

Coloring Book Versus Damn:

Chance the Rapper & Kendrick Lamar's Lyrical use of the Moral Exemplar Theory

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Abstract

This analysis looks at the varying views of God and religion used in Grammy-winning albums, *DAMN.* by Kendrick Lamar and *Coloring Book* by Chance the Rapper, using Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory with the lens of the moral exemplar theory. This artifact was selected due to its widespread fame throughout multiple countries, use of religious rhetoric and gospel influences, and multiple music awards and positive acclaim. The researcher showcased that though Kendrick Lamar does not see God in the same merciful light as Chance the Rapper, he more accurately uses and understands the use of moral exemplar than his counterpart.

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“I get my word from the sermon, I do not talk to the serpent, That’s the holistic discernment,”

— “All We Got”, Chance the Rapper (Ft. Chicago Children's Choir & Kanye West)

In 2016, Chance the Rapper (a.k.a. Chancelor Bennett) mainstreamed the Christian Rap genre in his third album, *Coloring Book*. A more recent album, *Damn/DAMN*. (2017), by Kendrick Lamar (Duckworth) took another approach to Christian rap, showcasing a path in the Christian faith and lived religion, specifically in Compton or Los Angeles, California and rap “game”.

Chancelor Bennett, from Chicago, Illinois, released the Grammy-winning album *Coloring Book* in May of 2016. The album, his third mixtape, was nominated for the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Album and won the Grammy Award for Best Rap Album, and the BET Hip-Hop Award for Best Mixtape (Havens, 2017). *Coloring Book* was notably the first streaming-only album to be nominated and win a Grammy. Kendrick Lamar released his critically acclaimed *Damn* in April of 2017. The album was certified triple Platinum, Grammy nominated for Album of the Year, and won the Grammy for Best Rap Album. Also of note, the album was the first non-jazz or classical work to earn the Pulitzer Prize for Music. The Pulitzer committee described the album as "a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life." (McClurg, 2018).

Other winners of the Grammy’s Best Rap Album include Eminem and Ludacris, who typically display a more “gangsta” approach to rap music with their controversial lyrics including consistent themes of crime, profanity, and sexual acts. Brummet (2014), discusses that although people do have an idea of the “gangsta” genre of rap being violent, sexual, and

materialistic; rap does have the potential to use its music, style and looks for a more positive social commentary and critique (Brummet, 2014, p. 261).

In this research, both Bennett and Lamar's most recent albums were analyzed for religious themes and/or the lack thereof, while also understanding the artists' differences in opinion on the Christian faith and relationship with God. This study analyzes the lyrics from both artist's latest albums. This analysis explores whether there are multiple instances that Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar lean on religion and faith in their messages. Due to the similar timeframe of Bennett and Lamar's musical careers, the research follows Chance the Rapper's *Coloring Book* (2016), as well as, Lamar's *Damn* (2017).

Literature Review

Though research on Chance the Rapper and Lamar is sparse, the literature reviewed was done so as to enhance the foundation of my study. This study seeks to extend research on both modern-day rap culture and lived religions. The topics included theories, Christianity, gospel music, and hip-hop/rap. This section also discusses the limitations in the study.

Christianity and The Moral Exemplar Theory

Bennett and Lamar are both baptized within Christian religions. Christianity is a major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth. According to Benko (1984), Christianity grew out of Judaism, the ancient religion of Abraham with the foundational text of the Torah. Benko states that though Christianity stems from Judaism, the faith states that Jesus suffered and died, was buried, descended into hell and rose from the dead to grant eternal life to believers. Over the years, we have witnessed a powerful motivation in cultures throughout the globe. In the 21st Century, Christianity is the most popular religion in the United States with 75% of American adults identifying with some form of Christianity (Newport, para 2, 2015). According to Newport, Christianity is divided into Evangelical Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, and the Catholic Church. Ploch (1994), discusses the recent history of Protestantism or Christianity in America, primarily in political changes, stating,

The political challenge is for the churches to define public voices. Liberals, though buoyed by secular attempts to define a common good, have difficulty because their denominational strength is ebbing as is the optimism of the liberal gospel. Conservatives have fiscal and personnel resources but seem unable to subject their vision to the give-and-take of political compromise. The religious right has placed issues in the debate but has not been able to enact legislation, (Ploch, 1994, para. 5).

