



Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop

Desmond Upton Patton^{a,*}, Robert D. Eschmann^b, Dirk A. Butler^b

^a School of Social Work, 1080 S. University, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA

^b School of Social Service Administration, 969 E. 60th Street, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 18 January 2013

Keywords:

Social media
Gang violence
African American males
Hip hop

ABSTRACT

Gang members carry guns and twitter accounts. Media outlets nationally have reported on a new phenomenon of gang affiliates using social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to trade insults or make violence threats that lead homicide or victimization. We term this interaction *internet banging*. Police departments in metropolitan areas have increased resources in their gang violence units to combat this issue. Interestingly, there is little to no literature on this issue. We argue internet banging is a cultural phenomenon that has evolved from increased participation with social media and represents an adaptive structuration, or new and unintended use of existing online social media. We examine internet banging within the context of gang violence, paying close attention to the mechanisms and processes that may explain how and why internet banging has evolved. We examine the role of hip-hop in the development of internet banging and highlight the changing roles of both hip hop and computer mediated communication as social representations of life in violent communities. We explore the presentation of urban masculinity and its influence on social media behavior. Lastly, we conduct a textual analysis of music and video content that demonstrates violent responses to virtual interactions.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Gang members carry guns and twitter accounts. Recently, media outlets have reported on a relatively new national phenomenon of Internet behavior in which individuals that are associated with gangs or neighborhood factions use social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to incite dares, trade insults or make threats of violence which may result in homicide or victimization. We term this interaction *internet banging*. Metropolitan police departments have increased the officers in their gang violence units and online presence to combat this growing issue (Hays, n.d. <http://www.komonews.com/news/national/Social-media-fueling-gang-violence-in-New-York-172282191.html>). There is little to no empirical or conceptual literature on this growing problem.

In this conceptual article, we argue that internet banging is a cultural phenomenon that has evolved from increased access to and participation with social media and represents an adaptive structuration, or new and unintended use of existing online social media. We examine internet banging within the context of gang violence while paying close attention to the mechanisms and processes that may explain how and why internet banging has evolved. We critically examine the role of hip-hop as a conduit

by which internet banging occurs and highlight the changing roles of both hip hop and computer mediated communication as social representations of life in violent communities. In addition, we explore the extent to which the presentation of masculinity influences and is affected by social media behavior. In order to explore and identify how violent messages are communicated, we also conduct a textual analysis of music and video content that demonstrates violent responses to virtual interactions. Important questions are: (1) how is internet banging explained by the computer mediated communication literature, and how does it represent a departure from established theory; (2) what changes in our culture have led to this trend in social media; (3) who is affected and why; and (4) how do social constructions such as hip-hop and masculinity interact with social media?

In the next section, we provide a definition for internet banging. We then turn to the computer mediated communication literature to explore the theoretical concepts that guide research on new trends in social media. Next, we further describe the internet-banging trend, and connect it to theories of collective identity and masculinity. We conclude by suggesting a connection between hip hop and internet banging, and analyzing examples of this trend.

2. Internet banging defined

Internet banging is a term used to describe a trend in online behavior among individuals perceived to be gang affiliated in the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 734 763 6582.

E-mail addresses: dupatton@umich.edu (D.U. Patton), rdeschmann@uchicago.edu (R.D. Eschmann), dirkabutler@gmail.com (D.A. Butler).

United States. Some reporters have referenced this behavior as “ganging banging on the internet” or “cyber banging,” but scholarly writing around the topic is sparse. Across the country, newspapers and blogs in cities like Chicago and New York City have reported on young people, usually African American and male, using social media sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube) or chat rooms to broadcast their gang affiliation, brag about a recent fight or murder and communicate threats. Reports from local newspapers suggest the following key elements of internet banging: (1) promote gang affiliation and/or communicate interest in gang activity; (2) gain notoriety by reporting participation in a violent act or communicating an impending threat; (3) share information about rival gangs or network with gang members across the country. At this point it is unclear whether or not internet banging is strictly a male phenomenon. Media has reported on male gang members as internet bangers and thus for the purposes of this article we structure our conversation around the behaviors of men who engage in internet banging. However, there is no evidence that this is solely male or an African American behavior. After reviewing the relevant literature on computer mediated communication, we will use a socio-historical conception of masculinity as a lens through which we theorize internet banging’s origins.

