

# From Rags to Riches: Does Wealth Effect the Ego of Today's Richest Rappers?

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**Abstract:** I decided I would like to research the correlation between increase in wealth and lyrical content among the five wealthiest rappers in the world. I would study their wealth year by year from the inception of their career (i.e. their first album), and then analyze their lyrical content and how it develops over time as their net worth rises (or falls). I would do this by creating a spreadsheet of the most common topics in songs (love, money, alcohol/drugs, ego, family, etc.) and keep track of which songs and lyrics correlate with each category. My hypothesis would be that over time, their lyrics would change to be more self-centered, egoistic, and aggressive given their wealth and social status and how it changed them over time. My focus draws aspects from social hierarchy, and it is very important to understand the relationship between empathy and social status. This could help shed light on global issues such as the plight of the poor and what happens psychologically when an individual becomes wealthier. My project would study a concept related to the psychology behind social status and behavior through the analysis of lyrical content.

**Keywords:** Richest Rappers, songs, career, love, money, alcohol/drugs, ego, family.

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## 1. METHODS

As a sociology major, I am interested in compiling social data and studying socio-psychological aspects of the society we live in. "What can we determine about the ego of a wealthy rapper from when he first became successful (measured by first studio album) to his most recent album?" is the question I am trying to answer. My prediction is that with more fame and wealth, the hip hop artist will be more egotistic. I believe that it is important to understand how wealth affects the psyche, and also have a great interest in hip hop. That is essentially why I chose an observational study like this one: it has the best of both worlds. Hip hop lyrics are known for rawness and realness, and using them to measure ego is going to be based upon Genius' interpretation or translation of the lyrics as well as my own. I used an Excel table to categorize "topics", "album" and "artist". There are 17 topics that are popular in music including but not limited to love, ego, violence, drugs, family, politics, etc. To define "ego" and measure it, any lyric that is associated with the definition of ego (a person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance) would receive a tally mark next to the topic "ego" in the table. For example, Drake raps in the song "Grammy's": "Ya'll a whole lot of things / but you still ain't this". I would consider this an egotistical statement, so I would make a tally next to the "Ego" topic. I go through Genius to read and listen to every song from each of the Top 5's first and most recent album. I compare the two tables and determine if the amount of tallies increased or decreased from the first to most recent album. I also will compare other categories that are relevant, as I mentioned before that I measured other subjects.

## 2. DATA

### 1. JAY Z – 1 Billion:

The wealthiest rapper in the world today is Jamaica Queens' very own JAY-Z. His first album, *Reasonable Doubt* (1996), was by far meatier and lengthier than the 36 minute-long *4:44* (2017), so the total number of tallies for each album have a large difference of 108. A flaw of this research is the fact that length can greatly reduce the number of topics in a song, however, we can still explore the topics without always comparing them. In *Reasonable Doubt*, Jay's number one topic to rap about is his money and assets. In fact, he mentioned money and his own wealth 93 times throughout the album. Money seems to be a favorite subject of his, because he mentioned 40 times in *4:44*, coming in a close second to the topic "Family" (44 tallies). This should come to no surprise, though; *4:44* was famously about his infidelity in his marriage

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with Beyoncé and their twins that had just been born. Egotistic lyrics comprised about 16% of all lyrics analyzed in *Reasonable Doubt* versus 15% in *4:44*.

