Wordsmith: Examining the role hip-hop texts play in viewing the world

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This dissertation, WORDSMITH: EXAMINING THE ROLE HIP-HOP TEXTS PLAY IN VIEWING THE WORLD, by CRYSTAL LAVOULLE, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education, Georgia State University. The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

WORDSMITH: EXAMINING THE ROLE HIP-HOP TEXTS
PLAY IN VIEWING THE WORLD
by
Crystal LaVoulle

Originally the voice of a silenced group of inner city Black males, hip-hop culture contains a historical road map that chronicles the experiences of its members. This study attempted to examine hip-hop through the stories of adults who incorporateaspects of hip-hop culture into their daily lives. Specifically, this study investigated, "How is hip-hop a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and educators who are actively and intimately involved in its music and culture?" Additionally, this study will explore the following sub-questions: (1) What does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community? (2) How does hip-hop inform the view of the world for participants in this study?

This qualitative research study, framed by critical literacy, attempted to fill the void in the scholarship of hip-hop texts. Data collection included in-depth individual interviews, photo-elicited interviews and music-elicited interviews, a group interview, and cultural artifacts. Narrative inquiry and analysis served as both the process and product used to describe the participants' lives as members of the hip-hop community. Narrative analysis allowed the construction of cipher-styled presentation of the data collected. Using participants' lived experiences, their individual stories are molded into a concise narrative. This narrative, told by members of the hip-hop community, may provide a context for other researchers seeking to understand the influence of hip-hop on everyday people around the world.

WORDSMITH: EXAMINING THE ROLE HIP-HOP TEXTS PLAY IN VIEWING THE WORLD

by

Crystal LaVoulle

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Teaching and Learning
in
the Department of Middle and Secondary Education
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation is dedicated to my mentor, Dr. Bill Hammond. Through his words, and continuous encouragement I began to believe that I could endure this educational journey. I would like to thank my children, Summer and Jordan for allowing me the time to pursue a dream. I am most appreciative for my grandmother Ruby Jordan and my parents, Lucy LaVoulle and Monty Hinds for encouraging me throughout this process. I must thank the members of the hip-hop community who agreed to share their story with me, especially my brother Jason Geter for sharing his expertise and helping to make my research unique. Thank you Wendell Robinson for providing the foundation that I needed to attempt to walk this long, hard path. I want to thank the members of my committee Dr. Peggy Albers, Dr. Tisha L. Lewis, Dr. Jodi Kaufmann and Dr. Kimberly Glenn who dedicated their time and patience to me.

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INTRODUCTION

Hip-hop is a prevalent culture in urban, suburban, and rural environments. The hip-hop movement has influenced the ways people speak, dress, dance, and view the world. Television shows like "So You Think You Can Dance" and several others incorporate some element of hip-hop and its many variations. Hip-hop's music, dance, and lifestyle are often situated alongside ballroom dancing and are all part of American society tradition. Hip-hop is often used as cultural capital, a set of skills acquired through social interaction over time to protest against racism against members of the black community (Chang, 2005). To a large extent, hip-hop content exposes issues of power of the wealthy over the poor in society. Perkins (1996) and Kitwana (2005) identified hip-hop culture as an art form containing the rich, instructive stories of how Black youth living in abject poverty developed strategies for adapting to their situation, carving out a space to be heard. Thus, the rise of the hip-hop culture marked the emergence of a social and political forum for Black youth to voice their real-life experiences. Through rap music, which is a form of hip-hop, youth could address things that were relevant to their culture. Hip-hop provided an avenue for these youth to critically view their realities in relationship to dominant mainstream culture. Subsequently, hip-hop culture has become one of the most effective single forms of communication for many people with varying languages, nationalities, and racial boundaries.

Culturally Relevant

For many people, hip-hop culture has become a way of life that influences how students think, act, and speak (Alexander-Smith, 1993; Asante, 2008; Baker, 1993; Baker, 2012); therefore, it is "culturally relevant" to many students' lives. Hip-hop's appeal to all youth makes it culturally relevant to a generation of students regardless of their racial backgrounds.

Culture, which is vital to learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995), plays a critical role in interconnecting and receiving information and shaping an individual's thought process. The role of culture in the development of thinking and learning makes it significant to classroom teachers. When teachers acknowledge cultural differences in the classroom and recognize the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning, culturally-relevant (responsive) teaching occurs (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Capitalizing on hip-hop's significance in students' daily lives, teachers have an opportunity to utilize instructional material that embraces an aspect of culture that students deem relevant (Ferdman, 1990). For example, the Flocabulary program (Rappaport & Harrison, 2012) is an instructional program that integrates hip-hop music into English, math, and social studies content. Flocabulary connects hip-hop to content that teachers must teach. The language arts series "Word Up!" by Flocabulary is used by middle schools in the Jersey City Public School district and at 10,000 schools nationwide. Therefore, Flocabulary is a culturally-relevant resource. To be culturally relevant to students who are part of the hip-hop culture is to acknowledge the skills and values of hip-hop and utilize them as instructional tools in the classroom (Akintunde, 1997; Alim, 2006; Asselin, 2001; Costello-Dougherty, 2009).

Using aspects of hip-hop culture to increase understanding of content presented in class makes learning more effective and transforms students' understanding; therefore, using hip-hop music in the classroom is an example of culturally relevant teaching. Notwithstanding, hip-hop music has the potential to provide sociopolitical consciousness and increase comprehension of concepts introduced in class when integrated into the curriculum as an instructional strategy (Akintunde, 1997; Alexanders-Smith, 1993; Anwar, 2007; Asselin, 2001), yet its use is often overlooked and misunderstood by educators.

A Historical Overview of the Four Tenets of Hip-Hop Culture

In educational settings, hip-hop is most visible in the physical speech and attitudes of students. Students, despite socioeconomic status, often have similar appearances, wearing the same limited number of name-brand clothing labels and styles and often using the same slang terminology. Hip-hop culture, originating as the voice of a silenced group of inner city African Americans, contains a historical roadmap that chronicles the experiences of Black people. The Bronx, in New York City, is the birthplace of American hip-hop culture (Chang, 2005). As an art form, hip-hop music boldly protests governmental procedures and policies that foster a culture of abject poverty in Black and Hispanic communities in urban American cities (Giroux, 1988; Carter, 2003; Chang, 2005). Chang (2005) identified four recognized and widely accepted tenets that converged to create the original hip-hop culture: (1) deejaying, (2) rapping, (3) breakdancing, and (4) graffiti writing. To understand hip-hop culture, it is essential to understand these four original components and how they develop, intersect, and influence the construction of a hip-hop identity.

Deejaying

The role of the "deejay" is significant in the hip-hop culture (Chang, 2005)**.** A deejay influences the mood of a hip-hop audience with the type of music he or she plays. The most popular deejays mix unexpected songs to produce a new sound that will impress their audiences. Using two turntables, the deejay would spin two or more records at the same time, playing a mixture of rhythm and blues and pop records that encourage dancing. A successful deejay found harmony with the two songs, blending them together at appropriate times to extend the beat. Locating the "break beat" within a record, the deejay extends songs to allow maximum time for

dancing. As a teenager, I attended parties where deejays played records that were popular on the radio along with other less familiar records with good beats for dancing.

Rapping

Rap is one of the original tenets of hip-hop, along with deejaying, graffiti, and breakdancing. Rapping developed from the West Indian style of *toasting*, which a form of boasting or bragging typically is done in Jamaica, West Indies (Chang, 2005). Clive Campbell, New York City deejay (from the Bronx) known as "Kool Herc," supported this direct connection between rap music and the West Indian musical form of toasting Rap music gained notoriety by serving as additional entertainment or support for deejays playing music for specific audiences (Hill, 2009). Individuals often make statements such as "I like hip-hop but not rap" as though both are types of music; people also make the mistake of assuming that aggressive and violent rap lyrics, such as gangster rap, represents all rap music. Likewise, people state that they listen to rap but not hip-hop, thinking that hip-hop emerged from rap music. From the beginning of rap, rappers rapped over a musical beat provided by the deejay. Initially, rappers were used to support the deejay, rhyming or using poetic expressions over a musical beat that the deejay provided (Harper, 2000; Miller, 2004). Rappers would rap alone, in pairs, in small groups, and sometimes even in larger groups, taking turns saying a rhyme. In every instance, the role of the rapper was to interact with the audience and get the crowd hyped or excited. Rappers used their stories as vehicles to respond creatively and powerfully to a society that viewed them as inert masses and menaces to society that deserved the impoverished conditions in which they lived (Asante, 2008; Chang, 2005). Rappers often used clubs and street corners as forums to express both social commentary and the realities of their personal lives (Forman & Neal, 2004). For instance, in response to police brutality, the rap group NWA penned the lines:

You'd rather see me in the pen
Than me and Lorenzo rollin in the Benzo
Beat tha police outta shape
And when I'm finished, bring the yellow tape
To tape off the scene of the slaughter
Still can't swallow bread and water. (Jackson, Wright, & Patterson, 1988)

The rap lyrics above described a young male's frustration with the treatment he received from local police officers. The author of this rap is expressing role reversal with police, directing the violence that the police displayed to him back toward the police with his statement "...beat tha police outta shape and when I'm finished, bring the yellow tape." The rapper demonstrated his belief that the police do not want to see him enjoy life, "rollin in the Benz" with his friend Lorenzo. Through his lyrics, the rapper released the shackles that he perceived holds him in an impoverished condition. These rappers used rap music to demonstrate what the human spirit, liberated from the shackles of tradition and oppressive authority, could do to affect the course of American popular culture.

Breakdancing

Similar to rappers, breakdancers also use their bodies as a form of unconventional expression. Breakdancing, also called "breaking," refers to the style of dancing associated with rap music (Watkins, 2005) and communicates meaning through physical expressions. Banes (2004) acknowledged that breakdancing illustrates all of the pleasures, frustrations, hopes, and fears that the dancer experiences. Banes (2004) describe techniques such as "the entry," "footwork," and "the exit," which are all significant features of the competition between dancers. "The entry" consists of moves that breakdancers do as they enter the circle of breakdancers and spectators. "The footwork" refers to the spins and hand-to-foot movements performed in the center of the circle (Holman, 2004). "The exit" describes the moves a dancer makes as he or she leaves the center of the breakdancing circle. Although breakdancing is animated, it would not be

as dramatic if viewed in isolation without a musical accompaniment. Chang (2005) indicated that it is impossible to describe the talent of breakdancers without considering a visual image and accompanying audio that reconstruct the sound of the street vibrations.

Graffiti Art

Just as breakdancers use their bodies as vehicles for expression, graffiti artists use their artistic talents to express their thoughts (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974). Graffiti writing, the fourth tenet of hip-hop, is a type of art in which images, words, and phrases are often displayed in public spaces (Conquergood, 1997; Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974). Graffiti often contains sophisticated messages that are understood by members of the hip-hop culture. Conquergood (1997) argued that graffiti, although considered distasteful by many property owners and illegal in many cities, transforms mainstream public spaces into an open display of street culture. Graffiti writing allows the inner thoughts, fears, and desires of a marginalized group to be expressed, read, and recognized. Graffiti involves a sophisticated level of literacy application demonstrated by the way graffiti writers use word manipulation and pictures to convey meaning (Castleman, 2004). Conquergood (1997) called graffiti a type of street literacy that embraces alphabetic, iconographic, and corporeal signifying modes. To support this analysis, Conquergood illustrated how graffiti-writing gang members "double dip" word meanings as they utilize well-known advertising products, such as using the crown from Corona beer to represent the royalty of the Latin Kings, a gang in Chicago. Conquergood (1997) adamantly presented graffiti as visual displays shared as acts of rebellion and demonstrated how the subordinate nature of marginalized youth supports their desire to be seen, heard, and recognized by the masses.

Concurrently**,** the four tenets—deejaying, rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti writing—combine to form what is understood to be "hip-hop culture." What began as a small group of

deejays, rappers, breakdancers, and graffiti writers has transcended into mainstream culture, gaining a wide assortment of supporters over the last 30 years (Chang, 2005; Forman & Neal, 2004). Developing a contextual understanding of hip-hop is essential to comprehending the goals of the current study. I began this journey, seeking to determine the ways that hip-hop culture functions as a lens for viewing the world and constructing identity, with an autobiographical reflection on the significance and influence of hip-hop on both a personal and a professional level.

Significance and Influence of Hip-Hop: A Brief Autobiography

Hip-hop music has helped define and give voice to a silenced group of teenagers who, like me, desperately wanted to express themselves. Rap lyrics have procured power to a generation previously perceived as powerless. The rap music that I grew up listening to was an artistic representation of talented teenagers such as Leaders of the New School, De la Soul, and A Tribe Called Quest, who all simply wanted a forum to express the joys and pains of being young and Black in the inner city.

As a child of the early hip-hop generation of the 1970s, I viewed the world through an urban-colored lens. I jumped "double-dutch" rope, played jacks, and sat on cars parked in front of the building I lived in while listening to rap music; these things were the typical urban experience for a girl growing up in Brooklyn. As I became more mature, my positionality was constructed and restructured through social interactions (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2001) to help solidify my identity as a "round-the-way girl" as an adolescent and eventually an African American female scholar. The term "round-the-way-girl" was made popular by the rapper LL Cool J in his song with the same title (Smith, 1990). In the song is about a neighborhood girl, who was both desired and respected by neighborhood youth. Though similar to the idiom "girl-

next-door," a round-the-way girl is distinguished by her urban style of dress, attitude, and language use.

Urban Style of Dress

Although not all youth living in urban areas dress exactly alike, the style of dress that was influenced by hip-hop culture of the 1980s and 1990s was distinguishable by street wear produced by a select few designers such as Tommy Hilfiger, Nautica, Karl Kani, Fila, FUBU, and Timberland. These designers created clothing and footwear that appealed to the hip-hop community's sense of style and fulfilled a necessity, which was the need for warmth during cold New York winters. It is important to note that because hip-hop originated in New York City, the members of the hip-hop community had to endure extreme cold weather, and their fashion choices included clothing that were considered fashionable, yet designed for cold weather. The females in the hip-hop community, those round-the-way-girls, often wore long denim skirts, which were functional considering the knee-length boots or Timberland-brand work boots that they wore. Round-the-way-girls also wore gold jewelry, such as large hoop or bamboo earrings and necklaces with their names on them.

Language Use

When I was growing up, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) influenced my language use just as hip-hop culture influenced my identity. The term AAVE refers to a variation of standard American English influenced by speech patterns originating in the southern region of the United States and some language dialects from western Africa (Smithermann, 1977; Wheeler & Swords, 2004). This form of English is sometimes referred to as Black English, Black Vernacular, or Ebonics. Within my home and the larger multicultural neighborhood, AAVE was used (Edwards, 2002) for purposes of endearment, to express particular sentiment, and for

everyday speech. Lippi-Green (2000) suggested that the methodical structure of words and sentences of AAVE confirm it as a multifaceted Black discourse. Words, phrases, and expressions known to be rooted in hip-hop culture often live within a trajectory of Black discourses (Richardson, 2006; Smitherman, 1997). Smitherman (1997) and Alim (2006) agreed that hip-hop discourse is "embodied in the communicative practices of the larger black speech community" and can be identified by classic aspects of Black vernacular, such as the habitual "be" (Smitherman, 1997, p. 7). According to Alim (2002), the often-used term "be" is illustrated in AAVE, a Black discourse, and the language of hip-hop in terms such as "You be trippin," which is an accusation of exaggeration or overreacting to a situation. Expressions like "word," "word up," and "Yo word is yo bond" (Cutler, 2007) all derive from older expressions found within Black vernacular English (Cukor-Avila, 1995). Hip-hop discourse is riddled with stylistic breaks from Standard English, such as "sista" for sister, "brotha" for brother, "boyz" instead of boys, and the controversial "nigga" in place of nigger. Each of these deviations is used to denote close, intimate relationships (Alim, 2006; Cutler, 2007; Lippi-Green, 2000; Smitherman, 1997).

Considering the prevalence of AAVE and the language of hip-hop in the community where I grew up, it is not surprising that as a round-the-way-girl, my language developed from a mixture of AAVE and hip-hop terminology. The hip-hop culture of the Bronx, New York, influenced the way I spoke to my friends and the way I dressed. The words "Ah, yo" were often exchanged between my friends and I when we wanted to get each other's attention. We were "fly girls," which is a term used to describe girls who were not only beautiful but were also respected in the hip-hop community. The fly girl attitude resulted from having the right clothes and shoes, using the right words at the right times, and being respected within the hip-hop community. My clothes would always reflect current trends, which led me to beg for a "B" bag (a brown handbag

made popular by female rappers in New York City) and a black leather "bomber jacket" while I was in high school. These items, along with the "name-chain" necklace that my mother purchased for me, supported my entrance into the "fly girl" community. Poet Robert Wilson uses the ancient Japanese poetic form known as "Tanka" to illustrate the significance of a "fly girl." A Tanka is a 5-line poem containing the syllable configuration "5-7-5-7" and ending with what is called a "Mora." A Mora contains "a vowel followed by a consonant, or a nasal consonant that is not accompanied by a following vowel, or the first part of a long consonant" (Alim, 2009). Wilson illustrates the influence of a "fly girl" in his poem "Sista":

> She da bomb, in her
> Foxy threads and stylin' shades
> Got flava and 'tude
> I be sippin' cristal and
> Git busy wit' da fly girl

This poem captures the essence of a fly girl as one who is current with hip-hop style. She is well respected, admired, and desired, yet somewhat unattainable. Fly girls represented the feminine side of hip-hop, which is a male-dominated arena. The fly girl used the right terms and phrases, wore the right clothes and accessories, and complemented her hip-hop male counterparts.

"Round-the-Way Girl" turned Educator

The burgeoning culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s helped shape my early identity and remains a part of who I am as an educator. As a teenager, my love for rap music was a key element of my worldview. Rap music continues to be a part of my life as an adult; however, its role has significantly changed. I now view music through a more critical lens, giving me the opportunity to analyze lyrics for content and meaning in addition to beat and sound. Resulting from the impact of hip-hop (as a music genre) on my life as a student, I recognize hip-hop's potential to elevate students' academic competencies in the classroom through active learning

and engagement by providing both culturally relevant text and meaningful connections to students' cultures (Alexander-Smith, 1993; Harper, 2000). I have taught in the classroom and served as a reading specialist; currently, I am a secondary school administrator who maintains my membership in the hip-hop community.

As a reading specialist, I used various aspects of hip-hop culture to pique my students' interest in reading a new book. I incorporated hip-hop terminology, such as "Get crunk" or "You better recognize," into my instructional conversations in the classroom. "Get crunk" was used as a signal for my students to get excited. I overheard students use the phrase "You better recognize" as a warning to someone who doubted their abilities. For example, if a student stated that he or she was a good chess player and another student made a snide or derogatory remark or responded in disbelief, "You better recognize" would be a logical retort to inform the doubter that he or she is indeed a good chess player.

In the classroom, I used a variety of instructional strategies to connect with students, and I related topics or themes from academic readings to real-life situations that the students understood (as long as they had the background knowledge to make these real-world connections). I utilized storytelling to make academic concepts less abstract and more concrete. For example, I created a six-week interdisciplinary unit on hip-hop culture, where I told the story of hip-hop from my personal perspective as a teenager living in the Bronx, New York. I took a New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) train map to class and highlighted the areas discussed in several rap songs and in articles about early hip-hop artists. Using old album covers and posters of rap artists such as Big Daddy Kane, Heavy D and the Boyz, Salt-n-Pepper, and Run DMC, I provided visual connections to rap music of the previous generation. My students were surprised to discover that I had been a fan of LL Cool J since his debut in the

movie *Krush Grove*. I shared some of my high school photos, showing the students hairstyles and fashion trends of that time. My students were able to ascertain that current styles were often adaptations of styles from previous generations. This shift in my instructional practice to include more real-world connections using hip-hop culture was met with increased enthusiasm and yielded higher academic performance (Alim, 2009) from my middle-school students, who were mostly African American males. In these small ways, I was able to link my personal interests, prior knowledge, and experiences with my role of educator. Although the students in my classroom were members of the hip-hop community, their membership was from the culture's second generation. The hip-hop artists that they listened to were newer, younger, and often not recognized by members from my generation.

From my personal role, a member of the hip-hop community, and my professional role, an educator, I have access to an assortment of resources that I have drawn from for the current study. For example, my younger brother maintains membership with the hip-hop community of my generation as well as with the generation of students today. He is professionally involved in the business aspect of hip-hop, working with rap artists as their manager, running an entertainment company with several artists, and starting a clothing line. Through his connections, I have access to hip-hop artists, managers, entertainment attorneys, and musical engineers. These associations have provided varying perspectives of prominent members of the hip-hop community, hip-hop scholars, and enthusiasts.

The Problem

Hip-hop is a racialized cultural production plagued with pluralities. Despite the diversity found among members of the hip-hop community—which includes doctors, lawyers, and many other successful individuals who grew up not only listening to hip-hop but also living it—hip-hop is continuously maligned (Ogbar, 2007; Schoss, 2009). The violence, degradation, and sexism within hip-hop make it challenging for intellectuals wishing to examine hip-hop in scholarly pursuit. The struggle to advance hip-hop through mounting criticism is a national problem identified by numerous hip-hop scholars (Alim, 2006; Anwar, 2007; Asante, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

Notwithstanding social class, race, and gender, members of the hip-hop community speak the same language (Alim, 2006). Expression, whether it is spoken (rap) or written (graffiti), presented though spoken word, demonstrated through dance, or depicted in dress, allow the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of people, often relegated to the sidelines, to be openly conveyed. Richardson (2006) contended that participants of hip-hop discourse have the aptitude to present multifaceted meaning to hip-hop texts. In the current study, I attempt to examine hip-hop via the stories of poets, artists, and creators who incorporate hip-hop culture into their daily lives. Understanding the sights, sounds, and meanings embedded in hip-hop texts offers insight into the reasons that innovative and inventive poets, artists, and creators in the hip-hop community are as powerful and influential as the poets, artists, and creators that are discussed in traditional classrooms (Alim, 2006). This insight, such as the perceptions of what real hip-hop is and the understanding of who is in control in the hip-hop community, is expressed in hip-hop texts such as rap artist Tupac Shakur's "The Rose that Grew from Concete" (Shakur, 1999) and rap artist

Jay Z's "Decoded" (Carter, 2010). In the excerpt below, Shakur (2010) expressed the resilient nature of hip-hop as he decribed a rose that grew from concrete:

> Did you hear about the rose that grew
> from a crack in the concrete?
> Proving nature's law is wrong it
> learned to walk without having feet.
> Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,
> it learned to breathe fresh air.
> Long live the rose that grew from concrete
> when no one else ever cared.

In this poem, this rose that Tupac describes, which defies the laws of nature, is similar to an inner-city youth's use of hip-hop to create a better life despite the odds. Sean Carter (better known in the hip-hop community as Jay Z) expressed several secrets of street life and his personal rise to hip-hop dominance in "Decoded", sharing information that is rarely discussed. On the cover of his book, Jay Z used an Andy Warhol Rorschach print to express his status as a complex, cutting-edge, polished adult; he used the book to accomplish three goals: (a) establish hip-hop as poetic expression, (b) set a context for adults who emerged from the first wave of hip-hop, and (c) describe how the explicit, powerful experiences associated with living in poverty-stricken inner-city areas in America can be relatable to people worldwide. The hip-hop text Decoded demonstrated an example of the numerous ways that hip-hop educates people.

The experience of hip-hop culture provides education as people learn about social injustices and racial realities within a cultural context. Although rap songs with direct messages about social injustices have decreased, many hip-hop and pop artists embed cryptic messages within their lyrics. For example, Black Eye Peas, Queen Latifah, Lauryn Hill, TuPac, and The Roots, use rap to express social justice.

Through hip-hop, individuals educate society about the process of transforming a natural talent or hobby into a multi-million dollar business. Educational texts, written by academic

researchers, as well as textbooks incorporate elements of hip-hop culture as a strategy to educate in the classroom (Akintunde, 1997; Asante, 2008; Baker H. , 1993; Dotree, 2007; Jeremiah, 1992; Love, 2012; Ogbar, 2007; and Watkins, 2005).

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding the current investigation is: "How has hip-hop become a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and creators who are actively and intimately involved in its music and culture?" Additionally, the following sub questions will direct this inquiry: (1) "What does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community?" and (2) In what way does hip-hop inform the participants' view of the world?"

These research questions offered an opportunity to investigate the elements of hip-hop that were central to members' lives. They were designed to generate rich discussion of the ways participants have experienced hip-hop from childhood into adulthood. The answers to these research questions will provide insight into the significance of hip-hop in shaping the opinions and influencing the actions of people inspired by this culture.

The current study of successful poets, artists, and creators who associate themselves closely with hip-hop is significant. I refer to these particpants as "educators" because in their roles, they educate formally as teachers in school environments and also work with youth in informal settings. Although Alim (2007) defined an educator as a specialist in educational theory and methods who help youth make sense of their social worlds and communties, the educators in the current study are "individuals who give support to others as they learn to achieve a goal." Educators are considered wise, trusted, and knowledgable, often known as a gurus on a particular subject (Chang, 2005; Delpit, 1995). As educators, the poets, artists, and creators who closely associate with hip-hop have the potential to influence millions of youth and adults around the

world. Examining hip-hop through these educators' stories may have been the first step toward the challenge of advancing hip-hop scholarship through mounting criticism.

Theoretical Perspective

Critical literacy is an instructional approach to reading text that unearths the way language is used to inform, entertain, persuade, and manipulate (Alim, 2006; Bartlett, 2008). Language, as a social construct that is never neutral, shapes the representation of realities in texts (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000). Texts can include television, movies, web pages, music (Callahan & Low, 2004), and art (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). The ways that individuals discuss the meanings embedded in text, particularly negotiation of power, are key elements to critical literacy (Haygood, 2002).

Significance of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy was chosen to study the language of hip-hop because it affords an opportunity to critically question and examine the resulting data. Hip-hop, created as a resistant, defiant expression of thought, presents critical views of mainstream opinions and interpretations just as critical literacy analyzes the way that language manipulates, persuades, informs, and entertains. When someone attempts to control and manipulate the thoughts of others, people naturally resist; hip-hop is a manifestation of the resistance to socioeconomic status that many African Americans in urban environments experience. Critical literacy is the frame used to examine and read the world from a critical perspective, allowing real-world issues to surface for investigation. Hip-hop music attempts to accomplish this same goal. Hip-hop lyrics are artistic expressions of real-world problems, addressing socioeconomic status, race, class, and gender through musical format. Critical literacy teaches us how to deconstruct and analyze popular

culture, which is essential because “the media reproduces structural power relations based on race, gender, class and sexual orientation” (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007, p. 654).

Currently, most studies examining the use of hip-hop in the classroom are either theoretical or examine the practices of those who attempt to bring in the practice of hip-hop without personally embracing the culture. The current body of literature addressing an analysis of hip-hop culture incorporates various aspects of hip-hop culture, including its origin as a social movement (Rose, 1991, 2008), analyzes the lyrical content of rap songs (Henderson, 1996), or provides an argument for use in the classroom (Akintunde, 1997; Harper, 2000; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Several researchers (Alim, 2002; Lippi-Green, 2000; Harper, 2000; Watkins, 2005) have examined hip-hop’s usefulness as a means of poetic expression. Yet, absent from the literature is a qualitative study of the different ways that hip-hop is experienced in daily life, hearing the voices of adults who simultaneously identify with the hip-hop culture and with mainstream society. The absence of qualitative research hightlighiting the voices of adults within the hip-hop community is problematic because hip-hop is only becoming a more dominating part of school environments. Hip-hop may give insight to educators with students that are heavily influenced by the nuances of hip-hop. Critical literacy involves asking complicated questions about language use and power, morality and ethics, and advantage and disadvantage (Comber, 2001). Critical literacy, which is informed by social justice pedagogy and influenced by the view of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, is essential to analyzing the meanings generated from participants in the current study. Examining the ways that study participants view hip-hop will allow me to see the influence of language, experience, and perspective on the meaning.

The goals of critical literacy are to empower students to read texts to understand the various ways that these texts influence them and to encourage analytical discussion about the

multiple meanings of texts. Although some voices or discourses are excluded from texts, critical literacy affords the reader an opportunity to question an author's intent, perspective, and position. Within critical literacy, the reader considers the author's worldview and questions why an author may choose to leave out or silence particular points of view. The current study is guided by four components of critical literacy: (1) mainstream politics, (2) social justice, (3) multiple perspectives, and (4) transformation.

Mainstream Politics

The term "mainstream politics" refers to a dimension of critical literacy that is divided into two critical components: disrupting the commonplace by seeing the everyday through new lens (Lewison, Flint, & van Sluys, 2002) and access orientation, which is granting access to the dominant form of language (Janks, 2000).

Disrupting the Commonplace

Seeing the everyday through new lens, producing and examining bias and perceptions that influence language use are seen as a way to *disrupt* the commonplace. This dimension of critical literacy is essential to an examination of hip-hop texts and may assist individuals who are outsiders to hip-hop by providing them with details of everyday experiences through the lens of hip-hop artists. The rap song "Today was a Good Day by Ice Cube (1992) is an example of disrupting the commonplace. This song presents the everyday life in south-central Los Angeles from hip-hop artist Ice Cube's perspective as Ice Cube shares his story through rhyme and details an ordinary day for him. Throughout the song, he talks about smoking, drinking, having sexual relations, hanging out with his friends, and not being harassed by local police. The listener can examine bias and perceptions of these activities displaced into the text (song). Examining these activities within context, the life of a young male in south-central Los Angeles in the mid-1990s,

invites the listener into the everyday realities of the rapper. In reference to the Los Angeles police, the rapper stated: “Saw the police and they rolled right past me. No flexin, didn't even look in a niggaz direction” (Jackson, 1992). This quote refers to a situation where young males are frequently and randomly stopped and questioned by police.

Incorporating popular culture in this manner is an example of disrupting the commonplace because it imparts a new perspective. While it is important to examine every day experiences through a critical lens, it is also imperative to view the power structures that control and influence the media that people experience on a daily basis. In Ice Cube’s song, the rapper questions the power structures in his Los Angeles neighborhood. The lyrics featured above reveals the rapper’s belief that the Los Angeles police are in a position of power and “flex” this power by stopping Black drivers with no probable cause. The term “driving while Black” is now commonly used to refer to police harassment of Black drivers (Kowalski & Lundman, 2007). The large number of Black drivers stopped for minor traffic offenses has fueled beliefs in racial profiling exists because these Black drivers are more likely to receive traffic citations than their White counterparts are. Ice Cube cleverly refers to the notion of driving while black in his song by stating that during this “good day” Los Angeles police rode right past him, an unusual occurrence in 1990s south-central Los Angeles. Listeners are exposed to the power structure that exists between the Los Angeles police department and Black drivers; therefore, this is an example of critical literacy that gives students the opportunity to question who has access and the authority to make decisions.

Access Orientation

Access orientation (Janks, 2000) within critical literacy is a struggle to grant individuals admittance to the dominant form of language, which is the language of power or standard

English through formal education. When educators assume an access orientation, they focus on providing access to dominant forms of language without compromising the integrity of non-dominant forms (Janks, 2000). Teachers who use and teach standard English but acknowledge nonstandard forms that students may bring to school, such as creating meaning through storytelling, demonstrate the access orientation element of critical literacy. Popular culture texts offer a storytelling element and alternative viewpoints and therefore serve as a good tool to permit individuals access to the dominant form of language without compromising the intergity of non-dominant forms of language. Popular culture texts such as music lyrics, websites, blogs, music videos, magazines, and film sometimes lead to controversial topics or genres that may be unfamiliar to the classroom teacher. Teachers who feel tension when incorporating a new aspect of curriculum can find support in study groups and through online resources provided by teachers with more experience using popular culture in their classroom instruction as a method of critical literacy. Popular culture studies, hip-hop texts, or alternative forms of texts provide an excellent view of the ways language is used to manipulate public opinion. Incorporating alternative forms of text (e.g., video, music, and film) begins the process of critical literacy through integrating multiple perspectives (Alim, 2007; Asselin, 2001; Callahan & Low, 2004).

Multiple Perspectives

Critical literacy allows an examination of perspective, specifically those with perspectives that are advanced and deemed valid, using multiple voices to interrogate texts by asking questions such as “Whose voices are heard and whose are silenced?” (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Incorporating multiple texts on the same topic (Behrman, 2006) encouraged students to question whose values are advanced in a text (Spires, 1999). Reading a range of texts on the same topic encourages students to understand different points of view and their influences on

text. When educators adopt a multiple perspective (Janks, 2000) stance, attention is given to the way language use creates social identities. As novice teachers become familiar with hip-hop texts, they may interrogate multiple viewpoints by examining competing or counter-narratives. Comparing and contrasting two hip-hop artists from two different rap genres (i.e., gangster rap and conscious rap) (Hagerdorn, 1991) demonstrates the use of hip-hop texts to interrogate multiple viewpoints. Students can attempt to understand both perspectives and critically read the text (lyrics). Gangster rap (also referred to as gangsta rap) is a subset of hip-hop music that evolved from hard-core hip-hop music closely associated with artists from the western coast of the United States (Chang, 2005). Gangsta rap contains violent lyrics about crime and gang affiliation. Examples of gangsta rappers are Too Short, NWA, Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, C-Murder, Capone-N-Noreaga, The Criminalz, Da Lynch Mob, and Ghetto Boys (Hagerdorn, 1991). Conscious rap music consists of lyrics that focus on positivity, knowledge, and learning (Chang, 2005). Conscious rappers habitually create lyrics about social change and self-awareness, often embracing an element of political rhetoric. Rappers such as Talib Kweli, Rakim, Nas, Mos Def, and Common are known as conscious rappers. Conscious rap music has a high level of social consciousness.

