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Don't Judge a Book by its Cover: An Ethnography about Achievement, Rap Music, Sexuality & Race

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ABSTRACT

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER: AN ETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT
ACHIEVEMENT, RAP MUSIC, SEXUALITY & RACE
by
Bettina L. Love

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore how youth consumption of

rap music informed their ideas of gender, race, sexuality, and education at a local

community center in Atlanta, Georgia. The participants in the study were comprised of

three male and six female Black students from working class families, ranging in age

from 13–17 years old. The data collection process included 60 formal interviews, 55

informal interviews, 27 focus group interviews, 103 participant observations, and

document analyses of media materials. Atlas.ti: The Knowledge Workbench (2003)

assisted with the organizing, coding, categorizing, and interpreting of the vast amount of

data. Findings from the study revealed four major themes: (a) youth's engagement with

rap music fostered essentialized notions of Blackness, (b) teens believed that Blacks were

intellectually inferior, (c) youth perceived their classroom teachers as racist and (d) youth

responded to their teacher's perceived racism by disassociating themselves from youth

they believed to be academically inferior. The findings of this study addressed the need

for candid dialogues about race in the classroom and educational policy that incorporates

critical media literacy.

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER: AN ETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Scholars Crouch (2006), Ford (2002), and McWhorter (2001) wrote passionately that Hip Hop culture and rap music are a threat to Black youth. The above authors argued that rap music reinforces negative stereotypes, which hinder the social, economic, and educational progress of Black youth in America (McWhorter). In "What's Holding Blacks Back," McWhorter described an afternoon lunch at a Kentucky Fried Chicken in Harlem. There McWhorter sat and watched a group of Black teenage boys, as he elucidated, "check out of mainstream society" (p. 1). He further described the boys' behavior as "bellicose" and suggested that they demonstrated a "bone-deep dislike of authority" (p. 1). McWhorter then drew a direct correlation between the boys' behavior and Hip Hop culture and rap music. According to McWhorter (2003),

> many writers and thinkers see a kind of informed political engagement, even revolutionary potential, in rap and hip hop. They couldn't be more wrong. By reinforcing the stereotypes that long hindered blacks, and by teaching young blacks that a thuggish adversarial stance is the properly "authentic" response to a presumptively racist society, rap retards black success. (p. 2)

Alternatively, there are scholars who assert that rap music can engage youth in political discourse, which promotes critical thinking (Dimitriadis, 2001; Giroux, 1994, 2001; Ginwright, 2004; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Stovall, 2006). These messages of rap are instrumental in educating Black youth about their potential to succeed or fail in the face of racism, sexism, and classism (Ginwright). Kelley (1996) and Rose (1994) argued that Hip Hop could be a powerful tool for social change. Ginwright contended,

> For black youth, hip-hop culture is a vehicle for expressing pain, anger, and the frustration of oppression, which is expressed through rap music, style of dress, language, and poetry. Additionally, hip-hop culture is used to organize, inform, and politicize youth about local and national issues. (p. 133)

With these issues in mind, this study attempted to understand how nine Black youth at a local community center in Atlanta, Georgia made meaning of rap music. This study's findings suggest that Black youth can examine critically the text of rap music. However, youth's examination of rap music is not without contradictions and confusion because the messages that rap music transmits are monolithic images of the Black experience (Bynoe, 2004). The corporate marketers of rap music convey to Black youth that there is one essentialized way to be Black, and that Black culture is for sale to the highest bidder (hooks, 1992). According to Bynoe,

> The Hip Hop industry's decision to intentionally target white rap consumers means that overtly socially conscious and/or pro-Black messages have been substantially sacrificed in rap music to accommodate a 'we-are-the-world' ethos based on hedonistic consumerism and general youth rebellion. . . . Whereas in the past there was a wide array of rap music styles and messages, today the Hip Hop industry markets ghettocentric lascivious rap content globally as the singular Black experience. (pp. 230-231)

The findings from this study support Bynoe's position that rap music teaches Black youth that there is a singular Black experience, a monolithic notion of Black womanhood, and that Whiteness is superior.

This study also suggests that Black youth feel intellectually inferior to their White and Asian counterparts inside the classroom. This dissertation examines the lives of nine urban youth, growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, who engage with rap's images and messages that inform them about their sexuality, intellect, body image, and what Blackness is and is not. Kellner (1995) argued, "Media culture also provides the materials

out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of

nationality, of sexuality, of "us and "them" (p. 1). The youth in this study utilized rap

music to construct notions of self and Black identity. The youths' contradictions were a

critical part of their process to understand the ideas embodied in this musical genre of

degrading messages about Black women; how it, "reeks of materialism; it feeds on

stereotypes and offensive language . . . and it surely doesn't always side with humanistic

values" (Dyson, 2007, p. 15). As youth critiqued rap music for all of its problematic

diatribes, they simultaneously enjoyed the music and understood it as the authentic

representation of Black popular culture.[1]

The global economic success of rap music has demonstrated that it is not just a

"fad." The versatility of rap is undeniable; its learning environment can be as formal as a

reading or language arts class or as informal as a street corner in the heart of the inner

city, a prison cell, or a rap video that depicts a lifestyle that is pleasurable, racially

unequal, and sexually promiscuous. These learning environments affect Black urban

youth who merge these worlds together to negotiate who they are. The merging of these

two worlds is important to parents, educators, community leaders, and anyone concerned

with youth development. It is essential that research is able to focus on the ways in which

youth process the messages of rap in their daily lives because the messages "constitute a

common culture for the majority of individuals . . . and identities" (Kellner, 1995, p. 1).

Therefore, this study attempted to understand how Black youth in Atlanta, Georgia, made

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[1] The term Black popular culture is derived from Stuart Hall (1983) in his classic piece, "What is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture." Hall (1983) defines Black popular culture as "popular culture, commodified and stereotyped as it often is, is not at all, as we sometimes think of it, the arena where we find who we really are, the truth of our experiences . . . It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented , not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time" (p. 28).

meaning out of rap music. This ethnographic study provides a piece of the ever-changing puzzle of rap music, race relations, youth sexuality, perceptions of academic achievement, and how Black urban youth conceptualize rap music.

In the essence of qualitative research, I share the ways my role may have shaped the study because Hip Hop music helped me understand what it meant to be a young, Black, poor female growing up in the inner city. I share my experiences for various reasons. One, as a qualitative researcher, I think it is vital that the reader learn about the researcher because the researcher serves as the primary data tool. In other words, I viewed this work through my eyes, and who I am shapes the study. Secondly, it is important that I expose my affinity for Hip Hop culture and rap music, not only to make the reader aware of my biases, but also my passion for researching Hip Hop culture and rap music.

My journey with Hip Hop started 13 years ago. I was a teenager searching for answers, and much like the youth of today, I was searching within Black popular culture. Hip Hop and rap music showed me who I could be: intelligent, street smart, and a bully who did not take "no" for an answer. These attributes did not always work in my favor, but I learned many life lessons along the way. Now, 13 years later, I am interested in how youth understand who they are. Much has changed in the intervening years. Today's youth face immeasurable obstacles. According to the Children's Defense Fund (2007), "Every six hours a child is killed by abuse or neglect, 2,261 high school youth drop out, 4,302 children are arrested, 17,132 public school youth are suspended, and one out of every three Black children will spend time in prison during their lifetime." Most of us

find these statistics heart wrenching, but they are also the reality for our poor and urban Black youth.

In the midst of these statistics, rap music glamorizes dropping out of school, committing a crime, going to prison, and even the act of taking someone's life. Numerous studies have demonstrated the ways television news portray Blacks as aggressive, violent, or criminal (Hansen & Hansen, 2000; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein, 1998). Oliver (1994) examined "reality-based" television shows and concluded this genre overrepresents violent crimes, and they depict disproportionately Blacks and Latinos as criminals. Independent research firms Harris Interactive (2006) and Teenage Research Unlimited (2006) reported that on average youth spend nearly 17 hours online, 14 hours watching television, and 12 hours listening to the radio each week (http://www.forbes.com/technology/newswire /2003/07/24/ rtr1037488.html). The time youth spend watching television, listening to music, and searching the internet is a part of their learning experience (Kellner, 1995; Storey, 1998). Therefore, what they learn through rap can become the landscape for their lives. Nightingale (1994) concluded that youth's relationship to mass media culture leads to serious social and psychological problems. Nightingale further argued that black youth live in a world of extraordinary materialism, conspicuous consumption, and poverty, which leads them to frustration, social stigmas, and alienation because of their inability to consume what Black popular culture says they must have. The images of rap music have become the breeding ground for youth's frustration. With these issues in mind, I think it is important to establish a common language for the study.

Is It Rap Music or Hip Hop?

Rap music evolved from the Hip Hop culture. The definition of rap is a "form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music" (Rose, 1994, p. 2). Hip Hop, for many, is more than just music; Hip Hop is a worldview or culture centered in African and Black traditions of art, dance, poetry, fashion, and experience (Baker, 1993; Neal, 1997; Osumare, 2001; Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984). The endless struggle of oppression, for better or worse, produces Hip Hop culture and rap music (Dyson, 2007). Dyson argued,

> where young black Americans once turned primarily to the church – and the civil rights leaders that the church produced – to articulate their hopes, frustrations, and daily tribulations, it is fast becoming men like Jay-Z and Nas, and women like Missy Elliot and Lauryn Hill, who best vocalize the struggle of growing up black and poor in this country. (p. xx)

The narratives and images used by rappers, whether consciously or unconsciously, link themselves to larger stories that play out in society– poverty, crime, and violence to name just a few. I believe that there is a distinct difference between Hip Hop and rap music; however, I will use the terms rap and Hip Hop interchangeably because much of the literature lumps both terms together. When I refer to this study, I will use the term rap because the participants of the study were not aware of any Hip Hop elements other than rap. Much of the literature I review will use the overarching term Hip Hop to describe all of the elements of Hip Hop culture, which are rapping, DJing, break dancing or b-boying, graffiti, and fashion (Osumare). All of the elements listed play or have played a major role in defining the culture of Hip Hop over 30 years ago. However, the element of rap has grown to unthought-of heights and has evolved into a "1.5 billion dollar a year commodity" (Crouch, 2006, p. 2).

Rap stands out more than any other aspect of Hip Hop because of its availability (Forman, 1995). It does not take any money to rap; often all one needs is a pen and pad. Rapping is something every all youngsters can aspire to do. It is an affordable and practical art form. Being a rapper also carries a lot of prestige. If a youth can out maneuver her or his opponent with words, it is a testament to her or his rapping ability, which makes her or him popular in her or his community. Unfortunately, rap is now the only element of Hip Hop culture that is mainstream; its popularity is global and local at the same time because of its easy accessibility. The youth in this study have limited background knowledge of Hip Hop as a cultural movement. The only element of Hip Hop culture that they know is rap.

One day I observed youth dancing at the community center, and I commented on how that dance was reminiscent of an "old school" dance I use to do. They laughed and told me that they had come up with that dance themselves. I found myself trying to revive my old dance moves to show them it was the same dance I did when I was their age. By the end, I had embarrassed myself and further expanded the generational gap. I learned through this experience that the youth at the center were not aware of the rich history of Hip Hop culture. The youth at the center listened to rap music and that was the only element of the culture they knew. Their perception of Hip Hop was not as a culture, but as a music genre. I surmised that their narrow knowledge of Hip Hop history was due to a lack of media exposure to the other elements of Hip Hop and an educational system that ignores or forbids Black popular culture in the classroom (Dimitriadis, 2001; McLaren, 2000; Stovall, 2006).

Thus, what started in the parks and streets of New York in the early 1970s now has become one of the overriding sounds and images of Black popular culture (Rose, 1994). Rap music has become boundless and transcends race, class, and gender. Perhaps, there is no other sound that resonates with our youth like rap music (Ginwright, 2004). Alridge (2005) contended that "For many youth, Hip Hop reflects the social, economic, political, and cultural realities and conditions of their lives; speaking to them in a language and manner they understand" (p. 180). Alridge implied that Hip Hop is a powerful force in shaping the lives of youth, for Hip Hop not only reflects youth reality, it helps create it. Watkins (2006) explained that:

> Whatever social or political impact hip hop has had on young people has come primarily in the world of popular culture. Hip hop's evolution launched a revolution in youth culture. All the things that traditionally matter to young people – style, music, fashion, and a sense of generational purpose – have come under the spell of hip hop. (p. 148)

This study attempted to understand how Black youth in Atlanta, Georgia negotiated and made meaning of rap music while under what Watkins calls the "spell of Hip Hop." Ford (2002) argued that the "spell" of Hip Hop lured Black youth to "embrace their own commodification, basking under the corporate marketer's loving gaze, believing themselves to be powerful and autonomous" (p. 3). The notion that Black youth are just products that corporate America uses to sell Black music is not new. Racial stereotypes proliferate in the sophisticated marketing of rap music, and youth internalize these stereotypes in multiple ways (Dyson, 1996; hooks, 2003c; Queeley 2003). In this study, the youth internalized the images of rap as essentialized notions of Blackness, intellectual and racial inferiority.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to understand how youth at Hope Community Center (HCC) constructed racial, gender, sexual and academic identities through rap music in their everyday lives. This was important to understanding the development of youth as they constructed identities of race, class, and gender through rap music. As youth digested the messages that stem from rap music, it taught them about who they are and who society says they are. Rap's interplay between entertainment and reality created contradictions as youth processed and made meaning of rap. Much of the rap music HCC youth consumed glorified violence, sexual promiscuity, and criminal behavior. Thus, rap music unfortunately played a large role in the maintenance of destructive images and conceptions about Blackness to the HCC youth. The youth internalized such images, which fostered notions about the youths' race, gender, sexuality, and academic achievement.

Significance of the Problem

I find the significance of this research in the voices of HCC youth. Many scholars have conducted research on the social, economic, political, and cultural significance of Hip Hop culture and music. Bakari Kitwana (2002) suggested, "Hip Hop is arguably the single most significant achievement of our generation" (p. 7). Rap music in the last 30 years has become a global phenomenon with mass appeal. There are countless books and articles that examine rap music and Hip Hop culture through multiple lenses, but few have given voice to the youth who consume the music, especially in Atlanta, Georgia, where rap music is so prevalent (Sarig, 2007). Therefore, the scope of this study was to explore ways "traditionally silenced" youth engaged with Black popular culture (Leard &

Lashua, 2006, p. 244). The ways in which urban youth engage with Black popular culture is important to education because youth learn about themselves and others through Black popular culture (Kellner, 1995). It was my hope to enhance the body of literature by adding the voices of youth to the examination of rap music in conjunction with analyses that aim to illuminate the experiences of urban youth outside the classroom.

Research Questions

The central and subsequent guiding questions that directed this study are specific to the research context. The focus of the study is to understand how youth at HCC construct identities through rap music in their everyday lives. The guiding research questions are as follows:

1. How do youth understand the images presented in rap music and rap videos?

2. How do rap's messages contribute to youth's construction of race and gender identities?

3. How does rap music shape youths' lived experiences?

Definitions of Terms

I include a few brief terms here for purposes of clarity. Each of the terms defined below will receive greater attention throughout the dissertation. I define *cultural consumption* as a social act that humans engage in daily (Storey, 1999). *Hip Hop* is a music genre that became a cultural movement that transcends race, class, and gender. There are five major elements that make up Hip Hop culture: graffiti, break dancing, rapping or MCing, DJing, and fashion (Rose, 1994). *Popular culture* is something that is

widely favored by and through mass consumption (Storey, 1998). Finally, *rap music* is the lyrical aspect of Hip Hop culture (Rose).

The Story, Before the Research

In the spirit of qualitative methodology, I want my audience to understand how I make meaning of Hip Hop culture and rap music; especially because Hip Hop can be different regionally in context but grounded in a sound that resonates with people around the world. I strongly believe that to examine Hip Hop culture, or any cultural substance, the researcher must first understand his or her connection to the research at hand. There-fore, I first present my love story of Hip Hop in hopes of giving the reader a piece of myself, so as they read, they will understand that this study is not just a requirement to obtain my doctorate, it is directly related to the last 13 years of my life. Thus, I share my personal accounts as a lover of rap music and growing up an urban youth.

The Hip Hop genre helped me understand what it meant to be a young, Black, poor female growing up in the inner city. Rap music also helped HCC youth do the same. Over the years, I have watched Hip Hop transform, grow, fall, and stumble, and each transformation taught me something about myself and about the world around me.

My passion to research Hip Hop developed during my days as an elementary school teacher. My students walked into my classroom performing aspects of Hip Hop culture, and, to some extent, I emulated aspects of Hip Hop culture too. I would hum the latest song under my breath while my students were rapping it. My sneaker collection told the story of my ties to the Hip Hop generation. Because fashion is a major part of Hip Hop, sneakers can tell a lot about someone's involvement with Hip Hop culture. My students loved my sneakers**.** That also made me "cool" in their eyes. It was easy to

integrate Hip Hop music and culture in the classroom. I was able to blur the awkward teacher–student boundaries because we both enjoyed Hip Hop music and culture.

Therefore, I found myself in a classroom full of youth who demonstrated more love for the music than they did for school-based learning. These were urban youth who could, with great precision, recite the lyrics of the most popular song at that time. I saw myself in my students. They used rap music to express their pain, fear, and love for their community, as I once did as a young girl. We used the beat of rap music to write poems, tell short stories, or just interact with one other. Their passion to learn became apparent through their love for rap music.

My ability to interact with youth and to understand the language that rap music created proved to be a key attribute in my teaching success. Because I showed a love for rap, listened to appropriate rap music in my classroom, and knew the latest songs, I found my students demonstrated a desire for academic success.[2] By using their favorite artists' lyrics to teach lessons, I was able to bridge the age and musical culture gaps that existed between my students and myself. I found a universal, common ground and a place in which youth could feel comfortable expressing themselves in their own ways. My students became critical thinkers, and that was more important to me than any standardized test, though their scores did increase. My connection to my students through rap music started years before I met them or before I became their teacher. My passion for Hip Hop and rap music started when my family hit rock bottom due to drugs and alcohol, and the only thing that I had left was the music.

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[2] By appropriate rap music, I mean rap that had no profanity.

Love of My Life

The year I was born, the Sugar Hill Gang released the groundbreaking track that awakened America to the sound of inner city youth in New York City. Their track, "Rapper's Delight," reached #36 on the U.S. pop charts and #4 on the U.S. R&B charts. As Hip Hop music became more mainstream, my exposure to it also grew, but first I heard the pain of Marvin Gay, the soul of the Godfather James Brown, and the effortless mystic sound of Charlie "Bird" Parker. As the youngest child of three, my brother is 13 years my senior and my sister 10 years my senior, my siblings naturally influenced me, and so did my community. I loved every minute of growing up in Rochester, New York. Every Saturday morning my mother cleaned the house as she grooved to Frankie Beverly and Maze, The Four Tops, Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, and Chaka Khan. My father, a James Brown fanatic, also was instrumental in influencing my love for music. While the style of my parents was more "Old School," my older brother filled the house with rap music and Hip Hop culture. I would listen outside my brother's room to Afrika Bambaataa, The Fat Boys, Kurtis Blow, and Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five, (and often times I would steal his tapes). With that introduction to the grandfathers of Hip Hop, I found my first love. I often times saw my brother and his friend dance the latest b-boy dances. My brother was also a huge fan of sneakers, especially Nike's. He would work all week at McDonalds to get the latest pair of Air Jordan's, Nike's, or whatever was popular at the time. I loved knowing that my brother was so close to the Hip Hop world, though I was too young to be a part of it. At the time, I did not know that my brother was indoctrinating me with Hip Hop culture and music; all I knew was that my brother was cool, and I wanted to be a part of his world when I became older.

By the age of 14, my two-parent home was no more, my older brother and sister left to start their lives, and I was left with the music. I would listen to anything I could get my hands on to remind me of my early childhood. Thus, I began to clean the house every Saturday morning while I listened to Nas, Jay-Z, KRS-One, Redman, Mob Deep, Biggie, and OutKast as my source for guidance and strength. During this period, I watched my house and my community taken over by drugs. I listened to Jay-Z and Biggie as they told me the stories of a hustler. Nas become a storyteller of sorts, and I found myself happily lost in his "New York State of Mind"; KRS-One become my history teacher who told me about my ancestors; and Outkast told me that I could "git up, git out, and git something" (Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik, 1994).