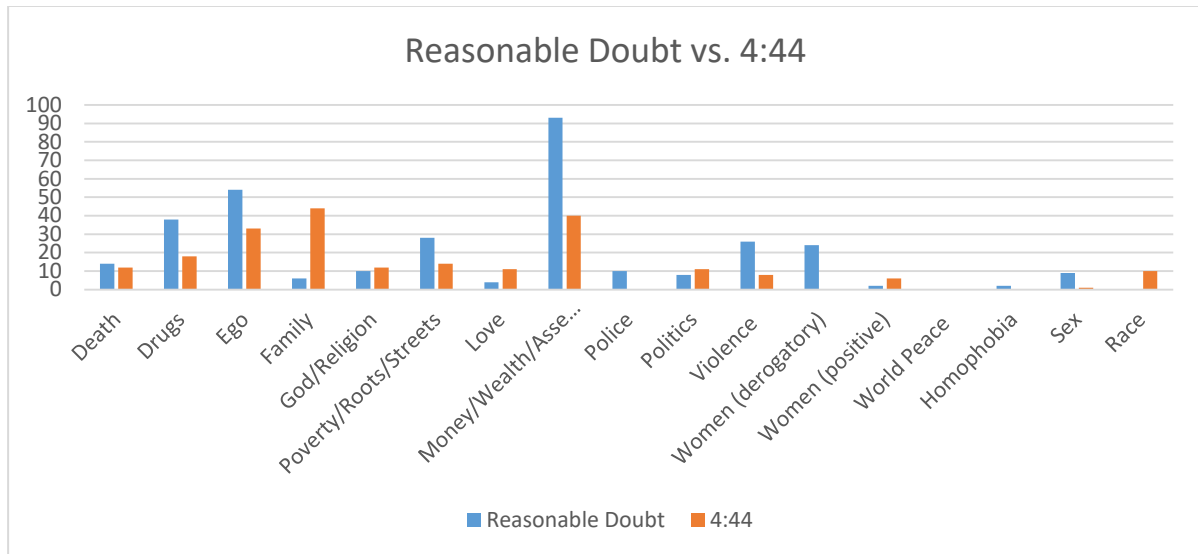


Table 1: The amount of tallies in each category studied and their prevalence amongst JAY Z’s first and latest album

2. Diddy – 825 Million:

Close friend and fellow entrepreneur of JAY-Z is Diddy: the second wealthiest rapper in the world. His first album, *No Way Out* (1997), solidified him as a rapper after his close friend Biggie Smalls was killed. This album was haunting and the amount of times death is mentioned is far more than in any other album measured for this essay (60 times). It comes in second to the “Money” topic, which has 68 mentions. That’s roughly 21% of all lyrics analyzed, or 1/5, which is significant in this study. Money is mentioned only 39 times in *Press Play* compared to the 68 in *No Way Out*. For Diddy’s most recent studio album, I chose to use *Press Play* rather than *Last Train to Paris* for a few reasons. Even though Diddy is credited to this studio album as an artist, he is also alongside a group called Dirty Money. The album is technically Diddy’s, however, because I only use the lyrics from the actual artist I’m researching (not the features or guest vocals) I would have the same issue that I did with JAY-Z: too big of a difference in tallies could skew my results. This album was not majority Diddy, but a combination of some Diddy, a lot of Dirty Money, and a lot of features. *Press Play* is fairer because it is officially and solely credited to Diddy, not to Diddy – Dirty Money. In a final comparison of ego, *Press Play* outnumbers *No Way Out* with 98 egoistic lyrics, or 38% of all lyrics analyzed.