Using the multiple perspective element of critical literacy, students are able to formulate new ideas and meanings using various modes such as hip-hop because of its relevance to their daily lives. For example, Akintunde (1997) argued that using popular culture values and students' life experiences lends itself to in-depth discussions of the sociopolitical context that is sometimes hidden within texts. Lloyd (2003) demonstrated how song lyrics could encourage students to deconstruct gender roles, racist practices, and governmental policies. Using songs like Marvin Gaye's "Mercy, Mercy Me," Lloyd helped students develop critical literacy through

discussion about man's role in protecting the environment. Guiding students through a careful critique of the lyrics reveals Gaye's depiction of pollution, devastation caused by oil spills due to human carelessness**,** and disregard for animal and plant life.

Teachers who employ a critical literacy perspective recognize that language is not neutral and teach students to seek out the bias depicted in language (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1999). All texts created from a particular perspective are intended to convey a certain message. Adopting a critical literacy perspective demands that the reader interrogate multiple perspectives with the understanding that texts are designed to influence the readers' thinking. Behrman (2006) maintained that identifying multiple voices in texts, engaging in dialog about dominant culture, and recognizing sources of authority in texts are all activities that support the uncovering of social-justice dynamics in critical literacy.

Social Justice

The social justice tenet focuses on the belief that the world is a socially constructed text (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000). Language and literacy are essential to social reconstruction and the eradication of economic exploitation (McLaren, 1999). In this tenet, critical literacy involves *reading* the world to uncover power relationships (Behrman, 2006; Green, 2001; Janks, 2000; Siegel & Fernandez, 2000). Knowledge is power, and power is not equally distributed among all groups. Delpit (1995) pointed out that access to knowledge and consequently power is unbalanced among cultural and economic groups. This imbalance of power led to one social or economic group exhibiting dominance over the others, and that domination is perpetuated by language. Nonfiction texts offer exposure to the power of language to influence opinion and motivate action (Sisk, 2002). Those that are granted access to the language of power maintain dominance or control over those that lack this access. Janks (2000) labeled this view as the

"domination perspective" and uses it to analyze the ways that language equates to power. Noting the way standard English (the language used in schools) helps individuals navigate through mainstream society, educators who adopt the domination perspective use texts that consider how language maintains positions of social and political domination. Unconventional instructional texts like those found in popular culture help demonstrate the connection between language and power. Lloyd (2003) suggested that lyrics from certain popular artists provide students with real-world, socially constructed content in a format that students can comprehend.

Critical literacy in popular culture (e.g., hip-hop texts) can extrapolate theories of language reveal that word meanings are fluid, can lose their historical baggage, and can be restructured for new purposes (Callahan & Low, 2004). Subtle changes can transform the meaning of words, at least for the user, and communicate a completely different context. For example, the term "get busy" has a different meaning in the hip-hop community depending on the context (Chang, 2005). When referring to a group of students, "get busy," meant having a good time or socializing. However, the term also had a sexual reference when used to describe interaction between a male and a female. In addition to these two meanings, "get busy" was used to describe a physical altercation, such as a fight. This term demonstrates the subtle changes that transform meaning, allowing the user to reclaim power by dictating the meaning associated with the term. The term was restructured for a new purpose. Callahan and Low (2004) demonstrated this same language transformation examining use of the word "nigger" by replacing the –er with –a by members of the hip-hop community. Despite centuries of negative connotation, the spelling and pronunciation of the word nigger was changed for a new purpose. The *er* was changed with an *a* to create a self-selected term of solidarity. Changing the word *nigger* to *nigga*

demonstrates an eradication of the socially constructed historical baggage previously associated with the word and therefore is an example of social justice.

Transformation

Restructuring a word, term, or phrase to influence the socially constructed meaning it is associated with is also an example of transformation. Taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & van Sluys, 2002) is an indispensable element of critical literacy that allows students to read text critically and then move toward changing unjust and oppressive situations. Hall (1999) confirmed that this element of critical consciousness leads to students' remaking their own identities and sociopolitical realities. To be critically literate, individuals imagine multiple perspectives and possibilities. Nevertheless, critical literacy does not stop with recognizing multiple perspectives; it also incorporates taking action and effecting social change (Green, 2001). Freire (1972) argued that the goal of critical literacy is to transform the world by first reflecting and then taking action. A multitude of hip-hop songs embody this social transformation element of critical literacy. When hip-hop artists choose to produce authentic music rather than be controlled by large record companies, it exemplifies the essence of taking action. The connection between critical literacy and hip-hop was demonstrated when students protested hip-hop artist Nelly's appearance at Spelman College (a historically Black college in Atlanta, GA) for a charity event to raise awareness of bone marrow registry (Carpenter, 2006). Female students at Spelman College planned to protest the rapper because of the misogyny demonstrated in his rap videos. The protest drew considerable media attention and negative publicity for the rapper; it also renewed the focus on video vixens and women's objectification in hip-hop culture. Spelman students were critically examining hip-hop videos (texts) as misogynistic and wanted to change the oppressive situations and female objectification in videos

through their protest. These students demonstrated the transformative element of critical literacy by understanding that language shapes understanding of social issues such as race, class, and gender (Janks, 2000) as well as how we use language to talk about those issues. These students' voices, in protest, influenced the public's opinion of female images in hip-hop as well as the language used to describe the female body.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a historical overview of hip-hop culture, explaining what hip-hop is and how it began. Just as it is important to address the history of hip-hop, it is important to address the significance of hip-hop's influence on my personal and professional life. In the brief autobiography section, I attempted to explain how hip-hop influenced my styles of dress, language usage, and ultimately the method of instructional delivery I used as a classroom teacher. The purpose of this study is to examine hip-hop through the stories of adults who incorporate it into their daily lives. I have described critical literacy as a theoretical perspective to examine the stories shared by participants. Critical literacy demonstrates the power of language to influence, control, and manipulate thought and action.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the current examination of hip-hop culture**,** I argue that hip-hop is born out of a larger urban black experience that incorporates language in various ways. In this chapter, I will focus on the historical connection between the language of hip-hop and Black discourse with special emphasis on the importance of the ways language is manipulated to sway opinion, resist authority and take action, and promote social justice.

History of Hip-Hop Language

The study of Black language dates back to Abrahams (1964), who examined Black speech and incorporated aspects of Black discourse. Abrahams, studying the speech patterns of African Americans living in South Philadelphia in the 1950s, attempted to include social considerations. Attempting to completely integrate into the working-class Black neighborhood where his participants lived and worked, Abrahams recorded the stories of local Black people. Abrahams presented this folklore to include stories, jokes, and songs that had been passed down for generations in the Black community. Abrahams focused on the insight that could be generated from the stories the participants told as opposed to the stories themselves; however, those stories were generated primarily from male participants. The view of Black language depicted in Abrahams (1964) was overwhelmingly male-dominated, just as the views and opinions presented within hip-hop culture are male-dominated.

Connecting Black Language and Hip-Hop

The study of Black language is also a study of hip-hop, which is deeply rooted in the Black language community. Cutler (2007) maintained that hip-hop has a long history in the Black language community. The systematic way that words are structured and sentences are

ordered supports the idea that Black discourse is exceedingly complex (Lippi-Green, 2000; Orr, 2000). Words, phrases, and expressions rooted in hip-hop culture often live within a trajectory of Black discourses (Richardson, 2006; Smitherman, 1997). Smitherman (1997) and Alim (2006) agreed that hip-hop discourse is "embodied in the communicative practices of the larger black speech community" (Smitherman, 1997, p. 7) and can be identified by classic aspects of Black vernacular, such as the habitual "be." According to Alim (2002), this "be" is illustrated in Black discourse and the language of hip-hop, via terms such as "you be trippin," meaning that one speaker is accusing another of exaggerating or overreacting to a situation. Expressions like "word," "word up," and "Yo word is Yo bond" (Cutler, 2007) are all derivatives of older expressions found within Black vernacular English.

The term we know today as "rap" refers to the lyrical aspect of hip-hop music. Smitherman (1997) suggested that the word rap was initially coined in the African American speech community to describe the romantic interactions between a man and a woman. With continued usage, the term began to take on a more inclusive meaning, representing any dominating verbal exchange. This definition of rap is akin to the definition of "rap" in rap music. When artists use conversation to transfer a message over a musical beat, it is called "rapping."

Rose (1994) contended that many rappers use aspects of 'versioning' and sampling in their music. Versioning refers to the process of creating a new version of a popular song. Versioning is a musical tradition used heavily in Caribbean Reggae music. Additionally, hip-hop is influenced by the Caribbean tradition of Toasting where a deejay talks to the audience while a song is played (Chang, 2005). Sampling in hip-hop refers to an artist using a sample or small portion of an existing record as part of his or her new song (Asante, 2008). Unlike versioning, hip-hop sampling may or may sample a popular or well-known song. Rose (1994) articulated

that hip-hop music's incorporation of pre-recorded sound, through sampling, has challenged copyright laws and demanded reexamination of musical property.

As an art form, rap music tells stories, analyzes social situations, and makes statements from an artist's point of view (Akintunde, 1997; Alim, 2006; Baker, 1993). A rap must be rational and provide information in addition to entertaining. Rappers gain power and prestige when they display a clever and articulate command of the English language. Therefore, a rapper must be able to condense a situation into a three-minute soliloquy and set it to a rhythmic beat, which requires higher level thinking skills and execution (Alexander-Smith, 1993; Chang, 2005).

Rapping as a Form of Storytelling

Rapper as Griots

Storytelling, an oral tradition, is one of the most distinctive forms of literacy that exists in the African American community. The African ritual of *call and response* is used to capture an audience and enhance the performance aspect of storytelling. Smitherman (1997) classified the rapper as a "postmodern African griot" or a verbally gifted storyteller. Richardson (2006) supported Smitherman's (1997) claim, arguing that African language practices employed in rap lyrics include mimicry, boasting, image-making, punning, and call and response. The art of rapping exemplifies the oral tradition of storytelling, particularly the practice of call and response. The song "Children's Story" by rapper Slick Rick, as seen in Walters (1988) illustrates one of the many ways that rappers use the literacy practice of storytelling to communicate with their audience:

> Here we go,
> Once upon a time not long ago,
> when people wore pajamas and lived life slow,
> When laws were stern and justice stood,
> and people were behavin' like they ought ta good,
> There lived a lil' boy who was misled,

by anotha lil' boy and this is what he said:
Me, Ya, Ty, we gonna make sum cash,
robbin' old folks and makin' tha dash..

This excerpt warns children to avoid criminal activity and negative peer pressure. The song vividly describes events that lead to a young boy's death during a crime spree that included robbery and kidnapping. Ironically, this cautionary tale is told as a bedtime story and ends with a vibrant lyrical twist, depicting how the young boy meets his fate.

Deep in his heart he knew he was wrong,
so he let the lady go and he starts to run on,
Sirens sounded, he seemed astounded,
before long the lil' boy got surrounded,
He dropped the gun, so went the glory,
and this is the way I must end this story,
He was only seventeen, in a madman's dream,
the cops shot the kid, I still hear him scream,
This ain't funny so don't ya dare laugh,
just another case 'bout the wrong path,
Straight 'n narrow or yo' soul gets cast.
Good night. (Slick Rick, 1988).

This song is significant for its depiction of the misfortune that falls upon youth who are "misled" and participate in illegal activities. Slick Rick's song "Children's Story" remains an influential piece of old-school hip-hop music, inspiring a children's story written by rappers Mos Def and Talib Kweli. Unlike Slick Rick's cautionary tale regarding illegal activity, Mos Def and Talib Kweli's version of "Children's Story" depicts the wrong path that hip-hop music has traveled. With the use of personification, Mos Def and Talib Kweli (1998) gave human characteristics to hip-hop music in the following excerpt that portrays how some hip-hop artists allow the business aspect of hip-hop to overshadow the creative aspect:

Once upon a time not long ago
When people wore Adidas and lived life slow
When laws were stern and justice stood
And people was behavin' like hip-hop was good
There lived a little boy who was misled

By a little Sha-tan and this is what he said
"Me and you kid we gonna make some cash,
Jackin' old beats and makin' the dash..."
They jacked the beats, money came wit' ease
But son, he couldn't stop, it's like he had a disease
He jacked another and another, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder
Set some R & B over the track for 'Deep Cover' (187!).

The line "Me and you kid we gonna make some cash, Jackin' old beats and makin' a dash…" illustrates the practices that some rappers use to gain fame in the hip-hop music industry. The song's tone and references to "Jackin beats" and "makin' a dash" refer to sampling other artists' music without proper authorization from or compensation to the original composers. Mos Def and Talib Kweli's version of Children's Story is a harsh critique of what happens when hip-hop artists, void of creative ability, fall victim to dishonorable practices within the hip-hop industry of record executives in lieu of maintaining the authenticity found within in hip-hop community of rappers, deejays, graffiti artists, and breakdancers. Both of the aforementioned versions of Children's Story illustrate the deliberate and premeditated storytelling aspect of rapping.

Rap Cipher

When rap artists join together to create impromptu, freestyle raps, it is known as a rap "cipher." Newman (2005) explored the rap cipher or freestyle rap, an oral communication practice deeply rooted in old school hip-hop culture. The rap cipher is impromptu rapping about various subjects, utilizing a debate style known as battling. Newman attempted to analyze rap lyrics, presented orally in response to different stimuli, as literacy, and observed young males' ability to freestyle. Rap ciphers emphasize the diverse ways that rappers manipulate words to get their points across. Using an ethnographic approach, Newman found equivalence between the frequency and design of the cipher and the ideologies and beliefs inherent in the creator of the

freestyle rap. Attempting to determine if rap music is literacy, Newman argued that the various acts of communication—speaking, listening, writing, and reading—are interrelated communicative domains. Literacy is not restricted to reading and writing; it includes understanding concepts and articulating that understanding, which is similar to the rap artist manipulating words to convey an understanding of concepts. Newman (2005) suggested that researching ciphers, or freestyle rapping, was a justifiable study of *literacy*.

Newman (2005) revealed the divide that exists between old-school hip-hop fans who embrace the freestyle performance of ciphers and the newer generation of rappers who may view rapping as a springboard to other ventures to obtain wealth. For example, when analyzing an interview, Newman stated that participants had pride in the commercial and popular success of artists on major record labels who sell many albums. This stands in stark contrast to underground rap artists who are admittedly concerned with advancing their views more than selling records. During data analysis, Newman (2005) also revealed, in support of my own beliefs, that the commercial turn that rap music has taken has led to a generation of rappers and fans who have ventured far from rap's original purpose: to give voice to a silenced group of people.

Socially Conscious Rap

Watkins (2005) reported that the early stages of rap music reflected the voices of urban youth and remained primarily under the control of the Black community and that the music contained serious, socially conscious messages. Well-respected rap artists mastered the ability to articulate social and political messages while maintaining rhythmic integrity. As rappers perfected their craft, their ability to manipulate words created a "wow" effect from the audience that encouraged inner-city youth living in New York City to build their own vocabularies. In the 1990s, aspiring rappers and rap enthusiasts alike unexpectedly began to carry a thesaurus in their

book bags, eager to outwit others with their verbal skills. In the following excerpt, rap artist Rakim demonstrates the creative ability that marked the rap music scene of the 1990s when he compares hieroglyphics (a written communication used in ancient Egypt) with his written rap lyrics. In this comparison, Rakim indicates that his rap lyrics are not commonly used, just as hieroglyphics is not a commonly used mode of communication:

> My rhyme flow different like a hieroglyphic
> Mind prolific, infinite, like mathematic
> The first language, now adds that, and adds graphics (Go head)
> Then go let the blocks know it's the gospel
> Life's new manual, so watch close
> The new Michelangelo and Pablo Picasso
> Prepared to show you the cosmos and rock flows
> Even my lyrical metaphysical
> What this will do is help you get to your spiritual pinnacle
> You find your mind too far-fetched for it to fathom
> I bring the darkness to the light, split the atom
> It's like watching the big bang theory emerge
> I take titles; bond them to reveal new words
> They want a clear view
> From the farthest and the darkest corners of the universe
> To a corner near you. (Rakim, 1988)

The comparisons listed in the Rakim excerpt involve basic knowledge of what hieroglyphics are as well as an understanding of scientific and mathematical themes. However, Rakim was not the only rap artist whose lyrics contained social commentary and content. The 1990s ushered in the emergence of artists, such as Poor Righteous Teachers, whose lyrics contained political rhetoric and exposed the economic hardships often found in inner-city neighborhoods. Public Enemy, whose song "Fight the Power" contained unapologetic lyrics such as "Elvis was a hero to most but he never meant shit to me" (Public Enemy, 1989), rapped lyrics that were thought by some to be too confrontational and militant. "Fight the Power," although peppered with strongly worded lyrics, was featured on the soundtrack of Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing," a film that uncovered the racial tension in a Brooklyn, New York neighborhood (Lee, 1989).

The rap music of the early hip-hop era of the 1970s and 1980s was mainly about race and resistance. Various artists, like Boogie Down Products, Eric B. and Rakim, Public Enemy, and X Clan, boldly protested governmental procedures and policies that led to a concentration of poverty in the Bronx, particularly in the African American and Hispanic communities (Carter, 2003; Chang, 2005). Through the establishment of street credibility, rappers are able to advance their social and political agendas, manipulating words and phrases within their raps.

Language Used to Sway Public Opinion

Critical literacy, the theoretical lens used in the current study, supports the connection to politically charged rap lyrics as social justice. The social justice element of critical literacy reveals that language is power, and the language of hip-hop influences millions of people worldwide. Consequently, the number of hip-hop songs that contain political content is rapidly increasing. Gosa (2010) investigated 97 Obama-themed "mix tapes" produced between October 2008 and April 2009. Mix tapes are compilations of music from various artists made by amateur deejays and distributed for publicity or profit. Focusing on music freely available via internet download, Gosa (2010) searched for songs with political content that were digitally produced and free of the corporate controls found in mainstream music. Songs that directly addressed American politics and government, President Obama, or the Obama 2008 campaign became the core data (Gosa, 2010). Rap music that contained an Obama-theme incorporated multiple meanings of words. Obama-themed raps demonstrate the tradition of signifying and hip-hop's connection to African American discourse. The presidential themes of "hope" and "change" were used in hip-hop songs, and rap artists used specific lines (e.g., Barack the vote, votes on deck) to encourage listeners to vote for then-candidate Obama. The rap artists on these mixtapes sampled President Obama's political speeches as well as his campaign slogans in their songs.

The Obama-themed rap movement even gained mainstream attention from artists such as Will.I.am from the popular group Black Eyed Peas.

Authenticity: Language Manipulation

In hip-hop music, authenticity or "street credibility" is essential to artist popularity among members of the hip-hop community. In this context, authenticity includes the same characteristics widely accepted in the Black community, such as speaking a version of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Consequently, "sellouts" are defined as Black people who might speak standard English or display other behaviors commonly identified as being part of the larger mainstream society. Similar to the issue of authenticity in the Black community, a struggle also exists within the hip-hop community regarding who is authentic or "real." Initially, the street culture from which hip-hop emerged mirrored the experiences in Black youth in urban communities (Rose, 1991, 2008). The direct link that hip-hop had to street culture led to an authenticity that placed at the top of the hierarchy of Black culture (Gilroy, 1997).

Alim (2004) provided a definition of authenticity in hip-hop as a complex theory that depends on socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural proximity to the urban community where hip-hop originated. Rickford and Rickford (2000) described the concept of hip-hop authenticity as being true to an individual's roots. Rap music gave youth an opportunity to express their voices and speak out against the deteriorating situations existing in their local communities. The storytelling nature of hip-hop gave hundreds of youth a sense of belonging and identity (Chang, 2005). Clay (2003) acknowledged that youth use hip-hop in everyday life to authenticate identity. Conversely, the determining factor for what fans deem is credible depends on one's perspective. Hip-hop fans respect music artists whom they believe are authentic, meaning the information provided in their rhymes are first-hand accounts or personal testimonies.

Alim (2002) revealed that hip-hop artists make a concerted effort to appear credible to fans through word manipulation. Essentially, Alim exposed the methods that artists use to create street-conscious copula variations. Utilizing a sociolinguistic approach, Alim analyzed the oral speech and rap lyrics of two well-known hip-hop artists, Eve and Juvenile, demonstrating how the transcription on a compact disc (CD) can provide data on copula variation. Alim revealed the copula absence is higher in the rap songs than in the conversations of these two rap artists. Data revealed that rap artist Juvenile had a greater percentage of copula absence than Eve in both lyrics and conversation. Alim asserted that the level of education, social class, gender, and geographic region of both artists contributed to the difference between the artists' copula variations. According to Alim, female rapper Eve grew up in a socially progressive middle-class family and was successful in school while male rapper Juvenile hated school and was more strongly affiliated with the "street" culture.

Additionally, Alim (2002) revealed that the street-conscious copula variations between the artists' interviews and their rap lyrics might also be attributed to their conscious efforts to project a street image. Some hip-hop artists go to great lengths to gain or maintain credibility among their fans. In response to other females in the hip-hop arena, rapper Lil' Kim compares herself to fellow female rappers by stating that she is an "in da street" (in-the-street) chick, not an "in-dus-try" (industry) (Alim, 2002). This bold comparison is her attempt to personally connect with the *street* life from her songs. This sentiment serves as an attempt to distinguish Lil' Kim from other female rappers who are industry-produced or more focused on the entertainment on the business side of hip-hop.

Although Lil' Kim's original authority as a female rapper came from her close association with one of hip-hop's most respected artists, Notorious BIG, she is not as well-

known to the current generation of hip-hop fans under the age of 20 years that may be more familiar with new rapper Nikki Manaj. Nikki Manaj, condemned in the media and by Lil' Kim as being an "industry chick" produced by the music industry and not a serious rapper, has had several public battles with Lil Kim. In the hip-hop community, these public battles suggest street credibility for the authors because there is a return to freestyle rap battles, or rap wars of the early hip-hop era in which two artists go against one another to outwit their opponent with clever rhymes.

In the same way, that street credibility is central to some hip-hop artists' ability to maintain credibility for the lives they lived prior to becoming rap artists, many artists also transitioned into rapping from engaging in illegal activities. In a song called "Hip-Hop Saved my Life," Wasulu Muhammed Jaco, known as Lupe Fiasco (2007) demonstrated how becoming a rapper saved him from a life of crime, describing how his new focus inspired a mission to improve his financial situation:

> … went back to the kitchen
> And put on another beat, and got back to the mission of
> Get his momma out the hood; put her somewhere in the woods
> Keep his lady lookin' good, have her rollin' like she should
> Show his homies there's a way, other than that flippin' yay
> Bail his homie outta jail, put a lawyer on his case
> Throw a concert for the school, show the shoulders that it's cool
> Throw some candy on the Caddy, chuck the deuce and act a fool
> Man it feels good when it happens like that
> Two days from going back to sellin' crack
> Yes sir [echoes]
> One you never heard of I
> Push it hard to further the
> Grind I feel like murder but
> Hip-hop you saved me… (Jaco, 2007)

An examination of Lupe Fiasco's lyrics demonstrates how the process of becoming a rapper, "putting on another beat," gave a young man a positive focus and provided a viable alternative to

illegal activities. In the excerpt, we see a young man just two days away from going back to selling crack (cocaine), which Fiasco referred to in this song as "flippin yay" to survive. Creative descriptions of such illegal activity is common in hip-hop lyrics.

Alim (2002) provided evidence of artists seeking credibility and authenticity in their songs (e.g., "I Ain't No Joke" by Rakim, "Fuck the Police" by NWA), where the focus is on "keeping it real" and maintaining authenticity to street codes. This credibility-seeking image, a recurrent theme in hip-hop music, is significant because it may influence students to attempt to make connections with perceived "street" or "hood" realities. Binder (1999) and Collins (1990) suggested that there is an identity struggle within the larger black community that seeks to divide those identified as authentic from those identified as "sell-outs." Rappers lose street credibility when fans do not believe these artists actually lived the lives portrayed in their music.

Rapper turned actor Will Smith is criticized in the hip-hop community for rap songs that are not reflective of the inner-city struggle often depicted in rap music; yet, he ironically maintains his street credibility. Smith created music that depicted *his* reality, which was authentic even if it was not the typical inner-city experience told by other artists in the genre. Although Smith's middle-class experience may not be the archetypal experience depicted in rap lyrics, his experiences are similar to the lives of thousands of middle-class African Americans, and his music has appealed to millions of mainstream consumers of all races and ethnicities. In essence, Will Smith's fans are individuals who believe he has street credibility. Those who do not believe that Smith is "authentic" will not be fans of his music.

Bragging and Boasting: Using Words as Weapons

Newman (2005) refreshed many personal memories and connections I have with old school rap music being a battle of intellect and the artists being celebrated for quick wit and their ability to manipulate the English language. Many people struggle to strategically organize words to convey their thoughts in written form, and others work hard to become great orators that are able to command the attention of a crowd. Communication is something we do with great preparation and with the benefit of being able to make revisions. What skill is required to give an impromptu speech or written communication on demand? Would we be able to communicate our thoughts as articulately without warning? Consider an inner city Black male speaking intelligently and with passion about social and political issues. Newman (2005) painted this image to take readers through the journeys of young men who use words as weapons to defeat opponents.

The following verse from "Swagga Like Us" by a rapper known as "TI" (Harris, 2009) illustrated the methodical structure of vocabulary, which expresses the artist's lyrical ability**,** notwithstanding the adversity surrounding his recent incarceration:

> Looking from the surface it may seem that I got reason to be nervous
> Then observe my work and see that my adversity was worth it,
> Verses autobiographical, absolutely classical,
> Last thing I'm worried 'bout is what another rapper do…

This verse demonstrated an ability to scaffold concepts such as adversity and buoyancy while intricately sending a message to his competitors. The message TI sent to contenders was that his abilities as a rap artist are enhanced by his trials and tribulations. Self-assurance is demonstrated through his autobiographical lyrics, as TI warns the listener that the last thing he is worried about is what another one does. This statement is significant because it demonstrates the bragging and

boasting element that is critical in "toasting," which is the Jamaican practice that hip-hop was founded upon.

Rap artist Rakim used rap lyrics to create meaningful content and express his dominance as a rap artist and his resistance to oppression. Rakim references slavery by the use of the word "chains," and discussed practices of renaming African slaves to erase their African identities. The following excerpt (Rakim, 1988) emphasizes the importance of knowledge and its ability to withstand the physical punishment inflicted by the master during slavery:

> But I'm here to break away the chains, take away the pains,
> Remake the brain, and rebuild my name
> Again, somebody told you, a little knowledge is dangerous
> It can't be mixed, diluted; it can't be changed with a switch.

Graffiti as Counter-Literacy

Conquergood (1997) argued that gang graffiti is counter literacy, supporting this with numerous examples of the cavernous meaning and complexity involved in gang-related graffiti. Conquergood discussed both the dominance and the invisibility experienced by members of a Chicago gang. Although the ethnographical study does not identify the total number of gang participants interviewed, Conquergood presented a compelling display of the theory and meaning involved in graffiti writing. Conquergood acted as a participant observer, living among his participants in an inner-city housing tenement in Chicago, IL, known as "Big Red." Conquergood conducted countless informal interviews with the gang members associated with each piece of graffiti and filmed gang members writing graffiti. Conquergood emphasized that gang graffiti, distasteful to many property owners and illegal in many cities, transforms mainstream public spaces into an open display of street culture. Graffiti writing is a deliberate act of defiance, an affront to mainstream society that often overlooks urban youth. Conquergood (1997) adamantly protests that the visual displays shared by these gang members are a form of

counter-literacy, as the subordinate nature of gang members supports their desire to be seen, heard, and recognize by the masses.

Conquergood (1997) analyzed the ways graffiti writing allows the inner thoughts, fears, and desires of a marginalized group to be expressed, read, and recognized. Conquergood acknowledged the sophisticated literacy involved in gangster "grammatology," a term he used to describe the way graffiti writers manipulate words and pictures to convey meaning. Conquergood also sheds light on street literacy that embraces alphabetic, iconographic, and corporeal signifying modes. To support data analysis, Conquergood illustrated how gang members double-dip word meanings as they utilize well-known advertising products to signify gang terminology, such as using Corona beer to represent the crown or royalty of the Latin Kings, a Chicago gang. Describing a previously closed and often misunderstood subculture, Conquergood went to great lengths to describe the symbolism involved in "throwing down," which refers to using hand signals to "dis" (disrespect) members of rival gangs. Conquergood (1997) explained the ways graffiti messages are often meant to discredit and disrespect opposing gangs by inverting or reversing their gang names or symbols.

Conquergood (1997) had in-depth conversations with gang leaders who gave insight into the history of the gang and discussed the street boundaries that distinguish between the local gang territories; he integrated text from seasoned gang members participating in the study. Conquergood traveled to many locations to view new or impressive graffiti with gang members in efforts to be educated about graffiti and show appreciation for quality work. Carefully constructing the words and images of his participants and their work, Conquergood (1997) presented a succinct view of Chicago gang graffiti as per formative writing. Graffiti writing allows street youth to publicly express their inner thoughts and fears, just as rap music allows

these youth to declare their existence within mainstream society. The challenging, confrontational images that are expressed through graffiti writing are also expressed through rap lyrics. For example, rapper Rakim used rap lyrics to create meaningful content, expresses his dominance as an MC, and express his resistance to oppression.

Language of Wider Communication

The "language of wider communication" refers to the preferred variety of English that dominant members of American society utilize and deem socially acceptable. This language, which is socially accepted by mainstream society, sometimes contrasts with the language deemed valuable by some African Americans. Purposely rejecting the language of wider communication, or standard English, in favor of a language that has more credibility on the street and within certain Black neighborhoods is a practice often used in hip-hop. The language of hip-hop is often used to resist the authority of the dominant culture. Alim (2006) illustrated how the hip-hop term "phat," as seen in the name of the retail clothing line Phat Farm, is spelled in direct defiance of the word "fat" used in standard English. Departure from the accepted English spelling is a conscious decision done with the knowledge of the alternative pronunciation of the "f" sound.

The Use of Hip-Hop Language in Schools

Hip-hop culture's influence on the culture of today's youth will—either officially or unofficially—become part of the world of school. Currently, there is a battle between teachers and students regarding the use and acceptance of the language. Language has the power to influence, control, and manipulate thought and action, and students influenced by hip-hop utilize language in inventive ways. Teachers' behavior supports homogeneous academic langugage while students' behavior assumes diverse, destictive language varieties (Alim, 2007). At the

center of the language conflict between students and teachers is the fact that schools often attempt to censor language that students value and supplant it with the language of school (Alim, 2007). The myriad of students identifying with the hip-hop culture is increasing, yet the number of teachers who can identify with students of the hip-hop generation continues to decrease. The language of hip-hop is valued by many students (Asante, 2008; Callahan & Low, 2004; Cutler, 2007).

Languages vary, and these variations are impacted by factors such as geographic region and the cultural/ethnic backgrounds of the speakers (Darling-Hammond, Banks, Zumwalt, Gomez, Sherin, Griesdorn, & Finn, 2005). Language expresses thoughts and fears and aids the formulation of relations to the world (Lippi-Green, 2000). The language variations that exist in a classroom are not deficits (Lippi-Green, 2000). Students use language in sophisticated ways outside of school, and teachers can utilize this to enhance academic performance. Anwar (2007) reported that hip-hop is the primary language that students influenced by the culture bring with them to school; therefore, ignoring the language and the existence of the hip-hop culture altogether represents a failure to provide equal education under the law.

Alexander-Smith (1993) and Alvermann and Hagood (2000) acknowledged the need for an instructional bridge to link teachers and students and advance academic performance. Hip-hop culture can serve as this bridge between students' (influenced by hip-hop) home lives and the world of academics (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Understanding hip-hop culture is necessary to support the students immersed in this culture and the teachers who wish to make connections with students, popular culture, and language. Today's classrooms need teachers who are "responsive to the learning, emotional and social needs of ethnically and linguistically diverse students in urban schools" (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006, p. 5). Villegas

and Lucas (2002) proposed that teachers should recognize the influence of race, ethnicity, social class, and language on their ways of thinking and ultimately their teaching practices. For example, integrating lyrics into instructional activities allows students to think critically about the meaning of a song without the interference of visual cues from music videos. Students appear to connect to learning by reading lyrics, hearing songs, and applying their knowledge from jazz to hip-hop from poetry to literature and back (Alexander-Smith, 1993; Alim, 2006; Richardson, 2006).

Hip-Hop language as Culturally Responsive Teaching

The goal of culturally relevant teaching is to accept all varieties of language, including hip-hop language and the language preferred in formal educational settings (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Adopting instructional practices that are inclusive of students' home language guides students toward using language in urban ways within the confines of school (Valdes, Bunch, Snow, Lee, & Matos, 2005) by tapping into the language that students bring to the school. Students come to school competent and whole, with some form of literacy that should be valued. It is critical that teachers do not attempt to replace students' language with the language valued at school (Barnes, 2003; Orr, 2000) but instead respect the cultural influences that inspire language use. Educators must strive to select and construct appropriate curriculum that connects to the lives of students while supporting academic, vocational, civic, and personal goals (Darling-Hammondet al., 2005).