Though Christianity is still a major influence in today's society, religion and social ideals have become a reason for division within the politics of the United States. Religious groups have established these motivations by creating conceptions of what is "right" and what is considered "immoral."

The lesson of morals, standards of behavior or beliefs, was written in the context of the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. In the Book of Genesis, chapter 2, Adam and Eve live at first with God in paradise. Through temptation, the two were expelled from paradise for eating the forbidden fruit, thus creating the original sin. Sin is the concept of acts that violate a moral rule (Genesis, Old Testament, Hebrew Bible). According to Long and Sedley (1987), morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions. These are distinguished as proper and improper.

Every detail is predetermined by a causal nexus called 'fate', so that human moral responsibility has to be understood as not entailing genuinely free choice of action. Individual goodness and happiness consist in the wise man's perfect concord with the preordained scheme of things ... The hope of moral improvement rests in particular on the primarily intellectual nature of our morally bad states, or 'passions': as false judgements (Long & Sedley, 1987, p. 366-367).

Long and Sedley also state an idea of moral ontology as the origin moral, and moral epistemology as the knowledge of morals. Zagzebski (2013, 2017) discusses the philosophical purpose of a comprehensive moral exemplar theory and states

In this theory, basic moral concepts are defined via direct reference to exemplars of moral goodness, picked out through reflective admiration. The theory gives narratives a critical function, and it connects empirical studies with the a priori side of ethics.

In Zagzebski's argument an idea of emotional motivation is a mapping or influence for what she calls moral domain. The idea of a good person, virtue, etc. is shown by exemplars and motives, thus creating an idea of saints, heroes, and sages.

Gospel Music

With Lamar and Bennett's heavy influences of Christianity in their music, comes an influence on Christian gospel melodies and lyrics. Gospel music is a Christian genre of music, with oral traditions mixing church hymns with black oral traditions (Jackson, 1995, p. 185). Jackson states that Gospel can be traced as early as the 17th century.

If a basic theoretical concept of a black aesthetic can be drawn from the history of the black experience in America, the crystallization of this and ideals of West Africa are the ultimate source from which the basic concept of a black aesthetic definition is derived (William-Jones, 1975, p. 373).

African-American culture began to have significant influences on mainstream American culture after what is referenced to America's Great Migration in the 20th century. Williams-Jones also states that the persistent retention in performances of gospel music is a clear definition of black identity from black experiences and African ethos (year unless this is a direct quote, in which case it needs quotes.).

Boyer (1979), argued that it was only a decade before the late 70's that the mainstream American felt secure in their taste of gospel music:

The years 1945 to 1955 witnessed the rise of gospel music from shabby store-front churches, and a few untrained singers dressed in threadbare black and maroon choir robes, accompanied by an upright piano, often out of tune, to the gospel group extravaganzas ... The late sixties and early seventies brought the gospel into the Roman

Catholic church, and through television and recordings, into the homes of listeners and viewers around the world (Boyer, 1979, p. 5).

Gilroy (1993) discussed this of black diaspora music, “facilitated by a common fund of urban experiences, by the effect of similar but by no means identical forms of racial segregation, as well as by the memory of slavery, a legacy of Africanisms, and a stock of religious experiences,” (p. 80). Areas of major influence by black diaspora include both gospel and rap music, due to their similar musical energy into vocal inflections and use of a motif or phrase that can be repeated in a similar pitch. A major reflection to black diaspora is Beyonce Knowles’s “Formation,” released in 2016. The song uses her African heritage, while she reflects on racially charged events that prompted the Black Lives Matter movement.