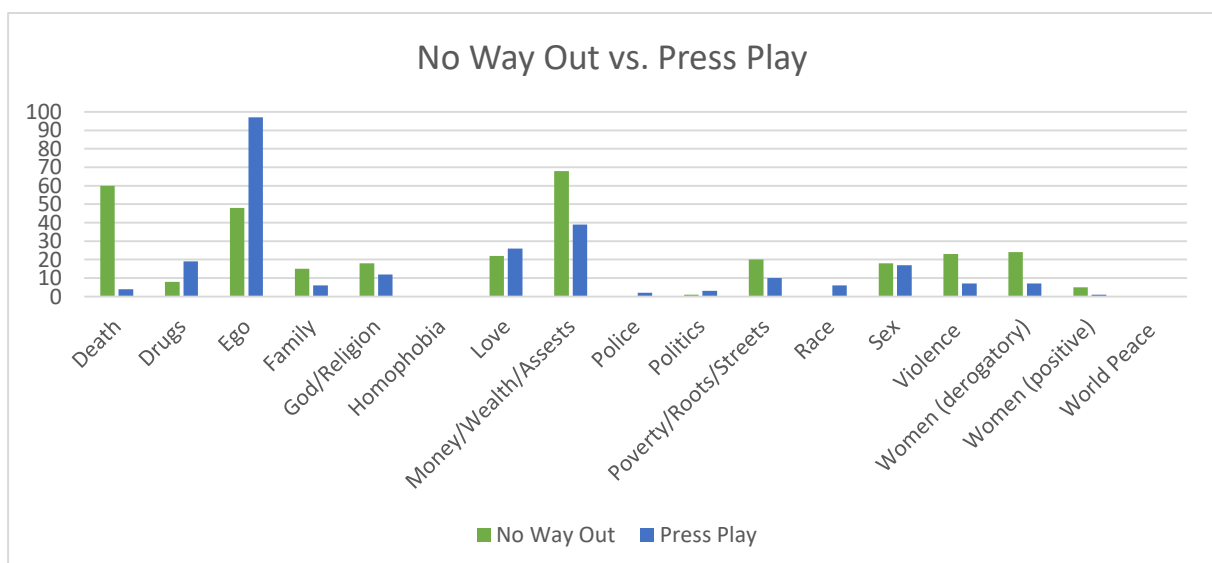


Table 2: The amount of tallies in each category studied and their prevalence amongst Diddy’s first and latest album

**3. Dr. Dre - \$740 Million:**

Dr. Dre is the third wealthiest rapper in the world, with his latest studio album being named after his hometown, *Compton* (2015), and his famously titled first album *The Chronic* (1992). Both albums are 175 tallies (not planned) and feature similar trends in topics. Egoism appears more in *Compton*, though, with 50 lyrical exclamations equating to over 1/4 of the lyrics I analyzed. *The Chronic* presents Ego and Violence almost evenly, each topic equating to 21% of all lyrics in the album that were measured. During this time in his life, Dre had separated himself from Eazy-E and N.W.A. and still lived in Compton. Violence was prevalent in his lyrics in the form of threats as well as in Dre’s portrayal of 1992 Compton. Violence in *Compton* was unavoidable, and we can see that in his most recent album when he mentions poverty or being out on the streets more often that he did in *The Chronic*. Derogatory comments about women decreased in his 2015 album, which might be attributed with the feminist movement (he wanted little negative controversy around his album), his age and maturity, his 20 years married status, or a combination of these things. It should also be noted that police and death are more common in *Compton*, showing us that these topics are still relevant in the hip hop scene today.