The language of the 21st Century

Students' use of language and literacy practices extend beyond the traditional school language, incorporating oral language, gestures, visual cues, and audio and spatial meanings (Heath, 1986) as well as internet technology, computer games, and software (Valdeset al., 2005).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) implored teachers to develop and nurture the language and literacy practices that students already possess. Technology and digital access has transformed the musical experience, particularly in the genre of rap music, as easy and immediate access to music has changed the way music is produced and distributed. This digital access to music has influenced the return of the "single," since it is more cost-effective to produce several singles and distribute them via internet outlets than it is to produce an album containing 10 or more songs. Digital avenues (e.g., sites like YouTube) have made it possible to become an overnight sensation after self-producing a song. Hip-hop fans have witnessed the success of hip-hop artists who gained a following from internet exposure, such as Drake (Serrant, 2010), Justin Bieber (Greenbury, 2010), and Draya Michelle (Hop, 2012) were embraced by mainstream America after gaining success through internet exposure. The music produced through hip-hop transformed pre-recorded sound (Rose, 1994). Hip-hop deejays used pre-recorded records, typically popular in disco or Rhythm and blues, as a baseline from which to build a new sound. For example, using the pre-recorded track "Good Times," by Chic (Edwards & Rodgers, 1979), a deejay might add another song with a completely different rhythm to create a new sound. Rose argued that youth's access to technology, with the use of deconstruction sound equipment, changed the creation of music.

Instructional Application of the language of Hip-Hop

Alexander-Smith (1993) examined the use of popular culture in the classroom. Using an action-based research method, Alexander-Smith acted as both a researcher and a classroom teacher, analyzing instructional methods with language arts students and investigating possible reasons why one class was not motivated by her instructional approaches. Data included direct classroom observations, students' work, lesson plans, and musical lyrics. Alexander-Smith, an

African American middle-school teacher, introduced hip-hop language into a 7th-grade poetry unit, integrating jazz lyrics to allow students to critically think about the meaning of a song without interference from music videos. The students listened to a song, analyzed the lyrics, and engaged in open discussion about the song's meaning (Alexander-Smith, 1993).

Alexander-Smith (1993) measured the study's success by the student's motivation and interest in the instruction. This study included great ideas but lacked thorough analysis of the data collected. Students appeared to learn by reading lyrics, hearing songs, and applying their knowledge of jazz, hip-hop, poetry, and literature. Although Alexander-Smith affirmed that using hip-hop in the classroom allows students to develop their voice, the argument in the current study is that students are already familiar with their voices but simply need **a** platform to be heard. In conclusion, I disagree with Alexander-Smith's (1993) findings that hip-hop music and "spoken word" poetry support culturally relevant pedagogy. Hip-hop music alone does not support culturally relevant pedagogy despite has its potential to provide sociopolitical consciousness and increase comprehension when used effectively as an instructional strategy. Not all urban students can relate to or even enjoy hip-hop music. The key here is to focus on connecting with students and valuing their discourse, which may or may not include the language of hip-hop.

Akintunde (1997) sought to determine the effects of a pedagogical approach using rap music to teach musical forms to urban African Americans. Akintunde randomly selected 66 middle-school students from Saint Louis County and placed them into either two experimental or two control groups. Akintude, interested in student self-esteem, divided the control and experimental groups according to level of self-esteem. Using rap music to teach students in the experimental group binary, ternary, and verse/refrain form, Akintude tested the effect of using

rap as a pedagogical device. Akintunde (1997) may help conceptualize participants' experiences, attitudes, opinions, and perspectives regarding the incorporation of rap into selected musical forms and the impact of using rap as a pedagogical device to boost urban student' self-esteem.

Stovall (2006) conducted an ethnographic study at a Chicago high school consisting of six workshops in a secondary social studies classroom. Using a critical thinking process to illicit engaged pedagogy, Stovall altered mainstream teaching strategies and texts to focus on content that was applicable and relevant to students' lives. According to Stovall, teachers are challenged to extrapolate issues central to students' lives and utilize them as context. Hip-hop songs provided historical and social context. The following excerpt from Andre Benjamin of the rap group Outkast demonstrated texts that is applicable to students' lives as well as critical views of perception, propaganda, and imagery:

> I live by the beat like you live check to check
> If you don't move yo feet, then I don't eat so we like neck to neck. (Benjamin, 1997)

In this excerpt, the rapper explains that there are economic similarities between fans and rappers, attempting to dispel the myth that all rappers are rich simply because their songs are played on mainstream radio stations. The discussion of this verse (Stovall, 2006) provides a tactic for students to analyze propaganda presented in popular culture and the purpose of imagery seen in music videos. Kelley (1996) confirmed that literary elements, such as metaphor, are central to rap lyrics and can be used effectively in the classroom.

Critical Hip-Hop Language Pedagogies

Alim (2007) compared the attack against Black vernacular to gentrification. Alim presented critical hip-hop language pedagogy (CHHLP) as a holistic approach to uniting theory and practice through a project titled "Real Talk." This project was designed to address the ways that language can be used to maintain, reinforce, and perpetuate existing power relations while at

the same time examine the way language might be used to resist, redefine, and reverse those same relations. “Real talk” or naturally occurring conversations sought to infuse the fundamental principles of sociolinguistic variation into school curricula. High school students were provided with an audiotaped interview of a local rap artist from the Bay area and instructed to transcribe what they heard. As a result, students’ transcriptions varied between standard speech and Black vernacular. This variance gave Alim an opportunity to discuss sociolinguistic patterns and structure and the systematic nature of the spoken word. After students gained experience with transcript analysis, they were allowed to collect data on their on speech from their actual lived experiences. In this project (Alim, 2007), students traveled with a notebook and recorded their speech throughout the day, and this practice reportedly led to a higher level of metalinguistic awareness.

Alim (2007) declared that educators are “obligated to present the current sociolinguistic reality to students who are subjugated in mainstream institutions” (p. 161). Arguing that attempts to alter Black speech into standard English are equivalent to attempts to alter Black communities, Alim admonished schools’ attempts to censor students’ home language and supersede it with the language of school. Critical hip-hop language pedagogies make a case for offical, conveyed language ideologies as well as unofficial, unarticulated language ideologies existing in schools. Alim (2007) demonstrated that at the center of the language conflict between students and teachers is the fact that teachers’ behavior supports homogeneous academic langugage while student behavior assumes diverse, distinctive language varieties. Alim (2007) compared schools to corporations, noting that educational institituions use standard English to alter the speech patterns from Black communities just as economic institituions use gentrification to alter the

geographic lines of Black communities. In Alim (2007), teachers revealed their goal of eradicating the langauge patterns of their Black students.

Critical hip-hop language pedagogies are designed to teach students how language can be used against them and are important in the current study because they address one of the ways hip-hop has become a critical element in the lives of participants. Similar to critical literacy, CHHLP teaches students how language can be used to resist, redefine, and reverse current situations. By raising student consciousness, CHHLP offers a view of one's social position within society. The hip-hop artist participant in this study critiqued society and continuously used hip-hop language to resist his current situation, redefine this position in society, and reverse the plight he endured in his Atlanta community through his music.

Summary

Stemming from Black discourse, the language used in hip-hop is directly connected to the African Griots that used "call and response" as a critical element in story-telling narratives chronicling events taking place within communities. Hip-hop artists such as Slick Rick, Mos Def, and Common used story telling elements with heir rap lyrics that honor the tradition of the African Griots. Additionally rap ciphers employ impromptu storytelling elements that highlight a rappers' use of language. The skillful ability to construct words around themes is a dying art form within the hip-hop adopted by rappers who have a strong command of language.

This literature review included that ways that socially conscious rap served as a reoccurring theme in tap lyrics since its inception. Hip-hop's worldwide influence has positioned hip-hop culture into a position of international prominence (Alim, 2007). Various aspects of hip-hop culture is used to sell products (Chang, 2005) teach curriculum explain images therefore the language used in association with hip-hop is critical and judged for its authenticity or credibility.

Members of hip-hop judge rappers by their communication skills, for example the rapper, TI's song Swagger Like Us was used to demonstrate how words can be used to brag and boast lyrical dominance. Boasting is a practice in hip-hop that connects to toasting, a practice used in the West Indies. The similarities between boasting and toasting support the connection between hip-hop and other elements of the black community.

Hip-hop lyrics are carefully crafted to portray a specific image, and the issue of street credibility, or authenticity, is a central theme found in rap lyrics (Alim, 2007). Several researchers (Alexander-Smith, 1993; Alim, 2002; Anwar, 2007; Baker, 1993; Kirkland, 2007) have examined the usefulness of integrating certain aspects of hip-hop in the classroom. Yet, there is little discussion about the daily experiences of those involved in hip-hop culture. The voices of adults who are actively involved in hip-hop culture and music hip-hop are yet to be heard, which I seek to change with the current study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods and study design used in this study as well as a discussion of the theoretical approach, research site, participant selection process, data sources, and data analysis. This study emerged from my quest to understand my own identity as an educator and member of the hip-hop community. The hip-hop culture that I love had started to conflict with my feminine affiliation due to its misogynistic aspects. In addition, my racial pride has led me to question the subset of the hip-hop community that glorifies violence. Attempting to comprehend the multifaceted identity of the educator who is also a hip-hop enthusiast, I explored the topic of hip-hop as a means of expression in daily life.

Qualitative Research Study Design

In this section, I address my process for designing a qualitative research study, types of data collection methods, and data presentation. I chose a qualitative research method involving six participants to investigate the way hip-hop has become a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and creators who are actively and intimately involved in its music and culture. Hip-hop, plagued with pluralities, is a different experience for each member of the community. To fully understand hip-hop the way members of the hip-hop community experience it requires a research approach that embraces the uniqueness of its participants.

In qualitative research, the researcher is often a participant, rarely adopting a neutral stance. Merriam (1998) suggested that qualitative researchers have a massive tolerance for ambiguity. Having already established friendships with the study participants, I cultivated a closer relationship during data collection. Qualitative research methods provide the opportunity to use multiple data sources to generate data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and consequently gain a

more complete picture of what it means to be a member of the hip-hop community. Qualitative research methods allow the use of in-depth interviews (Levy, 2006), which enables the collection of empirical knowledge from people who are familiar with the intricacies of hip-hop culture on both a personal and professional level.

In the current study, I used interviews, lyrics, photographic images and cultural artifacts. The data emerging from this study spanned an array of genres and mediums. Storytelling, a central element in hip-hop songs, was used to present the data. The participants' stories contributed to the body of research about hip-hop culture and identities. Also, throughout this study, participants told stories about other topics as they responded to certain questions. These sub-stories, seemingly off-topic, revealed pertinent information about study participants. For example, when answering a question about his occupation, one participant began talking about his strong connection to the "5% nation," which is a religious subsection of the Nation of Islam.

In qualitative research, the researcher spends a lot of time researching the phenomenon; sampling is purposeful, and the data collected necessitates complex data analysis. The data collected in the current study included open-ended, discussion-oriented, in-depth interviews as well as music videos, film, spoken word, photographs, and music, all of which were analyzed using narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). The goal of qualitative research is to aid the understanding of a phenomenon through the associated meanings (Levy, 2006).

The goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon through the meanings associated (Levy, 2006), and hip-hop is a phenomenon that has become prevalent around the world. The struggle to advance hip-hop, a culture continuously maligned and incased by mounting criticism, is a problem that has been identified by numerous researchers (Alim, 2006; Anwar, 2007; Baker, 1993; Cutler, 2007). Phenomenology seeks to describe as opposed to

explain; (Moustakas, 1994) therefore, this study described the participants' journey with hip-hop and did not attempt to explain why participants hold particular views about those experiences. In most phenomenological research, the researcher has personal interest in the phenomenon of study; this holds true in my situation as a member of the past and present hip-hop community. I am interested in understanding the views of other members of this community and my membership influences my preconceived notions about the hip-hop phenomena. Plummer(1983) argued that research cannot be conducted without preconceived notions and bias. I agree. I approached this research with preconceived notions about the hip-hop phenomenon; yet, I attempted to explain the interpretations and meaning that I associated with data collected in light of my bias.

The Process and Product of Narrative Inquiry

Hip-hop, a racialized cultural production plagued with pluralities, was identified as the research problem in this study. As a researcher, my goal was to understand and re-present the stories of individuals who were part of the hip-hop community. I utilized the review of literature to argue that hip-hop was born out of a larger urban black experience that incorporates language in various ways. Research questions were developed to explore how hip-hop has become a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and creators who are actively and intimately involved in its music and culture. In this study, I used narrative as both a *process* for collecting data and as the *product for re-telling participants stories*. I used narrative to collect participants' stories and then analyzed those stories by retelling them as reconstructed narratives (Huber, Caine, & Huber, 2013). Narrative inquiry is a methodological approach that explores narratives (stories) (Polkinghorne, 1988). In this study, narrative inquiry was used to inquire about participants' experiences with hip-hop culture through the stories they told. Narrative inquiry

uses stories, pictures and life experiences as the unit of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives.

The study of stories is critical to narrative inquiry, therefore, in this study, open-ended interviews were used to produce rich data as participants told the story of their journey through hip-hop. Narrative inquiry, which values stories (Bruner, 1986), was an appropriate way to present data because stories are also central to hip-hop culture as demonstrated in its historical connection to ancient griots (Smitherman, 1997). The meanings associated with hip-hop stories that are told orally through rap lyrics, represented artistically through graffiti writing, expressed rhythmically though dance, or conveyed creatively through video mediums, are captured via narrative inquiry (Creswell J. , 2008). One essential goal of narrative inquiry is to give voice to untold stories; (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) therefore, this study provided a platform for participants, who might otherwise be ignored, to share their personal experiences and views about hip-hop. Stories are important and should be respected. Lopez(1990) argued that re-telling stories are essential and researchers are obligated to carefully re-tell the experiences of others. Therefore, the researcher must approach narrative inquiry cautiously, carefully re-crafting participants' stories to maintain integrity and meaning.

Narrative inquiry focused on relationships, between the researcher and the researched as well as between the participants and others (Polkinghorne, 1995). The nature of the research topic, the interviews, and even my relationship with study participants all influenced the extent to which participants told their stories. The words that participants used to tell their story are significant in narrative inquiry; therefore, in the study I incorporated as much of the participants' voices as possible. Narrative inquiry, which supports the nature and design of the current study,

provided an extensive account of participants' lives and provided an opportunity for me to "fall in love" with study participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As a process, narrative inquiry, which seeks to help us understand lived experiences and the ways individuals portray and perceive their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), was used to help participants "reconstruct" their lives. As a product, narratives are reconstructed stories produced from data that has been collected. Narratives help readers understand the story of a participant's socially constructed reality (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995). Polkinghorne (1988) defined narrative as an organizational scheme expressed in story form. A narrative is more than a single story; it focuses on a collection of individual stories (Emden, 1998).

Bruner (1990) argued that the Functional approach to narrative inquiry incorporates a non-neutral rhetorical account to communicate meaning. A non-neutral rhetorical account of stories places the narrative "in time" to authenticate experiences. For example, when a participant recalled a rap song that was influential in his life, the story associated with the participant's recall communicates meaning. Details about the events that took place in the participant's life at the time he first heard the song reveal the importance of the song and places the song within the participant's personal timeline. In the example above, the participant's story demonstrates Bruner's definition of a non-neutral rhetorical account because the true significance and meaning of the narrative is exposed when the story is embedded within the participant's timeline and not simply placed within a miscellaneous historical timeframe. In this study, I utilized Bruner's Functional approach, using the participants' narratives (words) to shape the events they shared into coherent narratives, which I called a master narrative.

In the current study, participants' individual stories are a primary source of data, and these stories are infused with information shared by participants as well as my insights as a

researcher. Participants' stories encircle "identity," and each participant responded to the ways hip-hop shaped his or her personal and professional identity. Through participants' narratives, I uncovered hip-hop's function as a lens through which participants view the world and construct their identities. The stories collected for the current study reflect a rich cultural narrative known as "hip-hop narrative," which is the collective wisdom of the hip-hop culture articulated through the stories of members of the hip-hop community. People's life stories are effectively communicated with narratives (Heydon, 2007); therefore, narrative is an appropriate method for transmitting intricate cultural and social phenomena in this study (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Different stories, lyrics, photographs/images, and music were analyzed through the experiences of the participants, which made narrative a reasonable choice. I also used narrative inquiry as a tool of analysis.

In terms of significance, Nodding(1991) contended that stories have the power to direct or change lives. In the current study, participants' stories have the power to influence the reader and alter previously held opinions about hip-hop culture. Narrative inquiry provides an opportunity for new voices to be heard (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Although several studies examined the usefulness of hip-hop in classroom instruction (Alexander-Smith, 2004; Alim, 2006; Anwar, 2007; Baker, 1993; Kirkland, 2007), with narrative inquiry, this study allows the voices of members of the hip-hop community, often relegated to the sidelines of Discourse, to be heard. Carter (1993) noted that acknowledging teacher's voices through narrative inquiry might help teachers' know or understand their own story. Similarly, I argue that acknowledging the voices of members of the hip-hop community may help teachers, and others, understand the experiences of people influenced by hip-hop culture. Delpit (1995) reasoned that the voice of educators of color are often ignored regarding the educational needs of

children of color. The stories told by educators of color provide insight into the current generation of learners as well as present generation of educators (Delpit, 1995). Likewise, in this study, narrative inquiry allowed voices of educators of color to be heard as participants voice their opinion of the intersection of race, class, public education system and how it influences the larger black community. Narrative inquiry allowed me to pull together what may initially appear to be incongruent participant experiences and make meaning while answering my research questions. I attempted to visualize the experiences participants shared and used it to connect, compare and contrast with experiences shared by other participants.

Role of the Researcher

In the current study, I am the principal researcher and an insider in the hip-hop community just as study participants are. Merriam (1998) described the vantage point that I have as the principal investigator and as a member of the hip-hop community, an "insider" position. Acknowledging this insider position, I gave participants the opportunity to voice their opinions regarding hip-hop as they experienced it without allowing my bias to silence their accounts. In this study, I conducted two individual and one group interview. During individual interviews, I posed questions without sharing my opinions. During the group interview, I allowed participants' responses to naturally flow without redirection. For example, I did not interject with my interpretation or attempt to rephrase participants' statements when they were not well received by others or were met with opposition. During group interviews, I asked questions about hip-hop to generate rich discussions, and I provided adequate time for these discussions. As an insider in the hip-hop community, I witnessed hip-hop's early stages as a child growing up in Brooklyn, New York, as well as the rapidly changing landscape of hip-hop as a high school student in the Bronx, New York. I attended high school with a well-known rapper named Joe Ski Love whose

song, “Pee Wee Herman,” inspired a self-titled dance. Also during high school, I was asked to provide background vocals for an aspiring rapper, Cool Chris.

The current study, which includes two individual interviews and one group interview, benefits from my previously established relationships with study participants prior to data collection. The close relationship that has been cultivated with study participants along with my knowledge of the customs and social norms associated with membership in the hip-hop community eased both the conversations and ultimately the participants’ stories. For example, during a photo-elicitation interview with Rick, a study participant, he attempted to divide hip-hop eras using Slick Rick as an example. Amidst drawing a distinction between the period that Slick Rick performed in a duo with Doug E. Fresh and when he performed alone as Slick Rick the Ruler, Rick could not recall a particular song to validate his point. My insider knowledge allowed me to assist with Rondo’s analysis by providing the information that he could not recall. Lyrics to the song “La Di Da Di”, “Then I dilly dally ran through an alley, bumped into my old girl Sally from the valley” were essential to Rick's point. This knowledge helped me understand the division Rick was attempting to make between what he described as “old-school” hip-hop with the Doug E. Fresh/Slick Rick duo and the golden age of hip-hop when Slick Rick became a solo artist. During each interview, participants’ level of excitement and engagement visibly increased when they were asked about lyrics, which I attribute to the participants’ role as hip-hop purest, those motivated by a rapper’s lyrical ability.

Research Site: The Dirty South

The area in which the study is conducted allows me to better understand the role of hip-hop in shaping geographical identity. Atlanta, GA, in addition to being a convenient location, is known for its presence in the hip-hop community (Asante, 2008; Kitwana, 2003) and has been

dubbed the "Motown of the South" because of the record number of hip-hop artists and songs produced in the city. Atlanta is home to So-So Def Records (Grem, 2006; Kitwana, 2003), the former entertainment company LaFace Records, and Grand Hustle Entertainment, all of which are known in the hip-hop community. Two of the study participants are a part of prominent Atlanta record companies. Atlanta is also the primary city of residence for many music artists from the hip-hop and R&B community such as Missy Elliott, Usher, TI, Janet Jackson, Ludacris, and Andre 3000 of Outkast. Atlanta has become a major source of singers, dancers, rap artists, and producers in the music industry.

Participant Selection

Rubin and Rubin (2005) maintained that one of the most important aspects of designing research is the selection of participants who are knowledgeable and experienced in the particular area of research. Richardson (2006) contended that participants of hip-hop discourse have the aptitude to present multifaceted meanings of hip-hop texts. Members of the hip-hop community are diverse and include doctors, lawyers, and other successful individuals that grew up not only listening to hip-hop, but also living it (Russell, 2006). I sought to include participants who represented the variety found in the hip-hop community: people with different occupations, levels of education, physical characteristics, geographic locations, and ideas and opinions. Study participants are members of the hip-hop community who are diverse and essential to the preservation and expansion of hip-hop, which makes the study relevant to a society that may not comprehend the use of hip-hop culture as an educational tool.

"We be to rap what key be to lock" is a metaphorical excerpt from the rap song Cool Like That (Butler, Irving, & Vieira, 1992) from the hip-hop group Digable Planets. This metaphor was used to describe study participants because it presents a comparison between the participants and

rap music and a key and a lock. A key is needed to unlock a lock so that the lock is usable just as the participants are needed to unlock the nuances of hip-hop. A key allows a lock to be fully utilized, making valuable items accessible for future use. In the same vein, study participants have allowed hip-hop to be fully utilized, making the artistic, lyrical, rhythmic features of the music accessible for future use.

Participant recruitment occurred using a combination of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) and convenience sampling (Merriam, 1998). For purposeful sampling, I created a list of individuals I knew who met the defined criteria of being an adult member of the hip-hop community who performed or produced hip-hop music, listened to hip-hop music at least three times per week or purchased hip-hop music and paraphernalia on a regular basis. For convenience sampling (Merriam, 1998) I focused on individuals who lived in the metropolitan Atlanta area, who are willing and available to participate in the study. Convenience sampling is a group of people that are convenient to study due to factors such as geographic location, connection to topic or previous assembly for other purposes (Merriam, 2009). The combination of both the purposeful and convenience sampling methods allowed me to take advantage of my personal knowledge of individuals with expertise in the subject matter (Arcury & Quandt, 1999; Patton, 1990). Critical elements of purposive sampling were utilized as I choose people who I regularly interacted with on a weekly or monthly basis to discuss hip-hop related issues. With the exception of one participant, I spoke with all members of the study at least once a month prior to the study. I purposely selected the participants based on their ability to give inside information about the hip-hop phenomenon as determined by our previous interactions and communications concerning hip-hop related issues. The original study design (from my prospectus) included potential participants that did not participate in the final study. I initially invited a female

university professor that maintains a hip-hop blog to capture a female's perspective; however, once the final study was approved, the female professor was unable to participate. In the final study, the female voice was represented by a hip-hop entrepreneur. My desire to include participants from a various occupations was essential to the study design. Although I am an educator with many friends and acquaintances in the same field, I did not want the discipline of education to be overrepresented in the study. Only two of the six participants (a classroom teacher in his mid-30s and a 42-year-old instructional administrator) classify themselves as "educators," and these participants present vastly different perspectives. One of these participants grew up under Muslim influence and attended a variety of public schools in Georgia and Florida; the other participant was born in Alabama, raised as a Christian, and attended a private boarding school in Tennessee.

Descriptions of Study Participants

The study highlights the voices of six adult participants who are members of the hip-hop community. The participants, five male and one female, represent various professional communities in technology, entertainment, education, health and beauty industries. Representing various social class, and gender, the participants in this study share their beliefs, opinions and experiences as members of the hip-hop community.

Participant 1: John

John (pseudonym) is a record company executive and the CEO of an entertainment company; John is also my youngest brother. John, born in New York City, was surrounded by music as a child. His father was a music lover who created mixtapes for many years before they became common in the hip-hop community. John has a magnetic personality and makes friends easily. Good-natured and slow to anger, John is a smart worker who sets goals and carefully

devises plans to accomplish these goals. As a child, John was very inquisitive. He made good grades in school but was an "A student" despite occasionally being named Student of the Month and receiving Honor Roll certificates. John was successful in school, yet he never saw school as the path to economic empowerment.

Whereas I was influenced by years spent in Brooklyn, New York, John was influenced by the sights and sounds of the Bronx, which, according to Chang (2005), is the official home of hip-hop. In the mid-1980s, the Bronx was filled with aspiring rappers and deejays. Breakdancers performed in the neighborhood parks, and impromptu cipher contests would form on buses and trains. Graffiti writers took their markers and spray-paint to school. Hip-hop culture was everywhere. The years that John lived in the Bronx (1985–1989) were also the height of the crack (cocaine) epidemic. As the hip-hop movement gained momentum, the street economy also took form.

John's peers in the Bronx began to make life decisions: some gravitated toward one of the original tenets of hip-hop, break dancing, rapping, deejaying, or graffiti writing; a few became active in sports; others chose illegal pursuits and became "dope boys" or street-corner hustlers in the new world of crack cocaine. John never considered participating in the drug game, and sports never played a major role in his life. John confirmed that he was rhythmically challenged and was not successful as a breakdancer. According to John he was artistically challenged and could not identify with graffiti writers. The music that once filled our Brooklyn home was absent after our parents divorced. My mother did not own any stereo equipment, making the road to deejaying impossible during those formative years. However, John was naturally drawn to the music of the day and was influenced by the hip-hop music and culture that was present in the local community. During a group interview, John stated:

> My father had his music but I did not feel it was talking to me. I got older, I moved to Parkchester (Bronx neighborhood) and it was Joe Ski Love (rapper) he had the Peewee Herman Dance. When I walked outside, I saw him and other people who came to see him, Lord Finesse (rapper), Sweet Tee (rapper). I saw these rappers; they were right in my neighborhood sitting on the bench. I saw the Audi 5000 with the Alf doll baby in the back with the gold chain. Bid Daddy Kane, Juice crew, I saw how this one man took on this crew of men.

Visiting a local record store opened John's eyes, exposing him to a behind-the-scenes look at hip-hop music. Reading about producers and musical engineers, John began to learn about the "business" of making music. I am not sure if it was because John grew up in the Bronx or because our father was a deejay, but something sparked an early desire to dedicate his career to the business of music. Aspiring to work behind the scene, John began investigating careers in the music industry. After John's first year of college, he formulated a plan to get experience in the music business. I can recall his early career moves, which involved a host of unpaid internships and part-time jobs at record companies and studios just to be in the right environment. As an innovator, John sought opportunities to make money through music, sharing during a group interview:

> I was 18-years-old. I saw this dude every day with a sweatshirt and jeans on making $300,000 versus my mother who worked in corporate America did not make nearly as much. So for me it was a no brainer, I love this shit (hip-hop) and I can get paid and make more money than going to college and being an accountant. So that internship led to another and another, me educating myself, so that when dudes walk into a crowded room, I could stand out.

Maintaining various roles in the music industry, John offers a unique prospective on the business of hip-hop:

> Being a businessperson, I have to have my business hat on. I have a business hat and of course, I have a personal hat. There are things I like personally that do not make good business. You just have to look at it as a businessperson foremost.

As the CEO of an entertainment company, John has access to many local rap artists. Perhaps it is due to early, continuous musical influence that John decided to work in the music industry and I

chose hip-hop as the focus of my doctoral studies. John's commitment to hip-hop as a lifestyle made him a natural choice to participate in a the current study of hip-hop music. As John stated during the group interview: "For me there is nothing else. I am a product of hip-hop. It is till death do us part."

Participant 2: Destroyer Dave

Study participant John's connections in the hip-hop world provided me with access to individuals that I might not have known. Once John understood the goal of my research, he suggested that I include Destroyer Dave (pseudonym) John simply stated, "You gotta talk to this guy" and connected me with Dave's manager. Dave, as his name implies, is a tall, large man with the gift of gab and southern charm; he was animated and eager to tell his story. Upon connecting with Dave's manager, I met Dave in the studio for the initial interview. I liked Dave immediately. Not at all intimidated by Dave's size, I found him to be both humble and kind.

Dave is often invited to speak on educational panels and participate in interviews about a many issues affecting Black communities; however, he is occasionally mislabeled and misunderstood. His characterization as a "conscious rapper" excludes him from being connected to the streets. Likewise, his street credibility is sometimes problematic for his fan base. In the group interview, Dave stated:

> A lot of conscious people, when I sit on panels, do not want me to admit that I am that guy. They want me to defame Tip (TI). They feel TI should be out saving the world; I feel TI did a good job saving 20 black people from my neighborhood. I have seen people with more (money) not do as much. I want both sides of my community to know I love and appreciate them for vastly different reasons.

Dave is not one-dimensional and is very clear about the dual role he maintains in academia and in the streets. Often saying that school has helped him in his street life, Dave credits his secondary and post-secondary teachers for inspiring him in his first interview:

> In my first album, I thank all these high school teachers. Ms. Bishop said, I do not care that your nuts dropped and your voice changed, you cannot drop out of the arts program. Mr. Moore is the art teacher that went to Washington and Morris Brown that gave me a full scholarship to Morris Brown but I turned down and went to Morehouse instead. He taught me how to appreciate art and lay piping for a sprinkler system. He taught me that being a Renaissance man meant you better know how to change oil, fix a flat, and be able to paint a portrait of your children. Therefore, he taught me that there was no contradiction in being a renaissance man and being a street nigger. He is part owner in local s funeral home. He was very much known in the streets, so I asked him, why do they know you at the gambling house? He said some people get down on their luck and still have to bury their loved ones for cheap it is good to know the mortician. He is the one that taught me how to make these small connections that the Mayor's office is connected to Buttermilk Bottom, the old Summerville area. He told me that Lena Horne and Martin Luther King went to Washington High School. My teachers inspired me. I think that is the teacher's main job, to inspire.

Talking to Dave confirmed that he is intelligent and socially conscious. Discussing topics ranging from political responsibility to neighborhood gentrification and the role of women in hip-hop, Dave is connected to his local community. Dave refers to himself as a 'pan-Africanist rapper," indicating that he is concerned with the social and economic and development of people of color.

Dave is an "underground" artist. Out of the mainstream limelight, Dave is comfortable in his role of socially conscious underground rapper. Although someone from his label is a mainstream rapper that has had numerous film and reality television roles, most of Dave's income is generated from live performances and private investments. In the group interview, Dave informs me:

> Shit, it took me 9 years to get hot! I am able to sell out arenas with 300–500 people now. And it is not based on any one co-signing for me or a major label putting a lot of money behind me. It is based on me creating dope boutique records and touring. My life is like a rock band. I make records, tour 6 to 9 months then I go home. So for me I have very successful friends, Big Boi and Tip and I love that for them. But for me, I love being an underground rapper. I wanted to figure out a way to do it and become rich, meaning live below my means, and acquire wealth through savings and I am on board to do that. I own a couple of enterprises, some barbershops and some other shit. So I will rap and tour as long as people like me. And when that feels like a wasted effort I will focus on another aspect of hip-hop, which is entrepreneurship.

Dave's knowledge of hip-hop and its connection to other Black music forms was endless. In my first interview with him, Dave shared: "Music has been the only place that the black male mystic and ego have been safe." Dave is a natural storyteller, and it was clear to see why rapping is so easy for him.

Participant 3: Rick

The third participant, Rick, and I have common roots—we're both from Brooklyn, New York. Adopting the belief that "Once a New Yorker, always a New Yorker," Rick and I discussed the "good old days" of hip-hop. In addition to having a personal connection to hip-hop culture, Rick worked in the field of information technology. Rick's career choice adds an interesting dynamic to the study. Known as a gentle giant, Rick is about 6 feet, 5 inches tall and is a soft-spoken guy. Rick came to Georgia to attend a historically Black college; he fell in love with someone from a neighboring college early in his college career. After graduation and at the height of Atlanta's gentrification, Rick purchased a home in an inner-city neighborhood. During this time, I met Rick, his ex-wife, and their two adolescent sons. For many years, Rick was the sole financial provider for his family, and he chose to home school their children (which is not common for African American children(Welner, 1999)). Although they were educated at home, Rick's sons participated in extracurricular activities like baseball. Working as a baseball coach, Rick works closely with youth and serves as a role model to many adolescent males. Rick's perspective, that of a middle-class African American, is one often ignored in hip-hop dialog. During Rick's first interview, he commented:

> We were definitely privileged because we came up in the golden age of hip-hop. It is not a fad it is not going away. It is just a love that won't go away, it's just won't die; it is a part of us.

An articulate "techie," Rick agreed to share his story regarding the ways hip-hop is incorporated into his daily life. I met Rick at the clubhouse of his home on a clear sunny day to conduct the initial interview. He readily shared his views about hip-hop culture and revealed that way that hip-hop moved into and out of his life. As the study developed, I learned a great deal about Rick's transformation from steeped in hip-hop to a more sporadic hip-hop membership. Rick's life has shaped his everyday experience to embrace aspects of hip-hop culture such as music, clothing, language a more cursory level.

Participant 4: Turner

Turner, a fellow educator and former colleague of mine, brings a unique perspective to the study: He is an African American male that attended at an exclusive private high school in Tennessee and graduated from an elite university in the southeastern United States. In my initial interview with Turner, he shared the following about African American traditions:

> Hip-hop is connected to African American traditions. I think a lot of our history and the things that we hold dear, elements of our culture, have been shared through oral representation. Whether it be through Negro spirituals, to early 1920s swing music Cab Callaway call and response. Being such a versatile people, that is the way we have spread our history.

Displaying a "corporate America" look characterized by tailored suits (such as those from Brook's Brothers or those worn by Wall Street executives), cuff links, and designer shoes, Turner is handsome and well spoken. Turner's appearance and demeanor are misleading to outside observers because his appearance is not characterized by the urban sportswear and flashy jewelry stereotypically characteristic of members of the hip-hop culture. Instead, Turner has a polished, mainstream look that is rarely seen in hip-hop, even among corporate executives.