Fast forward to my 16th birthday, I remember waking up that morning ready for work. I had a job at the local community center. At the time, my mother was gone and I had no clue where she was. My father was there, but only in the physical form. Years of alcohol and drug abuse had weakened his heart. He would die a year and half later; so it was just me. I woke up on my 16th birthday, turned on my CD player and listened to OutKast tell me to "git up, git out, and git something" repeatedly. I knew at that point in my life that it was up to me to make something of myself. In short, I wanted more out of life. With no mother or father to turn to, I relied on my "uncles" for guidance, NAS, KRS-One, Jay-z, Redman, Biggie, Common, and OutKast just to name a few. Their words spoke to me as if I was the only one with their albums, and they knew my troubles at home. I felt every word that came out of their mouths, even though, at times, I could not relate to all of their experiences. I often knew someone that sold drugs or went to jail; therefore, I drew on those life stories for my connection.

As I look back, I can truly say that I used Hip Hop culture and rap music as a form of therapy. As these rap artists told their stories of growing up in broken homes, their mothers and fathers on drugs, and family members going to prison, they made my family problems seem common and easier to deal with. My story is just one narrative about how a kid growing up in Rochester, New York, in the 1980s constructed meaning of Hip Hop music to change her life for the better. However, times have changed, Hip Hop has changed; and for better or worse, youth today still construct meaning from the Hip Hop music and culture. Therefore, I feel as if I owe rap music, Hip Hop, and inner city youth something. If it were not for the lessons I learned living in the inner city while listening to rap music and becoming indoctrinated in Hip Hop culture, I would not be writing this dissertation and studying Hip Hop culture and rap music. This study has helped me understand rap music as more than just a musical genre in which youth engage. It is also a form of persuasive, influential rhetoric that has the ability to educate, inspire, or dehumanize youth in countless different directions.

<div align="center">Overview</div>

The proceeding chapter reviews literature that aligns with the findings of this study. The literature review grounds this study in similar research that investigated how youth made meaning of rap music at school, in their local community centers, and internationally. Chapter 2 defines in-depth terms and theoretical frameworks that provided conceptual maps for the study. Chapter 3 outlines the study's research design and describes the study's participants at length. Also in chapter 3, I include the methodological orientation of the study, which is important because it guided the data collection methods, the procedures, and the data analysis of the study. Chapter 4

discusses the findings of the research, and the last chapter addresses future research,

limitations of the study, and implementations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines and synthesizes literature that explores the history of the

Black female body, the experiences of youth that engage with rap music, and issues

surrounding African American achievement. Much of the current research on the topics

of rap music and youth and the Black female body are theoretical or quantitative in

nature. Therefore, included in the review are theoretical, quantitative, and qualitative

studies. I first define three significant terms that shape the study. Secondly, I outline the

theoretical framework that guided the study and provided a conceptual lens to examine

rap music and youth. Next is an overview of the history of Hip Hop culture and rap

music. The reviewed literature addresses the issues Black, urban youth face as they

engage with rap music throughout the United States. As young Black people engage and

read the explicit, violent, sexual messages of rap, there is a greater risk that they will live

out the messages they consume (Emerson, 2002; Stephens & Few, 2007a; Stephens &

Phillips, 2005; Ward, 2004; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). Youth's consumption

of rap music is problematic, especially when youth lack pedagogy that is critical of

popular culture and the divisive methods of popular culture, which perpetuate racism,

White patriarchy, and ideological beliefs that Blacks are intelligently inferior to their

White counterparts, and more promiscuous (Dyson, 1996, 2004, 2007; Emerson; Giroux

2003; hooks, 1992; Stephens & Few, 2007a; Queeley, 2003). In addition to urban youth

feeling inferior outside of the classroom, literature will be reviewed that addresses how

students who learn from the margins of education foster resiliency to overcome racism inside the classroom (Gayles, 2005, 2006; Miller, 1999; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Sanders, 1997; Winfield, 1991). According to Beachum and McCray (2008), urban areas across America are filled with "legions of voiceless young people who are trapped in neglected neighborhoods, segregated schools, and culture of chaos" (p. 55). Thus, this literature review discusses some of the issues that face Black, urban, youth as consumers of rap music and individuals who endure racism in the classroom because of the messages that stereotype Black youth as inferior outside the classroom (Dyson, 2004a).

I chose to review literature that consisted of a burgeoning body of empirical, peer-reviewed studies that represent the experiences of urban, Black youth. These studies reflect the issues that youth face as they engage with rap music at school or in their communities. A large portion of the literature used qualitative methods as a methodology for examining the lives of youth. In the studies reviewed, qualitative researchers collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analyses. Researchers also collected data in participants' natural setting. Therefore, I chose to review these qualitative studies because their methodology mirrored the methods I used in this study. Also, the qualitative studies reviewed investigated the ways in which educators used rap music in the classroom to foster critical thinking or how youth build communal bonds through rap (Dimitriadis, 2003; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade 2002; Stovall, 2006). The literature reviewed examines the latter topics discussed above; however, there is a scarcity of research that examines youth's race, gender, sexuality, and educational experiences simultaneously as they engage with rap music. Therefore, this study adds to the dearth of research that

investigates the complexities of rap when engaged by urban, southern youth. In addition to qualitative research, I included quantitative studies to highlight investigations that examined youth perceptions of rap in greater sample sizes. By examining qualitative and quantitative studies, this literature review attempted to capture how Black youth read the messages of rap music, alongside their experiences in the classroom.

Through this literature review, I map the sexuality of Black women throughout history in American and abroad; the role rap music has played in perpetuating myths about Black women's sexuality, the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom in conjunction with rap music, and the educational achievement of Blacks that face racism and discrimination in the classroom based on racial stereotypes. A plethora of research exists on the latter topics. However, the studies I chose focused on urban, Black youth to parallel the current study and expose the dilemmas urban youth encounter as they consumed rap music.

<div align="center">Review of Significant Terms</div>

Rap music is situated within the contradictory space of popular culture, and more specially, Black popular culture (Hall, 1983). Rap's roots in Black popular culture draw on the experiences of Black people to create forms of entertainment in multiple media (film, music, dance, television, print media) that express the social life and "culture" of Blacks (Hall, 1981; Rose, 1994). However, Hall (1993) contended that one must be wary of deeming any form of Black popular culture authentic because

> it is the space of homogenizations where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into to hands of established cultural bureaucracies, sometimes without a murmur. It is rooted in popular experience and available for expropriation at one and the same time. (p. 26)

Rap music has become the place where Black youth search for their identities, which is due in large part to Black popular culture representations of Black youth as the most accessible cultural representation of the Black youth quotidian (Alridge, 2005; Dimitriadis, 2001; Giroux & Simon, 1988; Lipsitz, 1994; Watkins, 2000). Thus, with that point in mind, it is central to understand rap's position within Black popular culture as one that is complex and saturated with "binary oppositions" (Hall, p. 26). These binary oppositions Hall explained as "resistance versus incorporation; authentic versus inauthentic" (p. 26). Hip Hop and rap music began as a site of resistance and a space of liberation, but it has now been folded back into dominant culture. The cultural milieu also began as a site of authentic Black struggle, but its incorporation into dominant culture creates an imaginary, inauthentic authenticity.

These binary oppositions create an inner struggle for Black youth as they locate their own definition of Blackness and sexuality juxtaposed by Whiteness within the confines of rap music. Hall (1997) profoundly stated, "It is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are" (p. 30). Given that school systems in the United States, for the most part, silence urban Black youth (Dimitriadis, 2001; Giroux 2003), Black popular culture and rap music comprise an important site for education because rap music informs Black youth and becomes their "common culture" (Willis, 1990, p. 30). Because of the silencing they experience in school, the site where youth spend most of their time, Black youth must look elsewhere to engage with one another culturally, and every day cultural engagement is a significant experience of formidable education. Therefore, rap music acts as the most influential bridge to this crucial cultural engagement, which means it is

the most influential educational site outside of the institution. Willis wrote that the "common culture" youth create stems from "the omnipresent cultural media of the electronic age," which "provide a wide range of symbolic resources for, and are a powerful stimulant of, the symbolic work and creativity of young people" (p. 30). Following Hall's (1992) and Willis's (1990) analyses of culture, it is important to examine rap music and youth because it is how they come to understand who they are.

Many scholars have argued that rap music celebrates capitalism, sexism, racism, violence, hyper-masculinity, promiscuity, and materialism (Dyson, 2007; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 2004; McLaren, 2003; Queeley, 2003; Ralph, 2006). Therefore, rap's messages to youth perpetuate and reflect our unequal, prejudiced society (Conquergood, 1992a; Dyson, 1996; Koza, 1994; Mahiri, 1998). Thus, it is important to review rap music within the realm of Black popular culture, which perpetuates already existing oppressive cultural elements. Rose (1994) stated,

> On the other hand, news media attention on rap seems fixated on instances of violence at rap concerts, rap producers' illegal use of musical samples, gangsta raps' lurid fantasies of cop killing and female dismemberment, and black nationalist rappers' suggestions that White people are the devil's disciples. These celebratory and inflammatory aspects in rap and the media coverage of them bring to the forefront several long-standing debates about popular music and culture. (p. 1)

Rose suggested that the media frenzy surrounding rap music has made the absorption of the genre into dominant popular culture inevitable, and its popularity centers on the negative aspects of the music. Black popular culture is deeply rooted in a contested and contrived space where corporate America controls the majority of rap music, dominant culture polices it, and these two forces distribute it strategically to represent and become the collective voice of Black urban youth everywhere (Basu, 2005; hooks, 2003c; Koza; Queeley; Stephens & Few, 2007b). Thus, Black popular culture is more than just its

component forms of entertainment: It stands as a representation of Black culture to the masses. The representations from Black popular culture influence youth and affect urban Black youth in profound ways that Dimitradis (2001) argued must be examined in depth and through the qualitative methods of ethnography.

Essentialism is the second term vital to the study. Anderson and Hill Collins (2004) define essentialism as a monolithic classification given to a particular group that shapes that group's identity. Epstein (1997) contended that essentialism in the post-modernist lexicon is

> the view that some social groups have characteristics or interests that are given rather than continually constructed and reconstructed—and reductionism, stereotyping, as in the view that all women are nurturing, or that African Americans have innate musical abilities. (p. 22)

Essentialism subscribes to the stereotyping of a particular group of people often based on the group's common race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristic, which influences how society views a particular group.

The third term of importance to the study is ideology. The ideas rooted in particular established ideologies are what create essentialist notions of identity both within and outside of a particular cultural group. Hill Collins (2006) defined ideology as "a body of ideas reflecting the interests of a particular social group. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism all have ideologies that support social inequality" (p. 351). Storey (1998) argued that ideology is a key term in the study of popular culture because it provides a lens that groups of people use to create "systematic body of ideas" (p. 3). Hall (1978) argued that ideology links to politics, which is an important aspect of popular culture. The term ideology can take on different meanings depending on the subject matter. For example, Storey suggested that ideology can "refer to power relations outside those of

class" and inside of class, which is "one of the fundamental assumptions of classical Marxism" (p. 4). Defining ideology is complex; however, within the realm of popular culture; it offers "significations of the way the world is" (Storey, p. 5). Storey most closely approximated how I define ideology in this study. He wrote, "ideology is encountered in the practices of everyday life and not simply in certain ideas about everyday life" (p. 5). These three terms are important to my study because they illuminate my findings and provide a common language for my research.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

Critical pedagogy was the conceptual framework for this study. Using critical pedagogy as the framework enhanced my study of popular culture by providing a lens that allowed me, as a researcher, to investigate students lives outside the classroom. Students' ability to learn does not start when they enter school: They are engaged outside of the classroom walls by many factors before they ever enter a classroom (Newman, 2006). These influences can be, but are not limited to, students, family, friends, and—the one of concern for this literature review—popular culture (Giroux & Simon, 1988c; Newman, 2006). McLaren (2003) argued that "Knowledge [is] acquired in school–or anywhere . . . Critical pedagogy asks how our everyday commonsense understanding–our social constructions or 'subjectivities'–get produced and lived out" (p. 196). My concern as a critical theorist was to understand how youth were "making sense of what is happening" (hooks, 1994, p. 60) in their everyday lives. I define popular culture much like Giroux and Simon (1988c), Storey (1998), and Lipsitz (1998), who suggest that popular culture is a site of education that is filled with "contradictory meanings" (Storey, p. 1) about race, class, gender, body image, and sexual orientation. Society consents to

and gives power to popular culture. Popular culture acquires power through the repetition of representations of cultural groups. It is through repetition that sociocultural groups may internalize how to represent themselves in the simplest ways—walking, talking, everyday living—and the groups may be unaware that the dominant culture established the rules for that group through ideological and essentialist ideas. Thus, our everyday practices become social constructions that we acquired or that popular culture taught us. The dominant group determines what is popular culture, which McLaren (2003) defined as "social practices and representations that *affirm* the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society" (p. 201). However, subcultures do emerge from the grip of the dominant group to create "space" for their counterculture ideologies.

Thirty years ago, Hip Hop music and culture was a subculture in which the dominant group did not participate. Neal (1997) suggested that "Hip Hop perhaps represents the last black popular form to be wholly derived from the experiences and texts of the black urban landscape" (p. 128). Subsequently, today's rap music has fallen under the constraints of corporate America and the dominant group, much like all other forms of black expressive culture (i.e. jazz, rhythm and blues, and soul music). Neal further stated the following:

> But like Soul music a generation earlier, Hip-Hop was essentialized and sold as the "authentic" distillation of contemporary "Blackness," though in fact the form rendered "Blackness" as postmodern as Hip-Hop was itself and thus as difficult to essentialize, though its value as a mass commodity was predicted on consumer acceptance that Hip-Hop represented as essential "Blackness" that was urban, youthful, and threatening. (p. 130)

The commodification of "Blackness" and Hip Hop through a false, negative representation of cultural authenticity is the way in which the dominant group successfully folded

the subculture into its ideological agenda. Educators need to teach the commodification of rap music to our youth through the utilization of the framework of critical pedagogy and critical media literacy because the corporate takeover and selling of rap music situates itself within a capitalist exchange of power and labor (McLaren, 2003). As the two parties coexist, the dominant group (corporate America) exploits the subordinate group (rap artists, urban Black community) through capitalism. Corporate America has sold Black culture and exploited urban youth in the process (Queeley, 2003). The youth identities that the exploitation of rap music essentializes represent a section of urban youth who are "blamed for society's ills (i.e. crime, drug use, delinquency, apathetic behavior toward education, etc.)" (Stovall, 2006, p. 586).

As the dominant group scapegoats urban Black youth as the reason for society's failures, it neglects to acknowledge that "20 percent of children live in poverty; 9.2 million children lack health care insurance; millions lack affordable child care and decent early childhood education; in many states, more money is being spent on prison constructions than on education" (Giroux, 2003, p. xviii). These data are alarming, but when disaggregated by race they are crushing. Giroux stated, "In 1998, 36 percent of black children lived in poverty" (p. xviii). Urban Black youth are impoverished, but when represented to the world through commodified rap music, the images represent them as oversexed, materialistic, violent criminals who reject education and hard work. Leard and Lashua (2006) stated that "critical pedagogy provides a way of seeing unjust social order and revealing how this injustice has caused problems in the lives of young people who live in impoverished conditions" (p. 246). Therefore, the conceptual framework of critical pedagogy provided a lens to deconstruct and make meaning of the everyday practices of

youth who interact with rap music as a site of learning. In Giroux's view, "knowledge has to be meaningful to students before it can be critical" (p.14). Critical pedagogy exposed how popular culture demoralizes urban Black youth, while simultaneously selling and romanticizing urban life to the world of consumers. The goal of critical pedagogy is to produce work that focuses on "the representation of texts and the construction of student subjectivity" (McLaren, 2003, p.185). "We can relate: Hip-Hop culture, critical pedagogy, and the Secondary Classroom" by Stovall (2006) is one example of a study that utilized critical pedagogy as a pedagogical method to help students reflect on and theorize about the music they consume. Stovall's use of critical pedagogy helped students deconstruct the representations of Hip Hop to articulate meaning in their lives and challenged popular culture's demoralization of urban, Black, youth.

Hall (1988) suggested that "cultural workers must link structure conditions of existence" to youth's learning (p. 27). Educators and cultural workers must connect students' lives to education, for this connection is one of the first steps in the process of critical thinking. The next logical step is to raise the critical consciousness of our youth through critical literacy, which is a key component of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000). Giroux and Simon (1988c) made these statements about critical literacy:

> If the questions of literacy are linked to questions of purpose and meaning
> that take seriously that imperatives of educating students for critical
> citizenship in a mass society, it will have to be concerned with the issue of
> how students actually become self-reflective about the spheres of popular
> culture as part of the very process of learning. To be literate is not simply
> to know something; it also means knowing how to participate reflectivity
> in the very act of producing knowledge. (p. xi)

If Black youth learn to use critical literacy as a framework to analyze rap music, then they will develop critical thinking skills and engage intellectually with the problematic text with which they engage most often. They will begin to reconstruct, rearticulate, and

challenge the dominant group's power and control maintained through the oppressive representations of popular culture. As youth become critical thinkers, they can begin to question popular culture representations of Black culture. hooks (2003b) contended that "Education for critical consciousness is necessary if we are to create a sustained cultural context for black folks to have healthy self-esteem" (p.83). hooks argued that if educators would embrace critical pedagogy then they could uplift the self-esteem of Black people, an effect that would improve Black peoples' health. Rap music and culture have the potential to promote critical consciousness to strengthen the Black race through rich cultural conceptions of identity and positive social practices. Using rap music as a site of learning allows youth to listen to rap with a discerning and conscious ear. Through the tools of critical pedagogy, youth could listen to and evaluate lyrics as tools of empowerment.

The classroom can be a place where students feel as though their lives matter. Ladson-Billings (1994) maintained that "effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both the students and subject matter" (p. 125). When students voice what matters to them, teachers have to listen. Educators must make an effort to learn from their students and begin a pedagogical practice that draws from students' social and cultural knowledge. Freire (2000), hooks (1994), Shor (1980), and Ladson-Billings all contend that educators must develop and engage in pedagogical practices that focus on the issues and concerns of students outside the classroom. It is crucial that educators use rap artists' 3-minute rap videos, which glorify violence and sexual promiscuity, as pedagogical tools that "raise important questions regarding such issues as the relevance of everyday life, the importance of student voice, the significance of both meaning and pleasure in the

learning process, and the relationship between knowledge and power in the curriculum"
(Giroux & Simon, 1988c, p. 9).

Corrigan (1979) called for learning institutions to "widen their understanding of
how we are taught, how we learn, and how we know what we know from the text of
popular culture" (p. 79). It is important that educators, parents, and community leaders
understand how youth comprehend their race, class, sexuality, gender roles, and social
positions through the text of rap (Giroux, 2003; Stephens & Few, 2007a; Stovall, 2006).
When youth can turn on the television or flip through a magazine and see countless
examples of Black culture and their community as uneducated, oversexed criminals, they
internalize these images without the ability to analyze and challenge the hegemonic
forces that disseminate these ideologies through popular culture in order to maintain the
status quo (Queeley, 2003). Dyson (2004a) wrote, "For many black and white Americans,
hip hop culture crudely symbolizes the problems of urban black youth" (p. 420). There-
fore, when Hip Hop enters the conversation of education as a pedagogical tool, it is met
with much opposition because Hip Hop is a part of popular culture and it is the culture
and music of marginalized urban youth.