3. Trends in social media

Overall, youth are spending more time on the Internet in recent years. Specifically, over 66% of 4–9th graders access the Internet from their bedroom (ChildrenOnline, 2008). Youth have always found public spaces to gather and gossip, provide support, compete for social status, collaborate and share information. Websites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have sparked new communication modes for young people that are instant, intersect public and private domains and are readily available (Wolff, McDevitt, Stark, 2011). While these virtual hangouts create new spaces for engagement for young people, they provide a challenge for adults and those concerned with monitoring content and behavior. Moreover, adults and authorities find it challenging to stay abreast of the new ways in which youth communicate.

Computer mediated communication (CMC) is defined as “communication that occurs within the context of the Internet or internetworks” (Christopherson, 2007, p. 3039). The past two decades have witnessed a growth of research on the Internet, social media and CMC. With over 2.4 billion users on the Internet in 2012 (retrieved from internetworldstats.com), CMC has never been more relevant for social scientists.

In 2000, McKenna and Bargh, discussed the potential social consequences of increased CMC and provided a balanced discussion of both positive and negative implications. Over the past decade empirical work has both disproven and confirmed their propositions. Some argue that CMC can have a positive effect on identity formation. As individuals feel free to express themselves without social repercussion, they take on alternative social roles and marginalized groups are capable of finding others with like characteristics and form online communities. CMC can also be a supplement for face to face (FtF) interactions. By studying impression management on online social networking sites like Facebook, researchers have described the connection between how one is presented or how many friends one has on social status in the real world (Lim, Chan, Vadrevu, & Basnyat, 2013).

Researchers have also documented some more negative aspects of CMC. The online disinhibition effects refer to a lessening of behavioral inhibitions, and toxic disinhibition refers to behaviors that damage one’s own or others’ self-image (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). When online users perceive themselves to be free of social norms, their activities are no longer bound by society’s

standards. One example of this is the proliferation of extremist and hate websites (Leets, 2001). Individuals are more likely to express extremist views online, where there is no social cost for adopted unpopular ideologies. Because the internet allows those with similar views to find each other, group polarization theory suggests that these communities will only increase the strength of subgroup ideologies. *Group polarization* is the tendency for like-minded individuals to become more extreme in their views in group settings (Christopherson, 2007). Research has shown that this tendency is stronger in CMC interactions than in FtF interactions.

The anonymous nature of CMC partially explains this disinhibition phenomenon. Christopherson (2007) distinguishes between two relevant types of anonymity. *Technical anonymity* refers to an actual lack of identifiers, while *social anonymity* refers to the perception that one is unidentifiable. This means that even users who can be identified by their email addresses, screen names, or real names, enjoy a false sense of anonymity online. They perceive the internet to be an environment that is completely separate from the physical.

This anonymity frees individuals from “normative and social constraints of behavior,” and is evidenced by increased hostility and inappropriate behavior (Moore, Nakano, Enomoto, & Suda, 2012). An example of the impact of anonymity on hostile and aggressive behavior is provided by Coffey and Woolworth’s research on online newspaper posts (2004).

These authors conducted research in a small city that had recently experienced a stream of violent crimes, culminating in a homicide, with the suspected perpetrators being black and Hispanic youth. The authors described two venues provided for residents to respond or vent about this issue: an online discussion board and a town hall meeting. The authors found that the online posts were filled with racist and hateful language that advocated vigilante justice and violence towards minority youth. In contrast, the town hall meetings were peaceful, and no residents verbalized race-based resentment rooted in these attacks. The anonymous nature of the virtual space freed posters from norms of respect, due process and justice, and led to residents making incendiary comments that may not be consistent with the values they acknowledge as acceptable. There is a separation between the virtual and the real, CMC and FtF interactions. The internet is understood to be a social space conducive to increased hostility, greater disinhibition and increased social freedom. With internet banging, we see a link between virtual hostility and actual violence. If increased online hostility is correlated with increased violence, there are real-world consequences of the online disinhibition effect.