In addition to Turner's style of dress, his physical features also prompt attention from some members of the African American community. His naturally curly hair and light skin

complexion are both attractors and detractors in the Black community. Lighter skin tones and softer hair texture have been linked to a multigenerational divide within the Black community, stemming from the days of slavery. According to Wright (1998), biracial children were produced when female slaves were raped by slave owners, presenting variations in complexion.

Slaves with lighter skin tones received better treatment from slave owners and were often "house slaves" as opposed to "field slaves." Resulting from the distinction made by slave masters due to skin color, African American people developed attached beauty and self-worth (Chapman, 2007) as well as perceived intelligence and integrity to certain complexions (Wilson, 1989). The less kinky an African American person's hair is, the more likely it is that this person's hair is described as "good." However, this reference has racist connotations (Chapman, 2007) due to the link to slavery. The concept of good hair is revisited in private and public conversations about and among black people in a documentary called Good Hair (Rock, Hunter, O'Donnell, Stilson, & Crouther, 2010), the movie School Daze (Lee, 1988), and a song cleverly titled "I am not my Hair" (Simpson, Sanders, & Ramsey, 2005). The complexion issue is a recurrent topic in African American communities and is, not surprisingly, mentioned by Dave regarding Turner during the group interview:

> My daddy said he remembers the minute the afro died, it was when he saw a preacher with a perm. Brothers with your hair was going to get a perm.

Turner's ability to "play both sides of the fence" is demonstrated through his easygoing conversation about two arenas that he loves: hip-hop and education. During his interviews, Turner makes several references to his unique approach to teaching as an extension of who he is as an "educated Black man" that is "still able to stay in touch with his community and feel comfortable doing it."

Participant 5: Xavier

Though small in stature, Xavier's views regarding hip-hop and African Americans' role in its production, distribution, and consumption are mammoth. Xavier teaches high school English in a suburban community. Xavier spent most of his childhood in Atlanta but was born in Florida. While living in Florida, Xavier endured ridicule from children and unfair prejudice from teachers based on his name. The assumption was that he was from Africa because of his obscure name. Xavier moved to Atlanta because his father, tired of the all-White environment in Florida, sought the opportunities granted by a larger city. Xavier's father earned a degree in theology from the International Theological Center in the Atlanta University Center (AUC), and his mother works at Nations Bank. His parents divorced shortly after moving to Atlanta, and Xavier's mother converted to Islam. Although Xavier never became Muslim, he was around the Muslim culture in his household.

During middle school and high school, Xavier began to hang out with eclectic groups of people that subtly influenced his musical choice and behavior. In middle school, he began listening to a mixture of rhythm and blues and rap artists of the 1990s (e.g., A Tribe Called Quest, Black Sheep, Kris Kross, En Vogue, TLC, LL Cool J, Ice Cube, Cypress Hill, Too Short, Onyx). Xavier recalled that during the early to mid-1990s, there was an influx of people moving to metropolitan Atlanta from the northeastern United States creating New York cliques. Although a southerner, Xavier identified with the New York boys who were considered "real hip-hop heads." While working at a music store, Xavier met a hip-hop connoisseur from Boston, a female rapper/poet from New Jersey, and an aspiring producer from New York (now known as Swizz Beatz). Most of Xavier's friends were from the northeastern United States, and several of them were active in the 5% Nation of Islam subset.

To understand Xavier's passion for hip-hop, I have included the following portion of his narrative regarding "realness" in hip-hop:

> I am against the exploitation! (Hip-hop is) kinda like books. The nonfiction is good but you have fiction also. You also have comics. You know there are different types of stories and that is how hip-hop is. Only problem is, when (hip-hop) is bought and sold by somebody that is not (part) of the culture, then it gets bastardized.

It was clear to see that Xavier's conviction is centered on grassroots, underground hip-hop. Through his interviews, Xavier revealed that his preference for counter-mainstream music developed from the over commercialization of hip-hop. As hip-hop became more mainstream and more accepted by the masses, it loses its appeal to hip-hop heads like Xavier.

Participant 6: Nicole

I met Nicole through a network of underground, natural sista-hood (sisterhood) in Atlanta. Nicole is an entrepreneur and stylist of "natural" hair with experience in both hair car and fashion. I learned that Nicole, as a child of the original hip-hop generation, still maintains membership in the culture. This connection to the culture includes experiences with hip-hop from the east coast, west coast, and the south. Nicole reiterates her deep connection to hip-hop: "Hip-hop is just like me breathing, you know. It is a lifestyle, a mindset. I stay with hip-hop because it is a universal language. I can go anywhere and they know hip-hop."

I found that despite Nicole's spoken allegiance to hip-hop, she is also closely tied to other musical art forms, such as rhythm and blues. When in her presence, one cannot help but notice that Nicole sings every song on the radio while she is working in her natural hair salon. Nicole admits that her knowledge of current hip-hop is predicated by what is played on popular radio stations; Nicole does not seek new hip-hop artists or songs through online channels.

Nicole's hip-hop connection is closely linked to a fifth tenet of hip-hop: entrepreneurship. Nicole credits hip-hop for planting entrepreneurial seeds in her life early. As an adolescent,

Nicole learned about careers of Black entrepreneurs associated with music. For example, Nicole spoke about her admiration for Black female radio pioneer Cathy Hughes who inspired her to become an entrepreneur. Nicole views hip-hop as a vehicle to numerous opportunities. When asked about how hip-hop influenced her daily life, Nicole responded:

> Once I got the cd Top Billing by Milk and Gizmo, I read the back and saw the names of the producer and CEOs, it influenced me. (At that point) I knew I wanted to be self-sufficient.

Nicole's lone female voice added a view of hip-hop that differed from that of male participants in this study. Acknowledging that hip-hop is a male-dominated sphere, Nicole questioned the female's role in the current hip-hop world.

The study participants were all appropriate for the current investigation because of their hip-hop insider status and their unique perspectives of hip-hop culture: A CEO of a record company offers a view of hip-hop from a business perspective. A hip-hop artist offers a unique perspective as one who struggles to balance street credibility with a burgeoning career as a multitalented entertainer. An entrepreneur provides the rarely heard voice of a female member of the hip-hop community. A technology guru adds a view of how digital natives have transcended hip-hop culture, and a "hip-hop head" and scholar provide useful information about their experiences with hip-hop, today's youth, and the current hip-hop community. Each study participant is active in the hip-hop community, meaning that they continue to frequent hip-hop venues, purchase rap music, wear clothing influenced by the culture, and use the language.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Merriam (2009) described data as a wide range of material that can be written, visual, or digital. In the current study, data sources were purposefully selected and aligned to address the research questions. The nature of this study warranted a small number of participants to capture

the in-depth stories closely and carefully analyze manageable data. Data were collected using open-ended interviews and cultural artifacts. Cultural artifacts included album or CD covers, printed rap lyrics, movies and books about hip-hop, hip-hop forums, photographs, and magazine articles, blogs and websites for and about hip-hop, all of which granted me the opportunity to deepen my insight and awareness of present-day hip-hop in both mainstream and underground contexts. Using critical literacy as a theoretical framework, I sought to discover the ways these individuals participated in dialogue about the meanings rooted within text as I analyzed data by viewing the recorded interviews, reading transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I conducted a total of 13 narrative interviews with study participants, and each interview was videotaped and transcribed shortly after completion. I watched the video recordings and read the transcripts at the same time to ensure accurate transcription. Upon my third viewing of the video recordings, I recorded participants' gestures, laughter, and moments of distress or anxiety. Member-checking was done once these reviews were completed; I gave each participant a hard copy of his or her transcript to review and edit if necessary. After multiple views of the video recordings, I began the process of open coding in search of any themes or trends in the data.

Using the approach of conversational partners (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), a partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee that influences the responsiveness of interview, I conducted interviews at the participant's home, office, or studio—locations where the participant felt at ease. The rapport previously established with participants encouraged freedom of expression without academic or social restraints. Table 1 presents the study's purpose, the research questions, data sources, and connections to the research questions and theoretical framework.

Table 1

The Details of the Study

Purpose: Examine hip-hop through the stories of adults who incorporate hip-hop culture into their daily lives.			
Research Questions	Data Sources	Connection to Research Question	Connection to Theoretical Framework
How has hip-hop become a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and creators who are actively and intimately involved in the music and culture of hip-hop?	In-depth interviews	Reveal hip-hop's significance to everyday life and focus on issues central to participants' lives.	Examine mainstream politics, social justice, multiple perspectives and transformation elements.
What does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community?	In-depth interviews, music videos, blogs, and websites	Reveal meaning associated with elements of hip-hop.	Examine the bias and perceptions that influence language use in hip-hop.
How does hip-hop inform the view of the world for participants in this study?	In-depth interviews and photo elicitation	Photos have a connection to memory and evoke different responses.	Hip-hop texts are used to manipulate opinion and arouse action.

I collected data in three phases using a combination of open-ended, photo-elicited, and music-elicited interviews and cultural artifacts. Phase I was vivid and comprehensive, in which I sought to establish a foundation for the ways that hip-hop entered participants' lives. Initial interviews included questions about participants' childhood experiences, the time in which they fell in love with hip-hop, and the changes that took place in their hip-hop lives. Phase II introduced photo and music elicitation during the second individual interviews. Phase III involved an open-ended group interview and the collection of cultural artifacts mentioned by participants, which were all directly related to hip-hop music to determine what is means to be a

member of the hip-hop community. Interviews were videotaped, transcribed, and examined using Polkinghorne's (1995) approach.

Interview Locations

I offered all participants the opportunity to be interviewed at my home; only two participants, John and Turner, opted to do so. Rick's first interview was in the club house of the apartment complex where he lived, and his second interview was in his home. Nicole's interviews were conducted at her home office, which also doubled as her hair salon. Xavier's interviews were in his classroom. Dave's interviews took place at the music studio used by the artists on his record label. The group interview was conducted at John's home. All participants were invited and participated in the group interview except Rick, who did not participate. All interviews were recorded to capture verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., facial expressions, body language).

Phase I

During the initial phase of data collection, Phase I, I utilized an informal, open-ended interview structure with all participants and collected cultural artifacts. I resolved to use an informal, open-ended interview structure to provide flexibility. The interview structure was a mixture of both semi-structured and unstructured open-ended questions (Merriam, 2009). I wanted the interviews to operate more like a conversation than an interrogation (Merriam, 1998). The combination of semi-structured and unstructured open-ended questions allowed more flexibility during the interview process.

The informal interview structure offered a more conversational element to the interviewing process (Merriam, 1998). The participants were asked a mixture of interpretive and devil's adovcate questions. Interpretive questions assisted in the process of understanding the

meanings participants associated with various stories shared during interviewing. For example, the following question, “Would you say that there is a difference between hip-hop culture and the hip-hop industry?” allowed me to clarify my understanding of participants’ opinions while also providing another opportunity to receive more information.
while devil’s adovcate questions challenged participants to consider another point of view (Merriam, 1998).

During each interview, participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences with hip-hop culture and deliberate whether or not those experiences transfer into other aspects of their lives. Rubin and Rubin (2005) discussed the effectiveness of interview questions that evoke vivid description and elaborate responses from participants. The flexibility of open-ended interviews allowed me to construct questions to understand how hip-hop became a critical element in the lives of each participant. Cultural artifacts were collected during phase II and III based on information that participants shared during their interviews.

Open-ended interviews. During the open-ended interviews, inquiries included items such as **“**Tell me about your first experiences with hip-hop. Has it changed?” and “How has hip-hop influenced your life outside of music?” These initial interview questions focused on participants’ earliest experiences with hip-hop, examining hip-hop’s influence on participants’ childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as lived stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Participants were also invited to share information about their perception of the changes in hip-hop music and its influence on adolescent consumers. Although interview questions were created prior to the interviews, questions were contingent upon each participant’s personal knowledge and experiences. For instance, in the individual interview I asked each participant to compare and contrast hip-hop and rap. However, the subsequent question asked of the participants was based

on the answer he or she provided. For example, during Xavier's interview, the subsequent question asked after he compared and contrasted hip-hop to rap was, "Are you against the commercialism of the hip-hop industry" because his answer to the difference between hip-hop and rap was filled with scorn for commercial aspects of hip-hop culture. Likewise, Rick's next question was, "Is there a difference between hip-hop culture and the hip-hop industry" because his answer prompted further clarification about his view of hip-hop as an industry.

The types of questions asked ranged from interpretive questions that help to clarify participants' statements and Devil's Advocate questions that challenge participants to contemplate alternative views (Merriam, 2009). This study, designed to understand the hip-hop phenomenon through participant stories, warrants a continuous check of my understanding of the meaning that participants attribute to hip-hop related memories and events. Therefore, I used interpretive questions during the interviewing process to understand what participants' point of view.

Cultural artifacts. In this study, I defined cultural artifacts (Greenfield, 1994; Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999) as items that reflect the hip-hop culture. Hip-hop, a cultural phenomenon that influences millions of people worldwide (Chang, 2005); can be understood through the examination of the countless objects and products that are part of the culture. Cultural artifacts in hip-hop include but are not limited to album or CD covers, printed rap lyrics, movies and books about hip-hop, hip-hop forums, photographs, and magazine articles, blogs and websites for and about hip-hop. The cultural artifacts collected for the current study included all of the artifacts mentioned above. For this study, I examined a mixture of cultural artifacts throughout all three phases of data collection, including documents written to offer new perspectives and opportunities for the increased comprehension of hip-hop. Some of the cultural

artifacts collected were developed from information shared during participant interviews while others were collected based on my personal inquiry and understanding of the hip-hop culture. For example, the excerpt below demonstrated an example of a cultural artifact developed during phase 1 from information shared during Rick's interview. The Dave Chappell movie Block Party was collected as a cultural artifact because of Rick's mention of the significance of block parties to his adolescents while growing up in New York City. The excerpt below revealed the presence of block parties during Rick's childhood development.

> Growing up in Brooklyn, in an urban environment, when you had your block party there was always music, roller-skating, stake boarding and riding your bike up and down the street. Cars were not allowed to park on the street. It seemed like a celebration just for kids. The people in the community wanted to do something special just for the kids. (Rick Interview one)

To support and enhance my understanding of what a block party was I used a Google search engine to generate more information on the term block party. I discovered a film with 'block party' as part of the title. I viewed Dave Chappell's Block Party and used it as a data source (Gondry, 2004). The film was a cultural artifact because it demonstrated early hip-hop experiences in New York City. The film epitomizes a critical element of hip-hop culture: rapping. Rap music gained notoriety through live performance with a deejay and rapper during neighborhood block parties. The film pays homage to the era of hip-hop when artists performed live at block parties. The film was actually a live rap concert with many present day rap artists, produced on a city street in Brooklyn, New York. Although Rick did not specifically mention the film Block Party in his interview, he mentioned the significance of block parties to his adolescence and hip-hop identity. The Dave Chappell film was the first cultural artifact collected during phase I. Using the film as a cultural artifact, I learned that the art of live performance in hip-hop highly valued. Hip-hop culture originated from neighborhood community block parties

held in the Bronx, New York (Asante, 2008; Chang, 2005). The film revived the tradtion of neighborhood block parties with live performance and crowd participation.

Phase II

Phase II of data collection began with a second individual interview with all participants, and this is where photo and music elicitation was introduced. Photo elicitation is the introduction of images into an interview (Harper, 2002). Exchanges that include images typically produce information that differs from what id produced by verbal exchange alone. Images have a connection with memory that predates verbal connection. When used in interviewing, imagery has the power to extend the dialogue, providing participants with multiple ways to express meaning. Photo-elicited interviews may add value and depth to research data and call forth data that may have been overlooked during questioning alone (Harper, 2002; Pink, 2004). Music elicitation involved the introduction music into an open-ended interview. Music triggers memories and experiences, and when used in association with qualitative research, music grants access to a participant's inner feelings (Anderson, 2004). Music is a valuable research tool that can elicit thick, rich description and discussion. Listening to music is an effective means to elicit responses from participants (DeNora, 2000).

Photo-elicited interviews. Photo elicitation was embedded in the second set of interviews to address the way hip-hop is significant in participants' everyday lives. Participants viewed photographs of graffiti or breakdancing groups and other visual objects such as rap videos and hip-hop magazines to generate conversation about the meaning of hip-hop. I selected a collection of images from Google images to reflect the unique characteristics and values of hip-hop culture. To generate a collection of images, I typed in the term hip-hop to search images to use in the photo-elicited interview. As I looked at all the images, I selected images that

represented prominent eras in hip-hop (e.g., the Golden age, conscious rap, West Coast/gangster rap, and the daisy age). Some of these images were portraits of rap artists while others were pictures of graffiti artwork or individuals breakdancing or free style rapping. Choosing from a multiplicity of photographs I selected the following images: album covers from the rap groups A Tribe Called Quest and the Sugar Hill Gang; a scantily clothed female rapper (Lil Kim), a female rapper wearing African-style clothing (Queen Latifah), rap groups De La Soul and Salt N Pepa, rappers Slick Rick, Common, Talieb Kwali, Will Smith, and Big Daddy Kane; clip art images of a rapper, graffiti artists and a break dancer, photo of graffiti, and a photograph of an unknown male wearing "skinny" jeans. I selected each images because I believed it would have meaning to study participants. Examples of the images used during the Photo-elicitation interview are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Three photos used during photo elicitation.

embedded these images into a 15-slide PowerPoint presentation along with Photo-elicitation interview protocol questions (see Appendix D) and presented them to participants during the interview. As each slide was presented to participants using my laptop computer, I read the questions and waited for the participants to respond. Participants responded to each image, describing what came to their minds when they saw the images in relation to their personal lives and answering the question asked (see Appendix C). I wanted to understand participants' views on controversial aspects of hip-hop, such as Christian rap, gangster rap, and female objectification. The images selected and presented during the photo-elicitation interview represented various eras as well as controversial aspects of hip-hop. Additionally, I wanted to elicit nostalgia by showing the participants images from the Golden Age, a hip-hop eras that many people hold in high esteem. The photo-elicited interview provided intense data, evoking strong emotions from some participants. Without any prompting, participants began to associate the images with specific times of their lives. For instance, after viewing a photo of the Sugar Hill Gang's album cover for Rapper's Delight, Turner stated, "Seventh grade, I think that was the first album I ever got." As participants viewed the photographs and images, they displayed an assortment of emotions that ranged from happy to sad.

Music-elicited interviews. To transition from photographs to music, I asked participants to "spit their favorite line," or recite their favorite song lyrics. In each instance, excitement intensified as participants eagerly shared their favorite verses along with stories about how this became a favorite. During the music-elicited interviews, I played Kurtis Blow's "These are the Brakes" or Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message." Each participant immediately began to rap along with the song and share stories associated with those songs. Music holds significance to people's identity (Allett, 2012) and social memory. During the course of the music-elicited interviews, participants were asked to create a musical timeline using songs that were significant during various times in their lives. This song list was played during these second interviews on iPads or iPods or found online. Four participants chose to write their musical timelines on paper and read them aloud. Their musical timelines are represented in a table below. An example of the top eight artists that appeared on four participant's musical timeline are represented in Table 2. Table 2 presents an example of four of the six participant's musical timelines.

Table 2

Musical Timelines

	John	Nicole	Dave	Turner
1	Sparky Dee	Teddy Pendergrass	Curtis Mayfield	Teddy Pendergrass
2	Roxanne Shante	Dave and Gizmo	Teddy Pendergrass	Ohio Players
3	Joe Ski Love	Rakim	Curtis Blow	Krush Grove soundtrack
4	Lord Finesse	Dr. Dre	Whoodini	Run DMC
5	Sweet Tee	E40	Sugar Hill Gang	Boogie Down Productions
6	Big Daddy Kane	Outkast	LL Cool J	Dr. Dre
7	Juice Crew	Lil Kim	Spoolie G	Motley Crew
8	Nas	Foxy Brown	OutKast	Iron Maden

Two participants searched through their personal music collections (External hard drive, I Pads and/or IPODS) and played songs that represented their musical timeline during the interview. Xavier and Rick chose to represent their musical timeline musically, playing songs that held significant meaning to their personal lives. During Xavier's music-elicited segment, he played "Beat It" by Michael Jackson (1983) from his music file on his external harddrive. As the song played, Xavier spoke of other influential, popular rhythm and blues artists from the early 1980s. As Xavier discussed his middle school years, he played a song by rap group called Another Bad Creation. As the song played Xavier explained he connection he felt to the members of that rap groups because at the time those rappers were close to his own age. Most of the songs significant to Xavier during his elementary and middle school years were popular rhythm and blues songs. In the excerpt below, Xavier shared the significance of one particular album, Low End Theory by A Tribe Called Quest (Davis, Muhammad, & Taylor, 1991), in framing his hip-hop identity:

> Now this is when I really started to listen to hip-hop. (Plays a song from Low End Theory, A Tribe Called Quest.) I got my iPod plugged in and I have all of these playlists. One playlist is called 'The best" and it has 180 songs, my favorite songs. Several songs from this album are on that playlist. Now groups like Run DMC and Eric B and Rakim were out but rap just was not my thing until A Tribe Called Quest. So I would backtrack and get Run DMC and Eric B and Rakim. You know rap used a lot of jazz samples so then I started getting into jazz. I have a lot of jazz of the original rap samples.

The excerpt above revealed Xavier's early experiences with vocabulary development, as he stated, "I acquired vocabulary from music and television. Like I learned what DNA, Deoxyribonucleic acid was from GI Joe." In Rick's music-elicitation interview, he also showed the power of music as he told the story of how rap has changed since he was an adolescent:

> I was having this conversation with (son's name) and I downloaded Nice and Smooth (a hip-hop rap group from the 1990s). Although they were rather edge, for the most part I could play this in front of my parents. When we were in the car and hip-hop came on they did not change the station. When I came home from college, my parents knew about Biggie (rap artist) before I did. They were singing, 'I love it when they call me Big Papa.' Now sex sell and the music moved from that bragging and boasting about your MC skills to material things and sex. You still have some voices of positivity like Common, but even Common is smart to divest. He is getting into acting and surviving in the industry and staying relevant. So in, I used to love H.E.R., Common is talking about how things change and either you are on board with the changes or you are not and you are searching for that old love.

This excerpt provides an example of the "mini stories" revealed within participants' larger stories. This excerpt also demonstrated how music and even references to music, as Rick mentioned when downloading Nice and Smooth, a hip-hop group, extracted memories and feelings.

Cultural artifacts. During phase 2, I collected three types of cultural artifacts from websites, a book and a hip-hop forum. I collected cultural artifacts from websites by reading articles posted on the VIBE magazine website (www.vibe.com). Vibe is a magazine dedicated to hip hop life and contains articles about hip-hop artists as well as current trends and issues in the hip-hop community. By reading news posted on the VIBE website, I became acquainted with news and information related to hip-hop artists as well as other celebrities associated with the hip-hop community. I learned that news that VIBE magazine producers deemed relevant to the hip-hop community included a variety of information ranging from television shows, sports information and fashion. I used a Google search engine to find websites dedicated to women in

hip-hop such as womenofhiphop.com. I read comments posted on the women of hip-hop website to deepen my understanding of female representation in hip-hop music. From that website, I learned that the internet is used as a bridge to connect many female rappers who produce their hip-hop music without the assistance of large record companies. These female rappers operate 'underground' outside of mainstream musical venues and outlets. Additionally, I attended an academic hip-hop forum for Dr. Bettina Love's presentation on "Hip-Hop's I'll Sistas Speak" at the Auburn Avenue Research Library (Love, 2012). I purchased and read the text Hip-Hop's Li'l Sistas Speak and created a list of bulleted notes about the role of body image. From Dr. Love's text, I learned that hip-hop images greatly influenced the adolescent females interviewed in Dr. Love's research. The participants in Dr. Love's study developed ideas of womanhood and femininity from mass produced media images and judged other females based on the standards of beauty presented through music video. This level of influence is later supported and articulated through the opinions expressed by participants in my study regarding a black female imagery.

Phase III

In Phase III, I conducted a group interview based on preliminary analysis of data collected in Phases I and II. As I transcribed the two individual interviews and compares and contrasted participants' responses to images and questions, I noticed a possible discord between the views of participants who created or produced rap music and those that were only consumers of hip-hop music. Uncertain if this was real or imagined, I wanted to create a forum for the participants who create or produce rap music to engage in dialog with those that only consume rap music. Based on initial interviews, the participants that consumed rap music believed that rappers should be role models because rap is such an influential force. Consequently, participants

who created or produced music demonstrated a contrary perspective, indicating that rappers are not in positions to be role models and often need of direction and guidance themselves. I wanted the study participants, all members of the hip-hop community with differing views, to discuss issues and hear alternative perspectives of hip-hop. The group interview was added to provide members from different sects of the hip-hop community a chance to engage in face-to-face discussion about hip-hop culture and influence. Participants were seated in a semi-circle, which allowed them an opportunity to communicate with each other. Seated across from the group of participants, I posed questions and allowed participants to respond to the questions that I asked and respond to each other's questions and comments. Participants were allowed to discuss a variety of issues ranging from initial exposure to hip-hop to development of youth in today's society. During this phase of data collection, participants openly shared their views and addressed the views, bias and opinions of the other members of the study. Table 3 demonstrated the type of rich data that was collected during this phase as well as phases 1 and 2.

Cultural Artifacts

The use of artifacts allowed me to extend my understanding of the hip-hop phenomenon by providing rich information that is not influenced by the researcher. During phase 3, I collected cultural artifacts from the following sources: song lyrics, television show, and film. I collected the printed lyrics of a song mentioned by a participant during music-elicited interviews to understand the meaning the participant attached to the song. I watched an episode of the reality television show Family Hustle (Sher, Abrego, & Bullochnikov, 2011) starring Atlanta rapper TI. The reality show focuses on providing an inside glimpse at how TI navigates his life as a rapper and husband and father simulaneously.

Table 3

Examples of Data Collection

Phases	Narrative data	Sources
Phase I: Individual interviews	"To some degree, government schools have failed. And not just for black kids. Government schools have been failing us before and since integration but now, we are failing ourselves when we fell in love with foolishness."	In an excerpt taken from the initial, interview with Dave.
Phase II: Individual interviews, cultural artifacts, and photo and music elicitation	"The ballot or the bullet, some freedom or some bullshit, Will we ever do it big, or keep just settling for little shit, We brag on having bread, but none of us are bakers, We all talk having greens, but none of us own acres, If none of us on acres, and none of us grow wheat, Then who will feed our people when our people need to eat".	Cultural artifact collected from lyrics of Dave's song, Reagan.
Phases	Narrative data	Sources
Phase III: Group interview	"And hip-hop became the, ya know, code word for Black opportunity among my generation so we have a huge population of people that had never seen Black empowerment. You know it is under the guise of hip-hop but Atlanta has always kind da been so for me hip-hop is my daily life it is kind of everything."	Excerpt from group interview.

In the data collection table 3, I selected an example of narrative data collected during each phase and listed the source of the narrative data. The chart illustrates the various types of data collected during each phase, i.e. interview data during phase one, cultural artifact during phase two and group interview data during phase three.

Data Analysis

In the current study, narrative served as a method of inquiry during data collection and data analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). Earlier in this chapter, I explained how narrative were used as a method of inquiry to collect data, now I will explain how narratives were used to analze data. As an object of interpretation or analysis, narrative allowed me to examine the data to identify common themes. To understand how narratives were used during data analysis process it is important to understand two distinct methods that can be used to analyze data, analysis of narratives and narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988). Analysis of narratives is based on paradigmatic reasoning while narrative analysis is based on narrative thinking. Analysis of narratives is used to analyze data collectively looking for themes, conversely narrative anlaysis anayze each narrative data source indepenedntly with an in-depth analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Table 4 presents an example of the two methods of anlaysis.

Table 4

Use of Narratives for Data Analysis

	Analysis of Narratives	**Narrative Analysis**
Based on	Paradigmatic thinking.	Narrative thinking.
Type of data	Non-narrative; factual information but not contextualized.	Narrative data; connected events with chronological sequence.
Produces	Knowledge of general concepts; seeking common themes.	Knowledge of particular situations; storied events with unique situations.

Note. Adapted from Polkinghorne, 1988.

Although both data analysis methods are effective, in this study I utilized Polkinghorne's (1988) definition of narrative analysis to analyze the data and retell the particicipants' stories.

Narrative analysis is based on narrative thinking, uses data collected in a narrative form, and produces knowledge of particular situations from a particular person's point of view (Polkinghorne, 1995); it allowed me to retell participants' stories as described by Creswell (2005). It is important to demonstrate what narrative *thinking* means within the context of this study: it is a process that involved reading raw data, the things a participant said, and attempting to glean what was meant to enhance participants' perspectives. During the narrative thinking process, I reorganized individual stories told by participants and paired them with stories that supported or enhanced the perspective or point of view to think about the separate stories as a whole. Independently, a participant's story might be viewed as an isolated experience, but when constructed with multiple voices, those stories enhance meaning. Hearing a person's perspective is critical to understanding that person's experience. As participants share how he or she feel, we learn about the experience. Using my knowledge and familiarity, I listened to the participants' stories and interpreted the meanings that were significant to this work. Interpretations developed from my perspective, therefore there is not one true correct interpretation however based on my understanding, I grouped participants' stories together in a ways that was logical and meaningful

to me. Narrative analysis, for example, helped me understand Rick's story about growing up in the original hip-hop era. Rick stated: "Listening to Run DMC, Grand Puba, and Kurtis Blow …just made us feel good." My understanding of narrative analysis helped me identify how the events that Rick shared were chronologically connected. As Rick discussed the conscious rap, gangster rap, and viral music eras, he was actually connecting those events in his personal story with musical history that correlates with the hip-hop music of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, respectively.

Narrative analysis begins and ends with a study's participants. Beginning with a participant's story told through informal photo- and music-elicited interviews, my status as a hip-hop insider required that I maintain respect and appreciation for the content of the stories told by participants. Understanding that the use of narratives to tell a participant's story (Baker, 2012) and generate data is a highly personal and subjective endeavor that demands an analysis that values the meaning that participants attach to various elements of hip-hop culture. In the current study, narrative analysis was conducted in three phases. I analyzed the data continuously throughout the three phases of data collection, seeking answers to my research questions. Utilizing the data presented in this study, I demonstrated how hip-hop became a critical element in the lives of participants who are actively and intimately involved in the music and culture of hip-hop. In Table 5 I demonstrated how narrative data was analyzed during each phase using narrative inquiry and narrative analysis.

Table 5

Chart of Data Analysis

Phases	Research Questions	Narrative Data	Narrative Inquiry	Narrative Analysis
Phase I: Based on narrative thinking	Question 3: How does hip-hop inform the view of the world for participants in this study?	"Knowing how to read was important because I could read the signs, eastbound, westbound so I knew where I was going. So I would ride the bike to my aunt's house, eat some pie, ride to grandmother's house, hang out with my uncle." (Dave)	I used narrative thinking to understand the significance of Dave's story about riding his bicycle from one grandmother's house to the other's. I learned that Dave connected reading with independence and survival.	Dave's narrative data produced knowledge of a particular situation and also revealed that for Dave reading was important and respected at home and in the street.
Phase II: Narrative data, connected events with chronological sequence	Question 2: What does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community?	"When you young and Black in America, depending on where you grew up and how you grew up, you kinda automatically apart of it. It's the culture in which you grow up in being a young Black American." (Xavier, Photo-/music-elicitation interview	As I read and reread transcripts, I searched for evidence of direct or indirect reference to identified theme (childhood and old school hip-hop). This excerpt also addressed RQ2 by stating that hip-hop membership is associated with Black American youth membership.	This excerpt demonstrated the connection between childhood experiences to the influence of hip-hop.
Phase III: Knowledge of particular situations, storied events with unique situations	Question 1: How has hip-hop become a critical element in the lives of participants?	"Well first of all I feed my family through hip-hop." (John) "Hip-hop is like me breathing." (Neeksa) "hip-hop is a place where I can be a full black man and that is why I love it." (Dave)	Participants view hip-hop as a part of who they are, not as a separate entity. Acknowledging the intersection between professional and personal, hip-hop is embraced as an everyday occurrence in participants' lives.	These statements were made during the group interview and upon transcription used to introduce the participants.

Phase I of Data Analysis

In the first phase of data analysis, I wanted to provide a solid description of what it meant to be a member of the hip-hop community. I read the initial transcribed interviews, viewed the cultural artifacts, and identified topics that surfaced from multiple participants. I viewed and reviewed video data to become familiar with what participants said and the way that they said it. As I viewed the video of John's first interview, I noted the change in his body posture as he spoke about artists having the potential to 'go all the way'. Looking at the video, I noticed that John moved forward in his chair and used more hand gestures as he responded to the question, how do you decided who to work with? The written transcript, listed below, indicated John's laughter as he talked about receiving a percentage of artists' revenues however, from the videotaped interview, I interpreted the significance of story he told. John's livelihood is generated from acquiring percentages of artists' proceeds; therefore selecting artists who have the potential to generate high earning is significant.

> For me you have to have the potential to go all the way. I mean to arenas. You have to have the potential to reach that kind of level of success. For me, the guy behind the scenes, I get a percentage. So, a percentage of a small business,(laughing) just don't make sense. It takes the same amount of energy and time that you are going to have to invest in this act. The time with the act is the same. Out of the different acts, there are different levels of success. It can be an act that can go all the way to Madison Square Garden or Phillips arena or a smaller kind of business. So you say, out of these two acts, what is success. It may mean that this act is doing 2,000 seat venues, like crazy, all year round (versus) another guy (who) may be doing 19,000 seat venues. Personally, I may love this guy right here (referring to the 2,000 seat artists) but you need the other guy to really make money.