By condemning rap music's usefulness as a pedagogical tool, schools fail to equip
students with the knowledge to detach themselves from popular culture as fans and en-
gage with the text of Hip Hop as intellectuals capable of separating their emotions from
analysis and interpretation (Shumway, 1989). Critical theorists argue that the intellectual
analysis of popular culture is vital to a democratic society concerned with equity, social
justice, and educating critical citizenry (Giroux & Simon, 1988c). Scholle (1991)
contended that critical pedagogy "must link itself to the goals of a radical democracy, it

must engage and critique the conditions of knowledge production, and it must provide a language of possibility for transforming those conditions" (p. 126). Urban youth can begin to understand the racism, sexism, and classism that Hip Hop glorifies and understand the reasons "inner city black youth are pushed to the margins of political power within society" (Giroux, 1998a, p. 23) when educators teach critical thinking in the classroom. Critical thinker's questions the world around them and, certainly, the music they consume (hooks, 2004). Hall (1981), Hill Collins (1998), Ladson-Billings (1998), Lynn (1999), and Giroux and Simon all contend that it is necessary to move towards a critical pedagogy that examines race, class, and gender in order to promote equity in educational policy, curriculum, instruction, and school funding. In doing so, we will be successful in strengthening urban city youth's chances for upward mobility and foster critical thinking skills. There are studies (Dimintriadis, 2003; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Mahiri, 1998; Mahiri & Conner, 2003; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Stovall, 2006; Viola, 2006) that document the need for rap music in the classroom and illustrate the ability of urban youth to think critically about complex issues such as racism, sexism, and materialism while they engage with rap. Exploring these studies serve as a necessary part to strengthen the rationale for popular culture and critical pedagogy in the classroom. However, first researchers and educators must examine the history of Hip Hop culture and rap music, how it became Black popular culture, and rap's commercialization.

History of Hip Hop

Robin D. G. Kelley (2002) suggested, "The most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with the problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression" (p. 9). A prime example of the intellectual vigor to produce a

complex culture comprised of talented, energetic, oppressed individuals is Hip Hop. The

contemporary sound of Hip Hop originated in the streets of New York City in the early

1970s as an outlet for youth to express the ills of their community and the pleasures of

being young. Rose (1994) wrote, "From the outset, rap music has articulated the

pleasures and problems of black urban life in contemporary America" (p. 2). The

problems Black urban youth in the 1970s experienced, at the start of the Hip Hop era

were, unemployment, drug abuse, poor schooling, gang violence, and teen pregnancy

(Rose). Youth still experience these problems today. As a result of these social ills, which

span across the nation hitting almost every major city, Hip Hop became the sound and

culture of inner city youth in America. Hip Hop became a culture with traditions,

customs, and a language seen as counterculture that now speaks to youth around the

globe (Alridge, 2005, Stephens & Few, 2007a; Smitherman, 1997; Watkins, 2000)

Many Hip Hop historians (Forman & Neal, 2004; George, 1999; Rose, 1994;

Toop, 1985) write that the contemporary sound of Hip Hop started in New York City in

1972 with the arrival of a Jamaican immigrant by the name of Clive Campbell, better

known in the Hip Hop world as DJ Kool Herc. Herc grew up with the musical influence

of reggae, which infused aspects of African and slave-era music to infectious rhythmic

beats (Perkins, 1996). What made Herc's DJing style unique was the isolation of the

break (Perkins). Rose states that "Time suspension via rhythmic breaks–points at which

the bass lines are isolated and suspended–are important clues in explaining sources of

pleasure in black music" (p. 67). In other words, the break is the part of a song comprised

of the percussion section of the song. Herc would isolate the drum part of the song, which

would be the part where rappers would interject their clever, poetic rhythms (Perkins).

The break is also the part of the song where break-dancers or b-boys and b-girls would dance (Thompson, 1996). Hip Hop and rap music would not gain mainstream popularity until the epic moment in Hip Hop history, the 1979 release of the Sugar Hill gang song *Rapper's Delight*, which as stated earlier, was one of the first rap songs to reach commercial success (Rose). *Rapper's Delight*'s popularity put Hip Hop culture and rap music in the forefront of popular culture and it has stayed there ever since.

While New York urban youth created, transformed, and turned the gritty and poetic style of rap into a cultural movement in their local urban streets, a bass driven form of rap music began to emerge in the South, primarily in Atlanta and Miami (Sarig, 2007). The history of Hip Hop outside of New York City is important to the comprehensive history of Hip Hop because many sounds and cultures have helped shape the popular rap music we now hear. The South, especially, has influenced the sound of rap music; however, it has only begun to receive recognition for its contributions in the last 5 years (Sarig). Currently, Atlanta shapes the world of rap music (Sarig). Sarig suggested that in recent years, almost every rap song played on the radio had input from a Southern artist, whether through producing the music, shooting the video in Atlanta, rapping on the song, or using dance moves from Atlanta's urban dance culture. For that reason alone, it is important that we study how Atlanta youth understand the text of rap.

Roni Sarig's (2007) book, *Third Coast: OutKast, Timbaland, & How Hip Hop Became A Southern Thing*, is the only comprehensive text about rap music in the South. Sarig interviewed over 40 Southern rap artists as they reflected on the evolution of Hip Hop and rap music in the South. Sarig argued that the culture of Hip Hop started in New York, but, because of the African American Diaspora caused by the history of

slavery and emancipation, its cultural and rhythmic influence originates from the South.

Sarig explored the love Southerners have for Hip Hop, rap music, and their newfound joy

of being the current home of rap music. *Third Coast* revealed "that more than half of the

top rap songs in the country are the work of Southern artists" (p. 1). Sarig suggested that

Hip Hop and rap started in the South and was nurtured in the South by slave music and

Black spirituals. Hip Hop culture and rap music expanded from the streets of New York

to the red clay of Atlanta and now spans across the globe because of commercialization

and the popularity of music videos (Perkins, 1996; Sarig). Rap music's underground roots

disappeared with the creation of music videos. The explosion of rap music began when

youth linked a face to the music, which occurred through the proliferation of music

videos. The history of how rap music transcended from the airwaves to the television

screen is vital to understand the influence of rap culture on youth because the cultural

genre's representations were shaped by outsiders, specifically outsiders who were the

other in the racial binary opposition historically. Before rap videos, youth attended

concerts to view rappers, but with the creation of videos, corporate America was able to

put a face to the sound and depicted Blacks has nefarious, promiscuous, oversexed, and

violent (DuRant et al., 1997; Nelson, 2000; Ward, 2004).

In August of 1981, MTV debuted on cable television (Lane, 2006). However,

MTV did not start showing rap videos until 1989 with popular rap acts like the "Beastie

Boys, Tone Loc, M.C. Hammer and Vanilla Ice [which] convinced music industry

executives that rap music, for all of it 'blackness' in attitude, style, speech, music and

thematics was a substantial success with white teenagers (Rose, 1994, p. 4). Since the

beginning, producers and artists use music videos "as a visual, story-telling format with

little time devote[d] to deep characterizations, music videos often rely on shortcuts and cultural stereotypes, working to convey a point with a quick cut, image, or gender role cue" (Ward et al., 2005, p. 144). Gender and racial stereotypes are the root of these quick cut images. Music videos create a delusional world that blurs the line between what is real and what is fantasy. Embedded in rap videos are violence, explicit sexual content, materialism, illicit drug use, criminal activity, hyper-masculinity, and the demoralizing of women (Boykin, 1999; Dyson, 2007b; Ralph, 2006). These videos take a snapshot of urban youth life and dramatize urban youth experiences into 3-minute videos that only display the ills of urban life. MTV and Black Entertainment Television (BET) are the top vehicles for the world of rap's illusion and representation of Black youth culture.

The Image of Hip Hop and Rap through Music Videos

In the beginning, MTV did not play Hip Hop or rap videos until 1989 with the launch of YO! MTV Raps, a 2-hour show devoted to highlighting the latest rap and Hip Hop videos (Rose, 1994). It was here where the rap consumer could not only place a face with their favorite rapper, but a personality. While MTV was becoming a huge success within White and Black teenage America, BET was not too far behind (Rose, 1994). BET became the voice for urban youth everywhere, and BET's depiction of Black youth and culture has come under much criticism since the late 1990s because of its programming that reinforces negative stereotypes of Black culture (Boykin, 1999). The popularity of these two channels helps perpetuate and bolster the negative stereotypes about Blacks to a wider, Whiter audience. Many argued (Conquergood, 1992b; Dyson, 1996; Koza, 1994; Mahiri, 1998; Males, 1999; McLaren, 2000; Queeley, 2003) that by depicting Blacks as violent, hypersexual, materialistic, criminals, Blacks become the scapegoats for society.

Through rap music, Blacks are highly visible; however, they have limited control of how the media represents them to the world. For example, Basu (2005) pointed out that major record labels (Sony, Universal, Arista Records) create and disseminate the majority of Black popular music, especially rap music, which Whites own. Dyson (1996) argued that for Black youth to get a record deal, they must rap about things that perpetuate White supremacist ideologies and Black inferiority. We see this in the abundance of rap videos that glorify drugs, violence, crime, and promiscuity. Dyson (1996) contended that,

> After all, it's easier to get an album made if you're "pimpin' hoes," "cockin' glocks," or generally bitch-baiting your way through yet another tired tale about how terrible it was to come up in the hood without your father while blaming your mamma for the sorry job she did, than if you're promoting radical black unity or the overthrow of white racism. (p.114)

The latter quote by Dyson illuminates the dilemma Black youth experience as they consume rap music. It is easier to hear and view rap music that degrades the Black community rather than uplifts it. Music videos play a major role in providing an image to the degradation of Blacks on a daily basis. BET and MTV provide a bombardment of negative images of Blacks. However, it was not until the late 1990s when research began to examine the potential influence of music videos on youth culture with theories that supported their hypotheses.

Cultivation theory (Brown, 1993; Brown & Steele, 1995; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980) suggested frequent viewing increases the likelihood of adopting the values and beliefs expressed by the content to which one is exposed. Gruber and Thau (2003) stated when researchers apply cultivation theory to children they notice that the perspectives forwarded in media representations increase the rate of adopting beliefs, which result in behavior changes. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1989; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999) contended that people learn by observing others and the observers

will ultimately practice those learned behaviors. These two theories are central to the ideas surrounding youth who watch violent, sexually charged rap videos. Social learning theory research also supported the hypothesis that videos shape the minds and actions of our youth (Brown, 1993; Courtright and Baran, 1980; Ward & Rivadeneyra). Therefore, it is central to this research study to understand how rap videos influence youth's ideas of race, gender, and sexuality.

Ward (2004) contended that there is limited research concerned with how the media influences youth sexual behavior. Ward wrote that media violence was the concern of many of the studies conducted on the media before 2000. Before 2000, approximately 1000 studies investigated the impact of media violence (Ward). In 1996, DuRant et al. examined the portrayal of violence and weapon carrying in music videos. The researchers "performed content analysis of the use of violence and weapon carrying in music videos from five genres of music: rock, rap, adult contemporary, rhythm and blues (R&B), and country western" (p. 1). While they reviewed five genres of videos, a total of 518, using inter-observer reliability testing, they found that rap videos were more violent than any other genre. They also found that 22.4% of videos shown on MTV were violent and the highest of any other video channel. The studies commonly defined violence as acts of human harm by weapon use, physical force, or aggressive behavior. These findings are consistent with much of the data that suggested that rap videos were violent (Gerbner et al., 1980; Gow, 1990; Ward, 2004). There was wide spread agreement among researchers that that rap videos were violent; however, what the researchers did not know were the ways youth made meaning of sexually explicit rap videos (Ward).

With the start of a new decade, researchers saw the need for studies that investi-gated the impact music videos had on youth, especially rap videos. Before the start of the new decade, there was a vast amount of research that examined how youth concep-tualized daytime soap operas and primetime dramas (Lowry, Love, & Kirby, 1981; Ward, 2004). However, researchers did not conduct studies that examined youth engagement with rap, especially Black youth, until 2003, which was pioneered by Wingood et al. Wingood et al.'s text "A Prospective Study of Exposure to Rap Music Videos and Black Female Adolescents' Health," employed 522 Black girls in the study, which investigated whether or not exposure to rap music videos could predict the high-risk behavior of young Black girls ages 14–18. The researchers defined high-risk behavior as fighting, arrest, using alcohol or drugs, and having multiple sex partners. To find the girls' level of exposure to rap videos, the researchers asked the youth to estimate the number of hours they viewed rap videos a day. There were three types of rap videos that they defined as videos the girls watched: gangsta, bass, and Hip Hop.

The study concluded that "Over the 12-month follow-up 37.6% acquired a new sexually transmitted disease, 4.8% hit a teacher, 12.1% reported being arrested, 14.8% had sexual intercourse with someone other than their steady partner, 44.2% reported using drugs, and 44.4% consumed alcohol" (p. 437). The findings in this study are not a direct correlation between exposure to rap videos and high-risk behavior; however, the results do indicate that the more teens interact with rap the greater the risk. However, since 2003, several researchers have conducted studies that examine how Black youth make meaning of rap videos (Emerson, 2002; Stephens & Few, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2005) and concluded that youth's constant

exposure to rap videos explosive content puts youth, especially urban, Black youth at a greater risk of being promiscuous, violent, and making decisions based on rap's essentialized schemas for Black youth.

These studies used multiple research methods to understand how youth make meaning of the images of rap. These studies are important to my present project because they give some empirical insight into how youth understand rap. It is also important to examine the work of scholars that have immersed themselves in the complex and often contradictory site of rap music and rap videos to tackle the issues that face urban youth– one being the embedded issues of White supremacist patriarchy that established and maintains the control of the Black female body through rap videos. Therefore, it is important take a historical examination of the Black female body and how it came to be an object of exploration, exotic, and essentialized.

Examining the Black Female Body

As stated in the previous sections, the incorporation of rap music by dominant culture allows for essentialized ideological representations of "Blackness" and Black culture. For example, rap videos often represent Black male rappers as violent and threatening. Black females are not immune to problematic representations, but these women are subject to a particularly historical image. Throughout modern history, White supremacist patriarchal society has represented, monitored, and regulated Black women's bodies (hooks, 1992; Roberts, 1997). Roberts explained that "American culture is replete with derogatory icons of Black women–Jezebel, Mammy, Tragic Mulatto, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Matriarch, and Welfare Queen" (p. 8). Even today, dominant culture still (re)presents Black women's bodies as grotesque, pathological, and deviant. White

supremacist patriarchal society constructs representations of the Black female body (hooks, 1992). According to hooks, (re)presentations of black women "seem to represent an anti-aesthetic, one that mocks the very notion of beauty" (p. 71). Roberts argued that "whites are associated with positive characteristics (industrious, intelligent, responsible), while Blacks are associated with the opposite negative qualities (lazy, ignorant, shiftless)" (p. 9). The classic example of this archetype that labels Black women's bodies as anti-beauty and an object that White patriarchy could and should control is the story of Saartje Baartmen. Her name while she was on display was "The Hottentot Venus" (Hill Collins, 2004). We can trace the debasing stereotypes of the Black female body back to "The Hottentot Venus" as her body was seen as "animallike" and "primitive" in the early eighteenth-century while on display in London and Paris (Gilman, 1985a).

In *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,* Sander L. Gilman (1985a) described how the historical, ideological pathology of Whites proliferated in the realm of art, medicine, and literature that labeled Black women's bodies inherently and biologically different from Whites. The culturally constructed differentiation between the White female body and the Black female body made the Black body unfit and the Black female body the "lowest human species with the highest ape (the orangutan) of the anomalies" (Gilman, 1995a, p. 11). Saartje Baartmen was a Khoi woman from South Africa. She was taken from Africa because of her buttocks and genitalia that were viewed as abnormal and "serve[d] as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century" (Gilman, 1995b, p. 13) as she toured Europe with "human oddities such as the Fattest Man on Earth, midgets, giants, and "freaks of nature" (Hill Collins,

2006, p. 26). White, Western scientists labeled Baartman a freak of nature because of her large buttocks, and when she died in 1816 after being on exhibit for several years, George Cuvier, who was one of the leading modern biologists of his time, studied her body (Gilman, 1985a; Hall; 1997, Hill Collins, 2006). Gilman (1985b) wrote that Cuvier established the ideology that labeled Baartman's body and, therefore, all Black women's bodies as inferior. The inferior label allowed White men to view Black women's bodies as exotically Other, which created a fetishized, complex objectification of them as both unfit and overly sexualized beings. Gilman (1985a) argued that Cuvier's findings claimed,

> If their sexual parts could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient sign that the blacks were a separate (and, needless to say, lower) race, as different from the European as the proverbial orangutan. Similar arguments had been made about the nature of all blacks' (and not just Hottentots') genitalia, but almost always concerning the female (p. 15).

Baartman's body was one of the first representations to become the "embodiment of difference" and "otherness" to distinguish biologically the Black and White body (Hall, 1997, p. 265). Baartman did not symbolize the European norm of beauty and, therefore, White society labeled her as the "Other" or not human. Baartman served as the paradigm of the White male gaze of Black women, which tied Black women's sexuality to their buttocks and the quintessential buttocks was Baartman's (Freud, 1905; Gilman, 1985a, Hall, 1997). Freud referenced Baartman and her buttocks as a representation of the Black female. However, the dehumanizing of Black women's bodies did not stop with Baartman. Hill Collins (2004) and hooks (1992) contended that the next representations of the Black female body that White society objectified and dehumanized was that of Josephine Baker.

Baker was a performer in the late 1930s through the 1950s that rose to fame because of her body, especially her backside, which earned her the label of the "Black Venus" in France (Hill Collins, 2006), a direct link to the "Hottentot Venus." Baker also toured Europe; however, she was not caged or on display with "freaks of nature." She was a singer and a dancer who danced bare-breasted for her audience (Hill Collins, 2006). hooks (1992) wrote that "Many of Baker's dance moves highlighted the 'butt' prefigure movements popular in contemporary black dance" (p. 63). The 'butt' was Barker's centerpiece and she performed as though her buttocks were an instrument (Rose, 1989). According to Rose (1989), Baker established the Black female 'butt' as a form of desire and fascination. In contrast to Baartman, Baker was a performer and was not viewed as a "caged animal"; however, both perpetuated sexual stereotypes about women of African descent. Hill Collins (2006) suggested that Baker had a level of agency and "sophistication that enabled her to move far beyond her initial depiction as a bare-breasted "primitive" (p. 28). Baker's agency was not without dehumanization, even though producers compensated her well for her performances in France, for Baker symbolized the biological essentialism of Blackness, racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Hill Collins, 2004).

Fast forward more than 100 years, and scholars such as Dyson (2004b), Emerson (2002), Hill Collins (2006), hooks (1992), Ralph (2006), Stephens and Phillips, (2002), Queeley (2003), Rose (1990), Ward (2003), and Ward et al. (2005) argued that contemporary examples of the Black female body in Black popular allow for viewers to focus their gaze on the buttocks, which suggests that White patriarchy and the notion of biological essentialism of the Black female body is more alive than ever through rap

music. Queeley contended, "Black performers have always been pressured to perform the Blackness of the white imagination, and the Blackness is most often in the service of white supremacy" (p. 4). These narrow-minded generalizations of Blackness and Black womanhood are a result of the racial stereotypes and notions of essentialism that have plagued the Black body throughout history. West (2001) contended that these myths and stereotypes "are part of a wider network of white supremacist lies whose authority and legitimacy must be undermined" (p. 131). Rap videos and music lyrics illustrate a strong example of West's assertion.

Rap music is certainly not the first musical genre to subscribe to White supremacist patriarchy (Blues, Rhythm & Blues); however, it is undoubtedly the most popular (Ralph, 2006). Patriarchy in rap music is pervasive (hooks, 2004) as it depicts Black women as objects for male pleasure. Arnett (2002) concluded,

> If there is such a thing as a typical music video, it features one or more men performing while beautiful, scantily clad young women dance and writhe lasciviously. Often the men dance, too, but the women always have fewer clothes on. The women are mostly just props, not characters, not even people really. (p. 256)

Thus, the Black women that appear in rap videos as objects have the sole purpose of fulfilling the male desire. Also, rap music is an apt example of Hall's (1997) contention that

> There is the opposition between the biological or bodily characteristics of the 'black' and 'white' 'races', polarized into their extreme opposites – each the signifiers of an absolute difference between human 'types' or species. (p. 243)

Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty by Roberts (1997) illuminated the black women's experience as sexual objects juxtaposed to White women who were "placed on moral pedestals" (p. 11) and, therefore, created and justified

Black women's cruel and inhuman (rape, torture, and the procreation of the slave master's children) conditions as slaves. Since the beginning of bondage for Blacks in the United States, Men have victimized and sexually exploited Black women (Roberts, 1997). Black women's exploitation during slavery established demeaning labels (Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy) that racialized and sexualized the experiences of Black women (Stephens & Phillips, 2005). Thus, this exploitation of Black women and beliefs about Black women's sexuality as promiscuous and hypersexual established a clear distinction between White and Black women.