3.1. Cyberbullying

Understanding internet banging requires determining its place in the broader virtual aggression literature. Cyberbullying is a CMC occurrence modeled after real-world bullying, yet remains conceptually distinct. Most cyberbullying occurs during adolescence and in contexts where there is less supervision (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013). It also has a greater potential audience, which could intensify the negative mental health consequences of being victimized (Slonje et al., 2013). Researchers continue to debate whether or not cyberbullying is similar to traditional bullying; but cyberbullying is distinct from actual bullying in several ways. First, there is a smaller power differential in cyberbullying. While real bullies are often physically imposing, there are no physical or social requisites to be a cyberbully. In fact, traditionally defined geeks may have the added advantage of technical skills and proficiency in CMC. There is some agreement that cyberbullying is an umbrella term that includes online bullying, electronic bullying and Internet harassment. The various terms used to describe

cyberbullying are consistent in that they highlight an aggressive, hostile or harmful act that is perpetrated by a bully through an electronic device. However, the differences between the definitions are situated within the actual event and the determination of whether the act was deliberate and repeated over time.

Research has found that traditional bullying roles (e.g., bully, victim, and defender) are blurred in cyberbullying because it is less one-sided (Moore et al., 2012). This may be because youths involved in cyberbullying see themselves as being reactive rather than provocative; cyberbullying is very much seen as an activity meant to get revenge, and is not, like real world bullying, used as a way of instigating conflict. (Law, Shapka, Domene, & Gagne, 2012). Two forms of cyberbullying identified by researchers are trolling, the act of writing inflammatory posts meant to illicit responses from readers (Moore et al., 2012) and flaming, or hostile expression towards others (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

The literature makes clear distinctions between online aggression and real world behavior, so why does internet banging seem to connect these distinct worlds? One might suggest that the worlds are not connected, but that the trend is the result of increased internet access among individuals who would have been engaged with violent behavior anyway. Alternatively, in order to answer this question, we must understand how this trend has evolved, particularly with disadvantaged youth and gang members and then how social media in hip hop music and culture. Specifically, we argue that hip hop music and culture have contributed to an adaptive structuration of social media that fulfills a validating role by confirming or disconfirming street credibility in violent communities.

3.2. Social media and gangs

Gang members now occupy two spaces: the “streets” and the internet. Data from the National Gang Threat Assessment suggest that gang members use social media to conduct drug sales, market their activities, communicate with other members, coordinate gang actions, recruit new members and to brag about acts of violence or make threats (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). Contributing to these changes, computers are more affordable than ever and Internet access is easily attainable. Barriers to internet access are easily overcome through public institutions that provide it as a free service. Many educational institutions have incorporated web-based technology into their curriculum and many students now have access to the internet at school and are technologically savvy.

There is a dearth of evidence highlighting the extent to which adolescent gang members use the Internet. The National Gang Intelligence Center (2009) conducted a small survey and found that 25% of gang members used the Internet at least 4 h per week and of those individuals 45% gained access during a trip to a local community center or institution. Following this further, 70% of gang members stated it was “easier to make friends online than in the real world.” Researchers have found that youth gang members are not very different from their non-gang peers in terms of online behavior. Data from the National Assessment of Youth on the Internet found that among students in grades 5–12%, 25% felt better and/or more positive about themselves while online than they do in the real world (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

Gang members differ from their cohort peers in that they may also use the internet for posturing. More specifically, 74% of gang members who frequent the internet suggest that they are using it to show or gain respect for the respective gang (King, Walpole, & Lamon, 2007). For example, in January 2012, 43 gang members in New York City were arrested for involvement in several fatal shootings in Brooklyn because they boasted about the incident on Twitter

Hays, n.d. <http://www.komonews.com/news/national/Social-media-fueling-gang-violence-in-New-York-172282191.html>). Historically, displaying pictures of the gang or recording “jump-in’s” or other acts of violence required expensive equipment and time. With the advent of smart phone technology, youth can upload pictures and videos to social media sites quickly (King et al., 2007).

Many gang members, usually those who are new, are interested in making a name for themselves which leads to bragging about acts of violence or crimes that they may not have committed. Some members are using social media to promote gang violence when they may not be involved with an actual gang. These individuals are referred to as “wannabe” gang members. In her ethnography of urban youth in Boston, Janelle Dance (2002) describes the wannabe as an individual who “does not genuinely possess gangster-banger-like abilities” (p. 61). She goes on to say, “the typical hardcore wannabe acts hard for fashion’s sake, and not for the sake of surviving the streets, he incites disrespect (p. 61).” Unfortunately, these wannabe youth often find that what they posted was misconstrued or perceived as a personal threat thus potentially triggering a violent event. Community agencies and police departments nationally are beginning to collect data on gang-related activities on social media sites but there still remains little known facts about this behavior. There are unique challenges inherent in reaching out to adolescent and teenage gang members to validate their online behavior including the following: (a) youth gangs are an inclusive group; (b) there are relatively few gang members; and (c) many youth gang members require transportation or reimbursement to participate in data gathering exercises (Wolff et al., 2011).