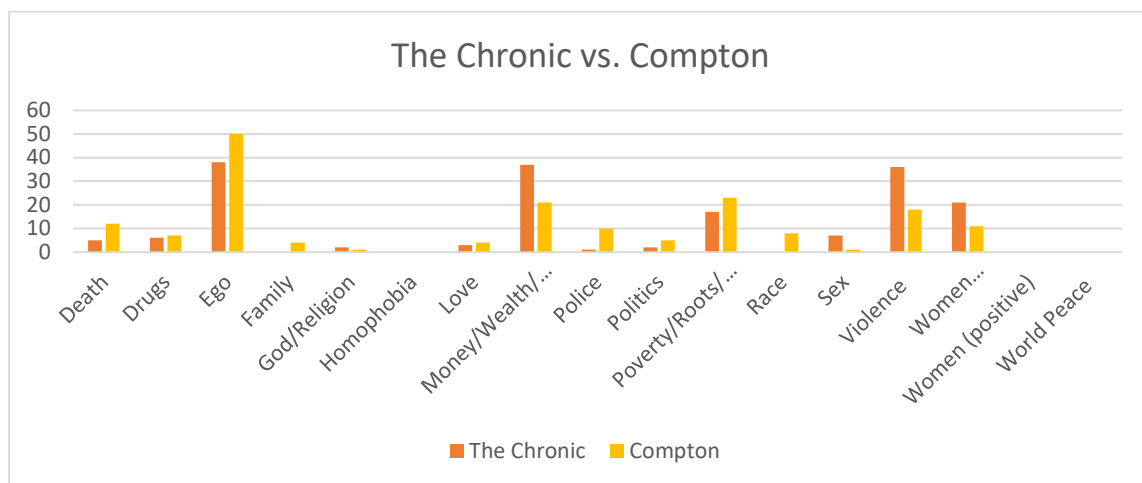


Table 3: The amount of tallies in each category studied and their prevalence amongst Dre’s first and latest album

**4. Eminem – 100 Million:**

The biggest difference between tallies occurs in the fourth wealthiest rapper Eminem’s albums with a whopping 217 more points on his latest album *Revival* (2017) than on his first album *Infinite* (1996). *Revival* was hugely political and contained a lot of messages about police, the government, and race; with nearly 1/4 of the album being dedicated to these topics. As common with Shady lyrics, he spoke a lot about violence and made many derogatory comments about women. Even with the progression of his “wokeness”, the sheer amount of b-words and degrading comments made about women shows that Slim Shady hasn’t changed deep down. In terms of ego, the ratio of egoistic comments is much higher in *Infinite* than on *Revival*.

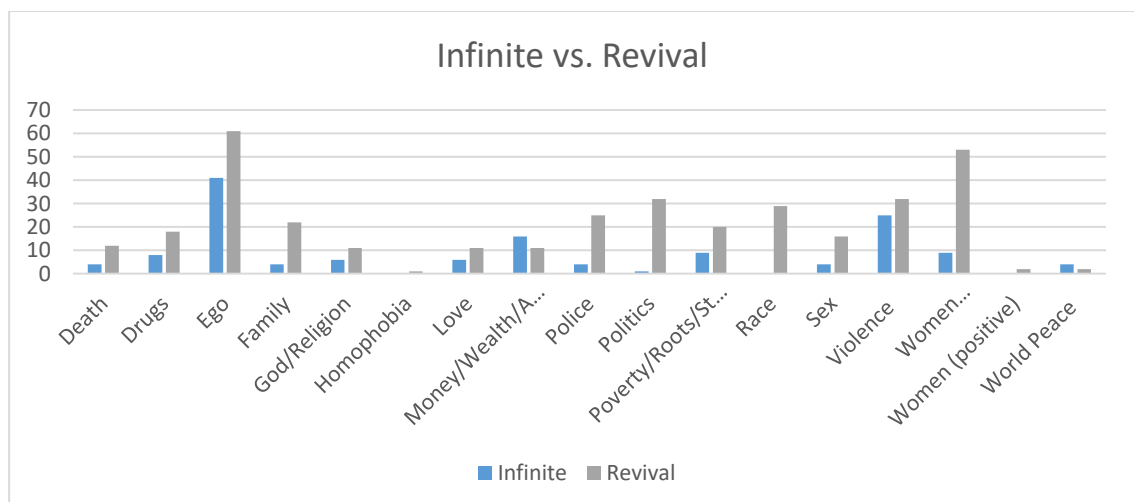
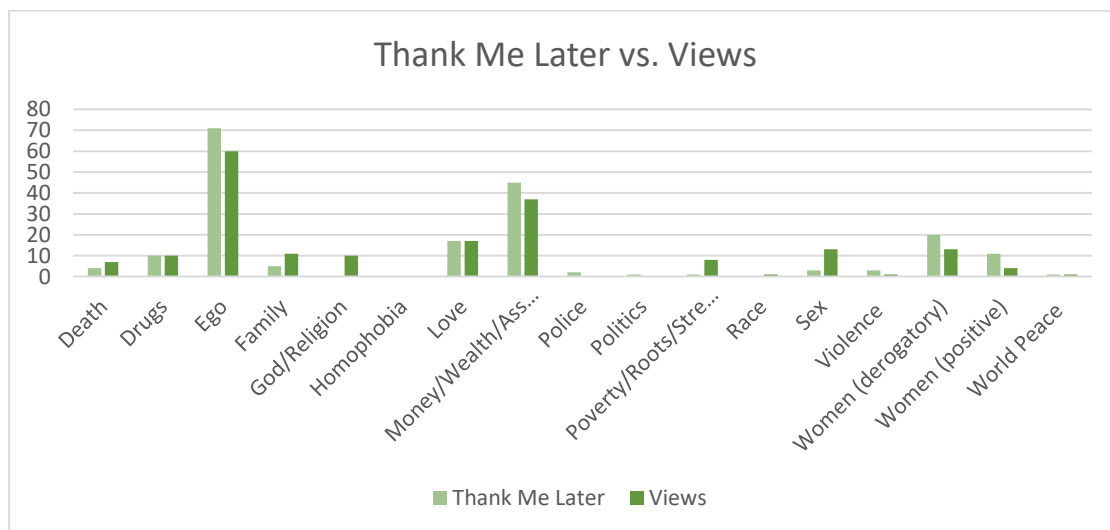