Stephens and Phillips (2005) passionately argued that differentiating the stereo-types of Black and White women perpetuate racist and sexist beliefs about Black women, while White women are seen as "good, innocent, virginal girls" (p. 4). Their analysis is worth quoting at length.

> Beliefs and attitudes about African American women's sexuality appear to be sanctioned by a culture that continues to embrace stereotypes about race and sexuality. This is made especially clear when one scans media models available for women. The good, innocent, virginal girl continues to be an idealized image of womanhood associated with white females, but unattainable for African American females. Differentiating African American adolescent women's sexuality from white women's reinforces their positions as individuals standing on the margins of society, clarifying its boundaries (Hill Collins 2000; hooks and Manning 2000). This socially constructed image of white womanhood further relies on the continued production of the racist/sexist myth that African American women are not and do not have the capacity to be sexually innocent. (p. 5)

The notion that Black sexuality is deviant and lacks the ability to be "moral" or "good" such as White sexuality is apparent in rap videos (Hill Collins, 2000; Stephens & Phillips, 2005). West (2001) contended that "white beauty plays a weightier role in sexual desirability for women in racist patriarchal America" (p. 130). According to Stephens and Phillips, these sexual scripts "are embedded within an African American, youth-

developed culture known as Hip Hop (p. 65). Hip Hop is an African American urban-based culture of creativity and expression that specifically expresses adolescents' concerns, beliefs, and worldviews. The sexually explicit and patriarchal images that rap music depicts about Black culture and Black womanhood are a tool youth use to understand who they are. According to Kellner (1995), "Radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless" (p. 1). Thus, rap music teaches viewers' consciously and unconsciously about Black culture.

Rap's representation of Black culture transmits negative ideological images, which rely on Black stereotypes that frame Black women as deviant, irresponsible, hypersexual, promiscuous freaks (Dyson, 2004a, 2007). Three salient studies contextualize the current sexual scripts of Black women today. As I stated earlier, dominant ideology traditionally has racialized and sexualized Black women as Jezebel, Sapphire, Mammy, Matriarch, and the Welfare Mother (Hill Collins, 2006; hooks, 1992; Roberts, 1997; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; West, 2001). However, through present-day Black popular culture, especially rap, the sexual scripts of Black women have evolved and created new sexual scripts for Black women – Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama (Stephens & Few, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips). The studies illustrated the evolution and the nuances of Black women's sexual scripts and how adolescents' conceptualized these new terms. There are eight new sexual scripts listed above; however, for the purpose of this study the Freak and Ho sexual scripts concern me because the youth of HCC discussed these terms. Ho is

analogous to Freak in the world of Hip Hop (Stephens & Few, 2007b; Stephens & Phillips).

Stephens and Phillips's (2005) theoretical outline provided an insightful look into the contemporary sexual roles for adolescent African American women's experiences within Hip Hop culture and rap music in their article "Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, and Dykes: The Sociohistorical Development of Adolescent African American Women's Sexual Scripts." Stephens and Phillips argued, "it is important to look at how their [African American female] images have been framed within a racialized and sexualized sociohistorical context" (p. 3). Thus, African American women have been normalized throughout history as wild, promiscuous, and immoral (hooks, 1992; Roberts, 1997; Stephens & Phillips). These constructions or boundaries of Black womanhood have had a profound impact on how Black women view themselves (Longmore, 1998; Stephens & Phillips; Wheeler & Petty, 2001). Stephens and Phillips used the theoretical framework of symbolic interaction to show how "people develop a sense of their sexual selves through sexual messaging" (p. 5). They argued that to understand the sexual scripts of African American women one must explore the sociohistorical interpretations that have defined the "sexual behaviors and experiences" (p. 6) of African American women because they created and maintained the "political, economic, and social structure of America, particularly during slavery" (p. 7). For example, Stephens and Phillips (2005) argued that White men framed the Jezebel as a woman whose only desire was to please men sexually, which gave her personal gratification.

The Jezebel, depicted as a fair skin woman with long hair and a shapely body, who had an "insatiable sexual appetite" that justified the act of rape by slave masters

(Stephens & Phillips, 2005), laid the foundation for the contemporary sexual script of the Freak or the Ho that Hip Hop culture and rap music suggests. Stephens and Phillips argued that the Freak is a women who is "sexually aggressive and wild . . . who simply loves to have sex without any emotional attachment (p. 20). Stephens and Phillips contended that the Freak is a woman who has "personal strength" and is "empowered" by her openness to express her sexuality (p. 22). However, the researchers argued, "On the other hand, the Freak appears to be following patriarchal scripts reflecting male defined desires of women's sexuality" (p. 22). In conclusion, the researcher suggested, "The everyday usage of these scripts has a direct impact on young African American women's sexual self-concept, behaviors, and experiences (p. 35). As Hip Hop videos depict social relationships of men and women in "pornographic" ways, young men and women will understand their gender roles as such (Stephens & Phillips, 2005, p.38). The Jezebel and the Freak are one in the same as they both work to demonize Black women's sexuality and maintain White patriarchal assumptions about Black womanhood and the Black body through rap music.

Stephens and Few (2007a) examined how seven African American males and eight African American females ages 11–13 accepted and used the sexual scripts identified by Stephens and Phillips (2005) in the latter study. Stephens and Few argued, "African American preadolescents' beliefs about female sexuality differ in meaning and sexual behavior values when compared to preadolescents in other racial/ethnic groups" (p. 48). Given that fact, the researchers contended that it is important to investigate how African American youth negotiate their belief system about sexuality and understand their sexual schemas used to "categorize norms regarding appropriate sexual beliefs and

behaviors" (p. 49). Like many researchers who investigate the sexual mapping of the

Black body, Stephens and Few referred to neocolonialism and white patriarchy to explain

how Black women have been framed as deviant and exotic beings. The researchers

suggested that Hip Hop music videos "are the accessible providers of these sexual script

frameworks" (p. 51). The popularity of Hip Hop is overwhelming; however, racist and

sexist schemas inform its messages. Therefore, the researchers argued that Hip Hop

music and images reinforce stereotypical beliefs about Black culture and Black women to

all viewers regardless of their racial or ethnic group (Stephens & Few, 2007a).

The study by Stephens and Few (2007a) was qualitative in nature and consisted of

two research questions: "What roles do images of women Hip Hop culture play in

transmitting information about African American female sexuality? And how do these

values and beliefs inform sexual-decision making processes and potential behavioral

outcomes?" (p. 53). The researchers used purposeful sampling to gather participants for

the study. All the participants' ages ranged between 11-13. According to the researchers,

they recruited the participants from an after school program in a working class

community. All the participants were African American and were not involved in sexual

relationships. The study did not report the amount of time the researchers spent in the

field conducting researcher; however, the researchers stated that they "utilized focus

group interviews to provide insight into our two research questions" (p. 54). The

researchers employed the method of triangulation to gather comprehensive data that

spoke to the full picture of their participants. The researchers' method of triangulation

was through semi-structured focus group interviews, document analysis, and researcher

notes. After conducting their data analysis with the constant comparative method to

analyze their data, the researcher's concluded that youth from the after school program were familiar with the eight sexual scripts, and the researchers stated that they "never need[ed] to clarify the meaning of the terms use[d] to classify each script" (p. 55).

They gave the youth pictures of female entertainers and asked them to circle the sexual script they thought that female entertainer exhibited. According to the researchers, youth's "continuous consumption of Hip Hop" (p. 56) established congruency in the definitions and meaning they associated with Hip Hop female entertainers. The youth were able to identify images associated with the term Freak. The picture of the Freak was of rapper Lil Kim wearing a provocative outfit, lying across a bed. One of the participants, Susan, stated, "You see the Freak a lot in videos—she is always in the videos" (p. 57). Keisha, another participant, stated, "Well, Freaks also like to have oral sex" (p. 57). Even though the researcher's questions presupposed, even predetermined, sexual scripts and guided the students to pick up on those presupposed scripts, the words of the youth are powerful and give profound insight into how youth understand the scripts of Black women in Hip Hop music. The findings showed the youth ages 11-13 understood the sexual scripts and the actions associated with that script. In conclusion, the researchers suggested that it is important to understand the sexual scripts youth internalize and accept in order to then link the outcomes to their sexual behaviors. The study found "Cultural ideas about appropriate gender behaviors were further reinforced when preadolescent females suggested and accepted the belief that males would have sex with any woman who was willing" (p. 60).

In 2005, Ward et al. studied adolescents' exposure to music videos and sexual schemas. The purpose of this study was to understand the media consumption of 152

Black high school youth. They surveyed the youth, assessing their media usage, gender role attitudes, and they exposed the youth to music videos in a controlled setting to measure their attitudes about gender. The researchers stated that Blacks watch more television than Whites across class lines (Greenberg, Brown, & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). Roberts (1999) reported that Black youth watch close to 5 hours of television a day and a large majority of that time is spent watching rap videos. Furthermore, many researchers (Emerson, 2002; Stephens & Few, 2007a; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2005) conclude that youth who interact with rap more are at a greater risk of dangerous behavior. Therefore, if Blacks watch more television than any other group, and spend a majority of that time watching rap videos, which are saturated with images of violence, sex, and illegal activity, it is important that research focuses on Black students to create educational policy that helps students examine what they are watching.

The age ranges for participants in the study were 14 to 18, with the median age being 16. Of the youth participating in the study, 72% lived in two-parent homes and 24% lived with women exclusively. Open-ended questions that centered on youth viewing habits comprised the study. For example, the researchers asked what shows the teens liked, how often they watched television, and how much time they spent listening to music. The second part of the survey measured gender and sexual stereotypes. The researchers calculated reponses using a 4-point Likert scale anchored by *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree*. The youth reported, "spending approximately 47 hr [hours] each month watching primetime comedies and dramas and devoting an average of 3 hr music videos, 2 hr to sports programming, and 6.8 hr to music" (p. 154). When measuring the gender attitudes of the informants, the researchers used Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences to analyze their data. They also used three surveys to obtain data on teens "endorsement of gender and sexual stereotypes" (p. 151), running a series of one-way ANOVA test on all three surveys.

The first survey, Attitudes Toward Women, generated information about the survey Scale for Adolescents with an alpha level of .78 and .72 for boys and girls. The second study measured Sexual Stereotypes, "which reflects stereotypical themes about relationships common both in the larger culture and on television" (p. 151). The final survey examined the youths' feminine and masculine ideas. The researchers concluded, "television, without a doubt, has become a prominent force in the socialization of American adolescents" (p. 161). The results indicated that teens valued men and women wealth attractiveness, cool persona, and athletic ability over men and women portrayed as nice, intelligent, and good (p. 152). Also, youth who frequently watched music videos had more traditional gender role attitudes.

These studies show that youth who watch and then internalize the messages of rap are at greater risk of acting upon the images they consumed. The videos youth view degrade Blacks and affect physical and mental health of Black youth. The quantitative research that exists on youth and rap is just one look into the world of youth and rap. It is important to understand how these images shape youth's personal experiences.

Summary of Rap Videos and The Black Female Body

The latter sections chronicled the destructive and perpetual White patriarchy paradigm that followed Black women out of bondage and into Black popular culture. The racist, sexist, exploitative mindset has transcended race and gender and many racial and ethnic groups subscribe to it, even Blacks. Rap videos label Black women Hos and

Freaks, which teaches young black girls about what Black womanhood means. These teachings are deadly when young Black girls negotiate their sexual behavior as "African Americans experience the highest rates of HIV/AIDS transmission, gonorrhea, herpes, syphilis, multiple partners, unplanned pregnancy, non-voluntary intercourse, sexual abuse, and earliest ages of sexual onset" (Stephens & Few, 2007a, p. 67). One of the many ways educators can help Black girls deconstruct rap videos to examine risky sexual behavior is through a pedagogy concerned with students' lived experiences and forms of education outside of school walls. Critical pedagogy offers educators the framework to help students examine rap videos in order to renegotiate their sexual behaviors and beliefs about the Black race and Black womanhood.

<div align="center">Critical Pedagogy and Hip Hop in the Classroom</div>

Dimitriadis (2001) wrote that "School culture today has been overtaken by media culture broadly defined to include music, film television, video games, and the Internet" (p. x). The intersection between school and popular culture are fragmented by "out of school" culture, with unofficial curricula (e.g., rap music, film) and learning settings (e.g., community centers, churches, etc.) taking on increasing salience in lives of the young" (Dimitriadis, p. xii). With the issues in mind that Dimitriadis raised, it is important for educators to bridge the gap between popular culture and formal education in order to create pedagogical frameworks that reflect the popular culture of choice for their students. One framework that embraces student's experiences with popular culture and assists students in developing alternate ways of thinking about the images and sounds they consume is critical pedagogy, which I defined earlier in the chapter as a paradigm that recognizes the voices, cultures, and everyday life experiences of individuals (Giroux

& Simon, 1988c). There are several studies worth examining that used critical pedagogy in the classroom in order to help youth examine the contradictions of popular culture, especially rap music (Dimitriadis, 1999, 2001, 2003; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Stovall, 2006). These studies have a close relationship with the present study because the researchers attempted to understand how youth made meaning of rap through the framework of critical pedagogy, which places the student's experiences at the forefront of the study. It is also important for students' culture and informal education to become part of the classroom experience because the *Digest of Education Statistics* (as cited in Morrell & Duncan-Andrade) predicted that "during the next decade, the number of ethnic minority teachers will shrink to 5 percent, while the enrollment of ethnic minority children in America's schools will grow up to 41 percent" (p. 88). With the drastic number of ethnic minority children taught by teachers who may disidentify with their students' culture, it is critical that schools find meaningful ways to stay connected with students as teachers begin to look less like their students and more like the dominant group.

Teachers face the challenge of building meaningful relationships with students, while developing students' academic skills (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade 2002). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) attempted to create a space for common and critical discourse between racially divided students and teachers through the utilization of Hip Hop culture and music (p. 89). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade contended that many rappers see themselves as educators with a message that critically examines their community. The researchers argued the Hip Hop could serve as a bridge between the streets and the classroom to promote empowerment and activism within the students'

social and communal spaces (p. 92). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade created an English

unit that incorporated "traditional" English concepts with rap music at a high school in

northern California. The researchers provided a limited description of their methodology

and how they collected data. However, the researchers stated that the goal of the study

was to use rap music to "develop [the students] oral and written debate skills, to facilitate

the ability to work in groups, to help students to deliver formal public presentations, to

teach students how to critique a poem/song in a critical essay, and to help students

develop note-taking skills in lectures and presentations" (p. 94). The researchers/teachers

had students compare and examine works by Romantic and Metaphysical Poets from

England, Civil War, Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement, and Post-Industrial

Revolution writers to Hip Hop artists such as Grand Master Flash, Nas, Goodie Mob, and

Public Enemy. The final piece of the unit was for students to write five poems, as well as

to select ten poems from other authors who they found interesting. The students then

presented their work, which addressed political, social, or economic issues within their

community. The last assignment for the students was to pick a song and write 5-7 critical

essays about the piece.

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) concluded that the unit was a success in

meeting the objectives aimed at infusing critical pedagogy in the classroom because the

unit situated students' lived experiences as the primary tool of the curriculum. The

researchers also felt that they met their goal of engaging youth in "culturally and socially

relevant" pedagogy (p. 96). The youth in the study learned more than just writing skills;

they also learned how to examine their life as critical thinkers, which is immeasurable,

but a lesson that is necessary for future "critical citizens in a multicultural democracy" (p. 88).

Leard and Lashua (2006) described the intellectual capabilities of urban youth when introduced to a pedagogy that embraced "critical literacy to connect with students' experiences" (p. 244). Two case studies comprised the study, which both engaged youth with popular culture, primarily rap music, in order to "challenge dominant narratives of public schools and daily lives" (p. 244). Leard's research took place at Inner City High School (ICHS) were she conducted individual interviews and focus groups with 12 students and 8 staff members. She conducted the study over a two-month period, as compared to Lashua, which was a three year study that taught students how to "use audio production software to create their own music, raps, beats, dance tracks, soundscapes, and spoken-word poems" (p. 250). Both studies took place in Edmonton, Canada. with students of Aboriginal heritage. Lashua's study took place at the Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC). The researchers noted that many of the students who participated in the study had difficulty in school, "drug addictions, gang involvement and violence, and struggles with depression and suicide" (p. 246). With these issues in mind, both studies aimed to empower students, teachers, and faculty by using critical pedagogy to provide voice to a "traditionally silenced" (p. 244) group–urban youth. Leard and Lashua's focus was to give youth control over their representations within popular culture.

Leard's research used drama to explore identified issues by youth such as "racism, violence, and prostitution" (p. 251). Leard contended that the drama program at ICHS provided real life contexts for learning difficult issues such as racism. The students were able to take a step back and analyze their life experiences through drama. Lashua's

three year project, which centered on rap music, "represent[ed] a type of knowledge and artistry that is valued in the classroom" (p. 252) by youth. The researchers reported that many youth stated that they came to school only to attend music class where they could "rap, make remixes, or simply hang out and talk about music" (p. 253). For the students, rap music served as an outlet and a way to examine the everyday struggles of their lives, which is the focus of critical pedagogy. The youth in the study not only began to come to school on a regular basis, but also, through rap music, they created "meaningfully shared spaces for critical practice" (p. 256). The researchers added that "Making a rap song provided a sense of accomplishment and success, and an area to build upon existing strengths and confidence, which in turn translated across a whole range of school competencies" (p. 253). Often, curriculums lose the experiences of urban youth in the classroom because pedagogical practices ignore popular culture. Grade books and traditional homework assignments often missed the school success that the students at ICHS and BSEC experienced, but to the students it is invaluable for their self-esteem and identity to school life. The work by Leard and Lashua leads me to examine "Hip Hop Stories and Pedagogy" by Trudy Mercadal-Sabbagh (2003), which is an insightful look at how "standardized education is often mismatched with minority students' experience" (p. 10).

The study was conducted in a major city in Florida and involved youth who the city's Youth Offender Services program labeled "at risk." The program placed "at-risk" youth in an alternative school for teens who had served time in prison, had drug or alcohol use, and emotional distress. Mercadal-Sabbagh based the study on her time at the school as a teacher. Mercadal-Sabbagh (2003) stated that for the youth in the program rap

music had a "special significance" (p. 4). Rap served as an alternative to fighting and

offer[ed] a venue for conflict resolution, collaboration, critical thinking and a pedagogical

method to engage traditional curricula" (p. 4). The state not only labeled the youth in the

study "at-risk," but also "unteachable" by state standards. However, when teachers

engaged the youth with a pedagogy that aimed to build "community involvement and

student empowerment, mediated by political and cultural art forms such as Hip Hop

music" (p. 5) youth thrived in the face of adversity. The youth wrote poems that not only

connected them to rappers such as Tupac and Ice Cube, but also to their owned lived

experiences. One student in the program wrote, "I hope my scores on my test is high, so I

can get my GED come July, Everyday I come here I seen the same faces, I seen a class of

29 drop to 5 . . . these are the GED Blues" (p. 14). This piece embodies the struggle of

"at-risk" youth to become part of mainstream society, while living in a world of

consistent failure that rejects their life experiences.

Mercadal-Sabbagh's research speaks volumes to the power of rap in the class-

room and the change agent rap can be on students' lives who learn how to examine their

everyday lives critically. Mercadal-Sabbagh (2003) wrote,

> I have found that rap provides a vehicle not only for celebrating, but also
> for mediating the vernacular—the students' "street knowledge"—and the
> outside, hegemonic academic sphere. The students' stories parallel the
> stories in rap lyrics; they express—and create a safe space for the
> expression of—the sadness, joy, beliefs, and life ways that shape their
> daily lives. Such stories enrich and energize the learning environment and
> create a space for student-centered collective action. (p.14)

Mercadal-Sabbagh's work and research with urban youth reshapes the idea of formal

education and the possibilities of popular culture in the classroom. The stories of urban

youth speak realistically to the ills of urban life that are ignored by mainstream society

everyday. However, schools must open their doors to the reality of their students and use their students' lived experiences to awaken minds.