Stewart (2016) discussed the merge of gospel and rap and said, “For millennials raised in the church and weaned on rap, it feels natural to use the language of hip-hop to grapple with thorny personal and spiritual issues.” Apart from Chance the Rapper, J.Cole (Jermaine Cole) is another artist who specializes in gospel influences. Cole released *Born Sinner*, his second studio album, in 2013. The title serves as an allusion to gospel music and uses gospel choirs. 2013 was not the first year that Christianity was a theme in rap music. Religion has had an overt presence in rap music, starting as early as “Son of the King” on Stanley Kirk Burrell or MC Hammer’s first album (Burrell, 1988). More recent artists to allude to Christianity in their music include Kanye West, Outcast, and Fifty Cent. According to an official statement released by Duke University, thousands of underground artists are grinding out to create the sub-genre of Gospel Hip-Hop (Perry, 2004). According to Best (2005), Sanders (1996), and Sorett (2007), similar to the two generations of black religious musicians before them, Christian rappers consecrated a

popular “secular” form by anointing their rhythms with sacred text, posting an exilic – in this world, but not of it – ethic to the larger hip-hop community.

Hip-Hop / Rap

Stepping aside from the Christian context of rap, in early discourses and commentary about the genre, rap was used to describe spoken word in a song or record as early as Isaac Hayes’ *Black Moses* in 1971 (Planer, 2014). However, the real historical origins of rap can be traced back to its roots of West Africa. According to Pollard (2004), griots of West Africa delivered stories rhythmically, over a drum base. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2017), rap is a “musical style in which rhythmic and/or rhyming speech is chanted (“rapped”) to musical accompaniment. This backing music, which can include digital sampling (music and sounds extracted from other recordings by a DJ), is also called hip-hop, the name used to refer to a broader cultural movement that includes rap, deejaying (turntable manipulation), graffiti painting, and breakdancing.” Alridge and Steward’s (2005) *Introduction: Hip-Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future* states that hip-hop music in its infancy was, “described as an outlet the disenfranchised youth of marginalized backgrounds and low-income areas, as the hip-hop culture reflected the social, economic and political realities of their lives” (p. 190). The Golden Age of hip-hop began in the mid-80s after the decline of disco until about the early to mid-90s. Writer and Black Historian Jelani Cobb (2007) says “in these golden years, a critical mass of mic prodigies were literally creating themselves and their art form at the same time” (p. 47). According to Cobb, this time period was the greatest innovation period of rap lyricism.

In Brummett’s (2014) *Rhetoric in Pop Culture*, he discusses how, although people do have an idea of the “gangsta” genre of rap, rap does have the potential to use its music, style, and looks for a more positive social commentary and critique (p. 261). Subjects of rap can be

classified as party rhymes, meant to pump up a crowd and reference subjects of love and sex (Blow, 2006). According to Blow's, *The History of Rap: Vol 1* (2006), rap has also created multiple forms of sociopolitical subject matter both on the East and West coasts. He goes on to state that some rappers make light of the crime typically portrayed in the urban areas where rap has been formed. Various leaders have accused rappers of developing a culture of violence and hedonism among hip-hop listeners through their lyrics (Kirby, 2006). However, rappers whose messages may be in conflict with these views typically align with Christian hip-hop.

Christian rap is now the most commercially successful form of religious rap. According to Cummings (2015), Christian hip-hop seems to have found its way in the hip-hop family with Christian rappers like Lecrae, Thi'sl and Hostyle Gospel winning national awards and making regular television appearances. Collaborations of mainstream artist and gospel artist, like Lacrae, shows an ultimate growth for the genre of gospel hip-hop and an idea of further discussion of lived religion within context of mainstream media.

Research Questions

There are a multitude of methods that have been used to look at the social influences of rap and gospel music, from content analysis to qualitative interviewing. However, there is limited research that has looked into how two artists utilized morals and ethics within their music, specifically when they feature gospel entities. This study will analyze two components of the artists: lyrics and fan responses. These categories prompted the researcher to ask:

RQ1: How do Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar utilize or not utilize the Moral Exemplar Theory within their most recent albums?

Method

Rhetorical criticism in communication studies is defined as the descriptive analysis of communication methods.

We live our lives enveloped in symbols. How we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of symbols we create and the symbols we encounter in the world ... rhetoric is defined as the human use of symbols to communicate (Foss, 2009, p. 3).