John's statement above demonstrated the importance of including the videotaped interviews as part of the analysis. Understanding what the participants say is as important as observing the way that they choose to express themselves. As data analysis continued, I developed an initial list of topics that were crafted and reformulated as new data emerging from

the additional interviews. The initial topics were hip-hop versus rap, childhood, technology, meaning embedded in texts, and underground artists. I noted these topics as possible themes. I assigned a color to these initial topics and underlined evidence that supported these topics from the participants' statements. Hip-hop versus rap was yellow, childhood was dark green and technology was light green, meaning embedded in texts was blue and underground artists were orange. For example, when I read the transcript of Rick's initial interview, I noted the following statement as an example evidence of childhood experience:

> Well we grew up in Brooklyn. We lived in Brooklyn about 12-14 years. We moved to In 1989, we moved to Roosevelt Long Island.' Both of my parents were teachers. I guess a typical childhood. We did a lot of vacations up and down the eastern seaboard I guess because my parents were teachers, and they had the summers off. So we did a lot of traveling. Actually when I came to Atlanta for college is when my parents started traveling abroad so my younger brother really got a chance to travel.

I underlined this statement in green on the paper copy of the transcript. I analyzed this statement by noting that Rick had a black middle class experience growing up with two college-educated parents. His parent's occupations as teachers helped shape his experiences in that summer vacation were a normal occurrence during his adolescent development. Additionally Rick lived in a single-family dwelling, which was very uncommon in an inner city such as Brooklyn New York. From these statements, I interpreted a fair amount of stability in Rick's childhood.

Phase II of Data Analysis

I read participants' first interviews, noting participants' nonverbal responses observed in video recordings. As I conducted additional interviews, I continued to transcribe the interviews, reading and reviewing these transcripts both independently and collectively. I originally identified five fundamental themes, hip-hop versus rap, childhood, technology, meaning embedded in texts, and underground artists however, these themes changed as I received new narrative data from participants. Based on participants' stories about what it means to be a

member of the hip-hop community the final themes were the following: (1) school, (2) technology, (3) underground hip-hop, (4) geographic experiences, and (5) old-school hip-hop. On the interview transcripts, I highlighted any direct or indirect references to these themes, each theme was assigned a specific color. I read each participant's first and second interviews as a unit, searching for commonalities, and then I read all interviews together. I engaged in member-checking, providing each participant with a copy of the transcribed data and providing an opportunity to clarify any misperceptions or miscommunication.

In this phase of analysis, I interpreted evidence that Rick's reoccurring references to his parents and his parents' music were significant to his connection to hip-hop. For example, Rick stated:

> My parents encouraged the music (hip-hop) because in their generation, they had Jimi Hendrix and others, and they saw our (music) and they were amused. Telling us it is not going to last. I tell my friends, I am 35, and I cannot believe that we are still listening to hip-hop. It is not a fad. It is not going away. It is just a love that won't go away, it just won't die; it is a part of us. This shows how much our parents supported us at that time, I remember my mother took me and my brother to see Kurtis Blow and the Force MDs at Brooklyn College. That was my first concert ever. I think, as parents when you know what your kids are listening to, what they are into, you can be a conversational partner. And help them navigate through things that you may find disturbing.

My analysis of the statement above, also coded initially as childhood then into the theme geographic location, is that Rick felt comfortable developing a hip-hop identity partly because his identity was not in opposition to hip parents. His parents, being supporters of the burgeoning hip-hop culture, offered opinions and support of Rick's development.

Phase III of Data Analysis

During the third phase of data analysis, I examined data from the group interview and concentrated on understanding the meanings associated with the cultural artifacts. During this phase, I utilized electronic versions of the transcribed data to group common themes. The initial

themes were changed, or adapted, as the group transcript was analyzed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The final themes emerging from the data were as follows: (a) hip-hop as a culture; (b) hip-hop's connection to the larger black community; and (c) corporate influence. The final themes were developed from the initial categories coded in the transcribed interviews. For example, in the initial paper copy of the transcripts the theme "childhood" was highlighted using green, however in the final analysis, childhood was relabeled as "hip-hop, the early years" and then color-coded as green in the electronic versions of the transcripts. Stories about the participants' transformation from childhood to the early years were meaningful to participants because not all participants experienced hip-hop as children; some participants began listening to hip-hop during their late adolescence. The stories that the participants told revealed critical elements in their lives as well as disclosed when they fell in love with hip-hop.

To answer the research question, "How has hip-hop become a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and creators who are actively and intimately involved in the music and culture of hip-hop?" I reviewed the interview data and observed statements such as," When I started liking rap music, you know, it was the late 80s"; "As a young kid, I was excited and emerged in the culture"; and "Hip-hop is that tool that helps you play both sides of the fence." Although data were collected and analyzed in three phases, data were eventually examined as a seamless unit in the write-up of the study.

Study Write-Up

Using participants' lived experiences, I integrated their individual stories into one concise narrative. The task of presenting the unique stories of these members of the hip-hop community presented a selection of options. To keep with the historical tradition of storytelling central to hip-hop culture, this research was written as a cipher, which is created when groups of people

discuss a particular topic (Newman, 2005). Rap ciphers feature artists who join forces to rap or create lyrics. To retell the participants' stories, I envisioned a tightly woven narrative that presents the messages as a connected conversation among participants (Stake, 1995); therefore, chapter four was written as a collective story that depicted the lives of several members of the hip-hop community.

In the current study, I will retell participants' collective stories as a rap cipher developed from narrative analysis (Alim, Lee, & Carris, 2010). To construct this circular presentation of narratives as a cipher, I incorporated considerable pieces of text from the interviews to allow participants to converse with one another. Participants' individual responses to interview questions were formulated as a dialogue or debate in response to stimulus. Using answers to the interview questions and responses to photos and music, data were reported in the same circular format experienced in a cipher. This approach honors the creative aspect of hip-hop while offering insight into a movement that touches the lives of people across the world. Although individual interviews were conducted separately, narrative inquiry allowed me to use narrative thinking and use the narrative data to produce storied events with unique situations.

Robinson (2007) demonstrates how narrative data can be used to create a cipher. In the data below, radical hip-hop artists who do not receive mainstream recognition were used as the topic of conversation, or the stimulus. In separate interviews, participants responded to this stimulus, and raw data were analyzed, extracted, and retold as a hip-hop cipher.

Cipher Topic: Radical hip-hop

> Mr. T: Because they (Dead Prez) are like the most revolutionary group I have ever heard. And the stuff they say is honesty, I do not want to say it is over the top, but America doesn't want to hear it. Like one song they did here in this concert is 'turn off the radio' telling people to turn off mainstream radio, turn off that bullshit. America don't want to hear that, they don't want people to speak out against what is really going on.

> Dr. G: Hip-hop is the only vehicle where you might see what you call a radical. Real hip-hop artists are *underground.* Real hip-hop artists are under the radar. Mainstream America cannot handle them and will never accept them.

In this cipher above, Mr. T referred to the rap duo Dead Prez, who exemplified the belief that there is a division between mainstream artists and underground artists. The second participant, Dr. G, echoed this sentiment in reference to America's disapproval of radical hip-hop. In the current study, radical hip-hop was a topic continuously discussed when participants referred to underground hip-hop artists. For example, as Xavier considered the influence of conscious rap, he stated that:

> A conscious rapper will tackle other issues that are pertinent to society. Like we had a poet. Some poets will just rhyme but some will rhyme for the sake of rhyme like actual poetry whereas other poets give social commentary. I think conscious rapper focus on social commentary more. I know Immortal Technique is conscious but at the same time, he is aggressive (hand jester). He is discussing issues but it is not all cookie-cutter sugar pops and gum drops.

This excerpt from illustrates the presence of radical hip-hop artists as viewed by participants in the current study. Although radical hip-hop was not a topic, Xavier's story contained sentiment similar to that shared by Mr. T and Dr. G, yet he used the term *aggressive* as opposed to *radical* to describe rappers who used their rhymes to provide social commentary.

Summary

This chapter described the data collection and analysis methods employed in the current study. Critical literacy theory is the theoretical framework for this study, which aided the interpretation of participants' experiences. The study design included an interview process that containing music and photo elicitation, which gave participants an opportunity to share the meaning they associate with the burgeoning hip-hop culture. Using interview data as the primary source of data, analysis involved narrative analysis approaches. Data collection was transformed into an artistic forum that not only borrows from rapping, one of hip-hop culture's original

tenets, but also connects to oral traditions of storytelling. Hip-hop, the phenomenon of study, is an art form that contains rich, instructive stories and speaks to people from all lifestyles. Adults actively and intimately involved in the music and culture of hip-hop have provided key insight to understanding hip-hop's role in viewing the world and constructing identity. Defying language and culture barriers, national differences, and racial variance, hip-hop unites millions of people from inside and outside dominant, mainstream society. The current study can make a significant contribution to the educational community's understanding of student motivation, interpretation, and scholarship (see appendix A).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In the current study, I examined hip-hop through the stories of adults who incorporate some element of hip-hop culture into their daily lives. As stated in Chapter 1, I sought to advance a scholarly examination of hip-hop, which is continuously maligned and plagued with pluralities and mounting criticism. This chapter begins with a summary of my journey to answer the research questions and transitions to an introduction of the participants who shared their personal voyages through hip-hop. This chapter includes a description of data analysis and processing methods and organized cipher to present the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

This chapter represents the participants' lived experiences as members of the hip-hop community. I presented their stories in the form of a hip-hop cipher, which refers to a circle of rappers engaged in verbal debate. My position as an insider assisted me in unveiling the meanings embedded in the participants' words. While telling the participants' stories, I aimed to identify the "new ways to define and appreciate genius and intellectual contributions" (Jenkins, 2011, p. 1237) offered by these members of the hip-hop community. The overarching research question guiding the current inquiry was, "How has hip-hop become a critical element in the lives of poets, artists, and creators who are actively and intimately involved in its music and culture?"

During the final coding stage of data analysis, I identified the following themes in the study findings: (a) hip-hop as a culture; (b) hip-hop's connection to the larger Black community; and (c) corporate influence. These findings were represented in the form of a cipher, narrated by the study participants, and their stories were retold in conversational form. The ciphers were

constructed based on the topics discussed by the participants. For example, as I reviewed the written transcript in which participants discussed the role of hip-hop in their lives or how hip-hop has changed over the last 30 years, I color-coded such topics using a designated color. I then cut and pasted the similarly highlighted stories and reconstructed the excerpts to use as discussion with the participants, thus creating a cipher. As I crafted multiple ciphers, I grouped them according to the larger ideas, which resulted in the three themes identified. The three identified themes and the ciphers that represent these themes are:

1. Hip-hop is a culture that captures several different ideas: (a) hip-hop versus rap; (b) geographical differences; (c) real hip-hop is "underground"; (d) hip-hop heads; and € hip-hop's political agenda.
2. Hip-hop has a direct connection to the larger Black community, which encompasses the connection to other musical genres; (b) women in hip-hop; (c) social responsibility; and (d) youth and schooling.
3. There is a strong corporate influence on hip-hop, which encompasses (a) today's hip-hop generation; (b) technological advances; and (c) the hip-hop industry.

Theme 1, hip-hop as culture, contains five ciphers. Cipher 1 of Theme 1, hip-hop versus rap, set forth the participants' views on the differences between hip-hop and rap. Cipher 2, Geographic Differences, revealed participants' experiences with the hip-hop culture based on their geographic location. Cipher 3, Real hip-hop is underground, included participants' definitions of real or authentic hip-hop. Cipher 4, hip-hop heads, included information about "hip-hop heads," which are members of the hip-hop community who want to hear lyrical dominance, or coded text with encrypted meaning, in rap lyrics. Cipher 5, hip-hop and politics, contained information about the political agenda in hip-hop culture.

Theme 2, hip-hop's relationship to the larger Black community, incorporated four ciphers. Cipher 1, hip-hop's connection to other Black musical genres, spoke about the ways that jazz and blues influenced hip-hop music. Cipher 2, women in hip-hop, included participants' interpretations of women's roles in hip-hop. Cipher 3, disagreement on social responsibility, contained conversations about social responsibility in hip-hop and the larger Black community. Cipher 4, public education failing the hip-hop generation, discussed participants' views about the public education systems' inability to reach certain youth.

Theme 3, corporate influence on hip-hop, contained three ciphers. Cipher 1, today's hip-hop generation, included participants' connection with today's hip-hop youth. Cipher 2, technological advances, contained participants view on technological advances in hip-hop. Cipher 3,the business of hip-hop, presented a discussion of the hip-hop industry. These three elements are addressed through ciphers, each demonstrating the participant's values, opinions about hip-hop's world wide appeal, and the ways in which hip-hop music has changed with the times.

Theme 1: Hip-Hop is a Culture

Theme 1 develops the perspective that hip-hop is a culture, which encompasses hip-hop versus rap; geographical differences; real hip-hop is "underground"; hip-hop heads; and hip-hop's political agenda.

Cipher 1: Hip-Hop versus Rap

The participants articulated their view of both hip-hop and rap, spoke to the confusion between the two, and discussed the circumstances under which hip-hop and rap collide. Hip-hop versus rap was discussed in individual interviews and during the group interview. In the individual interviews, participants were specifically asked if there was a difference between hip-

hop and rap. In the group interview, Dave made a distinction between hip-hop culture and rap music as Xavier discussed commercialism and exploitation. The cipher below sheds light on the unique differences between hip-hop and rap as articulated by the participants.

> When you are talking about hip-hop you are talking about a culture that involves rap music, (which is) the youngest of the culture, but you are (also) talking about graffiti, breakdancing, deejaying, and I'd like to add Black entrepreneurship because they charged to get into some of those parties. Black kids have started record companies and they are now some of the most powerful CEOs in the game, so those four plus one more (Black entrepreneurship) that is the culture. As rap music begins to dwindle in sales, which it had for a few years, that didn't stop these dope (clothing) boutique labels from popping up. That didn't stop hip-hop–driven television shows from popping up. (Dave)

> Well, you know, rap is just one aspect of hip-hop, which is a larger culture. Moreover, a larger culture includes, pretty much an entire, way of life. Rap is just one portion, one expression of that larger culture. Real hip-hop is just truthful, it is real, and it is telling the truth. Put it like this, uh, it is a quote somebody said I read it recently where somebody said, 'Rap minus lies, equals hip-hop.' (Xavier)

> Hip-hop is the culture. It incorporates breakdancing and graffiti, it's how you dress, walk and talk. The attitude. Rap is the musical component. Whatever you are doing it is real to you. I think every one's perception forms their own reality. Hip-hop to me is having those components but instead of a warm up suit, I have on khaki and skateboard shoes that does not make me any less hip-hop. It does mean my style of hip-hop is different but it is real for me. (Turner)

> For me, I would say hip-hop branches over into the commercial aspect. Hip-hop is what we know what we touch it is the final product. Rap is what happens in the developmental stage. Rap is pre-hip hop. (Rick)

Participants gave different definitions of hip-hop and what it exemplified. Their definitions of rap varied, ranging from the commonly held view of rap as one part of the complete hip-hop culture to the view that rap is the foundation of hip-hop culture. Dave, Xavier and Turner articulated the commonly accepted definition of rap and clarified the misconception that rap and hip-hop are at odds. Debunking the myth that rap and hip-hop are two different musical genres, Dave named the original tenets of hip-hop hop, which include deejaying, rapping, graffiti, and breakdancing; however, he added entrepreneurship as a fifth tenet. As a

hip-hop insider, I know that in the early days of hip-hop, deejays played music while MCs (rappers) entertained the crowd with rhymes. At these same parties, dancers would dance during the break beats of the records. These parties were often profitable, as people paid to enter.

Hip-hop culture touches many aspects of people's lives. For example, hip-hop influenced music is used in television commercials and radio advertisements. Therefore, individuals who do not intentionally listen to hip-hop music are exposed to it indirectly. Hip-hop, in its truest form, is the reporting of real experiences, whether personal or collective (Alim, 2007). Cultural influences are seen in advertising and have been adopted by popular culture and woven into television programming and news media. In the cipher above, only one participant, Rick, provided a definition of rap as being separate from hip-hop. For Rick, rap is a draft and hip-hop is the final product. Critical literacy respects the voices and experiences of marginalized people, as a result, opinions expressed by Dave, Xavier and Turner are valued. Hip-hop is more mainstream because of the people who have help define hip-hop culture. Using critical literacy as a tool for analysis, I discovered that the participants' words illuminated the discrepancy that exists within hip-hop regarding what hip-hop really means. I observed that most of the participants held definitions of rap and hip-hop that were similar to my definition as a hip-hop insider. I understood rap to be a part of hip-hop culture. Rap's popularity compared to the other elements of hip-hop gave it a false since of dominance over graffiti, breakdancing, and deejaying. From the participant's words I determined that rap's prominence over the other tenets of hip-hop is directly linked to corporate influence on the production of rap music. To view rap as separate or competing force with hip-hop is to contribute to the misconceptions about the culture. The debate over the fifth element of hip-hop, entrepreneurism is possibly the most lucrative. Countless rappers have extended their career by transitioning from rapper on stage to

business investor. As Dave stated, some of the most powerful CEOs began as rappers. Xavier's description of rap as one portion, one expression of that larger culture demonstrated his understanding of the cultural context that rap exists within.

Cipher 2: Geographic Differences

From examining the participants' responses, I determined that people's experiences with hip-hop vary based on their geographic location and exposure. All participants have varying hip-hop experiences despite being close in age. Dave, the only rapper in the sample, experienced hip-hop in a more stereotypical way—directly from the streets. Exposure to "street hustling" led to Dave's involvement in the creation of music. Like so many other rappers, his involvement in illegal activities preceded his rap career. John's connection to hip-hop developed through immersion, and he was surrounded by authentic displays of hip-hop in its infantry stages. Living in the Bronx, New York, the birthplace of hip-hop, enabled John to experience hip-hop before it became mainstream (or "watered down") enough for mass consumption. The other study participants were cursory users of the culture, meaning that their connections to rap began with the mainstream music played on local radio stations; they never interacted with rap music on a personal level. In the following cipher, participants express their early experiences with the hip-hop culture and demonstrate that their experiences vary partly due to their geographic locations.

> I'm from Atlanta. I grew up in Atlanta. I was born in Florida and then I moved to Atlanta when I was, you know, like in 2nd grade. So I been here for, it's different parts of Atlanta the whole time. Elementary school was regular pop stuff. I listened to stuff like this. (Participant plays music from a few artists like Another Bad Creation.) Now this is when I really started to listen to hip-hop. (Participant plays a song by A Tribe Called Quest.) Now groups like Run DMC and Eric B. and Rakim were out, but rap just was not my thing until A Tribe Called Quest. (Xavier)

> I was introduced to rap music through drug dealers. Being young and on the block. I grew up in the 80s, and being younger, I wanted to hang out with older dudes. My uncle, my daddy's younger brother, he was about everything that the 80s were about. Fila suits, flashy cars, paint. My uncle never worked a day in his life. (In the African American

community) Your cousin is your auntie and uncle is like a father figure, and as long as my uncle did not put me in the direct path of danger, I was free to be with him. I noticed that they would shoo the other boys away. Boys that really wanted the life would cut school and get in trouble. So I starting going home and trying to rap. 'I am sir fresh, I am the best. I rock the party from east to west.' I wanted to do what they did. I went one day and I smashed. I was just a 10-year-old kid, but I got the praise and accolades and it got me more time with my uncle. (Dave)

Well, we grew up in Brooklyn. We lived in Brooklyn about 12 to 14 years. In 1989, we moved to Roosevelt Long Island. I grew up with two brothers, an older brother and a younger brother; I am the middle child. Both of my parents were teachers. We were definitely privileged because we came up in the golden age of hip-hop. So we benefited from when breakdancing first came on the scene. And I remember in first grade, bringing records to school for parties. My parents encouraged the music because in their generation, they had Jimi Hendrix and others, and they saw ours and they were amused. Telling us it is not going to last. I tell my friends, I am 35, and can you believe that we are still listening to hip-hop? It is not a fad; it is not going away. It is just a love that won't go away, it's just won't die; it is a part of us. (Rick)

As a young kid, I was excited and emerged in the culture. Once I got to high school, I started to see the business side of hip-hop. Of course, you have your mixtapes, and the internet, which can get your music out there, lot of grassroots. I think hip-hop in general is going back to how it started off back in the 80s, where it was more underground. Now, at the end of the day, hip-hop is still the most influential music form. Still the most powerful. (John)

My first experiences with hip-hop were that of acceptance. I was in middle school. I was a little nerdy kid, but the connection to the music and the ability to be a part of the culture. I used to beat box. I think people expected me to do that 'cause I was a fat kid, but then I was good at it. I remember the cool kids would need somebody to beat box. I remember when I was in 7th grade, some 8th graders had a rap group and got mad at the dude that beat boxed and put him out of the group right before the talent show. They came to me and were like: 'hey dude, what is your name? We heard you beat box. We need you in our group.' I practiced with them after school for two weeks. We won the talent show. I remember coming to school the next day not being the little nerdy kid in algebra. I was officially the cool nerd. (Turner)

Hip-hop is a culture. Yeah, with my children, even with me choosing to be an entrepreneur had a lot to do with the music that I heard. Once I got the cd of Milk and Gizmo and MC Lite, read the back, and seen who the CEOs and the different people were, that 'kinda influenced me. I knew I wanted to be self-sufficient. I definitely use it (hip-hop) every day. It's in my everyday language, what I listen to, where I shop, um, the decisions I make, you know, with my family. It is all those things. (Nicole)

The cipher featured above was part of Theme 2 because participants' introduction to and experiences with hip-hop culture varied greatly due to their locations. This cipher topic emerged as a dominant theme as the participants discussed the ways in which hip-hop *is* a culture. The stories related to this cipher began with the participants' early experiences and continued as participants discussed how hip-hop has shaped them. I selected the specific quotes to help authenticate the way hip-hop informs this member's view of the world. For example, sentiments expressed by Rick, such as "It is not a fad. It is not going away," solidify hip-hop's lasting influence. This cipher identifies the specific circumstances of the participants' introductions to the culture. Rick and John articulate that the hip-hop culture is part of who they are as individuals. Interestingly, John and Rick, both from New York, were present as rap music went from an underground phenomenon to an internationally recognized genre. Turner and Dave reference the acceptance resulting from their connection to rap music. As John discussed his early experiences with rap music, he made the argument that rap music will return to its grassroots with a resurgence of underground rappers. Even though Xavier did not live in New York City, he felt connected to hip-hop culture through the music that he listened to. Through rap music Xavier learned about various neighborhoods, people and places that rappers mentioned in their rhymes. Likewise, Nicole learned about career paths through her exposure to hip-hop culture. In the cipher above, Nicole associated her decision to become an entrepreneur with the music that she listened to growing up.

I interpreted the participants' words to mean the hip-hop was more accessible to members who lived in the Metropolitan New York area. As the birthplace of hip-hop, New York residents were surrounded with the sights and sounds of the burgeoning culture. Other hip-hoppers were exposed to hip-hop at a slower rate as hip-hop moved from the New York area to other

communities. In the early 1980s, rap music traveled from New York City to other areas via radio airwaves and word of mouth. Participants' stories suggested that their introduction to hip-hop music came during critical times in their adolescence and represented acceptance.

Cipher 3: Real Hip-Hop is Underground

During data analysis, underground hip-hop emerged as a relevant subtheme. In the early days of hip-hop, everything was underground in the sense that rap music was not mass-produced, and graffiti writers and breakdancers were localized or not known outside of their communities. Graffiti artists attempted to gain prominence by "tagging" (writing names and messages in graffiti) train cars traveling to communities outside of their immediate locales. However, prior to movies like "Beat Street" and "Breaking," mainstream society knew very little about the hip-hop culture. Graffiti artists used the train as a conduit to send their messages out. In the same vein, rappers initially used word of mouth to build a reputation and pass their messages. Engaging in rap battles built a rapper's reputation in the hip-hop community and showed the rapper's abilities. Often without the benefit of a record, rappers were known during these times for their quick wit and ability to "freestyle" rap. The transformation of local rappers into recording artists brought a decrease in the number of rappers with the ability to freestyle and an increase in the number of rappers with audience appeal. In the associated cipher, participants deliberated on the importance of underground hip-hop.

> There are different levels of underground. Like you have your Mos Def, success is defined by money. Also, success is defined by being critically acclaimed and cultural. When you have success as far as the numbers, those numbers don't just fall out of the sky, they define your impact. Nowadays, you have the internet, satellite radio, certain video outlets, touring, so those are the ways that an act is gonna get money. Mos Def is the most successful underground act. You have guys like J Electronica who are still underground. The artist Chris Webby, who has done two tours already, is underground. Now you can be underground and make a nice living and have a good career underground. Prior to the internet, if you were underground you were going to be regionally underground. If you were from the northeast, only people in your region knew

> you. With the internet, you are worldwide, now you are globally underground. That act can run around a bigger territory than they can physically capture. (John)
>
> Gangstar had a phrase called 'respect the architects.' So you know I respect people who built the house. …a long time ago, all hip-hop was underground. I only wanna hear real stuff, kinda went underground a little bit. I am (mostly) into the underground. (Xavier)
>
> Kendrick Lamar …sold 250 thousand records in a week, Ab Soul is his underling but no one is talking about him, he has dope records, Dave, Immortal Technique is more militant than me or Ice Cube, and no one is championing that, the Peruvian brother and let's throw something up as a 5th, Bamboo a Pilipino brother out of the west coast. Why don't you know these artists? The reason most adults don't know these artists, they are the ones radio is programing to; they accept the garbage. They accept the Downy commercial. They never get on their internet and search for new music. We stopped hyping each other. (Dave)
>
> I am dissing mainstream stuff. As I got older, the people I listened to got older, too. I am into underground stuff I kinda fell out with the commercialization of mainstream rap. I like real lyrical skills, I don't like stuff watered down. The culture still exists it is alive and well. Hip-hop is not dead but it is underground. (Xavier)

These excerpts were chosen to present this cipher because the underground hip-hop phenomenon was a prominent idea in the current study. In this cipher, John and Xavier shared social experiences and connections while Dave shared his personal experience as an underground artist. From a profitability perspective, John expressed the levels of underground artists in terms of earning ability when he stated that "success is defined by money." John described underground success in terms of profitability by stating, "When you have success as far as the numbers, those numbers don't just fall out of the sky, they define your impact."

Dave was frustrated as he accused older members of the hip-hop community of being lazy and not supporting underground artists, stating, "The reason most adults don't know artists (like Kendrick Lamar or Ab Soul is because) they accept the garbage (radio stations play)." As Dave named several underground artists, he argued that mainstream radio does not play underground artists' music and that adults fail to look beyond these stations to find artists. Being an underground artist has undeniably changed since rap's inception; there is a clear line of

demarcation between a mainstream artist like Jay Z and an underground artist like Immortal Technique, with the former emerging as a multiplatinum record seller. However, underground artists can enjoy a large national and international following based on Internet exposure. Technology gives underground artists the opportunity to have greater control over their product and profits. As John stated, "With the Internet, (underground artists) are world and are globally underground." Technology has increased underground artists' earning potential by making them more accessible to potential fans. As evidenced by Dave's statement about Kendrick Lamar and Ab Soul having "dope" records, underground artists are admired for their lyrical content. The witty delivery coupled with the fact that underground artists are free of corporate constraint appeals to the participants in this study. Hip-hop music's ability to freely express views about society is protected in underground hip-hop. Independent artists, typically assigned to independent labels have fewer constraints and restrictions on the political and socially-charged messages that are presented through underground hip-hop music. Xavier repeatedly referred to underground hip-hop music as pure, authentic and real. Although John, Xavier, and Dave described the underground experience differently, each expressed an appreciation for the way that technology has positively affected the underground movement. John, a hip-hop executive, Dave, a rapper, and Xavier, a hip-hop head, offered insight into a world, filled with underground artists who are thought to be superior lyrist than mainstream rappers. This analysis added to the importance of underground hip-hop through its presentation of marginalized voices within the hip-hop community.

As I analyzed participants' stories, I learned that the underground hip-hop movement transform lives. After I examined the coded data, I discovered that underground rap music represents hip-hop in its truest form. Initially I believed that underground artists were those that

were undiscovered by mainstream music companies; however, the coded data revealed that underground artists offer a message and insight that informs participants' views. Participants' comments in the cipher above depict what it means to be underground from a critical literacy perspective. Underground is significant to Xavier's life he stated that he only wanted to hear underground music because it is "real." Xavier viewed the world in term of authenticity and questioned what he considered packaged or artificial hip-hop. John revealed the financial opportunity that exists within hip-hop because of technology. The ciphers revealed that underground hip-hop has wider market because of technological advances. For example, in the cipher participants spoke about earning potential and audience. My knowledge of underground hip-hop was limited to artists who were formerly underground and became mainstream. Countless rappers begin as underground artists seeking mainstream success and support from a major record company. Many rappers self-produce their product and sell their music from the trunks of their cars until they can connect to producer who can assist them with getting a record deal at a major record label. The participants' comments demonstrate the significance of underground hip-hop. Through construction of this cipher, participants revealed that some hip-hop artist purposefully remain underground to maintain creative control over their music.

Cipher 4: Hip-Hop Heads

Lyrical skill, or lyrical dominance, was also an essential aspect of Theme 1. Although hip-hop has changed with the times, this one critical element has remained constant. "Hip-hop heads" respect rappers who write complex, elaborate, and detailed rhymes that tell stories and often have hidden meanings as well as nice beats. "It's tricky to rock a rhyme to rock a rhyme that's right on time, it's tricky" (Simmons & McDaniels, 1987). Despite the fact that rappers are

writers, Jenkins (2011) describes that hip-hop rappers are the only writers not acknowledged for their intellectual abilities:

> The ways in which the mind of the hip-hop artist is all but ignored within popular culture is, largely, a part of a broader trend within American society to disregard the experiences, perspectives, and ways of being, knowing, and expressing that are offered forth by African American men. (p. 1235)

Jenkins (2011) maintained that the real identity of Black men in America is invisible, stating that as a Black man, even President Obama is criticized for being "too smart" and "too ethnic." As quiet as it is kept, many writer/rappers are intelligent; their rhymes are riddled with interesting facts and intricate word play. The following cipher supports the finding that hip-hop is a culture by highlighting the participants' views on the skill and precision involved with writing hip-hop rhymes.

> Genius always existed within hip-hop, making something out of nothing. Hip-hop was like school: you learned something. Hip-hop 'schooled you.' It was cool to be smart. I remember UTFO, 'There's anesthesiology, ophthalmology, internal medicine and plastic surgery, orthopedic surgery and pathology, a disease involves a change of the body.' (Laughter.) MCs were smart. They had to read the dictionary, and they had to be witty. But somehow, it all got diluted. (Nicole)

> You could really see the poetics and the skill (in the lyrics). There were a lot of intricate rhymes, double entendre, and meanings. (Xavier)

> I believe before you love reading, you gotta love words. You have to be spoken to in a certain way that is going to motivate you to want to know more words. So everywhere, I went, in some way, words were flowing and I was being pushed to read and I was expected to be smart. And the smarter I was, the more I could put words together, the more entertaining I was, the longer I could stay out on the block. So, to me, being educated and being on the block (rapping) had always gone hand and hand. (Dave)

> Ohhhh! (Excitement shows when participant's face lights up.) Big Daddy Kane. Big Daddy Kane was the first rapper that was cool and danced. (Participant does hand gestures.) I think he was one of the most underrated MCs at the time. Just in some of his word play and word delivery. He was a little ahead of his time. (Turner)

> This is a piece of who I am. But the cool thing though, is the hip-hop is coded, because everybody can't hear it, everything is heavily shrouded with (double) entendre and it means all kind of extra stuff to different people. (Xavier)

In the cipher above, study participants described their personal connections to hip-hop artists that show intelligence through their clever delivery of rap lyrics. With the statement "Genius always existed within hip-hop," Nicole contended that rappers are intelligent. More importantly, the rappers mentioned in the previous cipher were recognized, respected, and admired in the hip-hop community for those abilities. As an English teacher, Xavier acknowledged the "intricate rhymes, double entendre, and meanings" embedded in some rap lyrics. Many rappers are intelligent and have formal education; however; it may be difficult to tell because the rap music that dominates commercial airwaves is steeped in misogynistic, braggadocios songs that lack intellectual significance. The theme of this cipher, hip-hop culture, is expressed as participants discuss the complex and intricate way that some rappers create rhymes. Participants discussed the presence of clever lyrics as a part of underground hip-hop. Hip-hop heads seek rap music that demonstrate a rapper's intellectual ability.

