inc.). In the authenticity category, people reveal themselves in an authentic or honest way. They are more personal, humble, and vulnerable. (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015). Emotional tone (categorized as Tone) is important because it includes both positive and negative emotion dimensions. According to Pennbaker et, als., “emotional tone with a high number is associated with a more positive, upbeat style; a low number reveals greater anxiety, sadness, or hostility. A number around 50 suggests either a lack of emotionality or different levels of ambivalence. (Pennbake et alt., 2015).

Figure 2.

My Block [Nitty Remix] (Better Dayz) (2002)

Word count – 991	Sad – 1.61%
Words per sentence – 330.33	Social – 9.28%
Analytic – 54.63%	Family - .81%
Clout – 40.43%	Cognitive processes – 13.22%
Authentic – 93.45%	Death – 1.01%
Tone – 14.60%	Sexual - 0%
Six letters – 10.90%	Focus Past – 2.72%
Dictionary – 86.18%	Focus Present – 10.90%
Function – 47.43%	Focus Future – .5%
Positive emotion – 3.13%	Time – 6.16%
Negative emotion – 3.94%	Home - .20%
Anxiety – 0.5%	Money - .61%
Anger – 1.01%	Religion - .4%
	Swear – 2.22%

Parental Advisory Explicit Content

The Parental Advisory Label (PAL Mark) was first introduced in 1985 by the Recording Industry of America (RIAA), and adopted in 2011 by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI). In an agreement with the RIAA, the National Parent Teacher Association, and the Parents Music Resource Center, the “PAL Mark” is placed on “music releases containing explicit lyrics, including explicit depictions of violence and sex,” so parents could make intelligent listening choices for their children...” (RIAA, PAL, n.d.). Mary “Tipper” Gore, the former wife of vice president (1993-2001) Al Gore, is the co-founder of the PMRC and is commonly cited for her role in the development of the Parental Advisory label. In 2006, the PAL Program was updated to include the increasing availability of digital music services which would allow consumers to receive sound recordings on computers and mobile devices. A voluntary program from its inception, the PAL Content Standards state, “Only the record label or artist that owns and/or distributes the particular sound recording may determine whether the sound recording contains PAL Content and warrants the use of a PAL Notice.” (RIAA, Standards, n.d.)

Findings & Discussion

As we began listening to the songs, categorizing, and transcribing them, and prior to using any text analysis tools and software, we began to observe what we are calling our pre-text analysis assumptions about this data set.

- Writing rap music is a solo endeavor
 - Assumption: if you rap it, then you wrote it.
- Recording and performing rap is often a collaborative effort; It's not always easy to tell who is rapping unless they refer to themselves
 - Assumption: if it's on your album, you support and endorse it.
- Production (music, beat, timing, chorus, background singing) is everything
 - Rap without production is spoken word
- Significance and influence of current events – political, popular, local, cultural, industry – on the artist
- Historical people, places and events are chronologically and culturally relevant
 - Native time and orientation
- Some hip hop lyrics about women, are hard for women to listen to
- Native language words, phrases and sounds are not homogenous
- Slang, regional and cultural euphemisms are difficult to spell, define, and interpret

Table 1. LIWC Analysis of Song Lyrics in Shakur/Native Categories.

	My Block (54 songs)	Born on the Rez (13 songs)	Thug Life (105 songs)	Rez Affiliated (57 songs)
Word count	38,354	7,486	72,276	29,618
Words per Sentence	52.40	680.55	64.13	51.96
Analytic	48.81%	50.18%	57.59%	67.13%
Clout	49.77%	58.40%	37.90%	68.38%
Authentic	65.81%	84.03%	70.86%	60.27%
Tone	8.92%	3.73%	3.26%	16.07%
Six letters	9.22%	10.59%	9.55%	9.80%
Dictionary	86.22%	89.57%	83.18%	81.11%
Function words	50.14%	53.02%	47.94%	48.53%
Positive emotion	2.73%	1.82%	1.97%	2.51%
Negative emotion	4.13%	4.09%	4.36%	3.19%
Anxiety	.39%	.51%	.41%	.38%
Anger	2.26%	1.20%	2.70%	1.75%
Sad	.69%	1.26%	.45%	.26%
Social	11.13%	11.89%	9.22%	10.69%
Family	.75%	.57%	.42%	.37%
Cognitive Processes	10.17%	10.30%	8.22%	8.43%
Death	.97%	.87%	1.04%	.43%
Sexual	.59%	.15%	.82%	.24%
Focus Past	3.11%	3.63%	3.06%	2.64%
Focus Present	13.18%	12.88%	11.78%	9.17%
Focus Future	1.50%	2.16%	1.39%	1.50%
Time	4.77%	4.89%	4.87%	4.04%
Home	.26%	.31%	.24%	.18%
Money	.72%	.44%	.75%	.58%
Religion	.83%	.88%	.59%	.46%
Swear	3.00%	.37%	4.26%	.84%