The analysis looks at the conceptual use of the grounded theory through the scope of the moral exemplar theory through two artists' album lyrics: Chance the Rapper's *Coloring Book* and Kendrick Lamar's *Damn*. This analysis also identifies their separate relationship with the gospel and "gangsta" rap genres.

Grounded Theory

According to Kathy Charmaz (2009) the grounded theory founded by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967), are systematic inductive methods that conduct qualitative research, which develops theory. According to Charmaz (2009), "The term grounded theory denotes dual referents: (a) a method consisting of flexible methodological strategies and (b) the products of this type of inquiry." Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that researchers will do simultaneous data collection and analysis (a normalized practice in qualitative research). The originators said the researcher codes the data, compare data, codes and identifies leads, and categories to develop through further data collection. Researchers across varying qualitative disciplines and professions adopt the grounded theory at a more frequent rate than any other method of analyzing qualitative data (Gubrium, 2012).

Thomas and James (2006) suggested the impossibility of going without preconceptions into the collection and analysis of data. This contradicts Glaser and Strauss' thoughts on lack of preconception as a necessity. Thomas and James point to the formulaic nature of the grounded theory method, stating there is a lack of consistency with open and creative interpretation.

Grounded theory is adequate for this rhetorical analysis as it does not show data-corruption issues with subjectivism. The data analysis of grounded theory involves the following steps: open-coding, axial-coding, and selective-coding. These steps were used to avoid subjective interpretations of both Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar's lyrics.

Open-coding is the first step of many filters in which themes or meanings are extracted from raw data. Babbie (2007) defines open-coding as, "The initial classification and labeling of concepts in qualitative data analysis and in open-coding; the codes are suggested by the researcher examination and questioning of the data" (p. 327). According to Babbie (2007), axial-coding involves the regrouping of the raw data or open-code categories and looks for more-analytic concepts. Following the collection of the open-coding stage, axial-coding is used to identify themes or patterns that re-appear in the data. Selective-coding builds on the results of open-coding and axial-coding to identify the central concepts that have been identified in the body of data examined. Babbie also states, "...selective-coding seeks to identify the central code in the study: The one that the other codes are related to" (2007, p. 327). The creation of the selective coding will develop a more processed storyline and an understanding of the research's core concepts.

The Moral Exemplar Theory

The moral exemplar theory, developed by Peter Abelard (1140, translated 1971), goes into Chance the Rapper's Christ-appreciating lyrics, charity work, spiritual reforms within himself and others on the album, and moral conflicts in the album. In addition, similar themes will be utilized for Kendrick Lamar, as well as his overall struggles with the Christian faith. The moral exemplar theory or moral example theory of the amendments holds the thought that the purpose and work of positive moral change came from Jesus Christ, who wanted to set an example to society (Wallace & Rusk, 2011, p. 250). According to Wallace and Rusk (2011), early centuries of the church developed an idea that the moral influence view focused around the issue of how people can pass God's final judgment, namely through positive moral change (p. 276).

The integral part of this theory is the lyrical use, and lack of use, in which the artists' discuss concepts of Christ, biblical references, moral and family values, in comparison to sex, drugs, and other concepts that are questionable according to the Christian-faith. These concepts are typically not used in gospel or church music. The analysis additionally looks to recognize contradictions in both rappers' work with the idea that the meaning and purpose of life can derive solely from faith traditions.

Data Collection

The coding for this research developed into two categories 1: *Coloring Book* and 2: *Damn*. Coding resulted in two subcategories. Subcategory 1 is religion. This includes codes, morals, family values, biblical references, and gospel. Subcategory also two is rap culture. This includes codes, sexual, drugs, anti-government. Under subcategory 1, code 1: morals or a lyric discussing a person's standards of behavior or beliefs concerning what is and is not acceptable for them to do, primarily based around religion. Code 2: family values or a lyric that discusses

the values held to be traditionally learned or reinforced within a family. Code 3: biblical references or any reference to God, The Old Testament, and The New Testament. Code 4: gospel or melodic lyrics in regard to the teaching or revelation of Christ — discussion of Jesus. Under subcategory 2, code 1: sexual or lyrics relating to the activities connected with physical attraction or intimate physical contact between individuals. Code 2: drugs or lyrics discussing any substance that when consumed causes a temporary physiological, and often psychological change in the body. Code 3: anti-government or lyrics that are against a government or the administration in office.