There is some research that examines Internet usage among marginalized youth (Hayni, 2002). Over the past decade, social media has become a ubiquitous mode of communication for all youth and is particularly important to examine among those most vulnerable (Skoric, 2011). For example, a qualitative study of Singaporean male juvenile delinquents found that Facebook played a large role in their interaction with other peers but also presented opportunities for promoting delinquent acts and extending group loyalty to peer networks online. For those youth who were attempting to rehabilitate, the desire to stay connected with delinquent peer networks on Facebook hampered progress (Lim et al., 2013).

4. Gangs, collective identity, and masculinity

The internet gangster who exists on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Myspace is using the internet as the perfect tool to express a collective group dynamic forged over time. While it may be true that individual actors have specific and unique aspects to their identities and personalities, individuals also negotiate and learn much of who they are from the collective identity. History is central to the process of a group developing a collective identity. It is important to remember that this is a collective process in which all members of the group participate. Out of this endeavor, collective identity emerges. The group is able to look back on accomplishments past, obstacles negotiated and norms developed and compile a strategy to deal with situations, problems and issues. The group is also able to establish and access guidelines for behavior, morals, ethics and organization.

Collective memory specifies the temporal parameters of past and future, where we came from and where we are going, and also why we are here now. Within the narrative provided by this collective memory individual identities are shaped as experiential frameworks formed out of, as they are embedded within, narratives past, present and future (Eyerman, 2001, p. 6).

Collective identity and collective memory are essential to human development and human organization. Within this frame, internet banging is not just a social media phenomenon, but the natural progression of a problematic urban masculine identity born out of a collective identity formulation that has been shaped by certain social, political and economic forces throughout American history.

To understand this masculine identity formation, you must understand the socio-political contexts from which it emerged. From the 1920s until the late 1960s, many urban communities formed factories and industrialized companies, ensuring easy access to these jobs; this process is known as *Fordism*, named after Henry Ford owner of Ford Motors. Unfortunately, Fordism did not last forever. In the late 1960s and early 1970s factories began relocating their operations. All over the country jobs were disappearing. The Post-Fordism era was ushered in by changes in the political climate, aspects of globalization and revolutions in advanced technology (Amin, 1994; Lipietz, 1997). Post-Fordism completely changed the American workforce.

These developments affected masculine identity profoundly. Almost overnight, many blue-collar men who embodied the American work ethic became unemployed and disenfranchised, severely damaging many urban men's self images, and representing an identity shift. Similarly, in 1973, the American political economy began to change in response to the growing international oil crisis. A return to a freer and more self-reliant economic structure was being instituted. The country was returning to a political structure it knew all too well. Its supporters argued that it was never given a true chance to flourish; its detractors suggested that it was a cold and uncaring structure that did not consider the needs of the most vulnerable people. This move to a free market economy hit urban communities very hard because they were already reeling from Post-Fordism and a shift from governmental regulation and welfare spending to an entrepreneurial and economic prosperity focus further crippled communities lacking economic capital.

Still dealing with Post-Fordist unemployment and poor self-image, many men were thrust into a political market where the strong survive and conquering the free market economy was the aim of the game. Many urban men did not have the economic or human capital to compete, so many became perpetual losers and victims of the game. While Post-Fordism left the masculine with a sense of inferiority stemming from joblessness, neoliberalism withdrew the help that could have rectified the situation, and exasperated feelings of inferiority because the new measuring stick for masculinity was economic accumulation. Many urban men did not measure up. This added to the feelings many had of powerlessness, failure and inferiority that already existed because of Post-Fordism, and set the stage for a new masculine identity formulation that emerged within a generation that would have to negotiate these harsh new realities (Amin, 1994). In essence, the internet has provided the perfect stage for this masculine identity to be performed in front of an audience of millions.