Stovall's (2006) research focused on the notion that youth find meaning with Hip Hop, which is a relevant tool in the classroom to foster critical thinking. Stovall stated,

> As an alternative to situations that are dehumanizing and depersonalize, the infusion of hip-hop culture can provide the context for students to develop a critical lens in approaching subject matter and its relevance their everyday lives. Hip-hop culture, as relevant to the lives of many high school students, can provide a bridge to the ideas and tasks that promote critical understanding. (p. 589)

Stovall's research is an ethnographic account of his position as a facilitator-researcher in a high school during a thematic unit in social studies class. The school was located in Chicago. He comprised the study with "19 African American and Latino and Latina students" (p. 587). The class, entitled "Society and Social Inequalities," "discussed and engaged in activities originating from hip-hop lyrics" (p. 587). What makes this study unique is that Stovall turned his attention from the students and to the teachers and their experiences with integrating popular culture into the classroom. Teachers saw a need for "relevant" social studies curriculum, which was the impetus for the class's creation. Stovall also cited Ladson-Billings' (1994) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy infused with critical pedagogy. Ladson-Billings contended that effective teaching must provide space for teachers to "build a productive environment centered [on] students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the official curriculum" (p. 34). The teachers surveyed the students and found what rap artists they listened to, then teachers selected verses from rap songs to engage in a discussion about subject matter that was relevant to their lives.

Stovall stated that the class dialogue became what Shor (1980) called "critical and criticism-stimulating activity" (p. 595). Stovall incorporated rap verses by rap artists that discuss issues of sexism, record companies control of artist image and sound, perception verse reality, and slavery. The students who participated in the study learned the skill of critical thinking and reflection. They examined texts as more than just something that they consumed in an empty and alienated manner, but as intellectuals, which fostered their ability to think critically about their relation to and participation in cultural consumption and make sense of it all. One aspect that researchers need to examine is how youth understand the ingrained violence in popular culture, particularly in rap music.

Mahiri and Conner (2003) explored the perspectives of 41 middle school youth attending a low-income school in northern California. The researchers referred to the school and community as Westwood. The departure of large manufacturing plants and lacked banks, supermarkets, and local commerce severely weakened the community economically, and a large number of the residents were Black, poor-to-working class. Through observations and participation during instructional and other school-related activities, Mahiri and Conner found ways youth interacted with rap and resisted some of the negative images of rap. The central research question was to understand in what ways "do the perceptions and reflections of these youth on violence in their lives offer to our understanding of the nature of black violence, particularly in the context of ways that it is represented in the larger society" (p. 122). The researchers used a number of strategies to assess youth perceptions of violence in rap. For example, the researchers used a novel that centered on two teens growing up in the South side of Chicago. The two teens in the story faced violence and the everyday struggles of growing up the inner city. During

class, youth began to discuss the book and everyday things related to the reading; they exhibited "perceptions and engagements with this music and culture with respect to issues of violence, crime, and sex" (p. 122). The researchers did not report an exact numbers; however, they concluded that some youth, not all, normalized violence and had feelings of helplessness. These youth connected the violence they saw on television with the violence that was taking place in their neighborhood. Through an exercise where they asked youth to create an album cover, Mahiri and Conner discovered that youth analyzed the negative images of rap. The researchers contend that

> These youth's critiques of the negative characterizations of men and
> women as gangstas and ho's suggest that they understand something of the
> larger cultural/political dynamics that generate these negative
> representations in rap music and in other their lives. (p. 135)

Mahiri and Conner concluded that their findings were complex because the youth showed a broad and reflective understanding of violence and crime in association with rap music. They understand notions of violence and promiscuous behavior due to their daily-lived experiences and interactions with high-risk behavior in their communities. Mahiri and Conner's research is eye opening because their interpretations are considerate and give voice to the youth.

Through ethnographic methods and drawing on critical studies, the researchers above discovered that teachers who used popular culture in the classroom, often rap music, could begin to have a critical dialogue with their students. Using the tenets of critical pedagogy, teachers helped students question popular media and develop a discourse to "challenge contemporary understandings of social issues such as racial and class conflicts" (p. 254). Studies like that of Leard and Lashua (2006) confirm that rap

music can be a creative and effective teaching tool for progressive ways to communicate with youth.

An important, seminal study is Dimitriadis's (1999) dissertation, *Popular Culture and the Boundaries of Pedagogy: Constructing Selves and Social Relations at a Local Community Center*, and his later works that drew from his dissertation, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* (2001) and *Friendships, Cliques, and Gangs: Young Black Men Coming of Age in Urban American* (2003). He bases these texts on an ethnography that spanned three years, and examined how young people in a community center in a small Midwest City used popular texts to "construct, sustain, and maintain notions of self, history, and community through popular culture" (p. 6). Dimitriadis's contended that an analysis of Hip Hop is important to the field of education and cultural studies because popular culture is a site that educates us about others and about ourselves. Too often we fail to realize that Black youth come to understand "notions of self and community outside of school" (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. x), and this pervasive force that influences youth outside of school walls is popular culture, especially Hip Hop culture and rap music. These issues were the foreground of Dimitriadis's study.

Dimitriadis's site for his research, though he did not disclose the specific location, was a local community center in a small midwest city. While conducting research at the community center, Dimitriadis (2001) held several different positions including mentor, tutor, official staff member, and researcher. As a White man researching an all Black setting, he was "clearly marked as an outsider" (p. 39) and found it difficult at times to gain the trust of his participants. His methodology was qualitative in nature, conducting

interviews, focus groups, participant observations, life histories, narrative analysis, and audience analysis. The community center where Dimitriadis conducted his research "served over 300 economically marginalized Black children in the community" (p. 37); Dimitriadis interacted with youth that aged from 10-18; he separated the youth into two groups 10-12 and 13-18 for focus group purposes. While in the role of researcher and staff curriculum developer, his research began to center around two youth at the community center, Tony (17) and Rufus (18).

Tony and Rufus became the focus of the author's research, and it was through their eyes that Dimitriadis viewed Hip Hop. These two boys' consumption of Hip Hop and their Southern kinship roots became one of Dimitriadis' primary themes. Tony and Rufus' family roots, entrenched in the South, became a primary tool in the way they constructed meaning of Hip Hop and popular texts. Dimitriadis (2001) wrote, "the two teens who were the centerpiece of this study used Southern rap music to reconstruct a sense of community and shared Southern values in the city" (p. 43). Furthermore, Hip Hop nurtured Tony and Rufus' sense of community and family. Dimitriadis (1999) stated that one could hear Tony and Rufus' bond to their families and the neighborhood in the rap lyrics of Southern rappers. Tony and Rufus are not biologically related, but both of their families moved from Mississippi in search of better lives. Their family networks help them "deal with interpersonal and potentially violent conflicts" (p. 52). Through the text of Hip Hop, many Southern rappers also discussed the importance of family and community. Dimitriadis discovered that Tony and Rufus leaned on rap and the lives of Southern rappers to make connections back to the family traditions of the South.

While I do agree with Dimitriadis that these two teens' Southern roots played a major part in the way they made meaning of their worlds, he oversimplified his conclusion by not examining African traditions that embraced kinship. I would argue that much, if not all, of Black traditions originated in Africa. Grills (2004) contended that "This African-centered perspective is not restricted to a specific African ethnocultural group but rather reflects a basic historical continuity, historical consciousness, and cultural unity" (p. 173). The kinship that these boys had and their families had is not just limited to the South. One could argue that it may be more prevalent in the South as opposed in the North; however, it is Africa that developed and nurtured its roots and ideology. Dimitriadis failed to see the rich culture of his participants, much like the schools' officials that he critiqued.

Dimitriadis (1999) also explored the ways the teens understood Black history through popular movies. After showing the teens the movie *Panther* (1995), a fictionalized account of the Black Panther Party's early years, the teens at this local community center began to critique the history their teachers taught at school against the history that popular films told, which depicted historical events and radical heroes. Many participants began to question why, during Black History Month, they do not learn about the Black Panther Party and Malcolm X, the more radical heroes. Dimitriadis (1999) observed that these teens had a sense of power after watching particular scenes in the movie *Panther*. Additionally, the teens viewed the Black Panthers as a gang. Because many of them were quite familiar with gangs and gang activity, they interpreted the use of guns and the clique-like behavior of the Panthers as a huge gang to which they could relate. Their fascination with the strength of Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale was

instant; however, how the Panthers dealt with the political and social issues facing the Panthers in their community also interested the teens.

This realization that there are ways to address the political and social ills facing oppressed people is vital for the education of and empowerment of Blacks. Curricula teach Blacks in public schools across the United States a Eurocentric education that marginalizes all other races. The diminutive history of Blacks in public education curriculum preserves the status quo. The youth questioning their Eurocentric education and essentializing images is critical to their social consciousness. Dimitriadis (2001) concluded that educators must begin to understand elements of popular culture such as the Hip Hop subculture and films popular in youth demographics so that they can emerge in school curricula.

Dimitriadis (1999) also observed youth's obsession with the life and death of Tupac Shakur, a slain rapper who lived and breathed the very "street life" with which the youth identified. Tupac was, and still is, a popular icon who, before his death, told his emotional life story through popular texts. One young woman told Dimitriadis (2001):

> Tupac is an inspiration to me because he talks about everything that happens in the real world. The stuff he be talking about – his momma and how she was a drug addict but how she still loves him and tries to do what she can for him and how he still loves her because his momma loves him a lot even though she was in jail and his grandma took care of him. And his father was never there for him. (p. 103)

These marginalized Black youth could relate to some, if not, all of Tupac's life, and it is also significant that his mother and godfather were Blank Panthers. Tupac's music and life connected with the youth of this community center, arguably much like the youth around the world. The timing of Dimitriadis' (1999) research is vital to this discussion because it takes place during Tupac's rise to fame and premature death. Through

qualitative methodology, Dimitriadis is able to capture the emotional loss these youth feel as they grapple with the death of Tupac.

Dimitriadis (1999, 2001) stated that school officials deliberately ignore popular culture research as a teaching tool in the school curricula. Dimitriadis contended that educators must find a space for Hip Hop. His research is an essential element for bridging the gap between the Hip Hop community and the education community. It is crucial that the educational community understand the significance of Hip Hop and popular culture in terms of race and how youth make meaning of who they are as raced human beings.

These studies illuminate the power of critical pedagogy in the classroom. The fact that a number of these studies are ethnographies exemplifies research that has spent extended time in the field with youth in order to gain a deeper understanding of how youth negotiate, communicate, and make meaning through rap music. These studies are important for the daily encounters that educators have with youth who are bombarded by stereotypical images of rap music. It is apparent by the research that youth need a pedagogy that will embrace their informal education and create ways of thinking and analyzing rap music. Researchers (Comer, 2005; Dimitriadis, 1999, 2001, 2003; Hilliard, 1995; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Stovall, 2006) have demonstrated that updating classroom lessons to engage innovatively with rap music interests Black youth and opens up new possibilities in critical pedagogy.

African Americans and Academic Achievement

> All children deserve much better than this of educator expectations. I believe that this narrowness of focus is the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the ideology of white supremacy and in large measure allows us to be satisfied with mediocrity, even for the elite. Oppression drags everyone down. The legacy of oppression has not been overcome (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, pp. 137-138).

The notion that African American children are capable of achieving excellence is an idea that has resonated throughout the years with scholars who have refused to stereotype Black youth and perpetuate the ideas that Black youth are unteachable (Asante, 1991; Du Bois, 1935; Evans-Winters, 2005; Gayles, 2005, 2006; Perry et al., 2003; Hilliard, 1991, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Sanders, 1997). Conversely, most of the literature that focuses on African American students centers on teenage pregnancy, school dropout rates, disciplinary actions, special education, expulsions, and failing grades when compared to their White counterparts (Mickleson, 1990; Munford, 1994; Ogbu, 1992; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1996). In recent years, scholars have linked African American achievement to race, academic identification, or disidentification (Crocker & Major, 1989; Demo & Parker, 1987; Finn, 1989, Hindelang, 1973; Majors & Billson, 1992; Ogbu, 1992; Osborne, 1997; Steele, 2003). According to Osborne, identification academics "is the extent to which academic pursuits and outcomes form the basis for global self-evaluation (p. 728). Whereas disidentification is a lack between academic self-esteem and global self esteem (Osborne; Steele, 2003). Academic identification and disidentification has placed the focus of African American achievement on the concepts of self-esteem, academic self-concept, and African American identification with academics or their lack there of (Osborne). Osborne (1995)

suggested that this withdrawal or "academic disidentification" occurs sometime after the eighth grade.

Steele (2003) concluded that African American youth disidentify with academics because African America youth internalize the racist stereotypes and the anxiety of failure associated with these negative stereotypes, which causes poor academic performance. Steele (2003) called this anxiety and internalized racism the "stereotype threat", which he defined as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. Everyone experiences stereotype threat" (p. 111). Although Steele (2003) suggested that everyone experiences the threat of negative stereotypes and possibly succumbs to the pressure, African Americans are at a greater risk because of the negative stereotypes that exist. Alternatively, Asante (1991) argued African Americans can increase their self-esteem and self concept of academics if curricula link their education to "academic achievement goals in connections with greater levels of Afrocentricity" (p. 331). Asante suggested that African American students taught from an Afrocentric lens would enhance academic achievement as well as racial identification and pride.

Thus, the levels of success for African American academic achievement is something that research suggests relies on various factors: for example, students perceptions of their teacher's expectations of them or students examining their teacher's classroom practices and determining that their teacher discriminates on the basis of race, gender, class, and ethnicity affect achievement. Fine (1991) and Oakes (1985) found that teacher's low expectations of African American students denied the students access to educational resources and placed them in lower track classes. Rowan (1989) concluded

African American males shun academic activities because of a fear of racism. Marcus,

Gross, and Seefeldt's (1991) study found that African American boys in elementary

school felt their teachers favored girls or White students more in the classroom. The

perceptions of African American students or students of color are an important piece in

the academic triumphs of students of color. Schunk and Meece's (1992) study of

students' perceptions in the classroom concluded that how students feel their teachers'

perceive them grounds the students' participation in the classroom; therefore, students

can cooperate or resist their teacher's classroom rules, guidelines, or academic learning

activities. Therefore, Schunk and Meece argued that students influence classroom deal-

ings and classroom climate. In other words, if students perceive their teacher's actions as

racist, sexist, or discriminatory they may resist being educated or they may achieve in

response to racism and discrimination, which I will explore later in this section of the

literature review (Bogle, 1991; Edwards & Polite, 1992; Gayles, 2005, 2006; Miller,

1999; Sanders, 1997; Winfield, 1994).

Researchers (Casteel, 1998; Holliday, 1985; Marcus et al., 1991; 1994; Rabinow

and Cooper, 1981; Rong, 1996) have concluded that teachers give less attention to,

ignore, and reprimand more often African American students at a greater rate than their

White counterparts by White teachers. These findings have a direct impact on the

academic achievement of African American students. Ironically, in 1935 Du Bois'

infinite wisdom argued that

> The proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between
> teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the
> individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history
> of his class and group; such contract between teachers and pupil on the
> basis of perfect social equality, as will increase this sympathy and know-
> ledge; facilities for education in equipment and housing, and the promo-

tion of such extra-curricular activities as will tend to induct the child into life. (p. 328)

In 1935, Du Bois understood the importance of the student-teacher relationship that they must establish and build on the foundation of equality. Felsenthal (1970) and Graybill (1997) argued that a positive relationship between teachers and students must exist for academic achievement. With this issue in mind, in 2005 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network surveyed 3,450 students in Florida, ages 13–18. The survey asked questions concerned with students' perceptions of their teachers. Ninety percent said they thought their teachers were racist. The researchers concluded, "The results of this study indicate that there is a lot of work to be done in Florida to ensure that all students can learn in a safe place" (www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1871. html). I assert that other researchers can extrapolate these findings from other sites outside of Florida to reflect the beliefs of students across the United States.

Pollard (1993), in her study "Gender, Achievement, and African-American Students' Perceptions of Their School Experience," surveyed "361 high and low achieving male and female adolescents in five middle schools and five high schools in a large urban community" (p. 348). Pollard concluded 91% of boys and 86% of girls found support outside of school. Pollard's study is consistent with others (Fine, 1991; Marcus et al., 1991) that also concluded that African American youth found comfort outside of school, rather than with their teachers because of their perceptions of their teachers being racist, sexist, or subscribing to discriminatory behavior. Sheets (1996, 2002) investigated student perceptions of their teacher's disciplinary methods, classroom conflict, and resistance.

Sheets (1996), in "Urban Classroom Conflict: Student-Teacher Perception: Ethnic Integrity, Solidarity, and Resistance," conducted a qualitative study that collected data by interviewing, observing, and examining students' disciplinary records of 16 students and 9 teachers to determine interpersonal conflicts between teacher-student relationships at Lincoln High School, an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The study's demographic consisted of 4 African American, 4 Chicano, 4 European American, and 4 Filipino American students, two males and two females were in each ethic group. The students were in grades 9 -12 and their GPA combined average was 1.96 on a 4.0 scale. The researcher's findings concluded that students felt alienated, disempowered, perceived injustices in disciplinary practices, and that they developed coping strategies to adapt to the feelings of inferiority. For example, Sheets reported that one of the Filipino American students stated " I know they [teachers] just don't care, and one of the African American students stated "They always think the students are liars" (p. 172) Out of the four ethnic groups, Sheets (1996) reported,

> Specifically, African American students identified such factors as lack of respect, differences in communication styles, being purposefully pushed to the edge where they were expected and encouraged to be hostile, and feeling that teachers did not care about them as major causes of disciplinary conflicts. They believed teachers wanted and expected them to "act a fool" in order to justify their disciplinary actions. They also stated that teachers intimidated by African American males and treated them worse than they did other students. (p. 175)

With these issues in mind, Sheets (1996) concluded that many African American students developed coping strategies to comfort the hostile school environment. Sheets stated that the African American students avoided honors classes, dropped classes if they knew they could not emotionally "hang," and "strengthen[ed] interpersonal" bonds to form a support group (p. 177). Sheets's findings are consistent with her later (2002) study of all Chicano

students and their feelings of alienation and feelings of disempowerment as students of color, which was similar to African American students.

Honora (2003) assessed student perceptions of their teachers and found, "Regardless of achievement, African American boys in the study believed that when provided feedback, teachers focused more on their behavior than academic potential (p. 74). In 2007 Fenning and Rose linked African American overrepresentation of suspensions and expulsion to the "school-to-prison pipeline" (p. 536). They argued that one of the primary reasons African American students are overrepresented in exclusionary discipline is because school personnel perceive African American students as "dangerous," "troublemakers," and "not fitting into the norm of school" (p. 537). Many other scholars (Casella, 2003; Noguera, 1995; Skiba & Peterson, 1999) echo Fenning and Rose's assertion. The above studies only highlight one aspect that hinders the academic achievement of African American students. These studies focused on the relationship or lack there of between teacher and student that serves as the foundation for learning. Teachers' perceptions, not students' academic potential is what denies many African American students access to educational opportunities. However, there is a burgeoning body of literature that investigates how African American youth cope with discrimination and racism in the classroom in order to excel and resist withdrawal or "academic disidentification."

Studies that investigate African American student's resiliency and how African American youth achieve in the face of racism are important to understanding all aspects of African American student's achievement and not just their failures. The stories of high-achieving, resilient African American youth are a vital part of educational research.

Evans-Winters (2005) defined resiliency as "the ability to recover from or adjust to problems, adversities, and stress" (p. 20). Evans-Winters's definition is consisted with others that explore resiliency (Miller, 1999; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). In terms of resiliency, there have been a number of studies that suggest African Americans' awareness of discrimination can foster achievement (Anderson, 1988; Bogle, 1990; Edwards & Polite, 1992; Gayles, 2005, 2006; Miller, 1999; Sanders, 1997; Winfield, 1991). These studies illuminate the experiences of African Americans who excel in the face of adversity and discrimination to disprove the dominant group.