For this analysis, each song was analyzed for religious themes or the lack thereof. This analysis will explore whether there is a myriad of instances that Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar lean on religion and faith in their message. There are also several lines and verses that contradict the messages of faith that have been built in previous songs. Additionally, a comparison of each rapper's use of the moral exemplar theory, biblical references, as well as the lack thereof is utilized.

Results

Upon completing the coding process for Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar's mixtapes as per Abelard's moral exemplar theory (with proper extensions) and codebook, the researcher bifurcated their 27 coded entries into two categories. These two categories were supplemented with two subcategories. The first category included the coded entries representing utterances of morals, family values, biblical references, and gospel. The second category included the coded entries representing sex, drugs, anti-government, and degrading towards women.

First Subcategory - Religion

The moral exemplar theory is shown in Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar's music by exploring the moral teachings and readings Bennett and Lamar use within their lyrics. In one instance the morals of God and the Bible are utilized to create an uplifting album based on the teachings of Christ. Chancelor Bennett utilized the belief practices and everyday experiences of urban Chicago-based Christianity. On the other hand, Lamar goes against his traditional sinful upbringing in Compton and utilized his holistic framework of lived religion to follow the morals of God. Lamar thus creates an idea of a merciless and wrathful God.

Overall, the data shows that *Coloring Book* has substantial differences in each coding tool. According to *Deseret News Entertainment*, Bennett told *TeenVogue* in 2017 that he was a Christian Rapper though he does not label his music Christian (Binowski, 2017).

Bennett, a Chicago native, is reported to be the son of two established middle-class African-American parents. Chance the Rapper is noted to have grown up in the church. He grew to regard gospel singers Kirk Franklin and Fred Hammond as musical standard bearers.

“All We Got” is the first track on *Coloring Book*, and within the first 10 lines, Bennett puts Christian thoughts in his lyrics. He claims his “... daughter couldn’t have a better mother,” and proceeds to say that “If she ever finds another, he better love her” (Bennett, C., track 1), claiming that he wants nothing but happiness for the woman who gave birth to his child even though it seems like in these lines that they are not together. This is an indication of a Christian state of mind. He makes reference in the second verse, “I do not talk to the serpent,” after saying he gets, “...his word from the sermon” (Bennett, C., track 1). This is a direct reference to the story of Adam and Eve and the serpent who persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and that he is able to dodge temptations by listening to the word of God. There are a few other lines that share this idea, including him, saying “I was baptized like real early” and “I might give Satan a swirlie” as he continues to seemingly bolster his religious side (Bennett, C., track 1). The song itself has a gospel tone to it with a choir singing in the background and a very positive and uplifting feel.

Lamar, who was noted to not join the Christian church until the early 2010s has a different view on religion. *Damn* portrays a God that imposes dire consequences for not following His lessons. Lamar’s use of religious rhetoric and gospel have significant differences to other codes of morals and family values. The idea of a harsh, demanding God is a common idea among descendants of slaves and among African-American Pentecostals in the twentieth century, specifically in American gospel music. Lamar’s album also showcases a sense of existentialism and asks God tough questions. According to the A&E Television Network, Lamar’s parents moved to Compton from Chicago to escape the city’s gang culture. Lamar’s father was associated with the notorious Gangster Disciples gang. Lamar grew up around treacherous street activity during the 1980s crack trade and rise of West Coast gangs. His

involvement in these activities shows his life was not short of sins. Discussed in the next category, Lamar's album uses religious rhetoric to candidly go against his sinful nature and strive to be absolved of his sins (2018).

In Lamar's first song, "Blood", he shows that his people are often cursed/damned by their disobedience to the Lord,

"Is it wickedness? Is it weakness? You decide/ Are we gonna live or die? So I was takin' a walk the other day/ And I seen a woman, a blind woman Pacin' up and down the sidewalk/ She seemed to be a bit frustrated/ As if she had dropped somethin' and/ Havin' a hard time findin' it/ So after watchin' her struggle for a while." (Lamar, K., track 1).