5. The deadly symbiosis: hip hop identity and social media

In his text, *The Hip-Hop Generation*, Bakari Kitwana suggests that urban Americans born between the years of 1965 and 1985 do not belong to Generation X, but rather are part of a distinct group with a unique experience in America. He terms this generation the Hip-Hop Generation. Kitwana argues that the experiences of urban people born within this generation are much different from other groups and need a separate characterization. He uses hip hop to describe this generation because its creation was the defining historical moment for this group. He also acknowledges that this generation is the product of a post civil rights experience, shifting

political economy, homicide and incarceration epidemics. All of this has created a very specific generation, with a very specific collective identity (Kitwana, 2002).

Kitwana suggests that two characteristics distinguish the Hip-Hop Generation in the Neo-liberal political economy, (1) most are low-skilled workers and (2) most are concentrated in urban communities with low job growth. This has turned this generation into social, economic and political outcasts. This phenomenon is most apparent in urban males. The social and political landscapes of the last 30 years have turned the urban masculine into a very dangerous identity that is imploding.

Faced with few options, urban men have radically embraced otherness, like no other time and demographic group in American history. In essence the stance is this: if the political and social discourses are shaping me into a thug, I will be a super-thug; if they are crafting public opinion that I am dangerous, I will become super dangerous; and if they are creating me to be a criminal, I will create and advocate a criminalized identity. As we have established this paper, collective identity depends on the collective memory which is created through the interpretation and influence of history. We postulate that recent historical events, their consequences and their interpretation within social discourse have set the stage for a criminalized urban American male subject. Furthermore, for men to survive the environment that these historical events have created, they had to adapt to and accept a new post-civil rights identity.

We characterize the hip hop identity as the rebellious, assertive voice of predominantly urban youth, males in particular. It is the result of a generation being reared in a Neo-liberal political economy, and growing up in a Post-Fordist context. This new masculine identity is often alienated from and antagonistic toward many other aspects of American culture. In many respects, hip hop identity has rejected the values and norms of the mainstream, while embracing and substituting oppositional values.

This process has been shaped by society, but also reflects the agency subjects possess. Even though structural forces influence much of this process, urban males have taken these influences and interpreted them in a very specific way. The outcome generated a hip hop identity that, along with unemployment and poor educational opportunities, helps to situate urban males for mass incarceration, and poor outcomes, and it is this identity that fuels the behavior we currently see in among African American men on the Internet. In social media, the hip hop identity has found the optimal playground to perpetuate and replicate itself, because of its public nature.

The plight of many urban American males is distinct because in many regards "they have not been factored into the social, cultural and economic future of the society" (Leary, 2001, p. 36). In fact, the messages that many urban males receive can be quite debilitating and demoralizing, so the context of urban masculinity can be a complex struggle for full recognition of manhood, public recognition of honorable masculinity and for love in a public forum. It is from this position in which much of urban masculinity is negotiated. This is precisely why social media is so important to this group of urban males. It gives them a place to seek public love, and recognition of their manhood, a reinforcement of self they receive in few other places. In social media, they can perform reactionary masculinity and it is applauded.

5.1. Hip hop

Hip hop is an art form that originated in the Bronx in the late 1980s (Chang, 2005). It began with DJ Cool Herc throwing block parties where the first emcees (masters of ceremony) would rhyme over the records that he played in order to direct the crowd. Hip hop began in economically depressed neighborhoods, and served

as a means of expression and enjoyment for residents who lived under the shadow of civic neglect. Today, some hip hop can be equated with pop music, and hip hop artists enjoy international stardom. Yet at its core, hip hop still remains an art form that tells the stories of the urban poor.

In Jay-Z's autobiography, *Decoded*, he writes that the hip hop story is the hustler's story. By Jay's definition, a hustler is a drug dealer who, in the absence of legitimate economic opportunity, turns to the illegal drug economy. The idea that this genre of music exists to highlight illegal activity does not sit well with everyone. Critics of hip hop emphasize the negative impact hustler or gangster themed music may have on urban youth (Rose, 2008).

When hip hop artist 50 Cent was asked about the violent content in his music during a panel discussion he responded by saying, "hip hop's a reflection of the environment that we grew up in, it's the harsh realities that end up in the music" (Youtube.com, 2007). He goes onto liken the depiction of the ghetto in hip hop to a painter who paints what he sees – the implication being that one should not put moral judgments on an artist who simply creates an accurate depiction of the surrounding scenery.