Turner argued that Big Daddy Kane was "one of the most under-rated MCs of the time despite that fact that his rhymes were filled with complicated word play and word delivery." And Xavier accused some rappers of altering their rap style to "dumb down" their lyrics to appeal to mainstream consumers. Xavier makes an important point about rapper Shawn Carter, better known as Jay Z:

> Yeah, matter fact Jay Z said it. He (used to) rap like common sense, but since he started making some money, he ain't rap like common sense. So he wanted to, you know, slow it down or dumb it down a lil' bit, you know. If he was really super witty like he was (before), then it (music) probably would not have sold. (Xavier)

Although Xavier acknowledged that some rappers simplify their lyrical content for mainstream audiences, he also stated that "hip-hop heads" lose interest in lyrics that appeal to mainstream consumers. Xavier claimed that hip-hop heads seek those super witty, complex rappers like

Common, Mos Def, and Rakim. Xavier also stated that “Real hip-hop-heads would’ve appreciated (hidden meanings in lyrics), but not the masses. Rappers used to try to appeal to hip-hop-heads, but now I think they appeal to the masses. Now there are fewer and fewer real, real hip-hop-heads.” Just as Xavier mentioned hidden meanings within rap lyrics and the way some rappers shy away from complex meaning and messages in efforts to appeal to a wider audience, Dave gave an example of a rap song that incorporates hidden meaning as well as social, political, and educational agendas and also has an impact on youth, using the song “That’s Life”:

> The fat nigga singing "show over" in opera
> Leader of the crack Rat Pack, I Sinatra
> They say I dissed Oprah, I'm like "so what?"
> I never get to jump up and down on a sofa (that's life)
> Now watch me as I Cruise like Tom through the slums
> Where the education's poor and the children growing dumb
> In the section of the city where civilians don't come
> Where Mr. Cosby and Mrs. Winfrey won't come
> Unless it's a hurricane, then FEMA don't come
> Comin live from the city where the Dreamer came from
> Standing on the same corners that he stood upon
> I got violence in my waistband, death in my palm
> Ask em am I a bad guy? "Ya goddamn right!"
> I done seen how ya do a nigga when he doing right

The excerpt above addresses the research question, “In what way does hip-hop inform the participant’s view of the world?” Dave’s lyrics demonstrate political awareness and have hidden meanings and provide insight into Dave’s view of the world. In the song, Dave expressed a social and political agenda, which is a critical element within hip-hop culture. The opening line, “the fat nigga singing show over,” is a direct reference to the fat lady singing in musical theater to indicate that the show is over. Another reference is made to the famous “rat pack” with a spin to indicate Dave’s former life as a drug dealer by calling himself the leader of the “crack rat pack.” Although Dave is a Morehouse graduate, he publically admits to having sold drugs. In this song, Dave references an area in the city of Atlanta where “civilians do not come,” which is

close to Spelman College and Morehouse College but is ignored by prominent members of the Black community like Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey, who have both donated money to these institutions. Dave's hidden reference to "the dreamer" (referring to Martin Luther King, Jr.) contradicts the tenets of nonviolence that Martin Luther King, Jr. is known for. This encrypted meaning is revealed in the final line of the excerpt, "I done seen how ya do a nigga when he doing right," which is about King's assassination. Through this song, Dave is fighting against the mainstream commentary that considers all rappers dumb and ignorant. He directly affronts Oprah Winfrey's comments about hip-hop (Carlson, 2009). These lyrics maintain a strong political element that is specific to Atlanta, Georgia. Rap music has always included political elements; however, the exposure was contained by the geographic limitations of independent artists or the censorship imposed by corporations that control the production of rap music by mainstream record labels. This cipher described the intelligence of hip-hop which is a critical aspect of hip-hop as a culture. Critical literacy supports examination of rap lyrics to understand the rapper's views. Investigating rapper's words demonstrated the intellectual ability that it takes to create witty rap lyrics. Demonstrating the intelligence that exists within hip-hop is important to describing hip-hop culture.

Cipher 5: Hip-Hop and Politics

In the early stages of hip-hop, all rap music was underground and noncommercial, but as rap music gained mainstream attention, the record companies began to control the content of the music they produced, and the political agenda diminished. A political agenda still exists in underground rap music as a result of the minimal political content played in the rap music heard on popular radio stations (Rose, 2008), free of corporate control (Gosa, 2010). For example, the use of digital technology fueled political participation during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Members of the hip-hop community, now able to connect electronically, were able to participate in the politics of music, song, and dance. Artists used electronic outlets to express their feelings about the political process and the 2008 presidential campaign, particularly the Presidential election.

During the 2000, 2004, and 2008 campaigns for President of the United States, rappers expressed mixed feelings about voting. Political activism, expressed through group affiliations with organizations such as the Hip-Hop Action Summit, was an attempt to increase the number of Black American and young Latino voters. Some rappers were on both sides of the political fence in terms of voting. Rapper Nas called Black Americans who supported activism through voting "race-traders" (Jones, 2004), expressing his skepticism and disbelief in the political system's ability to improve the circumstances for most Americans.

Rap music has moved from local neighborhood ciphers about the political and economic climate to songs accessed by millions via the Internet and heard all over the world. Social media strengthened the connection between President Obama and the hip-hop community during his 2008 campaign. The surge of hip-hop artists discussing Obama's political campaign in their lyrics was fueled through an underground grassroots movement sent worldwide via the Internet. Gosa (2010) referred to this music as "Obama-themed" content. During the 2008 presidential campaign, many people accused President Obama of not being "Black" enough and also accused him of being a "Black radical" because of his association with Reverend Jeremiah Wright.

Other rappers with political content in their hip-hop lyrics include Tupac Shakur, Brother Ali, Dead Prez, Blue Scholars, Eminem, Diabolic, Emcee Lynx, Hasan Salaam, Immortal Technique, Kendrick Lamar, Dave, KRS- One, Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Poor

Righteous Teachers, Public Enemy, and X-Clan. In the following excerpt, Rick and Xavier addressed the way hip-hop is used as a political tool.

> When it is convenient, hip-hop is used as a political platform. I do not think we have a commercial space for those artists to push many political views. It would be wise to stay away from politics. You look at Kanye West; he was ostracized for his comments about President Bush. Hip-hop now has to play by the same rules as anyone else: stay away from politics and religion. (Rick)

> Immortal Technique is straight revolutionary, "we are about to overthrow the government right now" type music. He has a large fan base but no radio play ever. Back when Bush was President, there was this song called Bin Laden with Chuck D., Mos Def, Immortal Technique, and they are just getting in it. That's when I started getting into the political side of hip-hop. (Xavier plays a song.) This is a song called Persian Cocaine. It is a story about how cocaine is brought into the United States and how it ends up on the street corner. Each rapper is a character and takes on a persona. (Xavier)

Although hip-hop began as a political outcry, protesting injustices experienced in inner city neighborhood, Rick 's comments suggest that rap and politics do not mix. Rick cautions rapper to stay away from using their music to advance political agendas. Rick's warning is based in the fear that mainstream America will not accept strong political views or that a rapper's political voice may be interpreted as militant. Xavier's comment about the rapper Immortal Technique supported Rick's views about rap and politics. As Xavier explained, Immortal Technique's revolutionary stance has cost him mainstream radio air time. From Xavier's responses, I concluded that he prefers to listen to rappers who take risks in their music such as Immortal Technique, Chuck D, and Mos Def. However, Rick prefers rap music that is mainstream and contemporary, which does not contain hidden messages or political agendas. These distinctions reveal more than musical preference, it is indicative of personalities as well. Music lies at the core of hip-hop. Understanding hip-hoppers' musical preference or style gave insight into hip-hop trends. Hip-hop culture was developed from the style and preferences of members of the hip-hop community, therefore the insight that participants shared regarding their musical preferences

is significance to the culture. As a hip-hop insider and having knowledge of these two individuals, I see a connection between their musical preference and their personalities. Rick has an easy-going personality while Xavier has a more confrontation personality. Data provided in the cipher above addressed how hip-hop became a critical element in the lives of Rick and Xavier. Xavier used music to confirm his identity as an intellectual radical. Likewise, Rick's musical preference revealed a link to lighthearted rap music played on mainstream radio. These two participants' musical preferences are indicative of their view of the world. Rick views hip-hop as a replica of the world. In the cipher above he stated "hip-hop now has to play by the same rules as anyone else; stay away from politics and religion." This cautionary statement offers a warning that mainstream America does not favor political or religious extremist, even when expressed through musical outlets. Critical literacy values multiple voices and Xavier's comments exposed his preference for rap music that utilize language to express political agendas. For example, Xavier's preference for artists such as Immortal Technique who he stated is a "straight revolutionary" expressed Xavier's belief that hip-hop membership includes political activism.

Theme 2: Hip-Hop's Relationship to the Larger Black Community

Cipher 1: Hip-Hop's Connection to Other Black Musical Genres

The music of the current hip-hop generation differs from the music of the original hip-hop generation of the 1970s. Musical themes have changed, moving from social outcries, political protest, party-themed anthems, gangster rap, and boastful stanzas to misogynistic chants. Corporate financial support and influence has transformed the local rapper who only wanted a forum to speak out against social injustice into a platinum-selling artist that earns millions of dollars (Au, 2005; Carter, 2010; Chang, 2005) without any political or social agenda.

Participants revealed that hip-hop's connection to other Black musical genres has remained consistent. As participants shared their musical timelines, four of the six participants identified a rhythm and blues artist as their earliest musical memory.

Table 2

Musical Timelines

	John	Nicole	Dave	Turner
1	Sparky Dee	Teddy Pendergrass	Curtis Mayfield	Teddy Pendergrass
2	Roxanne Shante	Dave and Gizmo	Teddy Pendergrass	Ohio Players
3	Joe Ski Love	Rakim	Curtis Blow	Krush Grove soundtrack
4	Lord Finesse	Dr. Dre	Whoodini	Run DMC
5	Sweet Tee	E40	Sugar Hill Gang	Boogie Brown productions
6	Big Daddy Kane	Outkast	LL Cool J	Dr. Dre
7	Juice Crew	Lil Kim	Spoolie G	Motley Crew
8	Nas	Foxy Brown	OutKast	Iron Maden

As a research method, music elicitation uses "music as a means to draw out data about experiences, memories and feelings" (Allett, 2012, p. 4) as opposed to using music as the source of data. For instance, during Turner's music-elicited interview, he shared a painful memory of his parent's divorce as he created his musical timeline. Turner revealed that the first song he remembers is a sad song by Teddy Pendergrass:

> The whole town is laughing at me, Teddy P. My parents were going through a divorce and my dad would come home and play that record every day. They got divorced a year later.

This song, listed in Table 2 as part of Turner' musical timeline, evoked strong memories from a painful period in his life. However, just as music evoked sad feelings for Turner, music also revealed pleasure as Turner recited the lyrics to the next song on his timeline, "Skin Tight" by the Ohio Players (1974). Playing an imaginary guitar and horn in the song's introduction, Turner demonstrated music's power to produce a range of emotions. Although an uncommon method, music elicitation was a solid data source in the current study because it allowed participants, who

are heavily influenced by music, to use music to tell their story. Some participants used music as talking points in their interview and others referred to songs or artists as references to time periods in their life.

As hip-hop has journeyed through a variety of eras, hip-hop music retains remnants of other Black music, such as rhythm and blues, blues, and jazz. In the following cipher, participants discussed hip-hop's connections to other Black music forms.

> You know rap used a lot of jazz samples so then I started getting into jazz. I have a lot of jazz of the original rap samples. (Xavier)

> Blues will make a hip-hop nigga blush. They were creeping with each other women, drinking whisky, they were killing, you cried for her, you hated her, she cut you then you got back together that was the blues. So I realized early on that the experiences that I was listening to in hip-hop were not unique to me. At 16, my grandfather shot a man in church. So gangster rap was (just like) blues to him. Music has been the only place that the black male mystic and ego have been safe. You were castrated politically during the Jim Crow era when black men were denied the right to vote, you were castrated in your homes when the perception is that you can't run your home but your women can. But the reality is that black families have been balanced that many other cultures, men and women have worked together. (Dave)

> I think that's what's dope about hip-hop you have something for everyone. (John)

> Kids know the records because culturally our music is based in soul sampling and in soul music. So my 14-year-old daughter knows Cee-Lo, she knows 8 Ball and Jay Z because you can play those records directly behind Marvin Gaye. Because they sample these records, so here culturally because we are juke joint-based, the music lives longer. 8 Ball and Jay Z could go around and perform their first three albums over and over again and they are going to perform on Monday to ratchet ass White kids at Emory, on Tuesday to ratchet ass Black kids in North Atlanta, and on Wednesday to old people. And it is an amazing thing to see that these artists get these secondary, primary, tertiary stages of their career. (Dave)

From the participants' stories, I determined that hip-hop is connected to other Black forms of music such as jazz and blues. Through music sampling, hip-hop artists pay homage to the music of the past and music from other genres, which connects the generations (Hess, 2006). For example, Xavier learned about jazz by listening to jazz samples in hip-hop music. His interest in

music led him to seek out the original jazz music that was sampled in hip-hop, and he eventually developed an appreciation and love of original jazz music.

Dave acknowledged that the hip-hop music he listened to contained content similar to content found in the blues that his grandfather listened to during his childhood. Dave's statement, "Blues will make a hip-hop nigga blush. They were creeping with each other women, drinking whisky, they were killing…so I realized early on that the experiences that I was listening to in hip-hop were not unique to me," revealed the meaningful connection that he attributed to the blues and hip-hop music. Dave also drew a connection between gangster rap and blues as understood by his grandfather's experiences. Through his storytelling, Dave shared a story about a time when his grandfather shot another man in church. In retelling the story about his grandfather, Dave stated that "gangster rap was (just like) blues to him (his grandfather) because it was the music of the time." Dave's statement about gangster rap connects a subsection of a musical genre with a violent experience. For his grandfather, the blues represented the spirit and experiences of a people; this is similar to Dave, as rap music represented the spirit and experiences of the people for him as well. When Dave stated that "Music is the only place that the Black male mystic and ego have been safe," this was pertinent to hip-hop music and also applicable to other forms of music that Black men produce. Participants' further supported this finding in the next cipher, directly referencing the cultural aspect of hip-hop that transcends generation and race lines while proving that the culture is a way of life.

> So the music is always something that is pure for the people and the way of life, it is everything. (Xavier)

> So I think that with the culture now it is safe to say that you have people that are 55-years-old that are still part of the culture. You know so you can be 55 and your kid could be 20-years-old and you are part of the same culture. (John)

In the cipher above, participants revealed that being a member of the hip-hop community means being a member of the larger Black community, which includes various musical forms. In Xavier's music-elicited interview, he further reveals an interconnectedness between hip-hop, African American culture, and American culture by stating:

> American culture is one thing, and then you have African American culture within that. Hip-hop is subculture, but you have derivatives or offshoots within hip-hop. West coast rap is not like southern rap. Then you have older west coast and under west coast.

Likewise, during his photo and music elicitation, Dave recognized the overlap of creative cultural expressions, such as film, music, and photographs, within the larger Black community. Dave shared his opinion about the connections between hip-hop and other art forms:

> I saw Shaft and Super Fly, but to learn about the director, to learn about the stories that went into making those movies, inspired me. People say they love Shaft but they do not know who Gordon Parks is. If it was not for Gordon Parks, a black man riding horse with a cowboy hat taking pictures, that said we need a Black James Bond, his son Gordon Parks Jr. would not have made Super Fly. In American Gangsta, when Denzel Washington walks in and the man was playing the piano, people don't know that is Gordon Parks he is talking to.

Just as Dave made a connection between the movies Shaft and American Gangster, in Xavier's music-elicited interview, he made a connection between rap and jazz, stating, "Now I am into jazz for the sake of it, but it is rappers who turned me on to that." Xavier's comment revealed that rap music contains jazz, which led him to a new appreciation for jazz as a musical genre. Likewise, Dave, a rap artist and a fan of jazz music, values jazz and encourages his daughter to develop an appreciation for it. In Dave's first interview, he stated:

> I listen to rap music all day, but when my daughter gets in the car, I put on jazz. She asks why we have to listen to jazz when you got this Chris Brown cd. I tell her because you know I know Chris Brown, but we are listening to this so we can engage in conversation. I know that you do not like jazz, but by the time you reach 18, you will appreciate it. I know that if she develops an appreciation for jazz at 16, at 27, she is going to be a more cultured woman than the woman next to her is. Culture will get you further than education sometimes.

Dave's comment described the value of being a "cultured woman" as he spoke with his daughter about developing an appreciation for jazz music. Through member-checking Dave confirmed my interpretation of his sentiment that women should have an appreciation for jazz. When Dave stated that "Culture will get you further than education sometimes," I understood him to mean more than just an appreciation for jazz but also an appreciation for various other cultural forms of artistic expression. Dave's referral to a woman having culture indicated his value for women who appreciate more than just hip-hop. Dave's reference to women and the things men value in women led to a discussion about the roles of women in hip-hop, as it is impossible to have a discourse about hip-hop music and not address this. Dave's words address the research question, what does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community. For Dave, hip-hop membership included an appreciation for cultural art forms outside of hip-hop. In this cipher, four participants shared their musical timeline which depicted songs and artists which were significant to their development. Participants also gave collective testimonials about the interconnectedness that exists between hip-hop music and other Black cultural expressions, such as jazz, blues, film and photography.

Cipher 2: Women in Hip-hop

Having essential roles in the Black community, women have held an interesting role in hip-hop, which continues to remain a male-dominated arena. Intellectual discourse on hip-hop culture eventually debates the misogyny in music lyrics and videos and highlights its objectification of women. In male-dominated hip-hop music, women are often described as objects of male pleasure. This reality is addressed in the following cipher as participants discuss female rappers and fans.

> Why doesn't Salt N' Pepa receive recognition as being the greatest female rap group? Tupac is known as the greatest rapper, but you never hear anything about who the best

female rapper is. That is problematic. Why can't women be recognized for their accomplishments in hip-hop? In fact, why can't women rappers be compared to men rappers? (Nicole)

I am just aware of it, so like when I am with (my daughter), I do have her listen to Latifah with me. I do have her listen to MC Lyte with me. I do have her listen to Fox and even Kim. Like for me, it is important that she knows that it isn't just little boys with Abercrombie and Fitch who do this, that if she wants to be involved in the process, she can. (Dave)

I see branches of hip-hop, but as the branches grew out, they became tainted. They did not get the same level of nutrients, the same positive nutrients to help them grow. Because that grew (pointing to the photo representative of scantily clothed female rapper), but it grew out of the industry and the machine as opposed to this growth (pointing to the previous photo of Queen Latifah) coming out of the love of music. Like this one over here do not know nothing about what it took to get her where she is today. Kinda' like today's generation talking about how they not going to vote. They really do not understand the backs of the people they are standing on to have that right. That statement by itself is a slap in the face. I think if female artists of today had a better understanding of what the female artists of yesterday had to go through, there might be little more respect. Like I said earlier with the Lil' Kim picture, she was fully clothed and she was a hit (Queen Latifah), and you (scantily clothed female rapper) half-naked and you ain't going gold. Her demographic is very small, here again: sex does not necessarily sell. (Turner)

Sex does not always work in selling. When it comes to hip-hop, it ain't just sex from a female rapper perspective. Like looking at Lil 'Kim as a female rapper, I do not think dudes really care if you are up there with your boobs all out. Can you ride the track? Can you keep the flow? Can you command an audience? Are your lyrics truly who you are? Looking at that picture, I feel so sorry for her 'cause she got caught up in so much Eastern European thought about what is beautiful. She lost the very essence of what made her popular in our community. I think she lost touch with reality. She was this raw little gap in your tooth chick. Umm, yeah (shaking his head in disgust). (Turner)

What is up with this 'Bad Bitch' craze? These women with the long hair weave, long lashes like Jezebel meets Sapphire. Now everyone is affected. Men are saying 'I will do these things for you (financial) if you look like this.' Hip-hop has enhanced the new stereotypical image of women into a Bad Bitch Barbie. Now, more and more of the hip-hop music is encouraging the red-bone (light-skinned Black women) with long hair weaves. Hip-hop is shaping the image of women and women are attempting to achieve it by any means necessary. (Nicole)

Its amazes me how many times I am walking down the hall and I hear the girls singing songs that is dogging them (females). They coming down the hall in groups singing 'bands make her dance,' and it's like either you really don't understand what they are saying, or you don't even have enough respect for yourself… How many times I see a

> dude put his hands on a girl or call her the B word and she not go crazy. There is not another support group. The kids, they are kids, they don't know any better. (Turner)

In the cipher above, Nicole questioned the "bad bitch craze" that she says authenticates the new image of Black women in hip-hop as objects of sexual desire and male lust as opposed to equal competitors on the microphone. Iwamoto (2003) discussed hyper masculinity, which is exhibited by young males to combat the degrading effects of racism on their self-esteem. During the group interview, Dave described music as a place where "Black men could express themselves" and also said that hip-hop as the only safe place where he can be a "full Black man." Based on Dave's description, music, hip-hop in particular, serves as a safe haven for maleness to include hyper masculinity.

Kratz (1999) argued that men are under tremendous pressure to conform to the limited images of masculinity in the media. In the film, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis of Masculinity*, Kratz skillfully describes "maleness" as an artificial pose that men adopt to respond to societal pressures. Referring to this pose as the "tough guise," Kratz argued that the media constructs violence in masculinity as a social norm. Although the cipher was focused on the role of women in hip-hop, it is important to understand the interconnectedness between the way women are viewed and portrayed in hip-hop and the way men assert their maleness in hip-hop. Kratz argued that the tough guise is perpetuated in the media and supported by women who praise men for their tough, hyper masculine images.

Kratz provided a good analysis of a possible reason why men conform to hyper masculine behavior; however, women are often the victims of the over-sexed, over-charged super masculine behavior that these men display. Women in hip-hop have been reduced from respected female rap competitors to ornamental background in music videos props. Nicole questioned the way that hip-hop culture supports and encourages objectification of women.

Likewise Turner questioned the influence hip-hop has on young females whose behavior demonstrated a ready acceptance of objectification.

Dave's statement in the cipher above, "Hip-hop is the only safe place where (you) can be a full Black man" begs the question, "what *does* it mean to be a full Black man?" During member-checking with Xavier, I asked him how he developed his definition of what it means to be a man. Xavier responded with a list of reference points that included his father, men in the local community, and the media. Xavier used sports as an aspect of maleness that is critical to what it means to be a man. Although Xavier stated that he was not a sports enthusiast, he did say that he has to reference sports to connect with other men so that he is not judged negatively. This is supported by Kratz (1999), who found that the male image is heavily influenced by external forces, particularly those portrayed in the media.

The media overemphasized images of power and sexual prowess within hip-hop culture. Thus, the woman's image in hip-hop is a major issue of dispute, and study participants did not reach a consensus on who is responsible for this image. Nicole's question about Salt N' Pepa is answered by John's response to why women are more difficult and costly as artists. In his first interview, John stated:

> With a guy, you don't have a glam squad. She (female artist) will cost you more money, even in the studio. Most females, the majority of female rappers, do not write their own rhymes. They need someone else to help them write, help them prepare. Look at any female rapper, successful female rapper, has always been associated with a man. Even today, you got Nicki Minaj with Drake, Lil Wayne. Trina had Trick Daddy behind them, helping them write raps. I believe Eve wrote her rhymes, but even she was with Ruff Ryders. Go back to MC Lyte, she had guys working with her, helping to produce her. Salt N' Pepa had Herbie Luv Bug. (John)

Using John's rationale, it is understood that Salt N' Pepa would not receive much recognition from the male hip-hop community because technically, the group had male influence from Herbie Luv Bug, who wrote their lyrics. Dave's attempt to expose his daughter to female rappers

is noted, yet it warrants mention that the number of female rappers is dismal when compared to male rappers. Turner vehemently blames the hip-hop industry for the direction that the female rapper has taken, referring to Dana Owens known as the rapper Queen Latifah as a successful model for female rappers because she never used her sexuality to sell records. It is important to note that in addition to success, sans nudity and sexual objectification, Queen Latifah also produced male rap groups such as Naughty by Nature and also branched into modeling and acting. It is important to note that Queen Latifah has her own television talk show, produced by Flavor Unit Entertainment. Queen Latifah is the first female hip-hop artist to host a television show, Queen Latifah depicted the diverse talents that lie within the hip-hop community specifically mainstream acceptance of hip-hop artists. In stating that "Sex does not always work in selling," Turner asserted his opinion regarding the female hip-hop image; however, this opinion appears to be a minority. Nicole, Dave, John and Turner each addressed the role of women in hip-hop. Through critical literacy, I understood their words to reflect an image of women that is greatly influenced by mass media outlets. Commercialized mainstream American hip-hop glorifies violence against women (Rose, 1994).

Cipher 3: Disagreement on Social Responsibility

Hip-hop, an influential medium, can present images that are often accepted without question by millions of people worldwide. But does that level of influence require one to be a role model? The "educators" in the current study, Xavier and Turner, questioned rappers' levels of social responsibility because they have the attention of the nation. These educators were concerned about the youth of the current hip-hop generation who believe everything they hear on the radio. The following cipher resulted from the group interview, as participants debated the level of social responsibility a rapper needs to maintain a positive image.

A student in my class really thinks that Gucci Mane has trap houses. (Xavier)

The rapper may not be selling crack in the trap house, but he is telling the story of the guy who is. (John)

But these kids really believe the rapper is doing these things. (Turner)

You did an interview with Atlanta Tech that was talking about raising kids such a way that they can be the rappers that people respect, which is cool, I think somebody should get at the rappers who… (Xavier to Dave)

Why? (Dave)

Because they have people's attention. (Xavier)

At this point, everyone erupts and starts talking at once.

Because the kids listen to the artists, what sense of or level of responsibility do rappers have? (Turner)

But kids are not failing because of what is present in their life they are failing because of what is absent in their life. And what is absent in their life is real male role models. (Dave)

At this point, both John and Xavier try to speak, and Nicole remains quiet.

In addition, honestly, this is coming from many broken homes, there are other elements that feed into it but I am asking as industry people, do you not feel any level of. (Turner)

(Yelling) Honestly no! You cannot put that challenge on a rapper who 9 times out of 10 is an uneducated person himself. (John)

Xavier tries to speak but is stopped by John.

Hold up, hold up. You are an idiot to even think that Gucci Mane is going to save you. You are talking about dudes who by the luck of God made it out they made it through the crack so how do I (rapper) have the education, (knowledge) to come back and talk to anybody else. They are not leaders, so you cannot put that responsibility on that person. (John)

I think that is not the problem so much. They are on the internet look at their playlist. (John)

I am talking about those that are only listening to Gucci Mane. (Turner)

> So we are not talking about race, we are talking about class? So now were are talking about doing the same thing Dr. King tried to do. This is not about saving the hip-hop generation, it is the poor people's campaign. That has nothing to do with music. Music is the symptom of 'Are we willing to say that what we have been doing for the last 30 years does not work?' Public school does not work, but who is going to vote for a charter school? Now think about that because as a teacher that is going to directly affect you. We know public schools don't work. We know classrooms with over 15 children don't work. Yet, we will belabor the rap execute and the rapper and give them the social responsibility that we never give to the institutions that are underpaying you, undervaluing you and treat your children like chattel. Are Black people willing to say we are not going to vote for Romney but on this thing, we are going to pull out of public school. (Dave)

Does the fact that hip-hop culture indeed influences people mean that members of the hip-hop community should bear social responsibility? If so, what level of social responsibility is justified? Are rappers culturally, educationally, spiritually, or socially capable of leading a nation of followers? All of these questions arise from the cipher above, as members of the hip-hop community disagree about rap artists' social responsibility. This was also evident in the debate about who is responsible for what youth believe. As Xavier mentioned gullible students who believe everything they hear from a rapper, John argued that gullibility is a symptom of childhood inexperience, reiterating that he also believed what he saw and heard as a youth.

In this cipher, Dave argued that students fail due to the lack of positive male role models, and John contended that it is unrealistic to expect rappers to be the positive male role models that our youth need. John confronted a point of tension by stating, "a rapper, who 9 times out of 10 is an uneducated person himself, is not (a) leader, so you cannot put that responsibility on them." During the dialog, Turner interjected, referencing those students who "only listen to Gucci Mane." Turner's reference suggested an imbalance in the influence of hip-hop among youth because some students are more heavily influenced by hip-hop than by other students. Dave's retort identified poverty as the source of this imbalance, not music.

The question at the heart of this cipher was, "What roles, if any, do hip-hop artists play in serving as a positive role model for listeners?" According to these participants, rappers have the ability to influence many people worldwide, and the images that hip-hop artists portray is critical to public opinion. Yet, is it their responsibility to be positive role models? Xavier and Turner argued that these artists do have a social responsibility to the Black community while the two participants in the music business argued that it is unrealistic to expect rappers to serve as role models. Xavier's comment, "I think somebody should get at the rappers," was met with a negative reaction from Dave. As Xavier attempted to voice that rappers should be held accountable for the negative images they portray in their music videos and lyrics, Dave's statement, "But kids are not failing because of what is present in their life, they are failing because of what is absent in their life," warrants consideration. Through member-checking Dave confirmed that the term "failing" referred to students' academic and social failure. When Turner questioned the level of responsibility of people involved in the business of music, John responded by stating:

> You are an idiot to even think that Gucci Mane (a rapper) is going to save you (youth). You are talking about dudes (rappers) who by the luck of God made it out (of inner city neighborhoods) they made it through the crack, so how do I (rapper) have the education, (knowledge) to come back and talk to anybody else.

As the debate turned from rappers' responsibility to listeners' responsibility, it in ended with a discussion about social responsibility within the larger Black community. John's comment spoke to the research question, 'what does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community?' John's words exposed his view that rappers are given an unfair bear the burden of social responsibility within the Black community. For John, being a member of the hip-hop community means knowing limitations. According to John, society should not expect members of the hip-hop community to serve as role models if they do not possess the education or experience.

Cipher 4: Public Education Failing the Current Hip-Hop Generation

During the group interview, Dave attacked the public education system, which struck a chord with Turner and Xavier, the two educators. It is difficult to discuss issues involving youth and not discuss public schools. Many youth are part of a generation heavily influenced by popular culture, including images, sights, and sounds influenced by hip-hop. Elements of hip-hop are found in advertising, news media, literature, and music with the intent to persuade and advance an agenda. Not surprisingly, hip-hop's influence is also visible in public schools. Public schools are thought to be failing because they are unable to meet the cultural needs of a diverse student body (Au, 2005) that is heavily influenced by hip-hop. The participants in this study interact with youth in various ways—formal educators, coaches, employers, and mentors—and they have strong feelings about schooling. They shared these sentiments in the following cipher.

> To some degree, government schools have failed, and not just for Black kids. If you listen to conservative talk radio, sounds like Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglas in regards to education. What I mean is Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglas, and WEB Dubois let the government know that the treatment that we are getting at the time in terms of under-educating us and overusing us is unfair. You are training us to be drones and feed for the prison system. We are not going to share-crop our entire life. That is what Neal Boortz, Sean Hannity and Herman Cain are saying. Herman Cain, being a Black Morehouse graduate, is saying that government schools are failing. And they are not talking about our kids, they are talking about their kids (white and middle-class children). Government schools have been failing us (Black Americans) before and since integration. (Dave)
>
> Kids now experience education as a double-edged sword. On one hand, technology limits critical thinking and reasoning (kids rely on technological advances to the extend it thwarts their creativity). Kids can do things with a click of a button. Reason and logic take a back seat. What happened to knowing the Dewey decimal system? On the flip side, children of color see themselves in their teachers and administrators, which is inspiring. (Nicole)
>
> My teachers inspired me. I think that is the teacher's main job, to inspire. (Dave)
>
> Teaching is a scientific art. There are some very research-based aspects about how people think and process information. But the other side of that is how you deliver information, the art, how you captivate people and keep their attention. We are on stage; we are on

> stage every day. Nobody performs more than a teacher. If you break down the hours. Even if you are an artist that tours seven months out of the year, your show is only three hours, if you have a show every day. We (teachers) work 180 days, with a two hour break for planning. We (teachers) work six hours a day, putting on a show. And you are praying that your show is scientific enough for them to get something out of it. And the good teachers, they are rock stars. Good teachers captivate you, they entertain you, and they give you information at the same time. They are the KRS Ones of the classroom. (Turner)

Some of the participants' voices embody the long-held view that formal education (displayed in rap lyrics) is failing to support the needs of youth of color. Turner stated that great teachers, viewed as rock stars with the ability to motivate and inspire, seem to have failed at reaching countless members of the hip-hop community. Various hip-hop artists have written lyrics about disappointing public school experiences (Benjamin & Patton, 1994; Calhoun, 1991). These issues are germane to the research question, "What does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community?" because todays' youth are part of the hip-hop community. Dave was very critical of the public education system. Using a critical literacy lens to exam Dave's words, I determined that Dave's critique of the public education system is similar to hip-hop's critical views of mainstream institutions. When Dave stated that African Americans need to "let government know that the treatment that African American are getting in terms of under-educating African American children and overusing African American is unfair," he expressed his opinion that public schools are failing the African American community. Dave also expressed that teachers are supposed to inspire because his teachers were inspirational. Dave's comment could be interpreted as a political finding however, it is based in reference to schooling of today's hip-hop generation. Nicole criticized the educational system's integration of technology in the classroom when she stated that "technology limits critical thinking and reasoning." Turner, an educator, offered a different view of the public education system by stating that, "Teaching is a scientific

art." In the presence of a rap artists and performers, Turner argued that teachers also perform. Turner stated that teachers entertain students as well as deliver academic content.

The discussions shared in this cipher connect to issues concerning youth and schooling within the larger Black community. For example, critical literacy's move toward valuing the issues and concerns of today's hip-hop generation are significant in the analysis of the cipher above. Voices from within the hip-hop community such as Nicole's, view technological advances as both beneficial and problematic. Critical literacy examines issues of power and the ways that power is replicated and denied with the use of language. Nicole's discussion of the power of technology to 'limit critical thinking' exposed her view of the world. For Nicole, various technological advances stand in conflict with basic ability to reason and apply logic.

Theme 3: The Corporate Influence on Hip-Hop

Cipher 1: Today's Hip-Hop Generation

As documented in the literature, hip-hop has worldwide appeal (Asante, 2008; Baker, 2012; Carter, 2010; Chelsey, 2011). Hip-hop culture, the combination of music, fashion, dance, attitude, and other elements, influences people everywhere. Hip-hop is no longer confined in inner-city neigborhoods and now has a home on Wall Street, yet its influence is most evident among youth. In the following cipher, participants consider the countless ways that they interact and connect with youth that are heavily influenced by hip-hop.