Following Lamar's idea of a merciless God, he uses the lyrics, "My cousin called, my cousin Carl Duckworth/ Said know my worth/ And Deuteronomy say that we all been cursed" (Lamar, K., track 3).

These lyrics follow Deuteronomy 28:45 (Holy Bible, King James, Version), "All these curses will come on you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord and your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you." Other religious testament elements include Revelations 1:3, John 3:16, Jeremiah 17:5-6, and Leviticus 24:19-22 (Holy Bible, New King James Version).

Second Subcategory - Rap Culture

The rap or gangsta standard is shown in Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar's music by the typical sexualization and partaking in drug use Bennett and Lamar use within their lyrics. Bennett and Lamar utilize and understand lived religion in their lyrics describing the struggles and everyday experiences of urban Chicago-based lifestyles or, in Lamar's case, Compton struggles.

In *Coloring Book*, Bennett, who had a child out of wedlock, discusses sex in almost every song that does not have religious rhetoric. “Mixtape” takes another turn back into a “gangsta” rap lane, with next to no religious messages or references made throughout the entirety of the song. The song diverts from Christian messages fairly early in the song, when Bennett says “Bad little bitch, wanna know how the lips taste” (Bennett, track 7). The song is riddled with sexual innuendos, phrases, and words that degrade women and give off a “gangsta” vibe. On the track, he is joined by Young Thug and Lil Yachty, who are not known for their religious messages. This song has a different sound than the rest of the album. Gone are the choirs and the uplifting tempos. Instead, they are replaced with a heavier bass and a more current hip-hop/rap sound.

Similar to the first two references, *Coloring Book* discusses his drug use and uses slang terms in references to his consumption of weed, acid, etc. In the lane of “gangsta” rap, “Smoke Break” centers strictly around marijuana. One recurring line through the song is Bennett saying “we deserve, we deserve,” before saying “a smoke break” (Bennett, track 12). Constantly repeating the line over and over gives off the impression that Bennett is justifying the action to himself. There can be an argument made by both sides of the marijuana debate, but the fact is that federally, it is still a crime and does not fall under the Christian guidelines. The fact that he says either “you deserve” or “we deserve” 22 different times through the course of the song could be taken as someone who is regretting a decision but is doing their best to justify it to themselves (Bennett, track 12).

The study of moral exemplar theory can argue that the act of deserving “sinful” behaviors can step a person down a path of an interpretive meaningless life, and not a virtuous one.

Ultimately, “Smoke Break” could refer to a point in his life where Bennett knew he was living

against the word of Christ and was having to make himself believe he was doing it for a legitimate reason, thus fighting the theory of moral exemplar.

The coding process showcased that Lamar utilizes typical rap culture less frequently than Chance the Rapper. For Lamar, growing up with influences of gangs, violence, and drugs, there is a large number of vices available, but drugs and gangs do not seem as present in his life as Chance the Rapper. Lamar is noted to not partake in drinking or smoking. This is a stark contrast from the life Bennett leads. Lamar, like Bennett, uses lust, and their most significantly used code is *sex*. Lamar reveals in the song “Lust”, that he indulges in wrath and lust self-reflexively. In the coding of *degrading toward women*, Lamar does refer to females as hoes and bitches, but doesn’t make reference to sex when utilizing those terms.

Lamar does not reflect on anti-government speech, though he does go against *Fox News* and *Fox News* pundit Geraldo Rivera. Rivera notably dissed Lamar’s performance of “Alright” in the 2015 BET Awards. Lamar decided to include the audio in his opener “Blood” and throughout “DNA.” He then addresses Fox on his third track. Though the original sentiments of the argument were political in nature, due to “Alright” being an anti-police sentiment piece, the overall tone of the songs had no anti-government sentiment.

Discussion

The moral exemplar themes portrayed in these albums make a bold statement about the current state of Christianity in the United States, primarily in popular culture and the rap game. This discussion will use the lyrics performed by the two rappers to answer the research question.