This description of hip hop as an art form that describes urban pathologies is important as we move forward. Hip hop artists are expected to "keep it real," and remain true to the realities of the ghetto. The alternative is selling out and toning down their music in order to increase mainstream appeal and financial gain.

Because rappers claim to keep it real they are held accountable for what is said in their music. Rappers who get in trouble with the law or are involved with violence build street credibility – they are proving that they are as tough as their lyrics indicate.

Tupac Shaker and Biggie Smalls, two hip hop legends who were murdered during the 1990s, are tragic examples of what can happen when the gangster mentality finds its way from the studio to the real world (Barrett, 1999). Before these two rappers were killed, they were enmeshed in a rap beef, or a highly publicized lyric-based conflict. While no one has been convicted of either killing, in the hip hop community these murders are widely understood to be the results of rap beef taken too far. As a result, after the deaths of these two artists, hip hop musicians redefined rap beef. Disputes between musicians are now settled by diss tracks, songs that demonstrate technical prowess by creatively insulting other musicians, instead of bullets. These battles were often followed by public truces, where artists promoted nonviolence.

This seemingly positive change had the unintended consequence of taking away from hip hop's street credibility. It was now possible for artists to talk tough without backing it up. With "keeping it real" no longer a requisite for being a respected artist, hip hop music lost its place as the sole source of authenticity. Additionally, because corporate control over the American music industry constrains hip hop fans can access, hip hop did not offer a way for alternative "real" artists to make a musical impact on listeners.

In contrast, social media allows anyone to reach a broad audience. Viral videos become wildly popular, seemingly overnight, without corporate marketing. Social media has taken hip hop's place as the medium through which individuals are able to "keep it real." This is evidenced by a number of videos made by self-proclaimed gangsters or hustlers who expose tough talking rappers as phonies. In the next section, we analyze a number of viral videos that illustrate the connection between the changing roles of hip hop, social media, and internet banging.

5.2. Rappers and social media behavior

Waka Flaka is a rapper who makes aggressive party music and claims to be a member of the Bloods gang. There is an online video showing a group of rival gang members, or Crips, confront Waka Flaka and the crew that was on the video set with him. Rather than

step up to the confrontation, Waka walked away and stayed behind his security guards. This youtube.com video is entitled, "'EXPOSED' WAKA FLOCKA PUNKED OUT BY SOME CRIP BOYZ!" As the title suggests, this incident led to Waka being ridiculed as being fake, as he did not prove that he was as tough as his music indicates.

A second video involves a rapper named "Game" who also self-identifies as a member of the "Bloods" gang. In 2011, Game was attacked outside of a mall. Shortly after the attack, the individuals responsible created a Youtube video that detailed the attack. The video was a form of posturing; the individuals had demystified a popular figure and showed themselves to be tougher and more "real" than he was, thereby increasing their own status.

How does this relate to internet banging? Adaptive structuration theory describes the process by which the intended purpose of technology evolves, as individuals and groups who interact with the technology use it for their own purposes (Christopherson, 2007). Internet-banging is an example of adaptive structuration. Social media evolved into a social space that serves the purpose of legitimizing or delegitimizing street credibility. We argue that this adaptive process was influenced by hip hop.

Hip hop once served as a proxy for street credibility, but recently new social media has taken its place as the medium through which street credibility is established and disseminated. This adaptive structuration of new media, and twitter in particular, represents a significant departure from earlier models of CMC. While the toxic disinhibition and cyberbullying are purely virtual phenomena, internet banging mixes the two worlds.

Recently, many videos documenting violent responses to twitter posts have been circulated online. These videos are recorded in order to be put online as a proof of the encounter, and are a way to boost the perpetrator's reputation. Here we look at one such video, entitled, "It's more than just twitter: Internet gangster gets hands put on him for talking ish (Worldstarhiphop.com, 2012)." In this video, the instigator confronts the victim, someone who he perceived to threaten both his life and reputation on Twitter. He says:

Nigga I seen yo tweets nigga, don't fucking put my name in yo fucking Twitter nigga... Look man, what you tryin' to do? ... you better take your glasses off before they get cracked yo... you was looking for me with a [gun] right? Huh? Everybody talking bout, oh the little nigga running around looking for you with a [gun] 'n' shit. Nigga that make me seem like a bitch, so basically you calling me a bitch, right?