Table 1. include the results of the LIWC analysis on all of the lyrics in each of the four categories. Given the sadness and despair of the subject matter in the My Block and Born on the Rez categories, you would expect the Sad category to be higher, but it does not rise above 1.25% across the categories. The same can be observed of the Death, Home,

Anger and Anxiety categories. These men had a lot to say in these 229 songs with a collective 147,734 words; however, a look at the percentage of words in the LIWC dictionary offered the best clue to what was going on. Nearly 19% of the words in the Rez Affiliated songs do not appear in the LIWC dictionary, and while the Born on the Rez category fared better with more than 10% not appearing, these numbers are still way too high. What was being missed and are these missing words the key to the perceived low percentages across the categories? Luckily, LIWC not only categorizes words, but allows you to see the words that are not in the dictionary in the Color-Code Text feature. All words in the text analysis are used in the word count and words per sentence calculations, but words that are not in the dictionary do not get mapped to any of the LIWC dimensions. As previously noted, the origins of this software are deeply embedded in the psychology literature and although the dictionary does cover a wide spectrum, LIWC does not understand tribal, Rez, hip hop or hood. Hip hop lyrics are full of mentions of comrades (roaddogz, homies, niggaz, soulja's, ridah's, 'Skins, and warriors); beefs with adversaries (suckas, playa [haters], and mothafuckas); smoking and drinking (sherm, indo, weed, blazing, Alize, Cristal, Hennessey); and gunplay (4-4, .45, 9, automatic, and ammunition). With the exception of the bracketed word haters, none of these words are in the LIWC dictionary. The LIWC does not include people (C. Delores Tucker, George Bush, Pete Wilson, Geronimo Pratt, or Geronimo, Crazy Horse); or place names (Reservations, Rez, Cali, California, L.A., or Los Angeles, America), which means none of the more than 60 tribes and Reservations Litefoot gives a shout out to in "Native Pride" are categorized. Several of the rappers in this study identify as activists, but that word is not included either. Neither is the word Indian, nor avenge, or braids, or ceremonies.

Understanding that the missing words might represent a substantial change in the interpretation of the text analysis, we still found value in the exercise. It is worth taking a closer look at the percentages between the categories My Block and Born on the Rez, and Thug Life and Rez Affiliated.

My Block had the third most songs but the second most words of all the categories analyzed. This category, with its focus on struggles in the community, had some intriguing findings in LIWC. Of particular note, and in comparison to the other categories, My Block had the highest Focus Present percentage, 13.18%, which reflects the issues Pac was expressing in the now and shows the urgency in which he spoke on those topics (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Another percentage that was high was Social at 11.13%, which makes sense given that songs placed in this category were ones where Shakur was voicing issues that were impacting his friends, family, and larger community. We would have thought percentages would have been higher in Home, just .26% and Death, .97%, since both topics are prevalent in his lyrics, which suggests discrepancies with the LIWC dictionary.

It is not surprising that the authentic percentage for lyrics in the Born on the Rez category is very high in comparison to the other three categories. Each of the three artists with songs in this category consistently rap honestly and authentically about their lives and their truth. An interesting result for this category is the Focus Past percentage of 3.63%. According to Tausczik & Pennebaker, this category only captures the tense of words. This category should probably be larger for all categories because these artists often express in their music events in the past, or talk about Indian history, and their ancestors but because of software limitations discussed earlier, some words, e.g., ancestor, are not in the LIWC dictionary. The total number of words is taken into account in words per sentence, and the word count, and in the six letter category. This category includes all of the words including those that are not categorized. The song lyrics in Born on the Rez have a higher percentage of 6 letter words than each of the other categories indicating the use of more complex language (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010).