The data shows that *Coloring Book* opens up possibilities beyond the dichotomous boundaries of religious/sacrilegious or good/bad. Instead, it invites the listener, into a cross-grained experience where they may obtain a changed awareness of the living struggle that a Christian might face in a morally corrupt environment. A chaplain may take the song “How Great” and play it during a church service. “How Great” is a song researchers could write ten pages on focusing on the religious context of its message. The intro verse states: “How great, is our God. Sing with me, how great is our God” (Bennett, C., track 11). Followed by the intro skit: “The first is that God is better. Then the world’s best day. God is better than the best day. That the world has to offer” (Bennett, C., track 11). These two verses playoff the moral exemplar theory by explaining following God in everything. In verse one, Chance the Rapper creates multiple religious subtexts such as magnify (Psalms 69:30), “book don’t end with Malachi” (Malachi of the Old Testament), Shabach (Hebrew for praise) and more.

Overall, Chance the Rapper has stated on the American Music Award show that “How Great” was his favorite song on the album, due to family ties it serves and the work his cousin Nicole did on the track. The track’s strong Biblical themes are not only addressed by Chance the Rapper, but also by featured artist Jay Electronica, a practicing Muslim. Though Electronica is not Christian, he does sing praise to Christ, who is recognized as a prophet of Islam.

The research also shows that *DAMN*. rationalized that God is thornier than artists who might betray Him. In “Loyalty” Rihanna asks if there's anybody you would "lie for, slide for, die

for." Lamar responds "That's what God's for." This becomes confusing for listeners, when he states he believes he's plagued with immovable sin "I got power, poison, pain, and joy inside my DNA", but egotistical wrapped up in his fame "I am legend / Y'all are peasants" and situational unable to be separated from it "In a perfect world I would choose faith over riches". Lamar's knowingly sacrilegious mindset leads to one definitive statement on the track "Fear," "God damn us, God damn we, God damn us all." These verses create a true-to-life character. In *DAMN*. Lamar seems to have realized he consistently has to push back against himself, not blame outside factors for his feeling. In the album, "Lust" is followed by "Love" while "Pride" comes before "Humble." What might make Lamar far more complex is his comparison of "God" and "Duckworth," Lamar's album doesn't tackle the idea of good versus bad in a form of rap versus morals, but focuses on his frustration: he believes in God; he believes in himself—and is it sacrilegious to do both?

Kendrick Lamar and Chance the Rapper create and capitalize on their fans in one singular way: they are taking hip-hop to places people think it can't go. Their creation of a spiritual edge may be filtered in a different atmosphere, but fall within the same idea; political and spiritual rap can sell albums and can win Grammy's. America's hedonism and nihilism permeate hip-hop stars to be preoccupied with girls, gangs, and a good-time, but Lamar and Chance's clashing views on God create a statement in today's era.

Future Research

After the coding of *DAMN.* and *Coloring Book*, I found that a survey of varying fans from both artists could help see how audiences view God's presence in the albums and the moral versus sinful uses within the album. With such little research about the influence of Christianity on the two rap albums, one could do a larger analysis on albums with Christian themes including research on primarily Christian rapper, Tupac, and many more. Another analysis can look deeper into more relevant music produced by Chance the Rapper at a future date, as he will have *Coloring Book 2* released in the near future.

Conclusion

Chance the Rapper's subject matter of *Coloring Book* illustrates multiplicity in its varying views of a person's lifestyle. Though, according to the research, *Coloring Book* is unique in its explicit cross of spirituality and secularity. It is both pure and impious—it is not trying to be a spiritual experience nor a secular one—it is an exercise in representing humanity. Chance the Rapper's praises of the Lord and lyrics of an uplifting God is one that steps away from Kendrick Lamar. Research shows that although Lamar has a significantly lower use of typical rap culture references within his lyrics, he still does not follow the moral exemplar theory coding in all facets. Lamar questions God and his atonement. Lyrics in both songs can establish that Chance the Rapper would like to praise God despite his sins, while Lamar fears Him for the same reason. In an industry that is tainted with sin and a lack of atonement, the two rappers have been deemed two sides of the same coin.

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