The victim in this situation was posturing online by posting about having a gun with him, and this was taken as a threat both to the speaker's well-being and reputation. After explaining the reason for the fight, the video showed the aggressor repeatedly punching the victim until the aggressor's friends told him that was enough. Now, by posting this video online, the aggressor regains whatever street credibility he lost as a result of the victim's tweets.

Just a few years ago, internet-gangsters were seen as a joke. Hyper aggressive content online was interpreted as the result of the online disinhibition effect. Today, the internet-banging phenomenon has convinced many that social media is really where gangsters live.

Rick Ross is a rapper who claims to have gotten his start as a drug dealer. In 2009 his thug background was exposed as fake when pictures of him working as a correctional officer in a jail surfaced online. But because record companies value record sales more than authenticity, this blow to his street credibility did not destroy his music career. In December 2012, Ross canceled two shows in response to threats that were made against him in

Youtube videos (Msn.com, 2012). Members of the “Gangster Disciples” were offended by references he made to the gang’s leader, and disliked his fake persona. They promised to end his hypocrisy by targeting his life.

Perhaps the prime example is Chief Keef, a 17 year Chicago born rapper who has gained national attention for his chilling rap lyrics touting gang affiliations and promoting violence. Chief Keef’s lyrics were profiled in ABC’s Nightline special, “Hidden America: Don’t Shoot, I Want to Grow Up.” Diana Sawyer convened town hall meeting of youth most of who are affiliated with a gang and have been convicted of violence or drug related crime. During the discussion participants highlights Keef’s hit single, “I Don’t Like” which now has over 17.3 million YouTube views. In the video Keef makes clear his disdain for a “snitch nigga,” a phrase that refers to an individual, who is usually deemed a criminal suspect and provides incriminating evidence to the police or federal authority obtain leniency for cooperation during a criminal case (Natapoff, 2004). The special also pointed towards Keef’s rivalry with another young, rapper Lil Jo, who was murdered in early September after tweeting his location. Keef’s responds to Lil Jo’s death by tweeting, “It’s sad cuz that nigga JoJo wanted to be just like up, # LMAO (laughing my ass off).” The Keef incident brings to bear a new trend in social media where gang violence, hip hop music and the Internet intersect that can potentially lead to or exacerbate violence in urban communities.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this article was to term and describe an observed trend in social media, internet banging. We argue that the internet-banging phenomenon is a manifestation of adaptive structuration theory. Social media outlets meant to build and maintain social and professional networks are being used to provoke, perpetrate and publicize violent acts. In our literature review and social media and rap music analyses, we identified several factors which may contribute to internet banging. First, gang-related violence disseminated over social media appears to be a male-dominated behavior, rooted in a historical context shaped by changes in the employment status or urban men of color who developed an alternative identity to cope with their lack of position in the economic market. Second, changes in online behavior and usage created new and expedient ways of developing social networks, have allowed individuals to craft alter-egos and posture in ways that resemble hyper masculine behaviors displayed in urban community.

These new ways of being have led to technologically structured methods of bullying and victimization. We see social media being used as a tool for self-promotion, and a way for individuals to gain and maintain street credibility. Finally, there seems to be a relationship between internet banging and hip hop. Social media outlets are the primary means through which individuals can display the extent to which they “keep it real,” a position once occupied by hip hop. We find that violent acts against hip hop musicians in the 1990s gave rappers incentive to separate the aggressive content in their music from their actual lifestyles. Although this relationship has not been empirically tested, we provide evidence that this shift in hip-hop was followed by gangsters using social media feeds to discredit and threaten “fake” rappers, and make the conceptual connection between this new role of social media in urban communities and internet-banging. The embedded nature of hip hop in urban life, particularly as it relates to the origins of some rappers and their gang ties brings highlights an important cultural component of internet banging.

7. Conclusion

The study of the social phenomenon of urban men, social media and violence must be rethought to include “A proper cultural analysis of Black men must not rest solely on the exploration of values and norms, but must thoroughly interrogate how these men formulate worldviews, ideologies and belief systems regarding their life circumstances” (Young, 2004, p. 18). Understanding this new trend in social media requires an approach that will contextualize the experience of urban men and their social reality.