Table 4: The amount of tallies in each category studied and their prevalence amongst Eminem’s first and latest album

**5. Drake – 100 Million:**

Our final rapper is Drake, our only rapper than began rapping in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His first studio album was *Thank Me Later* (2010), which skyrocketed him into the limelight helping him go quadruple-platinum with his latest album *Views* (2016). Both albums are similar in length and measurable content, with a difference of only one tally. Although still significant, *Views* contains less egotistical commentary than *Thank Me Later*, with a difference of 11. Money and assets were also more popular in his first album, with 23% of its lyrics being about dollars and cars. By the time his first album released, Drake was already famous for starring in *Degrassi*, having the *So Far Gone* mixtape release become successful, as well as being in a huge bidding war before finally being signed to Young Money Entertainment in 2009. I believe these facts could lead to why Drake was less vocal about topics such as violence and more about his money and ego. I would be curious to see what his 2018 album will be like compared to his first, and if any of these topics would vary.



**Table 5: The amount of tallies in each category studied and their prevalence amongst Drake’s first and latest album**

**3. FUTURE**

The rap industry is dominated by men and for a future study, I would like to study female rappers and their lyrics. Before I began this study, I was going to analyze the lyrics of the richest rapper’s from developed and developing nations. Specifically, I wanted to do 10 rappers from 10 different countries. This strayed from my initial idea, which was to study the top 5 wealthiest rapper’s lyrics. When I began my research, I found how difficult and time consuming it would be to measure the wealth of foreign rappers; especially those in under-developed countries (their income information and net worth are difficult to uncover). I decided to stick to my original idea and analyze the top 5 wealthiest rappers in the world (who all happen to be American men). Diversity is something I would like to include in this list as time goes on.

**4. CONCLUSION**

After conducting this study, I found that two rappers supported my theory about wealth making people more egotistical. JAY-Z was 1% away from supporting my theory, so I believe that creating a larger sample (such as a top 10) would be better going forward. Despite only 2 out of 5 rappers supporting my theory, I would like to point out that 22% of all lyrics measured from each rappers first albums fell under the “Ego” topic, while 25% for the most recent albums. Despite my initial reaction being sadness for my hypothesis because more rappers rapped egotistically in their younger days before they were wealthy, I am now content with my findings because they do prove that more lyrics were egotistical. This experiment supported my theory that as rappers accumulate more wealth, they begin to become more self-centered and egotistic.

*“If the egotist is weak, his egotism is worthless. If the egotist is strong, acute, full of distinctive character, his egotism is precious, and remains a possession of the race.” – Alexander Smith*

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