Garibaldi (1992) contended, "too much of our time has been devoted to discussing the plight of African American males rather than developing potential solutions to mitigate the crisis" (p. 4). Evans-Winters (2005), in her book *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms,* echoed Garibaldi's concern and argued that most of literature on African American girls centers on teenage pregnancy, and the literature ignores the story of African American girls' school resiliency. Evans-Winters maintained that constantly viewing Black youth's experiences from a deficit perspective only serves to bolster negative opinions of minority students. Using data from a 3-year ethnography, *Teaching Black Girls* explored the ways in which teachers, educational institutions, policy markers, and local and state government officials can foster resiliency in Black girls who they label "at-risk" in a society that privileges Whiteness, wealth, and men (Evans-Winters). Evans-Winters's study took place in a Midwestern city, which she calls Haven. Evans-Winters examined the lives of three Black girls from middle school through their junior years in high school, living what Evans-Winters calls the "urban girl story." She stated that,

> Many students struggled with issues of poverty, violence, drug, and alcohol abuse at home, in the neighborhood, or at school itself. Some girls got pregnant; some boys went to jail for selling drugs; some students even experimented with drugs; and other students did not make it out of the ghetto alive. (p. 3)

Evans-Winters' description of Haven is deliberately historical in nature. She does this so the reader understands the historical events that have led to Blacks' perceived inferiority in Haven. Winters contends that "Space cannot and should not be ignored in critical approaches to teaching and learning" (p. 50). The social inequality between Blacks and Whites in Haven "threatened the educational resiliency of Blacks" (p. 52). In addition to Blacks' low economic and social mobility, Evans-Winters reported that "Haven School District has failed to comply with desegregation guidelines; Blacks comprise 5% of the school staff, while Blacks make up approximately 50% of the student body" (p. 63). This also affects how Black boys and girls foster resiliency in the classroom when they do not see themselves in positions of power.

Evans-Winters contended that her research is compelling and groundbreaking because as researchers "We need educational and social science philosophies, methods and methodologies that give voice to and empower urban African American girls" (p. 10). Evans-Winters's work expressed the lives and concerns of three remarkable and resilient young women Nicole, Zora, and Yssis. Through their stories of "inner-city blues," Evans-Winters illuminated the hardships that Black girls face as they seek refuge and find mentors in their school, community, and families, which Evans-Winters contended is an essential component of resiliency. Evans-Winters's guiding research questions—What are the coping strategies of the most resilient students? What factors contribute to students staying in school? When are students at their most resilient? What are the historical, economic, and political conditions in which the students are

experiencing schooling?—provide a theoretical framework for a harmonious merger between postmodernism and Black feminism.

According to Evan-Winters (2005), this merger perfectly suited her work because "it reveals the racist assumptions in White feminist discourse and challenges the essentialist stance of Black feminist theory" (p. 16). These frameworks provide insight into the learning dynamics of Black girls who may encounter multiple hardships in their home, community, and school. Evan-Winters's combination of postmodernism with Black feminism focused on African Americans girls as a group that dominate society had raced, classed, and gendered. These frameworks also strengthen the study's findings because they question essentialism, challenge metanarratives, and speak against the notion of scientific method or one particular way of viewing African American females.

In conclusion, Evans-Winters (2005) advocated for critical urban pedagogy, which she argued will foster resiliency in urban Black girls. Evans-Winters wrote,

> African American urban girls are in need of a more critical pedagogy that examines how individual and institutional racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism complicate their daily existence, a pedagogy that extends beyond multicultural education to take into consideration that context in which students live, play, and work. (p. 155)

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b) also proposed that educators must incorporate a culturally relevant or critically urban pedagogy in order to ensure students' resiliency because it can foster students to achieve in response to racism and discrimination. Sanders (1997) contended that African American students often excel academically as a response to racism, which is another component of resiliency.

Sanders's (1997) "Overcoming Obstacles: Academic Achievement as a Response to Racism and Discrimination" suggested students respond positively to racial discrimination "in ways that are conducive rather than detrimental to academic success"

(p. 84). Sanders's study of 28 eighth grade students, ages 12-15, found that students' racial socialization, community, and home involvement were predictors of academic success. Students were resilient and responded to racism by increased awareness of racism. Sanders discovered that students who had a profound understanding of the challenges African Americans face as raced people were students with higher grade point averages. Sanders' findings debunk those of Ogbu (1978), who concluded African American students withdraw from academics because they cannot face the challenges of racism. Sanders found students who subscribed to a colorblind ideology had lower grade point averages.

The ten students Sanders (1997) labeled with having a high awareness of racism had conversations with their parents about racism and how one copes with discrimination in a positive way that can lead to achievement. The ten high-achieving youth recalled candid conversations with their parents about race and racism. Patricia, one of the high-achieving students, stated, "I know that there will be people to hold me back, there will be people to tell me that I cannot succeed, that I am Black and I am a woman, but I am willing to strive in order to reach my goals" (p. 90). Patricia's comments indicate her keen awareness and determination as a 12-year-old African American female. Sanders argued similar to Bogle (1990) that Blacks yearn to "prove" themselves in the face of racism and discrimination.

Sanders's (1997) data was part of a larger study that investigated African American youth academic achievement in the southeastern part of the United States. The larger study researched 826 students from low-income families. "[T]he effects of teacher, family, and church support on the school-related attitudes, behaviors, and academic

achievement of African American urban adolescents" (p. 85) concerned the original

study. The study used a mixed methods approach and the researcher interviewed 40

youth. Sanders (1997) provided an Interview Protocol sheet with the 14 interview

questions that interviewers asked the students. The questions were typical in nature;

however, question number 14 was leading and over simplified the study's findings.

Interview question number 14 read as follows

> Does racism and racial discrimination affect African Americans' ability to
> achieve in the United States? If so, how? Has racism affected you? If so
> how? Do you think that racism or racial discrimination will affect your
> future goals? If so, how? (p. 87)

This question is explicit and the students with high GPAs may have been able to ascertain

Sanders' line of questioning and his objective to expose the educational and possible

detrimental future effects racial discrimination has on Black youth. Students with higher

levels of criticality would be able to read into this leading question to determine Sanders'

objective. However, the study does provide insight and debunks the claims that African

American student's withdraw from or disidentify with school when met with the

challenges of racism and discrimination. The notion the African American youth can

achieve in response to racism indicates that when youth's domestic or school space

provide youth with educational experiences that prepare them for the adverse challenges

of being a raced person they excel.

Gayles (2005, 2006) explored the lives of high achieving African American males

and found that high achieving youth separated themselves from their peers and achieved

in order to one day gain a higher class status through education. The young men in

Gayles's study were from working class families and attended high school in a non-

affluent school. However, for the three young men, "Academic achievement represented

a promise made by the students *and* by society. These youth believed that if they kept

their promise of achieving, the promise of a "new life" would be kept for them. (Gayles,

2005, p. 256). Gayles (2005) called the idea of achievement to acquire wealth or a

"better" life "utilitarian achievement" (p. 256).

> While they diminished the marker of academic achievement, all three of
> these youths were clear about the utilitarian value of achievement. For
> each of them, academic achievement was prospectively meaningful if not
> currently transformative (p. 256).

The idea that these three young men believed that academic achievement could one day

lead to a high-class status is another explanation as to why and how African American

youth achieve in the face of racism and discrimination. In 2006, Gayles's article

"Carrying It for the Whole Race": Achievement, Race and Meaning among Five High

Achieving African American Men," examined how five young men found motivation

within the realities of racism and the negative stereotypes to achieve.

The youth in Gayles (2006) study were all High school seniors: three of the

students attended Benjamin High School and the remaining students attended Elijah High

School. Both schools were in the state of Florida. Gayles interviewed each participant

weekly during their senior year of high school. The goal of the research was to expand or

debunk Steele's (2003) concept of the "stereotype threat." Gayles concluded that the

African American males in his study were aware of the negative stereotypes about people

of color and used the stereotypes to disprove those who subscribed to the racist paradigm.

When Gayles asked Keith, one of the participants in the study, about young Black males

being perceived as violent and not academically inclined, Keith responded, "I don't do it

because of that but I'm glad that my actions do go against the stereotypes" (p. 24). The

remarks of Keith resonated throughout the study with all the youth who participated. All

of the youth felt and believed it was their obligation to disprove the negative stereotypes of Black males.

The school dynamics of the males also played a major role in their process to internalize and disprove racism. Ronald, Baldwin, and Lonnie all attended an urban school, Benjamin High School, whereas Keith and Darnell attended Elijah High school, which was located in a suburb. The youth's school location placed them in "opposite socioeconomic poles" (p. 20). Therefore, the males who attended Benjamin were more in tune to race and racism because of their school's make up and community demographics, which was a majority African American. Darnell and Elijah did not always view the world through race and, according to Gayles (2006), the students of Benjamin inserted race into their remarks on a greater scale. Gayles concluded that students have individual agency to reverse the impact of negative stereotypes and debunk them to through achievement.

The achievement of the African American students is one that is complex because of the myriad of issues that affect achievement inside and outside of school walls. This section has provided just a snapshot into the experiences and issues that students of color face as they learn about race, racism, and discrimination from school officials who are supposed to create a relationship with the students based on equality. Scholars (Anderson, 1988; Bogle, 1990; Edwards & Polite, 1992; Evans-Winters, 2005; Gayles, 2005, 2006; Miller, 1999; Sanders, 1997; Winfield, 1991) have illuminated the unique, positive, achievements of African American students. This body of literature turns the corner on research the perpetually advocates the deficiencies of African American students and

illustrates the possibilities of their achievement when given the tools to foster resiliency and high self-esteem, which Evans-Winters called the "strength perspective" (p. 5).

Summary

The studies reviewed throughout this chapter reflect literature that is relevant to the findings of the present study. The literature above illuminates the experiences of Black youth who consume rap, search, and negotiate meaning of Blackness and Black womanhood while leaning from the margins of the classroom. As the literature above shows, there are a number of studies that investigate how youth understand their sexuality, race, gender, and achievement; however, no study has combined all four social constructs to give a fuller picture of the experiences of Black youth and how their interactions with essentialized notions of Blackness and sexuality influences their concept of self and academic achievement. Beachum and McCray (2008) argued that by understanding and critically examining youth culture, educators can make "significant connections with their students, which would help reduce many of the problems many African Americans face in schools" (p. 55). As Black youth learn from the margins inside the classroom, their relationship with rap becomes stronger as the disconnect between teacher and student grows. Educators embracing rap music in the classroom will only strengthen the teacher–student relationship, which is needed for learning. Rap music and formal education are both profound sites for learning in young people's lives, and as the literature review showed both can have a negative impact on our young. Thus, under-standing rap and education's influence on our youth is critical to their well-being and the well-being of all of society.

The present study addresses issues Black youth internalize and make meaning of everyday–race, sexuality, and achievement through the lens of rap music. The investigation of these topics together is vital to understanding the impact of rap music on the minds of youth. As educators, it is important that we bring rap music and Black popular culture into the classroom in order to promote critical thinking; however, we must first understand how youth read the messages of rap in terms on gender, race, achievement, and sexuality. Much of the literature that exists on how youth make meaning of rap does not address the underpinning issues such as racism and sexism. Thus, we must investigate these oppressive underpinnings in order to help youth understand the debasing images and lyrics of rap perpetuated by corporate America. The goal of the present study is to add to and enhance the literature surrounding the issues of urban Black youth as consumers of rap music, and how these young consumers understand who they are while under siege by biological essentialism of Blackness, racism, sexism, and White patriarchy within and outside of school walls.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the study's research design, which had the goal of understanding how youth at the HCC after-school program made meaning of rap music in their every day lives. Traditionally, after-school programs have been successful in communities that contain a substantial number of low-income students (Posner & Vandell, 1999). In general, youth who attend after-school programs engage in educational and recreational opportunities outside of the formal school day. The overwhelming need for after school programs is due to working class families' demanding work schedules that make it nearly impossible for parents to care for their children during non school hours (Belsie, 2000). After-school programs have become a staple for working class families and single-parent homes, all of whom are in need of affordable after school programs (Sanacore, 2002). Affordability is what made HCC so unique. There was no fee for children to attended HCC and the transportation was free as well. HCC provided a service to its community that is rare and invaluable. Many of the participants who attended HCC were returnees. Some of the students had attended HCC for 5 or more years. A number of parents relied on HCC year after year as a source for after-school care, social and education exposure, and recreational activities. Many of the students at HCC spent 6 hours in school and then 3 hours in after-school care at HCC every weekday. For that reason, I felt it was important to study and examine students' behaviors outside of school walls. After-school pro-grams are one of the primary places youth gather following a strictly regimented school day (Belsie, 2000).

I investigated youths' meaning making process of rap music during nontraditional school hours for various reasons. The importance of education was in the foremost of my thoughts as I did not want to be a distraction while youth engaged in learning. However, I now know that future research needs to focus on schools and the after-school programs equally. I recommend this because the participants expressed to me their concerns about school and academic achievement, which I could not capture fully by the research because examining students' school lives was not in the scope of the study. Secondly, the flexibility of the after-school program's daily schedule, which allows youth to engage in less academic activities and participate in activities they find important. During after-school hours, youths' schedules relaxed and youth had more free time to consume music, dance, and speak in a colloquial language. Lastly, an array of youth, who are of different ages, genders, and backgrounds, typically comprise after school programs, which, in essence, are representative of the school as a whole.

I think it is important that I first define culture and then consumption and the ways I will document these terms in the research. I define culture as a range of learned behaviors. For the purpose of this study, the term consumption connects to the term culture. Therefore, cultural consumption is a social act that we as humans engage in daily (Storey, 1999). Storey wrote,

> What and how we consume may serve to say who we are or who we would like to be; it may be used to produce and maintain particular lifestyles; it may promise compensation in times of loss or provide a symbolic means to celebrate success and mark achievement; it can provide the material for our dreams; it can mark and maintain social difference and social distinction (p. x).

From my observations, the youth's cultural consumption of rap music created and preserved a lifestyle that youth aspired to have or debunked. Their consumption determined what and who they thought was important in society, and it shaped their experiences.

Methodological Orientation

Rap music is more than a genre of music that youth listen to; it is a culture that has customs, traditions, and beliefs shared by millions of youth around the world (Alridge, 2005; Forman, 1995; Watkins, 2006). Youth develop micro-groups of Hip Hop culture and rap music, whereby each group carves out its own niche and makes rap a style (Forman, 2002). Youth around the globe all have rap music in common, but their country, state, city, town, street corner, or even their school may have its own style or interpretation of rap music that is unique to the youth of that area or group (Forman, 2002). With these issues in mind, I decided on ethnography as my methodology because the method's concerns focus on how people make meaning of their culture and beliefs in their everyday lives. The methodology of ethnography helped me understand the unique style of rap consumed at HCC. Tedlock (2000) suggested, "Ethnographers can better understand the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of their subjects than they can by using any other approach" (p. 457). The simplest definition for ethnography is the "attempt to describe culture or aspects of culture" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 27).

I chose to investigate rap music because youth have customs, beliefs, and languages of their own, which can serve as helpful tools in the classroom in order to engage and connect with youth (Giroux, 1992; Rose, 1994). An important data collection method in ethnography is participant observation. I used "thick description (Geertz, 1973) in the writing of participant observations. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated that "thick description" is when the ethnographer

> is faced with a series of interpretations of life, common-sense understandings, that are complex and difficult to separate from each other. The ethnographer's goals are to share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then to depict the new understanding for the reader and for outsiders. (p. 28)

Therefore, thick description is a detailed attempt to make meaning of informants' everyday actions that go unnoticed by informants. As we carry on with our day-to-day lives as humans, we

begin to pick up habits that become quotidian. These habits go unnoticed; however, as an ethnographer who employed thick description, I had the ability to examine the habits of my participants and to make meaning of their purposes. Furthermore, ethnography does not place limitations on the boundaries of data collection and time at the research site. In order to understand the complexity of HCC youth as they engaged with rap music, I spent 1.5 years at HCC researching the ways youth read and understood rap music. Spending that long a period at HCC, using the methodology of ethnography, enabled me to examine how youth at HCC related to rap music in their every day lives.

The study's second methodological orientation was symbolic interactionism (SI). I chose this secondary methodological orientation because how the youth self-defined themselves and their race through their understanding of rap music interested me. SI emphasizes the meaning people attach to their social interactions and the world around them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Based on this definition, SI is critical to understanding how youth attach meaning to rap music through their experiences. Youth who consume rap have experiences with rap through "mediated interactions" (Blumer, 1986), which Bogdan and Biklen (2003) defined as this process:

> Individuals interpret with the help of others–people from their past, writers, family, television personalities, and persons they meet in settings in which they work and play–but others do not do it for them. Through interactions the individual constructs meaning (p. 25).

Bogdan and Biklen gave the example of television personalities, which provide individuals with the medium to interpret and construct meaning of themselves and others. I add rappers to the list. Rap artists also influence the way youth construct meaning about themselves, their race, and their gender. According to Lather (1992), SI can help researchers understand the experiences of participants. The experiences of participants were crucial to my study. The way youth made meaning of rap was central to my interpretations and my research questions. Youth at HCC

constructed notions of self, their race, academic achievement, and Black women in the course of their interactions with rap music and educators. Their teachers, friends, family members, and rappers helped them interpret the world.

SI assisted me in discovering how my participants functioned in their everyday world within rap music. This second methodological orientation better equipped me to understand reality from the youth's perspectives as they interacted with each other, their surroundings, and the music. Through this lens, I was able to explain and interpret how my participants made meaning through symbols and individual understandings. Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine (2001) stated,

> Humans learn what things mean as they interact with one another. In doing so they rely heavily on language and the communicative processes it facilitates. In essence, they learn to see and respond to symbolically mediated 'realities' – realities that are socially constructed (p. 218).

It was very important for me to observe the interactions of the youth as these interactions provided insight into how they have constructed their realities.

SI also emphasizes the construct of the self. People create a definition of themselves through interactions with other people. It is the study of how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we think others see us. Thus, the self is also a social construction, the results of persons perceiving themselves and then developing a definition through the process of inter-action (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This concept pertained to my study in that how the youth perceived themselves as they learned from rap music interested me also. It is essential to those who research youths' experiences with rap music to have an understanding of how those youth view their culture, race, and gender through the music, which, in this study, proved to be a part of their informal education. For youth, these experiences served as educational because, through

their experiences with rap music, they constructed notions of racial identity, gender, and educational achievement.

Core and Guiding Research Questions

The main question of the study was: How do youth at HCC construct identities through rap music in their everyday lives? The following additional research questions guided my research:

1. How do youth understand the images presented in rap music and rap videos?

2. How do rap's messages contribute to youth's construction of race and gender identities?

3. How does rap music shape youth's lived experiences?

Hope Community Center

The HCC operated as a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization governed by representatives from neighborhoods, churches, and other community organizations. HCC's mission was to build a sense of community through innovative community building projects (HCC's website). The cornerstone of the HCC was the after-school program, which provided academic and social enrichment, standardized test preparation, computer training, college tours, and transportation at no cost. Many private donors funded HCC, the largest contributor being a local church in the area.

I limit the information that I disclose about HCC because I am revealing the city and state of my research site. Disclosing the location of my research is uncommon in qualitative research and is risky (Staller, 2003); however, the location is a piece of Hip Hop's history. In general, the community center served roughly 40 youth throughout the year. Many of the participants came

from low-income families. According to a survey conducted by the community center in 2006, the yearly income of the families was roughly $21,000-$22,000. The teens that I interviewed and observed ranged in age from 13-17 years old. The study at the community center spanned over 16 months. During that period, I interviewed participants, collected documents, tutored, and observed the every day lives of HCC youth.

<div align="center">Relevance of Atlanta</div>

The location of this research was important to the study of rap music. At the time of the study, Atlanta, Georgia, was the most prevalent and recognizable forum for rap music (Sarig, 2007). Atlanta was home to the creation of a very large majority of the popular rap music broadcasted to the world (Sarig). The city became the new home to rap music, whereas 5 years earlier, the home for rap music had been New York City.

On November 12, 2006, Black Entertainment Television held its first Hip Hop Awards show at Atlanta's Fox Theater. With Atlanta natives winning 8 of the 17 awards and taking the stage for 5 of the 10 performances, the marriage between Hip Hop and the city of Atlanta appeared stronger than ever. It was obvious that the city, once known as the "New York of the South," established itself, at least musically, and it could hold its own (Sarig, 2007). Thus, for youth from Atlanta, Georgia means a love for Hip Hop that equals that of the youth from New York City in the early 1980s at the start of Hip Hop culture. It is important to mention that Atlanta has a long history of Rhythm and Blues and Hip Hop performers. Current rap artists who represent Atlanta have local and national influence. From 1992 to 1995, TLC, Goodie Mob, and OutKast were the three most well-known Hip Hop acts based in Atlanta (Sarig). In 2008, that number grew to include artists like Ludacris, Young Jeezy, Lil' Scrappy, T.I., and Ying Yang

Twins, to name a few (Sarig). These artists arrived on the Atlanta scene with a sound that listeners and critics consider more risqué than their predecessors (Sarig).