> (Hip-hop) makes me more relatable. I know a little something about what they are talking about so I am abreast to what they are listening to so I can tell them hey this is not true. Listen to this instead. They respect that; I am not just some dude coming from the hill taking about 'let me tell you about hip-hop.' (Xavier)
>
> Hip-hop helps me understand kids better. I think that if you are not a person that listens to hip-hop you are not going to get the clothes that these kids are wearing. Helping them get exposed to older aspects of hip-hop. I have seen, in my fifteen years of teaching, the average age of parents get cut in half. Fewer father figures. You do not really understand what is feeding their psyche. Kids have become more dependent on their entertainment

> outlets. It influences their perception about life. The whole Soldier Boy craze, on YouTube with a million hits, producing people. It allows me to understand a little more about them but because of the dynamics of our family life a child can now pick up certain things from the music and videos, such as misogyny and a nonchalant regard for authority figures. (Turner)
>
> I created a playlist when my son was 9-years-old. Every time he got picked up, we were going to hear three songs by Biz Markie, three songs by Kane, three by Rakim, three songs by OutKast. I got to listen to dope ass rap music and I didn't have to listen to his mommy's wacky station or that punk ass music he listened to. What it did was develop a musically enriched kid. My son listens to everything now from Tribe to Slipknots. I would constantly play Ice Cube for him just because I wanted him to raise questions. So when they talk about the riots and police brutality, I wanted him to see that some things are exactly the same twenty years later. (Dave)
>
> To me it is interesting to sit here with the cast of people that you have (to discuss hip-hop culture). You have educators you know, when I was growing up, my teachers they couldn't relate to the culture you know, my parents they couldn't relate to the culture you know. So, I think it is safe to say you have people that are 55-years-old that are still part of the culture. You know, so you can be 55 and your kid could be 20-years-old, and you both are part of the same culture. So there are certain things that you could speak, a certain language that you know you can relate to a little more than others. I think that's what's dope about hip-hop is that you have something for everyone. (John)
>
> I think that is what makes students gravitate to teachers like me. I take my personality into the classroom with me. So when I get to reciting a rhyme the students are like you listen to that, yeah. (Turner)

From Xavier's statement, "I know a little something about what they are talking about, so I am abreast to what they are listening to," I determined that hip-hop's appeal adds to his ability to connect with youth. The following cipher demonstrates the connection between this globally influential culture and youth. Analysis of this revealed the role of age in hip-hop identity, noting that students' parents are getting younger. Through member-checking, Turner confirmed my interpretation of his statement to mean that he has seen parents' maturity levels decrease along with their ages over his career. Turner's statements also indicate that parents are heavily influenced by the same things that influence their children. Turner acknowledges that hip-hop helps him relate to students, yet at the same time, the unrestricted access that students have to

negative influences is the difference between his generation and today's generation. In essence, Turner's account indicated that there is limited parental control, and parental guidance is youth are missing.

As Dave shared his story, he also alludes to the benefit of parental control and influence in the lives of today's hip-hop generation. Using critical literacy as a lens to analyze Dave's views, Dave confirmed that guiding his son's musical development and exposure was important. Dave stated "What it did was develop a musically enriched kid," Dave also shared, "To me, it is interesting to sit here with the cast of people that you have. My teachers couldn't relate to the culture, you know, my parents couldn't relate to the culture." John seemed surprised that educators were part of this study of hip-hop. Despite John's initial statement about his teachers and parents not being able to relate to the culture, he later stated, "You can be 55 and your kid could be 20-years-old, and you both are part of the same culture." Although this may sound like a contraction, the use of critical literacy in analysis revealed the meaning John associated with musical interests of adults and adolescence. According to John, teachers and parents did not previously share the musical interest of adolescents however, as hip-hop culture grew and developed over three decades, hip-hop now appeals to people across the range of ages. John's words addressed the research question, what does it mean to be a member of the hip-hop community. Today, hip-hoppers range in age from early adolescence to middle age. Hip-hop culture's presence over the last thirty years has created an opportunity for the music and culture to change and grow. According to John's statements, the longevity attributes to hip-hop's versatility in offering something for today's hip-hop generation yet still appeal to hip-hoppers of the previous generation. In this cipher, participants expressed the ways in which they connect to today's hip-hop generation. Acknowledging that hip-hoppers of today are different from hip-

hoppers of the 1980s and 1990s, Xavier, Turner and Dave expose today's hip-hoppers to older aspects of hip-hop culture.

Cipher 2: Technological Appeal

Technological advances, including (web-based) YouTube, Facebook, and blogs as well as text messages, have been used to motivate voters and inform supporters. Today's youth are born into highly developed technological advancement (Dyson, 2006). Technology has influenced how people listen to music, watch television, advertise products, and teach content (Alim, 2009). In the following cipher, study participants describe the complexity of technology in hip-hop.

> I love that in the digital age, we can get exactly what we want. We don't have to buy a whole album to get one or two songs. But in doing that, you lose out on stuff that is not popular. Just because something is not popular or played does not mean it's not valuable. You can cherry-pick anything, our news, our wine. (Rick)

> It starts with the lack of outlets for videos to play. Stations like Black Entertainment Television and Music Television, originally video shows, now hardly show any videos. Take into consideration, with technology, anybody with a digital camera can make a video, I can direct my video and upload it to YouTube. It may get picked up by other blog sites, but it can live virally. Technology has changed the outlook of business on music videos. Years ago, you would hear about Hype Williams, directing a video for $1,000,000. Instead of $50,000, you can get a great video done for $5,000. The recession and technology has changed the perception and price of videos. Everyone has an iPod, iPad, or handheld devices. It's all accessible. You can go online and get anything, so now it's about content. Consistently good content. (John)

> Videos used to be only on MTV. Now you can download anything. Hip-hop history and videos give hip-hop more of a platform, a global look. (Nicole)

> It (technology) took the money out of the artists' hands. It is so easy to download music for free. It is a double-edged sword because it gives people more access and allows them to have a bigger following so that when they go on tour, they can generate higher numbers. (Turner)

> From a technical aspect, hip-hop has changed from the final product, how the beats come together. Before, it heavily relied on samples of turntables. It took more of a technical skill for someone to loop and get samples going. With turntables, you had to feel the music, have a sense of timing and rhythm in order to pin music on and have continuous

> play. Even at that time, you had more instruments going. It were not just turntables. Now in the digital age, you have more tools to help you make the music. However, definitely technology has made it easier, more accessible and cheaper. (Rick)
>
> Sales are down so low, the music part, you can get the song for free (online), so it's really about the physical element of the business. Touring, performing, publishing, endorsements, doing creative things. Definitely more touring. Before an artist comes out, you need to do a couple of legs of touring. Before you put an album out it will be more about singles. Single-driven business, less money to invest. Put out a single, oh that was great, put out another single, oh that was great, put out another single, now you start developing your career, your demand, for someone to want a body of work from you as opposed to saying 'I am going to put out one single and then out an album.' You put out one single, sold 5,000 downloads, you put out an album, and you sell 20,000 albums. You spent money to produce the single and the album. You spend money on each of the songs on the album, you would have been better off producing singles, moving on the something else. Of course you have your mixtapes and the internet, which can get your music out there, lot of grassroots. I think hip-hop in general is going back to how it started off back in the 80s where it was more underground. Now, at the end of the day, hip-hop is still the most influential music form. Still the most powerful. (John)
>
> Well, everything is digitalized now, so an analog experience is far and few between (laughing). You have to explain to some kids what a record is. I come (to deejay) with turntables, and they are used to synchronized CD decks or iPods and a virtual turntable deck. When I first started spinning records, I could not do it. I could not spin the vinyl. My ear was just not attuned to picking up the beats per minute. But when I was able to invest in other technology, what was then buying a laptop that costs $1,200 and the surono that cost $500, I already had the turntables and I bought a mixer that was another $200. I made that investment as a hobby. I am a professional, I kind of splurged, and I could make that investment in music. And that made all the difference in the world. That took me from being frustrated, turntables, to being someone who is invited out to do house parties for people. So definitely being a digital native can expand what one can do if you have the will to do it. (Rick)

In this cipher, Rick illustrated personal interaction while telling his story of spinning records with the help of technology. Continuity is established as the participants discuss the changes in hip-hop prompted by technology. Participants' comments reveal that hip-hop has "changed with the times." As technology advanced, the music industry transformed, making music and videos more accessible. The Internet allows artists to gain national and international recognition through free music downloads and blog websites. These advances have also forced artists to develop other income-generating talents, such as touring, as mentioned by John. John also explains the

costs associated with producing an album as opposed to producing a single. Producing a single that can be downloaded online is cheaper and generates a higher profit margin than producing an entire album. John's comments indicated that technology is a determining factor on the musical production of hip-hop. Decisions regarding what to produce and when are dictated by technological advances. This cipher explored the ways in which technological advances has influenced hip-hop culture as the participants shared stories about the ways in which they experienced hip-hop in social settings with others.

Cipher 3: Hip-Hop Culture is Morphing into a Business

John felt that too much emphasis is placed on rap and rappers, arguing that people should focus more on hip-hop as a whole and the various business opportunities within hip-hop. They also mentioned that parents should be more responsible for youth and not hold the music industry accountable.

> My thing is honestly, no disrespect, but people put too much on hip-hop. We not even talking about hip-hop issues right now. So it goes back to we know what hip-hop is and you can't hold a corporation accountable. They (industry executives) are not part of the culture, so why do you feel like they are going to talk to us in any kind of a way that you want them to? (John)

> I grew up in Brooklyn and the Bronx. I had a lot of independence to make decisions about where what I was going to do and where I was going to go. My mother did not censor my music or television. She did not go through my cassettes or anything. I could listen to anything that I wanted: NWA, Lord Finesse, Luke. If I wanted to watch the video with Luke on the box showing the booty, I could because when I came home from school, I had a nice cushion of time before my mother got home. I had no parental advisor, but I did have fear of my mother. She did not need to look over my shoulder every day because I knew better, I was scared. So at the end of the day, it goes back to parenting. Do your job. (John)

> Parents listen to the radio and believe things, too. (Xavier)

> That's the problem. The parents are so busy trying to get the kids out the room so they can do whatever they want to do. Kids raising kids. Because when I get in the car (with son), I gotta take an L, I gotta listen to something else. I can't listen to two Chains 'cause

> all my son has to do is hear it one time, and he is going to remember it. 'Big booty.' He may not get all the words right, but he will get enough of them. (John)
>
> So what do we do? How do we... (Xavier)
>
> Hey man, hey man, my son is not going to be raised by no punk ass rapper. I am going to lead by example. I have been hearing people say for years, 'how could we, how could we?' Well maybe if you shut up and do something, maybe, not you in particular, but if you know it takes a village, then hey, let me try to surround my kid with a support system. You can't save everybody. (John)

John asserted that what many people consider problems with hip-hop are actually business or industry issues. John's story about his childhood provided insight into his view of parenting and social responsibility, and John vehemently stated that parents failing to parent children is more problematic than they type of music these children listen to.

We learn that hip-hop culture provided economic opportunity for inventors, and entrepreneurs as well as artists. Hip-hop was the foundation for millionaire business owner Daymond John, maker of the clothing company FUBU, Russell Simmions founder of Rush Entertainment, Sean Combs creator of Bad Boy Records and Sean John clothing label, and Andre Young inventor of Beats by Dre headphone. These entreprenuers created multi-million dollar business and empires as a direct result of hip-hop culture. As a subset of the creation of hip-hop music, dance, and graffiti art clothing, beverage, alcohol products, cars are sold (Kitwana, 2003; Perry, 2004) providing opporunity for countless inventors and entrepeuners globally. Additonlly, many hip-hop rappers are taking advantage of succesful cross-over opportunities which result in mulitple revenue streams. For example, Will Smith's transition from rapper to actor in The Fresh Prince of Bel Air, Queen Latifah's move from female rapper to actor and Covergirl model. Even underground rappers like this study's participant Dave is transitioning from rapper to business owner opening barber shops and boutiques in the Atlanta area. In the cipher, Dave referred to entrprenueism as the fifth tenet of hip-hop. Dave specifically

stated that even if you didn t listen to rap music, you may be influenced by hip-hop cultre through fashion, television advertisement that feature hip-hop music or themes.

Review of Findings

The findings of this study are thought-provoking and provided a voice for a population that uses hip-hop as cultural capital. As I concluded in the previous chapter, issues that plague the hip-hop community affect the larger African American community. Participants' stories continuously progressed and regressed from specific to hip-hop culture to social, emotional, economic and racial issues germane to African American culture. Findings indicated that hip-hop is a culture with distinct characteristics. Secondly, the findings suggested that hip-hop is directly related to the larger Black community. Lastly, corporate influence has drastically changed hip-hop culture. Findings also indicated that hip-hop lends itself to countless possibilities for research in academia.

In this study, members of the hip-hop community engaged in discussions about various aspects of hip-hop culture. However, the discourse of hip-hop, represented with a lowercase *d* (Gee, 1996), refers to the language used by members of the hip-hop community that is constantly changing with the creation of new words, terms, and expressions. The Discourse in hip-hop, represented with a capital D, is multifaceted (Foreman, 2010; Keels, 2005) and includes a world view, ways of doing, being, and knowing (Gee, 1996) that is used in rap music, graffiti, spoken word poetry, and daily conversation.

The study data revealed that hip-hop incorporated multifarious issues within the larger African American community. For example, some participants shared stories told from a hip-hop consumer's perspective while others shared stories told from the perspective of someone intimately involved in making hip-hop music or products. Several study participants discussed

the concept of representing, referring to it as “keeping it real,” “being true,” or “not going pop.” The term representing (in hip-hop) was used to refer to the ways in which hip-hop insiders represent themselves (Hooks, 1992; Irizarry, 2009) and hold each other accountable to other members of the hip-hop community. Representation could be based on geographic location, ethnicity, gender, shared experiences, or personal affiliation (Irizarry, 2009), but it is a self-imposed connection to others within a particular group. All study participants represent hip-hop culture however, I learned that “hip-hoppers” represent hip-hop in varying degrees. Some members of the hip-hop community were very intimately involved with hip-hop using it as a means for economic empowerment while others were cursory users of the culture, and less intimately involved with hip-hop in their daily lives.

Critical literacy is a theory for understanding the power relationship in language as well as an instructional method that helps the reader read and understand text and its influence. As participants engaged in hip-hop Discourse, I studied the participants’ words within a critical literacy frame. I sought to examine the ways that the study participants viewed hip-hop within social, emotional, economic, and racial contexts. I studied their discussions in order to decipher the way hip-hop influenced and informed their behavior. Hip-hop videos, music, spoken-word poems, hip-hop inspired advertisements, and art are the texts that hip-hop elite examined and read for understanding.

Analyzing the data from a critical literacy perspective, I found two levels of hip-hop engagement. When hip-hoppers are not directly engaged with hip-hop on a daily basis but participate in the culture as consumers who listen to, read, or write about hip-hop, they demonstrate minimal engagement. Membership within the hip-hop community is open to anyone and appeals to a wide variety of individuals. I refer to members of the hip-hop community who

display this level of engagement as hip-hop elite (HHE). When hip-hoppers are directly involved in the creation, development, production and/or distribution of hip-hop they demonstrate maximal engagement. I refer to this level of engagement as hip-hop essential (HHe). My findings suggested that the participants in this study represented both hip-hop elite and hip-hop essentials.

Identifying the "Hip-Hop Elite"

Jenkins (2011) argued that hip-hop artists are individuals who can construct meaningful, heartfelt passages about life. Focusing on lyrical content and lyrical style used in rap lyrics, Jenkins described skillful rap artists as having a writing ability that is often overlooked and underestimated by scholars. Fortunately, more people are beginning to recognize the hidden talent and brilliance embedded in rap lyrics. A number of scholars, known as hip-hop scholars, write about the educational merit within the hip-hop community. Hip-hop scholars such as Joan Morgan (1999), Tricia Rose (2008), Elaine Richardson (2006), Jabari Mahiri (2006) and H. Samy Alim (2007) self identify with hip-hop culture, yet may maintain a different perspective and viewpoint than others within the hip-hop community. For example, Morgan, Rose, Richardson, Mahiri and Alim are scholars who write about hip-hop but do not experience hip-hop as many of the fans and producers of hip-hop music do.

In examining the numerous distinctions that exist within hip-hop culture, I used the term hip-hop elite (HHE) to describe self-identified members of the hip-hop community who appreciate the nuances of hip-hop culture. In this study, hip-hop elite were engaged in the culture from their adolescent years into adulthood as both consumers and fans but not involved in the creation or production of hip-hop music or products. The characteristics of hip-hop elite are (a) self-identified member of the hip-hop community; (b) listen to, read, or write about hip-hop; (c) appreciate hip-hop culture; and (d) engage in hip-hop culture as a consumer or fan.

In this study, the HHE developed an appreciation and respect for rap music and the culture that developed during instrumental times in his or her life. I identified participants Turner, Rick, and Xavier as the hip-hop elite because of their view of cultural occurrences within hip-hop.

In my analysis, I determined that Turner chose to be involved with hip-hop after being initially exposed by peers. Turner did not encounter many elements of hip-hop culture through first-hand experience but was exposed to hip-hop through other youth. As New York youth left the New York metropolitan area and traveled to other cities, hip-hop's influence spread. As an adolescent, Turner became a fan and hip-hop consumer, but never connected with hip-hop on a daily basis.

Participant Rick also developed an appreciation and respect for rap music through hearing rap music repeatedly in his neighborhood. In his first interview, Rick stated that as a youth he was 'listening to Run DMC, Grand Puba, and Kurtis Blow' and that those artists 'just made (him) feel good'. Rick grew up in New York City, the home of hip-hop culture. As an adolescence, he was both a fan and a consumer of hip-hop; however, as an adult, Rick did not incorporate hip-hop into his daily life. Rick listened to hip-hop music on the radio yet did not seek new hip-hop music or related activities. His exposure to hip-hop was concentrated during his adolescent years and decreased as he transitioned into adulthood.

Xavier felt automatically connected to hip-hop culture. For example, when asked to explain his initial involvement with hip-hop, Xavier stated that 'when you are young and black in America, you kinda automatically become part of (hip-hop).' Although Xavier is a self-proclaimed member of the hip-hop community, he approached hip-hop as a subject to be studied. In the following excerpt, Xavier compared himself to sports fanatics who follow teams and know all the statics for the players:

> Some people are really into sports…they know who got traded, where they went and where the player went to high school. For hip hop though, I am that type of guy. I know everybody's history. I know where (the rapper) came from and how they got to this point. (I know) the real story, who they were with before they became famous. I go to websites looking up stuff.

Xavier's commitment to hip-hop has a scholarly basis. As an educator, Xavier brings elements of hip-hop into his classroom. Xavier does not maintain a personal connection to rappers that created the music but does connect to the music that the rappers created.

In my analysis, Turner, Rick and Xavier emerged as having knowledge and understanding of hip-hop culture by virtue of geographic location, exposure, and/or timing. These participants were born during a time when hip-hop was gaining popularity and significance but these individuals were not personally, directly affected or influenced by many of the negative elements associated with hip-hop such as high crime and poverty rates. These three participants grew up in Black middle class, two parent households for the majority of their adolescent lives. Rick grew up in New York City, the birthplace of hip-hop culture. Living in an inner-city neighborhood, it was difficult for Rick to escape hip-hop's influence. As hip-hop gained popularity, its influence reached into urban and suburban cities across the United States. As a youth, Xavier and Turner, born in southeastern cities, became aware of the new culture and developed an interest. Xavier lived in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia and had a diverse social and cultural adolescence that included arts and sciences. Turner, who lived in a small city in Alabama, gained a well-rounded cultural experience attending a private elite boarding school for the majority of his adolescence. Rick, Xavier and Turner' experiences were not typical of many hip-hop youth who primarily remained within their inner city yet their perspectives add value to hip-hop Discourse.

The hip-hop elite addressed multiple hip-hop perspectives, examining the way other members of the hip-hop community experience hip-hop. For example, during a photo-elicitation interview, Xavier sheds light on the influence of Asian hip-hop. The following passage revealed Xavier's respond to an Asian hip-hop image:

> I do know that Asian culture is very strongly into hip-hop culture. To be honest with you, I would say that in Japan, 30 and 40 year olds are heavy, heavy into hip-hop as much as a 19 or 20 year old here. But it's the real deal stuff, you know, like I said no cookie cutter gumdrop commercial fluff. I would assume it represents the globalization of hip-hop. Hip-hop is worldwide.

From the information shared in the passage above, I determined that Xavier viewed hip-hop within a social context. Xavier's comment demonstrated that he values the pure form of hip-hop prior to the transformation that occurred with corporate investment interests. Xavier's reference to 30 and 40 year old Japanese hip-hop fans also revealed that for him, hip-hop is not limited to youthful indulgence but can be enjoyed into adulthood. Using the words 'cookie cutter gumdrop,' Xavier articulated disapproval of commercial influence in hip-hop music and culture. I concluded that Xavier's mocking of mainstream hip-hop music sheds light on his preference of raw, non-commercialized hip-hop music, even hip-hop produced from different cultures such as Japan.

Rick shared his connection to conscious hip-hop music as he discussed the union of rappers who joined together to create the song "Self Destruction." In the following excerpt, Rick demonstrated his view of hip-hop within an emotional context.

> Rappers got together and tried to show that there is a positive side to the culture, the music and a positive side to us. Always a few people can make a bad name for everyone. So the conscious side of hip-hop did definitely shaped me.

I determined from Rick's story that he was concerned about the negative image of hip-hop that exists in the media. Rick's statement, "there is a positive side to the culture, and a positive side to

us" demonstrated his belief that hip-hop music is influential and can serve as a leading determinant of behavior.

Participants also discussed hip-hop within a racial context. For example, in the excerpt below, Turner sheds light on his experiences being a Black man in a predominantly white environment.

> When I see that picture I think about the fine line that I have walked in my education and the jobs that I have had. I have maintained the ability to be a bit militant, pro-black, and angry about certain things that have happened in the black community, but maintain the ability to show my growth as a man and to show the more domesticated side. I am grown enough to know better but I am old enough to know when it does not matter.

In the excerpt above Turner responded to a picture of the rapper Ice Cube during his photo-elicitation interview. Turner spoke of his growth as a man and referenced the decisions that men may have to make to take a stand on relevant issues. From his statement, "I am grown enough to know better but I am old enough to know when it does not matter," I concluded that Turner understood that race does play a role in determining his actions. Maintaining a pro-black stance can easily be determined as a racist stance, which would be problematic in the environments that he chose to attend school and work. The fine line that Turner referenced is similar to the inner turmoil that many African Americans experience when they are presented with racially charged issues in the Black community.

In this study, hip-hop elite discussed hip-hop within a social, emotional and racial context, but did not discuss the role that economic advantage or disadvantage plays within hip-hop. Economics was a major contributor to the creation of hip-hop music, art, and dance (Chang, 2005) yet the hip-hop elite did not offer a perspective revealing their thoughts or opinions about how social economic status, experience and education may contribute or influence hip-hop participation.

Attempting to engage in discussion about hip-hop and ignore economic influence is problematic because hip-hop culture began as a community outcry as youth used their words and creative talents to protest the conditions of their local environments. High rates of unemployment, homelessness, and drug abuse were problematic in numerous inner city American cities, particularly the Bronx, New York (Baker, 1993). Hip-hop music started as a chorus of disapproval, people expressing their frustration with economic conditions. An attempt to engage in hip-hop discourse and ignore the social and economic conditions that exist in and around the creation of hip-hop masks and trivializes the spirit of the culture. The Urban dictionary posts a hip-hop phrase, the struggle is real," which references the everyday difficulty and danger associated with being poor and black in America. Rapper Talib Kweli stated that hip-hop is the expression of young people who have nothing. Kweli further encourages society to focus on the 'condition that hip-hop arts live in that created offensive language and images that may be used in hip-hop as opposed to just critiquing the music that results from those conditions. Many of the issues that blight African American inner city communities during hip-hop's inception continue to plague our communities today. Although the hip-hop elite discussed topics other than the ways that social economic status influences the hip-hop community, it is important to demonstrate the significance of SES and its link to larger African American community.

Fifty years after the Civil Rights March on Washington, many African Americans are still unemployed or underemployed (Michael, 2013). Census data collected in 2011 reported the median income for African American households as 59% of the median income of white households (Vara, 2013). Although African Americans have experienced slight economic improvement since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the gains that blacks experienced in the 1970s dwindled in the early 1980s as the number of manufacturing jobs began to decrease (Vara,

2013). Consequently, during this time many inner city neighborhoods experienced a surge of drug related crime and the epidemic of crack cocaine (McLoyd, 1990). Some youth responded to harsh conditions by participating in the illegal drug trade while other used their creative talents to write rhymes to tell their story. Hip-hop was born in this environment, under the harsh conditions experienced in the south Bronx, New York City neighborhoods (Chang, 2005). Many members of the hip-hop community experienced economic struggles on a daily basis and viewed hip-hop as a springboard to propel them out of poor economic conditions. For some youth, hip-hop music was essential to their survival.

Identifying the "Hip-Hop Essentials"

Members of the hip-hop community who view hip-hop as an indispensable aspect of their daily lives are hip-hop essentials. I coined the term hip-hop essentials (HHE) to describe members of the hip-hop community who maintained an intimate connection to hip-hop in their everyday life. The word essential was used to note the vital need to participate in hip-hop related activities. Hip-hop essentials were the individuals who personally experienced the situations described in rap lyrics and knew the reality of inner-city life. These individuals used hip-hop to move away from or rise above certain circumstances through career related, or entrepreneurial activities. Participants, who viewed hip-hop culture as a creative expression, as well as a professional avenue, fell into the category of hip-hop essential. The characteristics of hip-hop essentials are: (a) maintain a daily intimate connection to hip-hop; (b) participate in multiple hip-hop activities; (c) personally experienced situations described in rap lyrics; and (d) utilize hip-hop as a means for economic empowerment.

In this study, John, Nicole, and Dave are considered hip-hop essentials because they experience a more personal connection with hip-hop in their everyday life and utilized hip-hop as a means for economic empowerment.

John stated that hip-hop "influenced (his) life and definitely made (him) make some of the decisions that (he) made in life." Although the crack cocaine epidemic destroyed many African American communities in the 1980s, there were many African American youth who emerged from those communties unscathed. For example, in the following excerpt John shared a story about the guidance provided in a single-parent household in the Bronx, New York during the early 1980s.

> I lived in Brooklyn and the Bronx, New York. I had a lot of independence to make decisions about where what I was going to do and where I was going to go. My mother did not censor my music or television she did not go through my cassettes or anything. I could listen to anything that I wanted, NWA, Lord Finesse, Luke, if I wanted to watch the video with Luke on the box showing the booty, I could because when I came home from school I had a nice cushion of time before my mother got home. I had no parental advisor but I did have fear of my mother. She did not need to look over my shoulder every day because I knew better, I was scared. So at the end of the day it goes back to parenting, 'do your job.'

John's story represents the voice of many youths who were able to survive and thrive in an environment that presented social and economic challenges. Therefore, the support and guidance that John was provided as a youth helped him survive. Even without constant supervision John was able to make informed decisions.

Nicole used hip-hop for economic advancement. In the following excerpt, Nicole expressed the ways that hip-hop influenced her career choice and remains central in her everyday life.

> Me choosing to be an entrepreneur had a lot to do with the (hip-hop) music that I heard. I know I wanted to be self-sufficient. (hip-hop) is a culture and I definitely use it every day. It is in my everyday usage. (It influences) where I shop and decisions I make with my family, it is all those things.

I determined that Nicole demonstrated a strong level of commitment to hip-hop culture that transitions from personal to professional. During the group interview, Nicole shared she found inspiration after reading the credits on the back of a music CD where the musical engineers and CEO were listed. Nicole stated that her decision to become an entrepreneur was fuled by her exposure to music in general and hip-hop in particular.

Similar to John and Nicole, Dave is directly connected to hip-hop music and culture in his everyday life. Dave is an underground rap artist and earns a living through hip-hop entrepreneurial ventures. As Dave stated, "hip-hop influences your everyday life. In a lot of cases, we buy homes in places that we hear rappers rap about." The voice of the hip-hop essentials are clearly articulated as participants discuss hip-hop within a racial, social and economic context as they experience it in America.

Dave articulated his view of hip-hop within a racial context by stating that "Music has been the only place that the Black male mystic and ego have been safe." Dave's comment is linked to the belief that American society limits the degree to which African American men are able to fully express themselves. According to Dave, black men are not free to be men in other arenas outside of music. Dave further declared that Black men 'were politically castrated during the Jim Crow era when black men were denied the right to vote. (Black men) were castrated in (their) homes when (society) has the perception that (black men) cannot run their homes but women can." Dave's comments explored two periods in American history that has far reaching effects.

Fifty years after the Civil Rights March of Washington, it is important to note that the ramifications of the Jim Crow era may still influence African American men today. For example,

many black men still do not fully participate in the election process. Secondly, Dave spoke about a perception that black men could not manage their households. I concluded that this perception is linked to imbalance of economic power that exists within may African American households. In the 1960s, the influence of government programs such as Section 8 and welfare system maintained that a family could only receive government assistance if there were no male present in the household, contributing to a breakdown of the African American family unit (Smitherman, 1997). Currently, many African American women's earning surpass their male counterparts, which may also contribute to feelings of inadequacy for African American men in their homes. Dave's use of the word 'castrated' demonstrated his strong emotional connection to the issue of Black male voice in society; however, the political castration that Dave referenced was a reality for African American men of previous generations. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and changes to federal funding have eradicated the specific political and social castration that Dave disclosed. Today African American men and women have voting rights. Nevertheless, for Dave, the perception that black men do not have a voice still exists. This was a significant point that Dave used to justify Black men's behavior in the hip-hop community. According to Dave, the Black male ego is safe in the world of music. The views of hip-hop essential are significant to understanding the ways in which hip-hop is experienced in everyday life. Hip-hop essentials experience hip-hop culture in multiple ways, integrating it as a source of livelihood. For many African American men hip-hop is a safe haven where they can express themselves freely.

Findings suggested that the black male ego runs rampant in the world of hip-hop as men compete on an assortment of levels. Black men compete for the attention of women just as deejays competed to see whose music could get more people on the dance floor. Graffiti artists compete to create the most interesting or unique designs or leave their marks in the most

challenging places. Breakdancers compete to be known as the best dancers and rappers compete against named and anonymous opponents to outsell their opponents. The nature of this competition in hip-hop is also representative in displays of American masculinity. The notion of violent masculinity is at the heart of American identity (Dyson, 2006). Numerous American movies displayed violence as heroic, presenting a male character as a hero after exhibiting violence. Hip-hop culture has always been a male-dominated arena; however, over the years, hip-hop culture has incorporated another aspect of male ego: misogyny.

Dave and Nicole shared their views of hip-hop within a social context as it relates to women. Dave recommended that women, young and old, develop a "filtering ability" when it comes to the male gaze by stating the following:

> If a guy comes to you and says 'you really look beautiful,' take that with the same grain of salt you take 'bitch, you bad' because the same ends are trying to get met. And I am not saying that you are beautiful is not a complement, but he is not the judge of your beauty.

Dave's comment was derived from the re-telling of a conversation that Dave had with his young daughter. Dave attempted to help women recognize that the intent behind both comments were the same. The former comment, although stated more tactfully than the latter, is presented as a male's judgment of a female's beauty. Dave wanted to illustrate to his daughter that no matter how tactfully presented, she should not determine her worth by a male's comments or opinions of her. As a female, I found Dave's intent to be a commendable attempt to offer women a filtering system to use to screen male commentary, however a women's ability to filter comments will not combat the objectified female image presented in hip-hop. The state of mainstream hip-hop's rampant hyper-masculinity required a close examination of not only how Black women earned the image of sexual desire in hip-hop but also what can be done to eradicate it.

Nicole sheds light on hip-hop within a social context when she posed the question, 'what's up with this Bitch craze?" during her initial interview. Nicole evoked conversation about the physical image of young African American women in the world of hip-hop. Nicole affirmed that hip-hop culture rewards certain artificial beauty as she stated "hip-hop music is encouraging the red-bone (light-skinned Black women) with long hair weaves." Rappers use their financial resources to obtain the attention of women who subscribe to a particular type of look. This image is offered, through mainstream media, as the desired look for Black women in hip-hop.

I examined the way that participants viewed hip-hop within an economic context as they discussed the root causes of the misogynistic lyrics found in mainstream rap music. Although hip-hop has become a breeding ground for misogynistic lyrics and behavior, it is difficult to determine who is responsible for these exploits. Is it the rappers who create the misogynistic lyrics, the fans who request it, or the corporate executives who encourage its production? Data from this study revealed that mainstream rap music is controlled by large corporations and consumed primarily by White adolescent males, yet, young black males represent the face of misogynistic lyrics. For example, Xavier suggested that large corporations are in control of hip-hop music, stating that "Over the years hip-hop has become manipulated. The outside control from corporations controls what (rappers) say and as a result affect culture exploitation."

Xavier's comment, made during the group interview, evoked a negative image of corporations as manipulative money-making machines. Xavier suggested that corporations have had a negative influence on hip-hop culture. John also acknowledged that corporations have changed hip-hop culture, however, he stated that "you can't not hold a corporation accountable (for the changes to hip-hop) because they are not part of the culture." John's view revealed a

vastly different perspective than Xavier. Xavier expressed the opinion that corporations manipulated artists and transformed hip-hop culture into something less desirable.

John expressed the opinion that corporations operated as the business entities that they are designed to be, taking advantage of an opportunity to make a profit. Xavier asserted that rap songs with no educational, social or political substance receive more radio airtime than songs that contain messages. In a discussion about music played on the radio, Xavier asked the following question: if a political song is not going to sell Downy (products) how can a song about (selling drugs) sell it? Xavier's question referred to the practice of using songs to increase product sales for advertisers. For example, if market research showed that a certain song is associated with higher product sales then the radio station will continuously play that song. Dave argued that a discussion about the responsibility of rap artists or record executives is ineffective in regards to social responsibility within hip-hop culture. Instead, Dave offered that the discussion should be focused on institutions that systemically affect social and economic condition. All participants admitted that the public education system was a large institution with systemic issues affecting hip-hop and the larger Black community.