Thug Life had the most songs of all of the categories analyzed. Unlike the My Block and Born on the Rez categories, Thug Life and Rez Affiliated are decidedly different, even though some of the same elements are present. There are temptations, struggles, blinged out excess, wicked MC skills, sexual prowess, massive God complexes, extended family, and anger at cultural appropriation. But above it all there is pride in being Black, and Native. No one wants to be anyone or anything else except themselves, but they want respect, for themselves, and their people, and their land, and their communities. According to LIWC, "the heart of the program is a group of dictionaries that tell the text analysis module which words to identify and classify" (Pennebaker Conglomerates, Inc., n.d.). And, perhaps appropriate for his category of text, "The more words that you analyze, the more trustworthy are the results." With the exception of authenticity, Thug Life scored lower in the three remaining categories when compared to Rez Affiliated. However, one could argue that a higher number in analytical thinking is not desirable for a rapper because rapper's are story tellers. "People low in analytical thinking tend to write and think using language that is more narrative ways, focusing on the here-and-now, and personal experiences" (PC Inc.). Thug Life scored lowest across the categories in clout, which could be attributed to the nature of Thug Life, a collaborative existence and collective experience where everyone is drinking, smoking, partying, sexing, fighting, and 'riding' together. Shakur's voice personifies authenticity when he raps about his relationships, friends and foe, and the authenticity of the true Thug Lifestyle. Across the board, the tone category is low, with the Thug Life category at the lowest, 3.26%. This is not surprising when one considers that living the Thug Lifestyle leads you to one of three inevitable ends: locked down, cracked out, or in the dirt" (Pac's Life, 2006).

The Rez Affiliated category had the highest percentage in Analytics, Clout, and Tone across all categories. This seems appropriate for the Clout category because songs coded as Rez Affiliated include lyrics that reveal these artists and activists as role models and leaders in their community. Although any number below 50 is a negative in the Tone category, Rez Affiliated lyrics scored higher across all categories studied. The majority (63%) of the songs in the Analytical category come from Litefoot's catalog. Litefoot is the oldest artist in this study and has more experience performing and recording than any of the other artists. His lyrics are noticeably different from the younger artists in that his story lines are much more complex including vivid imagery of otherworld experiences woven seamlessly with current reality. In Native languages, there are many words that may be Swear words, words for Home, and words for Family not in the LIWC dictionary that would contribute to the low percentages in these categories for Rez Affiliated and Born on the Rez.

Next Steps

Typically, once the research has been completed, analyzed, presented and discussed, time is taken to contemplate what we do next. As we were compiling the data set, we began to discuss the potential for developing and analyzing other data sets because there is much more flexibility when you create your own custom data set, which allows you to you can analyze anything you want.

- Female voices are scarce in male rap productions
- What do Native female rappers rap about?
- Quantitative comparison of objectification and appreciation of the female form
- Qualitative comparison of rappers experience growing up on the Rez and off the Rez

For us, this reflection gets more complicated because we do not feel as if we have successfully completed what we originally set out to do. The LIWC software was a great start, but for all of the categories of song lyrics we analyzed, nearly 20% of the words were not categorized because they were not in the dictionary. Thus we are faced with multiple opportunities to proceed with our research agenda. We could continue on the original path and transcribe and analyze the songs from the remaining four categories, or create a separate dictionary which includes hip hop and ethnic and tribal terminology (LIWC2015 has instructions for creating your own dictionary), or assign a pre-existing LIWC category to each word that is not in the dictionary. Ultimately, we decided to continue with the four categories addressed in this paper, and develop a plan for including the words that are not in the LIWC dictionary. The outcome of this decision will be presented at the National Diversity in Libraries Conference to be held in Los Angeles, CA, August 10-13, 2016.

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