I felt that it was important to the history of Hip Hop to study youth who take pleasure in rap music and read rap as a site of education. What Atlanta natives call the "ATL" is the site that currently creates the sounds and images of rap music. The stories of Atlanta youth are essential to all youth who interact with rap. This study was just one look into the world of rap through the voices of youth; there are countless other stories to be told throughout America.

The final reason I chose HCC was because of its accessibility and my good-standing relationship with the youth at the center. I previously worked at the center as the youth program leader and the basketball coach. Before officially conducting research at the center, I spoke with the teens at the community center numerous times about rap music, and each time we had a conversation the youth of HCC left me wondering how they personally made meaning of the music.

<center>Negotiating Access and the Researcher's Role</center>

Black feminist scholars contend that one cannot separate themselves from their specific race, gender, and class identities (Hill Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992). Therefore, I entered the study as a classed, gendered, raced person that was inevitably in the position to "work the hyphen." Fine (2000) stated that working the hyphen is to "suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations" (p. 72). I recognized that while in the field I was in a position of power, which is an aspect of working the hyphen because of my status as an academic. The label of researcher carries with it a power. In other words, I am an authority in the academic world

according to many perspectives. Thus, carrying the researcher label was always an arrangement of power as I connected with adults and youth alike at HCC.

Who I am in terms of my race and class collapsed some of the barriers that surrounded the researching of informants in this particular setting. I grew up as a Black female in a working class family, and I attended the Boy and Girls Club for after-school care. My parents did not get off work until 5 or 6 o'clock at night, so I would go to the Boys and Girls Club for my after-school care. My parents relied on the Boys and Girls Club just like the parents at HCC. I have many similar experiences with my participants; however, I did not see myself as an insider while at HCC. White studies scholar Charles Gallagher (2004) argued that "being an insider because of one's race does not mute or erase other social locations which serve to deny access, create misunderstanding, or bias interviews with those from the same racial background" (p. 205). While there were a number of characteristics that I had in common with my participants, I understood that there were some areas where the situation limited my access. All my participants were Black, came from working class homes, and attended public schools. I can relate personally to each of these situations as someone who grew up in the inner city. However, the common meta-narratives that I shared with my participants did not automatically designate me as an insider. My race and my life history played a major part in my ability to talk to and relate to my informants. Because of my race and background, I understood common gestures or phrases that another researcher from a different ethnic group or class could miss or not understand. Initially, my semi-insider status was an advantage in the early interviews and observations. However, as the study continued, I slipped back and forth continuously between the role of a semi-insider.

I am 28 years old and my informants range in age from 13-17. Like my informants, I grew up in the inner city, but our geographic backgrounds differ as the participants resided in

Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, I have become "middle class" with an educational background that put me in a position of power. All these differences inevitably made me an outsider and a person of power. I am not from the South; therefore, many of my informants saw me as a "Yankee" and a northerner with a "big mouth." I also had a difference of opinion in terms of musical taste, politics, fashion, and race and gender issues, among many other issues in contrast to my participants. Therefore, I began my role as a researcher situated between an insider and outsider, and I left just the same.

<div align="center">Data Collection Plan</div>

Throughout the study, I gathered data using multiple methods of data collection. My intent for using multiple data collection methods was to triangulate my data (Flick, 2006). Triangulation illuminated the study by using "multiple sources to lead a fuller understanding of the phenomena [one is] studying" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 107). Therefore, my data collection plan consisted of interviews, observations, and group interviews. I also collected media materials such as magazine clippings and posters to conduct document analysis. Data can serve as evidence and as clues to help one better understand "unfound speculation" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 107). Therefore, my data served as a guide as I saw the world through my participants' eyes. By the end of study, I had spent a year and a half at the community center as a researcher. Data collection started in November 2006 and ended March 2008. I visited the site every week, two to three times a week, for roughly 3 hours per day, not including weekend programs that I attended. I used the purposeful sampling method to select youth who were to be a part of the interview process. Purposeful sampling enabled me to select informants I believed to facilitate the growth of a developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The youth I selected to participate in the study were outspoken and opinionated, which created rich data. I based the criteria I used

to select youth to be in the study on three prerequisites. Firstly, the students' ages ranged between 13-17. I chose youth who attended the center regularly. Finally, the youth listened to rap music. This criteria led me to select the nine participants in the study.

I conducted over 55 informal interviews with students, which were impromptu, and I documented them in my fieldnotes. My fieldnotes captured what I saw, heard, and experienced in the field. I wrote my fieldnotes when I left the center. Once I arrived home, I would recall my day at the center and construct my notes on my desktop. I would recreate conversations I had with youth and what I saw in the field. I tried not to write anything down at the center, but there were times when I did write one-word phases to cue me of a topic or an artist the youth mentioned in order to investigate it later. I also wrote observer comments, which reflected on my fieldnotes and what I was learning in the field.

The second vital piece of my data was my collection of formal interviews with the youth of HCC. I did not interview the staff and volunteers at HCC for various reasons. It was not in the scope of the study to interview or interact with staff. My grantors gave me permission to research the center with the caveat that they did not want me to examine the center or the volunteers. My research honored these boundaries and focused solely on the youth participants. I conducted and recorded 60 formal interviews and 27 group interviews, which varied in time. Many of the individual interviews lasted 30–40 minutes. Group interviews were much longer in time, lasting an hour or longer, depending on the group dynamics. I interviewed the students from August 2007 until March 2008. I chose to interview the youth during this time because of their availability. During the summer, the students participated in various fieldtrips and sport camps, which made it difficult to interview the youth on a consistent basis. I was able to observe the youth; however, they preferred not to participate in the interview process during summer

activities. Therefore, I decided that when school started in August 2007 and the students had a defined routine and schedule I then would begin interviews. For the first 8 months at the center, I only observed the youth at the center and conducted informal conversations. I wanted to reintroduce myself to the teens because I had taken a 6-month leave from the center to start a new job. Many of the students, if not all, remembered me. However, I worked as one of the center's staff members in a position of power for the 2 years prior. I wanted the teens to understand that I did not work at the center anymore and it was acceptable to discuss matters with me as a researcher. Therefore, I deliberately watched youth run throughout the center, hit each other and run away, and cruse in front of me, so they would no longer perceive me as a staff member. At first, it was difficult because of my previous role as a staff member. However, I needed the students to feel comfortable with me as a researcher in order to generate rich data. I had to ignore some of the teens' minor offenses so that I could to gain access to them and their trust.

At times, it was hard to interview the students on a consistent basis because of attendance issues. Darrell and Lara's attendance was inconsistent and by February 2008, all of the boys in the study had discontinued their participation at the center. Darrell and Lara's schools had suspended them twice during the study; therefore, they did not come to the center for weeks at a time. Darrell and Lara also admitted that they did not like the community center anymore. They thought it was "childish," so their attendance was sporadic. I also surmised from the teens' conversations that some of the older youth were growing bored with the center, and they wanted to socialize after school with their friends. In addition, some of the teens wanted jobs and financial freedom from their parents.

From August 2007 to March 2008, I interviewed the youth as much as possible. At times, I would arrive at the center and all of my participants were absent. Conversely, I took full

advantage of my time with the teens when they were present. Under the circumstances, I did not have an organized interview process. The teens' attendance was infrequent, which did not allow me to establish a pattern. Here, I list the number of individual interviews and group interviews for each participant. As for the female participants, I conducted 8 individual interviews and 4 group interviews with Lisa; 9 individual interviews and 4 group interviews with Dee; 6 individual interviews and 3 group interviews with Maxine; 5 individual interviews and 3 group interviews with Star; 5 individual interviews and 2 group interviews with Lara; and 8 individual interviews and 3 group interviews with Nicole. In terms of the male participants, I conducted 8 individual interviews and 3 group interviews with Reggie; 8 individual interviews and 3 group interviews with Dave; and 4 individual interviews and 2 group interviews with Darrell. There were various documents collected from the youth, which the reader can find in the appendices section. These documents consisted of pictures of rappers, posters, and magazine clippings.

Procedures

Interviews were a vital part of the study as well as the primary source of data. Interviews lasted no longer than 30 minutes each. Because I interviewed youth, the interviews were short in length to keep the participants interested in the study and to make sure they were giving information relevant to the question at hand. I found that 30 or fewer minutes interviews were a way to keep youth focused and on task. I conducted the initial interviews in a style to spark conversation and create trust. I asked the teens about their age, number of siblings, date of birth, and school. These conversations did not produce rich data, but they did set the foundation for later interviews that were in-depth and informative. The interviews consisted of semi-structured and unstructured open-ended questions. I constructed many of the interview questions on an ongoing basis because they pertained to each student's experiences with rap music. I also conducted

group interviews, which I found to be quite helpful as the participants spoke candidly with their peers about issues and experiences. Merriam (1998) maintained that a good respondent is "one who understands the culture but is also able to reflect on it and articulate for the researcher what is going on" (p. 85). Because popular rap music trends in their schools and communities fueled the HCC youth, their knowledge of rap is invaluable to the study.

Data Management Plan

I used a digital recorder to capture my informant's comments and phrases during interviews and group interviews. A reputable private transcription service company transcribed the data. I listened to recordings while reading transcriptions to edit for mistakes and missed content. After editing and reading my transcripts countless times, I began to code my data. I coded my data using ATLAS.ti, a computerized software program that organizes qualitative data. ATLAS.ti helped me organize the vast amount of data I collected over the year and a half in the field. A locked filing cabinet secured all material related to the study. In addition, all computerized transcriptions were available only on my personal computer, which I password protected.

Data Analysis

After conducting interviews, getting the data transcribed, editing my transcripts, and reading over my data a myriad times, I used the "open coding" method to analyze my data. The process of "open coding" is organizing data into "chunks" that represent categories, often times based on the actual language of the participant (Creswell, 2003). The complex aspects of my data were the teens' contradictions that, at times, I found confusing in terms of making meaning and relating that meaning to literature. While coding my data, I wrote countless memos reflecting on the substantive issues and summarizing my observer comments. These memos served as the analysis foundation as I began to ask myself analytic questions to create themes grounded first in

my codes and then in the literature. The analytic questions I asked myself focused on the process and the meaning of the words and actions of my participants. The questions helped me examine my data beyond a surface level of analysis. While coding data and writing memos, I asked myself why the youth of HCC had a one-dimensional notion of Blackness. How did the center's location and tutor population foster meaning making for the students? In addition, why did the participants believe that a particular body type and expression of sexuality was being a "real" Black woman? These questions helped me take my data from codes and "chunks" that represented categories to themes, which grounded themselves in literature and gave an explanation to my data.

My data consisted of 46 codes that I grouped into "coding categories or code families" to organize and conceptualize my data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 161). My list of codes consisted of general terms such as Beat, Black girls, Black boys, Drugs, Guns, Money, Sex, Teachers, and Butt. T.I., Little Wayne, Young Jeezy, and Piles were the four rap artists who I found necessary to list as codes. The participants also used a number of phrases that became codes, which were "I like the beat," "I don't know the words to the song," "They love them kids," "Black women got body," "They want to be there," and "Teachers don't care." Codes with more specific analytic messages were "Teachers and caring," "Messages in videos about Black women," "Messages in videos about White women," "Proving them wrong," "Choice," "Anatomy," "Black women options," "Future aspirations," "Just the Beat," "Sexualized messages," "Hood story," "White women and sexuality," and "Role Model." Of course, I also had codes with academic histories, specifically "Privilege in the classroom," "Hegemony," "Resistance," "Racism in the class-room," "Feelings of inferiority in the classroom," "Critical thinking," "Code switching," "Race," "Gender," "Critiquing popular culture," "Authenticity," "Blackness representations," "Oppres-

sion," and "Individualism." These codes along with asking myself analytic questions helped me create code families to examine my data and place them within theoretical perspectives. After creating code families, I turned to the literature for answers. For example, one of my code families' over-arching label was "Students' perceptions of their teachers being racist or showing favoritisms." Under this code category the codes were racism in the classroom, feelings of inferiority in the classroom, "teachers don't care," Teachers and caring, "They love them kids," privilege in the classroom, and teachers. I then turned to the literature to help me understand my data. After reading books and articles by various critical theorists (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1988a; McLaren, 1994), I decided the notion of the hidden curriculum proved salient to define my data. As I read my transcripts, the concept of the hidden curriculum spoke to me and illuminated my data. I proceeded to ground my data in literature that became the framework for the theme entitled *The Hidden Curriculum.*" I used the process I described above for all the themes that emerge in chapter 4. Additionally, it was my intent to "give acknowledgement and give authority to the student voice" (Capporimo, 2001; Gayles, 2006). Therefore, I intentionally made the primary data for the study the students' voices (Gayles).

<div style="text-align: center;">Entree, Confidentiality, Ethics, and Trustworthiness</div>

I gained Institutional Review Board approval to conduct my study in November of 2006. As far as entree, I previously worked at the center as the youth program leader and basketball coach. I had a great relationship with the youth as one of the community center's staff. During my time as the basketball coach, I spoke with the youth numerous times about rap music. Each discussion left me wondering how they made meaning of their race and gender from rap music. I had an outstanding rapport with the youth at HCC built on trust and respect. I can say honestly that I have been a mentor to many of the HCC youth. I have spoken to parents and, at times,

went to student's homes to discuss with their parents or guardians issues of concern for the students' future goals. Everyone at the HCC knows me as "Coach T." I have been involved with HCC in some capacity for the last 3 years, the last being a researcher. I am committed to HCC and to the HCC youth. My time there did not stop once my research stopped. I am still an active volunteer and attend many community festivals for the center. I felt it was important that my research stressed community connections, caring, credibility, and personal accountability of the researcher (Hill Collins, 1990). Conversely, several scholars have criticized the methodology of ethnography and ethnographers for not reflecting on the complicated issues when doing field-work (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Therefore, by member checking and allowing students to view and discuss the data I collected, it was a way to ensure credibility and trust-worthiness throughout the study. I also used peer debriefing as another method to establish validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998). I discussed my findings with impartial colleagues to review my research methods, which provided methodological advice that enhanced my findings.

I also conducted two informational sessions about the study, giving parents the oppor-tunity to ask me questions about the study and sign consent sheets. These informational sessions went very well, with a lot of interaction from the parents. My second session was around the time of the Don Imus scandal.[3] Parents were very eager to talk about rap music. Many expressed the importance of my study because of the heightened attention rap music received because of Don Imus. Parents did insist that I not bring any outside material for their children to view. They expressed concerns about explicit album covers, rap videos, and magazines that they did not

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[3] On April 4, 2007 Don Imus and his executive producer Bernard McGuirk referred on-air to the Rutgers University women's basketball team as "nappy-headed ho's." Imus later apologized for these remarks; however, he was fired by MSNBC.

want their children to see. I agreed with the parents and told them that I would not bring in outside material for children to view; however, we all agreed that if a child brought me something, then it was acceptable to discuss that material. Furthermore, during the informational session, I ensured that every participant signed and understood their consent forms. Additionally, to ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to protect informants, the community center, and the surrounding community. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I wrote memos that reflected on challenges that happened during my study. Writing provides an outlet for a researcher to reflect on and expose her biases about her environment, informants, and issues that may discredit the research. Laurel Richardson (2000) suggested writing different types of memos depending on the issues at hand. For example, she recommended writing personal notes, which are "uncensored feeling statements about the research, the people I am talking to, my doubts, my anxieties, my pleasures" (p. 941). This writing technique also helped me learn things about myself as a researcher and as a person.

Finally, Guba (1981) contended "that immersing yourself in the research setting and spending time at the site for prolonged amounts of time will help the researcher gain trustworthiness and credibility with informants and community members" (p. 56). Because qualitative research is done in a participant's natural environment, it was vital that I gained my informants' trust, which would subsequently provide richer, descriptive data.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

In this section, I describe the nine participants of the study in detail. This will provide the reader with an in-depth depiction of the nine Black youth as students, young adults, and individuals. Rap music was the background and framework to discuss sensitive issues, including race,

academic achievement, and gender. The participants shared personal stories and thoughts about their lives growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, and attending public schools.

I interviewed three males and six females in the after school program. As stated in chapter 1, informants' ages spanned from 13 to 17 years old. I selected youth that I knew were talkative or would have a lot to say in terms of rap music, education, and what they liked and disliked. I had known these youth for over a year before the formal research project started, and they were youth with who I already had various conversations about rap music. The youth were also the most popular youth at the center and had a great impact on their peers. Some of these youth dictated what was "cool" at the center, and their peers often followed their lead.

The Johnson Girls

Fearless, blunt, and sassy—if I have to describe the Johnson girls in three words, with one word representing each sister, these are the words I choose to use. The Johnson girls consist of 17-year-old twins Nicole and Lara, and 16-year-old Lisa. Because Nicole and Lara were retained in the sixth grade, all three girls were in the 11th grade. They lived with their grand-mother, mother, and their 19-year-old sister. They also have an older brother; however, he did not reside with them at the time. I had worked with the girls for 2 years as an after school tutor, and my observations of and interactions with them had not been the most successful, which was why I was hesitant about inviting the sisters to participate in the study. While I felt they would be great additions to the study because of their self-proclaimed knowledge of rap music, I thought their personalities would conflict with mine and prove to be a barrier for gathering data. However, all three Johnson girls provided rich data and became crucial to the study for their unique and often blunt remarks.

I began working with the girls as an after-school worker in 2005. As such, my job was to make sure the students were doing their homework and to assist them if they needed help. Unfortunately, the Johnson girls did not like my telling them what to do, and it was a daily struggle to get them to do their homework. Although none of the girls had graduated from high school yet, each one behaved as if she were much older. When I first met them, there was immediate friction in our interaction as I was determined not to let a then 14- or 15-year-old girl speak to me like she would her friends. They constantly used matronly colloquialisms like "honey" and "baby" when referring to youth and adults alike. On several occasions, I asked them not to use these terms when speaking to or referring to me. After 2 years of my requests and being ignored, I gave up. Their sassy language took some getting use to and it was, at times, a humbling experience. Each of the girls was extremely confident and not afraid to speak her mind; unfortunately, their quick-witted thoughts were often disrespectful.

Lisa (16) was the overachiever of the family and had a 3.4 grade point average. She was placed in classes such as Advanced Placement Biology and Spanish III. She was sassy, but respectable. She was the fighter in the family and spoke up for her sisters, which I found ironic because she was the youngest Johnson. Lisa liked school and wanted more than anything to go to college. At the time of the study, Lisa spoke to me about leaving home and attending college. Lisa and I spoke on numerous occasions about the cost of college and applying for college. Lisa was the calm, level headed one, who was not afraid of anyone, and was determined to make a better life for herself. Initially, Lisa came off as aloof; but as I interacted with her, I saw that she cared deeply for her future. Lisa loved her sisters; however, she told me that she was ready to leave because she was tired of helping them with their schoolwork and their "I don't care" attitudes.

Nicole (17) was the younger of the twins by a few minutes. She was the most outspoken of the three. All of the Johnson girls spoke their minds, but Nicole laced her statements with venom at times. Conversely, she could be caring and motherly, which contributed to her becoming a natural leader. Her physical appearance set her apart from her sisters. Although Nicole and Lara's facial features were identical, one could differentiate them easily because of their weight difference. Lara's stature was much thinner while Nicole was slightly overweight. Academically, Nicole's performance directly contrasted Lisa's performance. Nicole struggled and barely passed her classes, but in her mind, she did just fine. Nicole did have plans for the future; she considered becoming a chef or a teacher, and she wanted to go to college. However, she was not as determined as Lisa, and she made comments that led me to believe that she was very apprehensive about continuing her education.

Lara (17) was the older twin. She had the lowest grade point average out of all the girls in the study, and she had poor study skills. Although she had a knack for remembering and repeating gossip, Lara constantly forgot important details and never assumed responsibility for her actions. Lara loved to engage anyone in a conversation and could talk herself out of almost any situation at HCC. Therefore, she spent the majority of her time at the center focusing on the latest gossip and frolicking about with her friends. Completing her school assignments while at HCC was one of Lara's last tasks. When staff reprimanded Lara for not focusing on her work, she tried to copy Nicole's work and pass it off as her own. Nicole's first response to Lara was usually "no"; then Lara used her coercion skills to get Nicole to relinquish her assignments.