The findings implied a link between the education system's inability to prepare youth for changing economic conditions and the current poor economic conditions. Some members of the hip-hop community used hip-hop to transform economic conditions when they school and education do not serve as viable options. Critics attempt to link the music that youth listen to as being the cause of their negative behavior, attitude and performance in schools, yet Dave argued that "kids are not failing because of what is present in their life. They are failing because of what is absent in their life. And what is absent in their life is role models." Dave maintained that

public school does not work. Public school influences milllions of students, particularly students of color, who dominate America's public education system (Alim, 2009).

Dave expressed a belief that the public education system failed countless rappers and others in the hip-hop industry. Poor education systems and minimal job opportunities lead to an increase in illegal activity among inner-city youth, which many rappers often discuss in their music. In a pilot study conducted in 2009, southern rapper, TI shared a story about his experiences in the public education system. In the excerpt below, TI described how the public school system's inability to reach him lead to his involvement in illegal activity (Harris, 2009) in the excerpt below:

> Because of my life at home and the things I was going through when I left school I found it a little more difficult to take my education seriously at that point in my life. When you are dealing with the struggles of helping your mamma pay the light bill, you don't know how you gonna eat that night, then homework because less and less important. I wanted clothes for myself. I wanted money for my own pocket. I just wanted to be a provider. I wanted to provide for my family. Once I concluded that I could sell drugs and get money, then I saw school as something that was keeping me from getting paid. Sometimes I would go to school the whole day and apply myself but then my homeboy would say, 'man you missed it we made $5,000 today'. The next day I wasn't going to school."

As TI explained, selling drugs was an easily accessible option for youth with limited skills. In the excerpt above, TI mentioned his life at home, wanting to be a provider, and viewing school as something that was keeping him from the economic freedom that he sought. Illegal activity has become a bridge to careers in hip-hop, with several rappers admitting to selling drugs prior to selling records (LaGrone, 2000). I concluded that mental ability had very little to do with some rapper's decision to drop out of school and sell drugs. The decision to sell drugs was often prompted by a need to improve social and economic condition with limited opportunities. Similarly, Dave, an underground artist and study participant, elaborated on his rationale for selling drugs in the following excerpt:

> I am the product of what happens when a kid grows up in the crack era, sells crack but does not get lost in all the bullshit and instead starts listening to KRS One. I was not going to sell crack forever, but I also knew it was going to pay for my demo quicker than working at UPS.

In the excerpt above, Dave acknowledged that his environment contributed to his decision to sell drugs. Admittedly, growing up in an era where crack cocaine was easily accessible, Dave used selling crack as a way to make money fast. Interestingly, Dave acknowledged that selling drugs would be a temporary solution to his problem of getting money to produce a record demo. Findings confirmed that the corporate influence on hip-hop has changed hip-hop from a creative outlet to a multi-million dollar industry. This change influenced Dave's desire to make a demo and become a rapper by any means necessary. By stating that he did not 'get lost in the bullshit and instead started listening to KRS One," Dave indicated that despite the crack era in which he grew up, he was also exposed to some positive influences, such as the conscious rapper KRS One. Dave's reference to the rapper KRS One demonstrated that KRS One was a positive influence in his life. This conclusion is supported by Dave's earlier excerpt when he stated that students are failing because they lack positive role models in their life. Public schools inability to reach countless African American males like TI and Dave cannot be viewed in isolation because schools are connected to other economic and political structures. The issue of students' failure extends beyond hip-hop and outside of the African American community. It is systemic and affects mainstream America.

The findings suggested that the participants in this study represented both levels of hip-hop engagement. The purpose of this study was to examine hip-hop via the stories of poets, artists, and creators who incorporate hip-hop culture into their daily lives. Participants who represent various occupational fields and prespectives discussed the sights, sounds, and meaning embedded in hip-hop texts. I analyzed the stories that the participants shared using a critical

literacy frame. The way that the participants readily shared their opinions and insights is a testiment to the influence of hip-hop on their individual lives. This study documented the influence of various aspects of hip-hop culture on the participants' perspectives and views of the world. The way that participants view hip-hop within a social, emotional, economic, and racial context is influenced by their experiences and exposures. This study offered a picture of hip-hop from a multi-colored lens, shaded by individuals who approach hip-hop in diverse ways. This perspective of hip-hop is important to the field of education because the perspectives of these adults provide insight into a rapidily changing culture that influences millions of people worldwide.

Conclusion

Prior to conducting the current study, I understood that despite hip-hop's 30-year existence, its presence in academia is in its infantry stages. As I developed the research questions to guide thick inquiry, I understood this as not only a great time to examine hip-hop through an everyday lens, but also that members are eager to share their views. Some of the study participants wanted to "set the record straight" not only about hip-hop, but also about some of the misconceptions of adults who maintain membership in the hip-hop community. This chapter establishes the connection to who the study participants are as individuals.

As the first participant interviews were transcribed, I began to search for possible connections, only to find that not all participants interpreted my questions the same way. I anticipated discovering the how, why, and when of hip-hop's influence, and I thought participants might respond similarly. However, the interviews took different directions as the participants reflected on the way hip-hop influences their daily lives, framed their early opinions, and continues to intermix with their professional lives. Although rap music has changed with the

times—beginning as an outcry against injustice in inner-city communities and moving on to party-themed anthems, then on to violent, antiestablishment protests and finally to boastful, hypersexual masculine conquests—hip-hop music has always embraced its storytelling qualities.

Narrative inquiry provided the information that led to the answer to my first research question, how hip-hop became a critical element in the lives of the participants. As participants told their stories, I searched for the hidden meanings embedded in these stories. Some of these stories were central to the hip-hop culture and some germane to the African American community at-large. Some of the stories were told from a hip-hop consumer's perspective while others were shared as a part of the creative process involved in making hip-hop music or products. While uncovering the way hip-hop has become a critical element in the participants' lives, I realized that although hip-hop originated in the Black community, other issues within this community have an effect on hip-hop. At various times, the term "hip-hop" had to be defined for clarity because the participants' stories naturally flowed from rap music and its challenges to single-parent households and limited job opportunities for Black people. The latter two issues, which are "bigger than hip-hop," affect American society as a whole. Where does the discussion of hip-hop end and the discussion of the socioeconomic status of Black people begin? Is it possible to examine the ways a multidimensional cultural phenomenon influences its members without examining the larger questions? I transformed the participants' experiences, memories, and opinions into a cipher, and each cipher was arranged to address the three research questions that guided this inquiry.

The second research question, what it means to be a member of the hip-hop community led to findings, which indicated that although the participants are members of hip-hop community, they have very different perspectives and experiences within hip-hop culture. For

example, some participants appeared to have direct involvement with the creation, development and advancement of hip-hop culture while others did not. John and Dave worked in the hip-hop industry while the other members of the study worked in other fields. Nicole's position as a female entrepreneur is directly connected to hip-hop through fashion and hair. Rick's occupation in corporate America distances him from hip-hop on a daily basis. As educators, Xavier and Turner teach students who are part of the current hip-hop generation however; their direct connection to hip-hop is limited. Additionally, the participants varied greatly on the issue of social responsibility. Turner and Xavier were very vocal about the role that rappers and entertainers should play in protecting the image of hip-hop in mainstream society. Dave and John were adamant that expecting entertainers to serve as moral role models is an unfair expectation. John specifically articulated that too much pressure is on rappers and entertainers who are not equipped to represent Black America because of their limited educational and social knowledge. Rick articulated the belief that hip-hop should not be taken seriously and should maintain a casual pastime. Nicole shared her concern that rappers are projecting the wrong image to mainstream society. Through the use of the ciphers, the participants' stories demonstrated their unique hip-hop experiences.

The answer to my final research question, In what way does hip-hop inform the participants' view of the world, was revealed through analysis of participants' stories. I determined that levels of engagement exist within the hip-hop community. When hip-hoppers are directly involved in the creation, development, production and/or distribution of hip-hop they demonstrate maximal engagement. When hip-hoppers participate in the culture as consumers who listens to, read or write about hip-hop, they demonstrate minimal engagement. Membership within hip-hop culture involves multiple levels from occasional listener of rap music to producer

of rap music. The significance of hip-hop is determined by daily involvement. When hip-hoppers are maximally engaged with the culture, it resonates into multiple areas of their life. For example, people who are maximally engaged will express a connection to hip-hop outside of music to include one of the other tenets of hip-hop such as graffiti art or entrepreneurism. Minimal engagement may be limited to rap music only. Members of the hip-hop community who are minimally engaged may only connect with hip-hop on a weekly or monthly basis.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Hip-hop culture offers defiant thoughts, outspoken expressions, and critical views of mainstream society. Hip-hop emerged from the stories of impoverished youth who used their words as an outcry against social injustice, and it continues to incorporate language and expressions that are indicative of real-world concerns. Examining hip-hop from a critical literacy perspective created an opportunity for me to deconstruct various topics presented in hip-hop culture and also gave me more insight as to why the marginalized voices of hip-hop should be able to share their stories. The media reproduces power relationships based on race, class, and gender, silencing these marginalized voices. Although hip-hop gives some of those marginalized voices a platform from which to speak out about injustice, power relationships also exist within the hip-hop community. Critical literacy helped me understand the way that power relationships are reproduced within hip-hop culture. For example, hip-hop seems to reinforce some negative sterotypes about Black American women, giving men power over women with the use of mysogynistic lyrics. Through the ciphers presented in the current study, a hip-hop discourse emerges and the issues of power within the hip-hop culture is discussed. Although the media negatively depicts many elements of hip-hop, only the negative of a culture that is contiuously evolving are revealed. The participants in the current study, all members of the hip-hop community, offered better insight into hip-hop culture that has been ripened by decades of involvement with the culture in various ways.

In Chapter 1, hip-hop was introduced as a topic of research, and the researcher is shown as an insider of the hip-hop culture. I also introduced the theoretical framework of the study. In Chapter 2, I presented a review of literature, recounting the historical connection between hip-

hop language and the discourse of African American people. Chapter 3 included the study's methodology and identified narrative inquiry as an effective way to capture the stories of people influenced by hip-hop. Data collection and analysis processes were also described in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I presented the findings and the major themes emerging from the data. These themes were (a) hip-hop as a culture, (b) hip-hop's relationship to the larger Black community, and (c) the corporate influence of hip-hop.

In this chapter, I review the study findings, the implications of the findings to hip-hop scholarship, and the overall contributions to the education literature. I present my discoveries pertaining to two distinct levels of hip-hop engagement, and I also discuss the limitations of this study to prompt others examine the hip-hop community and those people whose voices are frequently disregarded in the literature. Finally, I address several issues present within hip-hop that plague the larger Black community, arguing for a close examination of the experiences—both educational and social—of adult members of the hip-hop community to help us identify how we can transform education to positively influence students' educational experiences.

Implications for Practice

The significance of this study is found in the experiences of the participants who interact with hip-hop culture on varying levels. Hip-hop culture's advancement signified a need for a social and political forum for "hip-hoppers" to voice their real-life experiences. Hip-hop culture shapes thought processes and therefore is vital to learning. Culture is important to interconnecting and receiving information, therefore culture is linked to development of thinking and learning. As a result, hip-hop 'culture' informs thinking and learning and is consequently significant to the field of education.

Education does not just happen within the walls of school buildings. People are educated in a variety of ways. For example, Gee (2004) argued that children learn more literacy outside of intuitions of formal education than inside. Gee described learning as being based on problem solving that is immersed in experiences. These experiences, according to Gee are developed through good guidance and mentoring and often occur outside of the classroom. Gee asserted that there are new ways to use words and new methods to learning that are not directly connected with schools. Some of the new ways that people learn involve the popular culture element of hip-hop.

In many ways, hip-hop culture is a reflection of the world and as such, hip-hop provides an enlightenment and insight to issues that are going on in our society. Through hip-hop, people build assumptions about the world and the people in it. Students "learn" through and from hip-hop culture (Akintunde, 1997; Alim, 2006; Forman & Neal, 2004). People develop basic knowledge and understanding about the world from popular culture mediums such as hip-hop (Rose,1994). For instance, hip-hop lyrics represent an artistic expression of real world problems (Chang, 2005). Listening to hip-hop music, watching hip-hop inspired television, art, and dance all contribute to people's opinions. People learn about hip-hop through the problems associated with hip-hop that have gained national attention. For example, a focus on domestic abuse surfaced from national coverage of the violent encounters between Rihanna and Chris Brown (Payne & Gainey, 2002), both members of the hip-hop community. Hip-hop culture allows dialog among peers and encourages conversation about a variety of relevant issues and events. Hip-hop challenges people to think critically about the events and circumstances that directly and indirectly affect their life (Wright, 2009).

The participants provided unique insight into the hip-hop experience. Through hip-hop Discourse, participants stories help readers understand that the hip-hop experience is actually 'bigger than hip-hop.' The hip-hop experience intersects with issues of racism, sexism, poverty and privilege. An example of the hip-hop Discourse relating to privilege can be understood in the participants' conversations about what role, if any, rappers should play in shaping society. Through conversation and debate, the participants exposed their shared belief that American society places great emphasis on the behavior and actions of rappers and entertainers within the African American community. However, according to John, "people put too much on hip-hop." Instead, John and Destroyer Dave argued that more attention should be paid to black politicians, and business owners or other members of the African American community who do not give back, uplift or support the black community. Participant Destroyer Dave challenged the notion that rappers are the primary group that concerned American citizens should focus their attention on, instead he argued, it is more beneficial to address social groups that have the political, economic and social ability to make positive changes in the black community yet do not. For instance, Destroyer Dave strongly opposed members of the black community who do not see themselves as part of the 'black experience' because they have obtained a high degree of formal education or achieved great economic status, or are born abroad. In the following statement, Destroyer Dave, confronted participants Xavier and Turner who suggested that concerned American citizens should 'get at' or challenge rappers for not serving as role models.

> "You gonna get at an entertainer but you not gonna get at the black president who has not started a black males jobs program? You gonna get at an entertainer but you not gonna get black doctors who used to live in (a black) community but now live in places like Fairburn and Sandy Springs."

According to Destroyer Dave, it is more important to 'get at' African doctors who ostracize African Americans yet seek their patronage or Black politicians who do not champion causes

that directly benefit the African American community. In the discussion above, participants disagreed on the notion of privilege and social responsibility. John and Destroyer Dave expressed the view that rappers were not socially, emotionally and educationally prepared for the role that many people want them to fulfill. Consequently, Turner and Xavier argued that because of rappers' economic power and influential position, they should be more socially responsible. Through the participants' voices, readers may contemplate expectations currently placed on hip-hop rappers and entertainers.

Conversations about hip-hop should contain critical exchange and not merely superficial discourse. Destroyer Dave accused some long-standing members of the hip-hop community as being avant-garde, unable to recognize the significance of the new direction that hip-hop is moving in. According to Destroyer Dave, hip-hoppers cannot afford to focus on nostalgic notions of what hip-hop was in its infancy and should instead focus on what hip-hop can become. The face of hip-hop is changing. The hip-hop community is global, steadily becoming more white and Asian. Destroyer Dave described the avant-garde group of hip-hoppers as overly concerned with 'Jay Z as diametrically opposed to (other rappers that they) don't like.' According to Dave, hip- hop conversations that only talk about who is the greatest MC ever, are trivial and inconsequential to the multi-faceted nature of hip-hop. Hip-hop Discourse provides an opportunity to be reflective and critical. Popular culture such as hip-hop provides a good platform to discuss race. Rose (1991) asserted that Americans exchange cultural knowledge about race through popular culture outlets such as music, television, movies. Americans have developed cursory knowledge of other races and cultural norms through popular culture (Rose, 1991). Rose suggested that a deeper knowledge of race relations and cultural norms can be developed using hip-hop Discourse as a medium. Hip-hop Discourse supports critical

conversations through the development of cultural literacy. Educators such as Marc Lamont Hill (Hill, 2009) have successfully used hip-hop as both content and educational strategy. Hip-hop offers the opportunity to support and extend learning in various areas ranging from the political process, science education (Emdin, 2010), and race relations (Stovall, 2006), to interrogating social problems and developing civic consciousness (Morrell, 2002). Hill (2009) argued that hip-hop develops thinking and expands the worldview of learners. Hip-hop themes help define urban life. Through the music produced in hip-hop the listener gains insight into the perceptions and views of the creator. In this study, participant Turner described how hip-hop served as a platform for discussions about race. For Turner, hip-hop served as springboard for conversation in the white institutions of higher learning he attended. Turner expressed that hip-hop helped him confront the cultural norms that automatically associated with him as a young black male.

Hip-hop honors youth's digitialized lives (Brown, 2000; Mahiri, 2008). Ladson-Billings (2009) contended that the widespread use of technology in hip-hop offers the rapid response today's generation demands and acts as a bridge to mobilize youth. For example, youth today are heavily influenced by digital mediums. Students receive messages and develop opinions based on information they discovered via the internet. Information is transmitted instantly through social media sources such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. During the group interview, Xavier's statement "hip-hop is not dead but it is underground," referenced the use of social media sources and the internet as a major part of the hip-hop experience. Students frequently multi-process (Brown, 2000) often moving effortlessly between two or more programs. The internet honors multiple intelligence (Brown, 2000) by offering stimulation for musical, visual, verbal, mathematical, bodily kinesthetic, and interpersonal experiences. For example, the internet offers the opportunity to hear music (musical), view endless images (visual), engage in verbal

and mathematical thinking and learning, and participate in interactive activities that require physical movement (kinesthetic). Hip-hop pushes information into people, offering storytelling in a sophisticated form. In the following excerpt, Xavier explained one of the ways that he learned through popular culture:

> I am and English teacher but a lot of books and vocabulary I use I acquired from music and television. For example, I learned what DNA, Deoxyribonucleic acid was from watching the television show GI Joe. When I was young, I would learn about what was going on in the world from a rapper, who was older than me.

As an assistant principal, I have witnessed the many ways that hip-hop culture has influenced students and teachers. Teachers influenced by hip-hop such as participant Xavier, appear to be able to multitask as rapidly as the students that they instruct. I have observed teachers born within the hip-hop generation eager to use class sets of IPODS and incorporate a variety of activities using technology in the classroom. These teachers frequently schedule lab time for their students to complete interactive projects using the internet. As I supervise students in structured settings such as classrooms and less-structured environment such as the baseball field, I have observed their growing demand for instant gratification and feedback. I noticed students, used to obtaining instant feedback from digital resources and social media outlets are more knowledgeable and vocal about their grades, grade point averages and graduation requirements than students are one decade ago. As hip-hop changes, its far-reaching influence will continue to affect youth and adults in numerous ways.

Hip-hop is about a number of issues that extend beyond the confines of hip-hop music, dance, art and clothing. This study suggests that it is difficult to isolate hip-hop from larger mainstream society. Participants were rarely able to discuss hip-hop without discussing social, economic and political issues that affect the larger Black community. For instance, in a heated

discussion about the direction that hip-hop music has taken, Dave made the following observation:

> We are not talking about hip-hop, we are talking about class. Now were are talking about doing the same thing Dr. King tried to do which is not saving the hip-hop generation, it is the Poor People's campaign. That has nothing to do with music.

As Dave noted that the participants' discussion had nothing to do with music, I conclude that music produced with questionable lyrics is the symptom of the economic conditions that poor people experience. In an unrelated discussion about the number of people that rapper Sean Combs employs, John demonstrated frustration stating, "Honestly, no disrespect but people put too much on hip-hop. We are not talking about hip-hop issues right now." Throughout the study, participants moved effortlessly from issues and stories directly related to hip-hop to concerns that affect members of the hip-hop community, who are overwhelmingly African American. Consequently, this study showed that the participants continuously found themselves engaged in discussion that involved issues that plague the larger Black community because hip-hop was born from issues that plague the larger Black community. The two cannot be separated because hip-hop is a manifestation of the creative and destructive talents within the African American community.

Hip-hop is influencing and educating people all over the world due to technological advances. Hip-hop insiders do not explicitly teach hip-hop but teach from their individual experiences, which are hip-hop related and inspired. Hip-hop has international influence and followers all over the world. As a result, certain aspects of hip-hop are used as marketing tools to sell products. As John shared in his first interview, "At the end of the day, hip-hop is still the most influential music form, still the most powerful." It is difficult to measure how much hip-

hop culture has influenced people, yet the participants in this study noted the connection between hip-hop and other creative outlets, highlighting its influence on youth in particular.

The research conducted in this study suggests that understanding the unique experiences of members of the hip-hop community is beneficial to understanding students influenced by hip-hop today. Participants' stories have the potential to assist with understanding the changing dynamics that influence students. For example, understanding the relationship between hip-hop and technology may provide insight into the fascination students have with technological advances. Technology has allowed students to access more information faster, and educators who understand technology's connection to hip-hop can use it to their benefit in the classroom, allowing students to assist in guiding instructional activities and projects with new technology (Mahiri, 2006). Hip-hop provided a springboard to discuss a variety of issues and concerns that influence the larger black community as well as mainstream America. This study provided a forum for participants, with varying perspectives, to engage in discussion in hip-hop Discourse. Participants were eager to share their views with other members of the hip-hop community who they might otherwise not communicate with. For example, during the group interview John shared the following sentiment about the other participants:

> To me it is interesting to sit here with the cast of people that you have. You have an educator, a teacher… when I was growing up my teachers couldn't relate to (hip-hop) culture. My parents they couldn't relate to the culture you know. So I think that with the culture now it is safe to say you have people that are 55 years old that are still part of the culture.

John's sentiment demonstrated his appreciation for the forum provided and the opportunity to engage in hip-hop Discourse. Additionally, John's comments revealed an acknowledgement that hip-hop culture has evolved since its inception. Members of the hip-hop community range in age

from young children to adults in their fifties because hip-hop has been available to mainstream population since the early 1980s.

As hip-hop becomes a more dominating aspect of the school environment, it may give insight to educators with students that are heavily influenced by the nuances of hip-hop culture. I offer the challenge of closely examining the experiences—educational and social—of adult members of the hip-hop community to help identify changes in education that may positively influence students' educational experiences.

Key Learning

At the beginning of the current study, I believed that apart from social class, race, and gender, members of the hip-hop community speak the same language. However, I learned that to exclude social class, race, and gender is to adopt a clouded view of reality. Although the participants of this study were all members of the hip-hop community, education level, social class and gender influenced their perspectives on various issues within the hip-hop culture. Participants were from two distinct hip-hop groups: the hip-hop elite and hip-hop essentials. Members of these groups differ in their views of social responsibility and activism in hip-hop.

The participants disagreed on social responsibility, bickering about that is responsible for hip-hop images projected in mass media. As members of this study discussed various aspects of hip-hop, an invisible line appeared during group discussion that divided the group. Dave said that kids are not failing because of what is present in their life, i.e. hip-hop, but what is absent in their lives, such as positive role models. Similarly, hip-hop elite argued that those that are present in the lives of youth such as rappers should also serve as role models to the fans that admire them. Hip-hop elite believed that 'because entertainers have people's attention," they have a moral responsibility to present and perpetuate positive images. Hip-hop elites articulated a belief that

rappers and those in the hip-hop industry should filter their lyrics and images in videos because of young, impressionable fans. Hip-hop elites To do so would position rappers to be positive role models. This expectation that hip-hop elite present is significant because of its implications regarding character and social responsibility.

Contribution to Educational Research

This study adds to the flourishing body of research that examines the intricacies of hip-hop culture. Specifically, the study adds to research that is focused on the different ways hip-hop is experienced in daily life. From the current examination, I realized that various levels of hip-hop engagement exist in hip-hop culture. The current study adds to the literature by demonstrating two levels of hip-hop engagement that exists in hip-hop culture. As participants discussed hip-hop within a social, emotional, economic, and racial context, two distinct groups of hip-hoppers emerged. Based on varying level of hip-hop engagement, I determined that members of the hip-hop community could be described as maximally or minimally engaged in a hip-hop lifestyle. The type and amount of activity that members of the hip-hop community demonstrated and the degree to which hip-hop was integrated into personal and professional life, determined the level of engagement. I described minimally engaged hip-hoppers as hip-hop elite. I described maximally engaged hip-hoppers as hip-hop essential.

Other scholars may build upon this research by studying members of the hip-hop community who fulfill roles behind the scenes of hip-hop music as managers, producers, and musical engineers. These members of the hip-hop community can offer a view of hip-hop that differs greatly from those of rap artists or consumers. The hip-hop community is home to many powerful and influential poets, artists, and creators who offer formidable insight into a deep, rich culture that is continuously changing. These insights are worthy of examination for their

connections to other creative forms. Additonally, these insights offer an opportunity to explain and respond to an experience that is shared, in some way, by millions of people all over the world. Hip-hop offers unlimited avenues for critical literacy because it analyzes the way that language manipulates, persuades, informs, and entertains. Additional research is needed that examines hip-hop elite and hip-hop essentials in other racial groups. The stories of all members of the hip-hop community are significant and offer a wealth of insight into the creative processes of musical production and the ways social, cultural, and economic influences affect those processes.

Hip-hop scholars (Alim, 2006; Mahiri, 2006) maintained that hip-hop could be used to motivate and enlighten disenfranchised youth; however, evidence suggests that hip-hop does not only educate marginalized individuals or youth but educates millions of people, of all ages worldwide. Hip-hop, in general, and this study in particular, informs the business, Information Technology and educational fields. As a business industry, hip-hop offers economic opportunity for individuals such as artists, engineers, songwriters, producers, talent scouts, and concert promoters. John's story help the reader see hip-hop as an industry, full of potential for both rap artists and entrepreneurs. As an executive, John explained his role in management as a '360' business, providing support and guidance throughout an artist's career. Decisions about profitability and potential determine which artists will receive contracts and endorsement deals. The information technology field is influenced by hip-hop artists' ability to reinvent themselves, and change their musical format to capitalize on digital production and reproduction of sound. For example, instantaneous response to demand is supported by technology. Hip-hop fans can access rap artists' music in very specific ways, downloading specific songs as opposed to purchasing a full-length album. This technological change has influenced the creation,

production and distribution of hip-hop music causing artists to focus on creating singles as opposed to full-length albums. Additionally, the field of education is influenced by hip-hop. Students in classrooms are influenced by hip-hop culture and hip-hop texts are marketed through educational conferences and taught in various schools of education.

Business, Informational Technology and educational fields intersect around hip-hop. John explained that technology changed the way that hip-hop music is made and hip-hop artists perform. In some ways, new technological advances have helped artists increase their fan-base yet in other ways technology has severely restricted the creativity in hip-hop music. As hip-hop transitioned from hip-hop culture into the hip-hop industry, corporate influence has limited the creative license of mainstream hip-hop artists. Under corporate control, mainstream hip-hop artists are no longer in control of their music. Likewise, business and technological advances have also limited the creativity in education. Mainstream educators, those who teach in public settings, are faced with mounting controls imposed by corporate influences. Restricted curriculums and resources create the feeling that the teacher is no longer in control of the classroom. A restricted number of corporate educational companies control testing, assessment and curriculum resources. This study provided hip-hop Discourse, allowing critical conversation about how hip-hop educates and informs. Participants' stories offered insight into the ways that hip-hop influenced their daily life.

Limitations

In this investigation, I focused on the experiences of *adults* who self-identified as members of the hip-hop community for several decades. Purposely, I selected adults because I wanted to study a perspective of hip-hop from its inception to today. Hip-hop became part of American culture over thirty years ago, therefore, participants needed to be over the age of thirty

to have experienced hip-hop culture from its inception. The study only focused on adults who self-identified as members of the hip-hop community. Adults who interact with hip-hop yet do not acknowledge their membership may yield different results.

Another limitation of the study was gaining access to participants. I wanted to include a mainstream rapper in this study to provide a broader perspective on the changes within the hip-hop community. I initially received a verbal commitment from mainstream rap artist, TI, however, the demands of his schedule conflicted with the time constraints involved in study. TI previously participated in a study that I conducted on the influence of age in the construction of a hip-hop identity. I was able to use the written transcript from the previous interview as a document for analysis in this study.

A final limitation of this study is the disproportionate ratio of men to women (five male participants to one female participant). However, the ratio is similar to the ratio that exists between men and women within hip-hop music. Hip-hop is a male-dominated arena, and there are few female members to represent a woman's perspective. The one female participant offered insight and perspective about hip-hop within a social, emotional, economic, and racial context. However, the minimal female voice may be considered a limitation.

Conclusion

After analyzing the data produced from participant's hip-hop discourse, my data led me to one conclusion: There is no universal hip-hop experience. Age, educational attainment, social status, and occupation are all contributing factors that influence hip-hop experiences. The study findings illustrate that hip-hop music has the attention of the nation and is a powerful medium, particularly with the use of technology. The Internet has revolutionized hip-hop culture, taking it into the homes of millions of people all over the world. Although the creation of hip-hop music,

language, art, and dance is a creative process, corporate involvement has transformed the hip-hop culture into the hip-hop industry.

The commercial nature of mainstream hip-hop has made many fans move to underground channels in search of authenticity. Acknowledging different levels of underground rap music, participants credited underground artists as representing original hip-hop music and creating more positive and socially conscious music than mainstream rap artists. Unable to agree on the role hip-hop artists should play in "saving our youth," participants debated larger issues plaguing Black communities, such as single-parent households, illiteracy, and lack of economic empowerment.

This study was not intended to critique hip-hop lyrics or debate the effectiveness of using hip-hop texts in the classroom. In this study, participants discussed what it means to be a member of the hip-hop community and reflected how that membership influenced their life. Each participant shared his or her story describing how hip-hop entered their lives during childhood and helped frame their adolescent years and adulthood. Using terms like "acceptance" and "discovery," participants spoke passionately about what hip-hop meant to them.

Hip-hop is one of the most power mediums of expression. Now is the right time to study this fascinating cultural phenomenon. Hip-hop culture's creative elements captivate the viewer while it's rebellious defiant nature challenges viewers' conventional sensibilities. This study examined hip-hop through the stories of adults who incorporate some aspect of the hip-hop culture into their lives. The ciphers used to present participants' stories honored hip-hop tradition and paid tribute to African griots storytellers. The participants' stories revealed what is meant to be a member of the hip-hop community and demonstrated their respective view of the world. Hip-hop culture holds significance to many people's lives. It is a cultural lifestyle with members

ranging in age from pre-school to senior citizens. Hip-hop culture boasts members who are doctors, lawyers, educators, and entrepreneurs. As hip-hop culture continues to flourish, it offers noteworthy opportunities to study its nuances.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Revised Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis

1st set of interviews	11/1	11/3	11/10											
Interview transcription		11/3	11/10	11/17										
2nd set of interviews			11/10	11/17	11/24									
2nd interview transcription				11/17	11/24									
Member checking	11/1	11/3	11/10	11/17	11/24									
Data Management		11/3	11/10	11/17	11/24									
Analysis	11/1	11/3	11/10	11/17	11/24	12/8	12/15	12/22	12/28	12/29	12/30			
Fine-tune finding										12/29	12/30	*1/7*	1/18	
Dissertation draft submitted													2/11	
Revision & feedback													2/27 6/19 7/28	
Dissertation announcement														10/7/13
Dissertation defense														10/21/13
Graduation														12/18/13

APPENDIX B

Initial Interview questions protocol

Mainstream Politics

Seeing the everyday through new lens, producing and examining bias and perceptions that influence language use are seen as a way to disrupt the commonplace within critical literacy.

- How do members of the hip-hop community communicate?
- What does hip-hop provide that no other form of expression can?
- How has hip-hop influenced you?
- How is hip-hop experienced in every-day life?
- Does hip-hop create new meanings?
- How do you view underground artists in relation to mainstream artists?
- What is *real* hip-hop?
- Do you think that hip-hop has a language?
- Discuss the control of hip-hop music.

Social Justice

The world is a socially constructed text and social justice within critical literacy involves reading the world to uncover power relationships.

- Define authority within hip-hop culture.
- Describe the role of women in hip-hop.
- How did you describe yourself as a hip-hop artist/or member of the hip-hop community?

Multiple perspectives

Critical literacy examines perspective.

- Give an example of how two different hip-hop artists address the same topic.
- Whose perspective is being told in rap lyrics?
- Whose voice(s) is (are) dominant in hip-hop music?
- Is hip-hop used as a political platform?
- How has technology influenced hip-hop?
- Tell me about a time when hip-hop was *real*?

Transformation

Taking action and promoting social justice.

- Self-destruction was a song about changing negative actions and practices. What other songs motivate people to change unjust situations?
- When Spelman students protested Nelly's Bone marrow registry, was "social transformation" achieved? Explain.
- What do you think is happening with hip-hop music right now?
- Describe the difference between hip-hop culture and the hip-hop industry.
- Can you describe some changes that have occurred in hip-hop over the last thirty years?
- Is there a difference between hip-hop and rap?
- How does your work as a _____relate to hip-hop?

APPENDIX C

Second Interview questions protocol

Music Elicitation Interview Questions

- What does hip-hop music provide that no other form of expression can?
- Looking at the lyrics from I Used to Love H.E.R., what is Common saying about hip-hop?
- Describe what is happening with hip-hop music right now?
- What role do women play in the creation, development and consumption of hip-hop music?
- Provide examples of significant hip-hop songs and explain why they are significant.
- Discuss songs that describe your life as a timeline.
- Name a song with lyrics that encourage the listener to deconstruct gender roles, racist practices, and governmental policies.

Photo Elicitation Interview Questions

- If CD covers to tell a story, what story would they tell?
- What comes to mind when you see this image?
- Has the look of hip-hop changed?
- If you could create the visual image of hip-hop, what would it look like?
- What role does age play in hip-hop?
- Is the southern hip-hop community different?
- What role do women play in hip-hop?

APPENDIX D

Initial Interview questions protocol

What era of hip-hop do these images represent?

Does the label of conscious rapper limit sales?

Compare and contrast graffiti artists with break-dancers.

Graffiti

Break-dancing

What comes to mind when you see this image?