References

- Amin, A. (1994). *Post-Fordism: A reader*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing.
- Barrett, Linton. (1999). Dead men printed: Tupac Shakur, Biggie smalls, and hip-hop eulogy. *Callaloo*, 22(2), 306–332.
- Chang, J. (2005). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. London: Ebury Press.
- ChildrenOnline (2008). Internet safety newsletter: Children online research 2007–2008. Retrieved 11.02.12. <<http://www.childrenonline.org>>.
- Christopherson, K. M. (2007). The positive and negative implications of anonymity in Internet social interactions: “On the internet, nobody knows you’re a dog”. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23, 3038–3056.
- Coffey, B., & Woolworth, S. (2004). Destroy the scum, and then neuter their families: The web forum as a vehicle for community discourse? *The Social Science Journal*, 41, 1–14.
- Dance, J. (2002). *Tough fronts: The impact of street culture on schooling*. Critical Social Thought Series: Routledge.
- Eyerman, R. (2001). *Cultural trauma: Slavery and the formation of African American identity*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Hayni, D. L. (2002). Friendship networks and delinquency: The relative nature of peer delinquency. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 18(2), 99–134.
- Hays, T. (n.d). Citing websites. Social media fueling gang violence. Retrieved 25.11.12. <<http://www.komonews.com/news/national/Social-media-fueling-gang-violence-in-New-York-172282191.html>>.
- Jay, Z. (2010). *Decoded*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.
- King, J. E., Walpole, C. E., & Lamon, K. (2007). Surf and turf wars online – growing implications of internet gang violence. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 4(6), 66–68.
- Kitwana, B. (2002). *The hip-hop generation: Young blacks and the crisis in African American culture*. New York: Basic Civitas.
- Lapidot-Leffer, N., & Barak, A. (2012). Effects of anonymity, invisibility, and lack of eye-contact on toxic online disinhibition. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, 434–443.
- Law, Danielle M., Shapka, Jennifer D., Domene, Jose F., & Gagne, Monique H. (2012). Are cyberbullies really bullies? An investigation of reactive and proactive online aggression. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, 664–672.
- Leary, J. D. (2001). *A dissertation on African American male youth violence. “Trying To Kill The Part Of You That Isn't Loved”*. Portland State University.
- Leets, L. (2001). Responses to internet hate sites: Is speech too free in cyberspace? *Communication Law and Policy*, 6(2), 287–317.
- Lim, L., Chan, Y., Vadrevu, S., & Basnyat, I. (2013). Managing peer relationships online-investing the use of Facebook by juvenile delinquent and youths-at-risk. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 8–15.
- Lipietz, A. (1997). The post Fordist world: Labor relations, international hierarchy and global ecology. *Review of International Political Economy*, 1–41.
- McKenna, K. Y. A., & Bargh, J. A. (2000). Plan 9 from cyberspace. The implications of the internet for personality and social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(1), 57–75.
- Moore, M. J., Nakano, T., Enomoto, A., & Suda, T. (2012). Anonymity and roles associated with aggressive posts in an online forum. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, 861–867.
- Msn.com (2012). Rick Ross, Live Nation cancel shows after gang threats. Retrieved 12.07.12. <<http://music.msn.com/music/article.aspx?news=778882>>.
- Natapoff, A. (2004). Snitching: The institutional and communal consequences. *University of Cincinnati Law Review* (73), 645.
- National Gang Intelligence Center (2009). National gang threat assessment 2009 (section on Criminal Activity[. Accessed 09.11.10. <<http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs32/32146/activities.htm#start>>.
- Rose, T. (2008). *The hip-hop wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip-hop and why it matters*. New York: Basic Books.
- Skoric, M. (2011). Introduction to the special issue: Online social capital and participation in Asia-Pacific. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 21(5), 427–429.
- Slonje, Robert, Smith, Peter K., & Frisen, Ann (2013). The nature of cyberbullying, and strategies for prevention. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 26–32.
- Worldstarhiphop.com (2012). It’s more than just twitter: internet gangster gets hands put on him for talking ish. Retrieved 10.21.12 <<http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshh10y6q91WGaQX2LdA>>.
- Young, A. Y. (2004). *The minds of marginalized black men: Making sense of mobility, opportunity and future life chances*. New Jersey: The Princeton University Press.
- Youtube.com (2007). 50 Cent speaks with Imus and Oprah (Imus returns to work). Retrieved 10.21.12. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CySrshUMwIw>>.