The Class Clown, the Actress, and the Pessimist

Star (14) stood almost 5'9" and was one of the tallest youth at the center. Star was the class clown and loved to entertain. She would do anything to get a laugh out of everyone. Star

had so much personality. Star was an average student; her grades were fair, and she always avoided trouble. Star was silly all the time and made sure she spoke to everyone that walked into the center. Her mother had lupus and could not work because the illness caused constant fatigue. Star's father did not live in Atlanta, and she did not get a chance to visit him much. Star spent much of her time at the center with her friend Maxine. They often talked about boys and what they were going to wear to school the next day. Star and Maxine were like most 14-year-old girls that love talking on the phone, buying clothes, learning the latest dance, and listening to music.

Maxine (14) was one of the few youth at the center who had the benefit of participating in various extracurricular experiences, which included being a member of a dance troupe and taking acting classes. A local day care employed her mother in a managerial position, and she worked extremely hard to expose Maxine to the world outside of HCC. Maxine was a ball of energy and never stopped talking or moving. She loved clothes and anything with glitter. Maxine was a good student, and her mother would not have it any other way. Maxine's mother enrolled Maxine in tutorial classes at Sylvan Learning Center. Her father was not in the picture; however, Maxine had a brother that was more than 15 years older than her. Therefore, he served as the male figure in her life. Maxine was the youngest of the family, which allowed her almost everything she wanted, and she was quick to let the other youth at the center know what she was getting.

Dee (16) was the pessimistic one who rarely smiled. She always had a negative response to situations. Dee was the oldest of four children and lived with her mother and father. She had a brother that formerly attended HCC; he had been asked not to return to the center because of his destructive behavior. Dee's brother not attending HCC was the best thing for Dee. Dee could do her homework and practice the clarinet with her tutor instead of defending her brother whenever

he challenged anyone to a physical altercation. Dee was an above average student, but her love was playing in the school's band.

The Young Men of HCC

The males that participated in the study varied in age, personality, and academic achievement. Dave (16), Reggie (15), and Darrell (16) were all high school students. Out of the three male youngsters, two had male figures living in their homes. However, not all the male figures were their biological fathers. Dave lived with his stepfather, and Reggie lived with his father. Reggie was the only one that lived with his biological father.

Dave was the high achieving male at the center. Dave had a grade point average of 3.6 and excelled in school. When he applied himself, he typically did well. Dave was tall and slim and had a smile that lit up a room. Dave was always smiling. He had a comedic sensibility and was always doing something to get a laugh. The timing of his jokes were thought out and delivered in a manner that made everyone around him laugh. He was a likeable kid whom every-one at the center hoped would go to college. Dave lived with his mother, stepfather, younger sister, and brother. His mother worked two jobs. In a candid conversation about Dave and his future, she expressed to me that she did not get to spend quality time with Dave because of her work schedule. She was aware of Dave's academic potential and wanted him to do extremely well in school. However, she was afraid that he would start to hang out with the "wrong crowd" and hurt his chances of going to college.

Reggie was Dave's distant cousin, so they tell me. The joke among the staff at HCC was that everyone was related depending on the day one asked. Reggie was the athlete out of the group. He was tall with broad shoulders and a face that could sell any sports drink. Reggie received all the attention from the girls at the center; nevertheless, he was humble and had a

boyish charm about him. His sport of choice was football, and he idolized Peyton Manning. Reggie wanted to be a quarterback in the National Football League (NFL) someday; however, he did not play football for his high school, which limits his chances of ever playing in the NFL. Reggie lived with his mother, father, and his younger siblings. His mother was active at the center and attended many of the informational workshops for parents. Reggie's grade point average was low. I never saw his report card, but I was told by a staff member that it was a 2.0 one grading period. His mother regularly reprimanded him for his low grades.

Darrell was a young man that exuded personality. Darrell stood about 6 feet tall, wore thick glasses that were often crooked on his face, and was a self-proclaimed ladies man. Darrell was the biggest flirt at the center. He flirted with girls at the center as well as any attractive women who came through the doors. Darrell spoke with the southern drawl. Reggie's first year at the center was the fall of 2007. However, he knew many of the teens at the center because he lived in the same neighborhood as most of the other teens. Darrell was a breath of fresh air. He was always smiling and talking to anybody who would listen. However, Darrell was failing in school and never seemed to remember to bring his homework to the center. Because Darrell was new to the center, I did not meet his parents, but I learned through conversation that Darrell lived with his mother.

When I first met Darrell, he had just been reinstated in school after being suspended for fighting at school. Darrell loved to talk. So Dave and Reggie suggested that I ask Darrell to participate in the study. When I asked Darrell if he would like to participate, he said, "Ya, I know a lot about the rap and street game." I then asked him what he knew. He replied, "I will tell you a thing or two" as he smiled and laughed. I instantly handed Darrell two permission forms, one for his parents and one for him. The next day I asked Darrell about the permission slips. He said,

"Ya, I have it, it's in my pocket . . . you want it . . . you thought I was going to forget, huh." He was right; I did think he was going to forget. Actually, he was the only teen to bring the form back the next day.

Summary

This ethnographic study explored how youth at HCC understood and made meaning of the messages of rap music in their daily lives. My data collection methods to examine this phenomenon incorporated individual and group interviews, observations, and document analyses for triangulation purposes. I analyzed the data using the qualitative software program Atlas.ti., which organized the vast amount of data I collected over the year and half I spent at HCC. By coding, organizing, and categorizing my data, I developed themes that I grounded in literature, which the experiences of HCC youth also illuminated. The study focused on the experiences and perspectives of nine youth, who consumed a music genre that informed them about their sexuality, race, gender, and academic success.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate the ways that urban youth in an

Atlanta community center made meaning of and conceptualized rap music in their everyday

lives. I selected nine Black students as the main participants for the study. At first, interviews

consisted of informal conversations centered on the youth's opinions of rap music and their

engagement with the text of rap music. Investigating their engagement with rap led to rich,

descriptive data as the students revealed their perceptions about teachers' racism, resisting

racism, academic achievement, and essentialist notions of Blackness and Whiteness, sexuality,

and gender. This chapter, grounded in data, examines how youth's ideas and perspectives of rap

music led to their essentialist, or monolithic, ideological understandings of what it means to be

Black and educated in America's public school system. The terms essentialist, monolithic, and

ideological are the foundation of the study's findings. I have already defined these terms in-depth

in chapter 2. However, I will briefly discuss the definitions of these terms below for continuity.

The study's working definition for "essentialist" derives from postmodernist lexicon,

which defines essentialism as

> the view that some social groups have characteristics or interests that are given
> rather than continually constructed and reconstructed - and reductionism,
> stereotyping, as in the view that all women are nurturing, or that African
> Americans have innate musical abilities. (Epstein, 1997, p. 22)

The youth in the study all had essentialized notions of Blackness. Their ideas of Blackness were

monolithic: Both male and female teens expressed that in order to be a Black female one must

possess a large butt; that White girls are smarter than Black girls; and that White women make better decisions than Black women in terms of career choices. I ground these conclusions in data that I will present in this chapter. I apply the classic term monolithic, meaning one or unified, to this study as youth expressed universal notions of Blackness and gender. The third term of importance is ideology. Hill Collins (2006) defines ideology as "a body of ideas reflecting the interests of a particular social group" (p. 351). I use ideology to ground the youth's beliefs as ideas that they believed to be true in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. These three terms appear throughout this chapter in order to illustrate the findings.

The teens, both male and female, also subscribed to a double standard that privileged men and rejected women as they disregarded patriarchal acts by men and reprimanded women for similar acts. In addition, there were times when youth demonstrated their consent to violent, degrading, misogynistic lyrics by their actions and musical choices because they enjoyed and found pleasure in rap music beats. West (1990) argued that "pleasure, under commodified conditions, tends to be inward. You take it with you, and it's a highly individuated unit" (p. 96). When youth found pleasure in a song they consented to the degrading lyrics by dancing or expressing to me that they ignored song lyrics that called women "bitches" or "hoes" so they could enjoy the song as individuals. I use the term consent because the teens in the study ignored the demeaning language and continued to listen to those messages. I read the teen's enjoyment and excitement of vulgar rap music as consent. The problematic lyrics and images of rap music were secondary to the beat of the music, even as youth critiqued the music for its derogatory content. I examine youth's awareness of racism in the classroom, and lastly I address how youth resisted racism, while learning from the margins.

The youth in the study had a keen sense of what racism feels and looks like, and they were not afraid to point out examples or times in their lives when they felt discriminated against because of their race. Their examples were their lived experiences, which shaped their perspective and changed their position from observer to expert. Hill Collins wrote (1990), "For ordinary African-American women, those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences" (p. 209). I cite Hill Collins's position on lived experiences for various reasons. First, I expand Hill Collins' definition to males and youth because all groups and individuals have experiences, some experiences are constant; and therefore, those experiences shape lives and create schemas. As a result, groups or individuals become the experts of those experiences. In addition, the concept of lived experiences is important to the findings. These findings situate themselves within the reality of the youth who participated in the study because youth candidly spoke about various aspects of their lives and how they engaged with the text of rap. The youth's words, which spoke to their experiences in the classroom, illuminated the discrimination and racism that youth encountered in the classroom. They also expressed moments of resistance, where they were determined to "prove" their teachers wrong and show teachers that they identified with school.

I focused the research concerns on how youth engaged with rap music and made meaning. Their understanding of rap music is important to education. Powell (1991) argued, "As educationalists we cannot afford not to tap into some of rap's vitality and bring it into the educational setting where it can inspire and motivate our youth to stay in school and receive relevant educations" (p. 257). Many educational theorists who echo Powell's remarks (Beachum & McCray, 2007; Dimitriadis, 2001; Giroux, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002) insist on the implementation

of rap music in the classroom. However, before teachers can use rap music to engage youth in the classroom, they must have an awareness of their own ideas about race. The teachers' ideas may find roots in racism, which reflects in their teaching and impedes learning in the classroom (McLaren, 1994). The youth in this study pointed out the ubiquitous racism that was present in the classroom. Because this study focused exclusively on students' experiences, their comments about teachers were solely their perspective, and I could not triangulate them with observations. The study did not take place in a formal educational setting and interviewing teachers was not in the scope of the study. The community center bound the study; therefore, I did not have permission to conduct research at the teens' respective schools.

My work strived to recognize the voices of the participants in the study. The teens provided rich, descriptive examples when asked about rap music, education, race, sexuality, and gender. Through examination of the participants' words and actions, I attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do youth understand the images presented in rap music and rap videos?

2. How do rap's messages contribute to youth's construction of race and gender identities?

3. How does rap music shape youth's lived experiences?

These questions are important to education because youth's social knowledge informs their academic knowledge and vice versa. Experience is the center of all knowledge; therefore, youth understand who they are by their interactions with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Lather, 1992; Sandstrom et al., 2001). One's experience with text can also shape one's knowledge, and in this case, the text is rap music. However, one's limited experiences shape one's knowledge.

As a subject's version of collective experiences of oppression and marginalization become a conceptualized knowledge, it also becomes common or expected (McPherson & Shelby 2004, p. 190). Thus, this study attempted to make meaning of the collective experiences of youth at HCC.

<div align="center">Essentialist Notions of Blackness</div>

> Hip-hop is not as multidimensional as black people are and rap music only represents an aspect of the African-American experience. (Nelson, 1999)

In "What is This Black in Black Popular Culture?" Hall (1983) noted that "black popular culture can pass the test of authenticity–the reference to black experience and to black expressivity" (p. 28). The concept of authenticity is vital to the findings of this chapter. Hall linked authenticity to essentialism in the realm of Black popular culture. The dominant group's ideological notions of what is Black serve as origin and creation of Black popular culture, while those notions web simultaneously within Black culture (Hall; West, 1990). The hybrid of Black culture, popular culture, and European ideology produces essentialized notions of Blackness that represent the Black experience as authentic. For the dominant group, the images and sounds of Black people expressing their experiences through the medium of popular culture is Black popular culture and represents the Black experience to the larger society (Hall). However, these images and sounds have their roots deeply planted in sexism, racism, classism, violence, hyper-masculinity, promiscuity, and materialism (Dyson, 2007; Giroux, 1997; Hall; hooks, 2004; McLaren, 2003; Queeley, 2003; Ralph, 2006; West, 2001). As the above oppressive ideologies ground Black popular culture, Hall contended that the oppressed may try to resist essentialized notions. Therefore, the oppressed struggle at times with what they see and hear as representations of them, and without "critical strategy" (Hall, p. 30) they are in a constant struggle to think about themselves devoid of the essentialized notions. Hall insightfully wrote,

> The essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological,

and genetic. The moment the signifier "black" is torn from its historical cultural, and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct. (p. 30)

Hall's words illuminate the struggles of the youth in this study as they encountered essentializing moments with rap music and struggled to counter the images and sounds of what they heard and saw. However, the teens did question essentialized notions of racism when they could juxtapose Black and White images. The teens in the study identified racial stereotypes, often when presented in "binary oppositions" to White representations (Hall, 1997, p. 243). However, when the teens in the study observed Blacks in degrading or stereotypical roles, as portrayed in rap music, they conformed to the essentialized notions of Blackness as evidence or proof that what they saw on television was authentically Black. They internalized the messages of rap as authentic representations of Blackness. These messages informed their ideas about what is Black.

bell hooks (1990) argued, "When black folks critique essentialism, we are empowered to recognize multiple experiences of black identity that are lived conditions which make diverse cultural productions possible" (p. 29). hooks suggested that when Black people use a level of consciousness that can critique essentialism, they create new identities of Blackness by questioning stereotypical representations (hooks, 1992). In this study, the youth displayed the inability to critique essentialist notions of Blackness and gender. The HCC youths' limited exposure to the various types of American Black experience led them to believe that what they internalized through rap was the bona fide and monolithic experiences of Black life. Through rap music's sexualized and raced messages (rap videos), youth understood that in order to be an authentic Black woman, one has to possess a large backside, be promiscuous, lack education, and be willing to exploit herself for money. The youth spoke about the women who appeared in rap videos in a scornful manner that criticized the women for their actions and judgments in partici-

pating in the rap videos. However, the youth contradicted themselves because they listened to misogynistic rap music in order to "fit in" to what they perceived as "being Black." The observations and interviews with the youth revealed teens' perceptions of Black womanhood. This data further explained HCC youths' dress, the music they listened to, and the ways they interacted with the opposite sex.

<div align="center">Biological Essentialism and Blackness</div>

When Dee and Lisa were asked how rap music represents Black women, they candidly responded by saying, "We freaks, we hoes, we do anything for money. If you got the biggest booty or whatever, you theirs on the block, yeah they go for like the biggest butt. They like girls with big butts" (Dee, Interview, 11/07). Lisa also commented, "Yeah, 'cause like they say the black ones got big butts . . . If you ain't got no big butt, you ain't no black person, you know" (Lisa, Interview, 12/07). By watching rap videos and listening to rap music, Dee and Lisa believed male rappers only like voluptuous females who are freaks and will have sex for money. Rap videos informed the youth's ideas of what it means to be a Black woman by a woman's body shape. To Dee and Lisa, Black women who partake in the rap industry have to acquire certain aesthetics and consent to a level of exploitation.

One can read Dee and Lisa's language as verbalizations of their engagement with rap, which is a culture that exploits women and informs them of essentialized notions of race, gender, sexuality, and biological characteristics (i.e., Black women's buttocks and hips; hooks, 2004). When asked the same question, Maxine stated, "Black women, they have on their bikinis and stuff in the video, they freaks, they nasty" (Maxine, Interview, 11/07). Star added the Black women in the videos "need to put some clothes on. Where is their mamma at? Have they been to church?" (Star, Interview, 11/07). The young girls focused continuously on the voluptuous body

image as the authentic quality that proves a Black woman as Black. Maxine stated, "Ya Black

girls have butts" (Maxine, Interview, 12/07).

> Like Kanye say we like girls that ain't on TV cause they got more ass than the models. That's a good example, so you have to have a butt. (Nicole, Interview, 12/07)[4]

> Probably 'cause they don't have no body, you know, like I ain't sayin they [White girls] don't have bodies but you know they're not like Black women. (Dee, Interview, 11/07)

Dee compared the biological make-up of Black and White women to make the distinction of

what it means to be a Black woman. Nicole cited rapper Kanye West, who stated that Black

women have large backsides and more curves than White models who dominate the modeling

field. In bell hooks's (1992) "Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in

the Cultural Marketplace," she argued that "black presence in early North American society

allowed whites to sexualize their world by projecting onto black bodies a narrative of sexualiza-

tion disassociated from whiteness" (p. 63). Roberts (1997) stated that the binary of Black and

White body shape has led the Black image to represent a curvaceous, erotic, oversexed female

that every "real" or authentic Black woman should aspire to look like. In "Never Trust a Big Butt

and a Smile," Tricia Rose (2001) argued,

> By paying close attention to rap music, we can gain some insight into how young African Americans provide for themselves a relatively safe free-play zone where they creatively address questions of sexual power, the reality of truncated economic opportunity, the pain of racism and sexism, and through physical expressions of freedom, relieve the anxieties of day-to-day oppression. (p. 237)

Rap music creates a space for youth to question and examine their gender and sexuality. How-

ever, the monolithic images that rap represent bar the creation of multiple, complex levels of

Blackness and womanhood. Therefore, the teens came to a perplexed crossroad when concep-

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[4] Kanye West is a rapper from Chicago who is also an eight-time Grammy nominee.

tualizing gender, sexuality, and race as they interacted with the rap music, which at times

celebrates its exploitation of women (Emerson, 2002; Hill Collins, 2006, 2007; hooks, 2004;

Ralph, 2006; Stephens & Few, 2007; Stephens & Phillips, 2005).

The decision young women have to make is one that is not made in a social vacuum:

Their decision to conform to the dominant images directly affects their self-esteem and how they

represent themselves to their community, siblings, teachers, and sexual partners. hooks (2003a)

contended,

> The most obvious internalization of shame that impacted on the self-esteems of
> black folks historically and continues to the present day is the shame about the
> appearance, skin, color, body shape, and hair texture. (p. 37)

hooks's remarks speak to the pressure Blacks, especially young Black women, face when

confronted with notions of biological essentialism associated with being a Black woman. The

following quotation from Lisa illustrates the expectation from other Black women in Lisa's

family to subscribe to biological essentialism. Lisa spoke about how her female family members

chastise her for not having a body that they consider worthy of the family name.

> Like in my family, most of the women got big hips and big butts. Like my family
> be like, you ain't no Johnson, be doing stuff like that. And they be saying stuff
> like, in my family like other people, like in my family like in the country. The
> Johnsons got the big hips and the big butt. (Lisa, Interview, 11/07)

Lisa questioned, at times, whether she was a Johnson and a Black woman because she did not

look the part. She later stated in the same interview, "That's just like saying, oh I'm probably

going to get some big butt and hips you know, just to fit in" (Lisa, Interview, 11/07). The girls

discussed at various times the possibility of injections in order to acquire a larger backside.

These conversations took on a joking tone, but the fact that they thought of it and verbalized it

speaks to their ideas of biological Blackness. Nicole stated, "Like you know, if you black, you

got a body, whatever" (Nicole, Interview, 11/07). To the youth, being a Black woman is having a

voluptuous body. The youth further explained that Blackness for women also means that they are

freaks and promiscuous because of their bodies. They explained,

> Probably that we're [Black women] freaks and we reveal a lot. Like we say today like things like easy access and stuff, like if the boy wants you, I mean, like you wear a skirt or something and they be like, they say it's easy access like it's easy for the boy to get you. Like you can go behind there with a skirt on quick, like a quickie. (Nicole, Interview, 1/08)

> People think you gotta dance, you gotta sing, and got a body . . . butt. Then you beautiful. (Lisa, Interview, 1/08).

> You gotta have body to be black. If you ain't got body, you lame. (Lara, Interview, 11/07)

Nicole's candid comments exemplify what she thinks the outside world thinks of Black women

and it is what she thinks as well. The notion that Black women in rap videos were freaks and

have full-size backsides resonated with all the HCC youth.

> They some freaks. . . . I don't know why (Darrell, Interview, 11/07)

> The underwear be in their butt, they nasty. (Dee, Interview, 11/07)

> All Black girls have a butt (Reggie, Interview, 11/07)

The youth in the study saw Black women who appear in rap videos as nasty, freaks and have a

specific biological feature that makes them authentically Black.

Lisa stated, "They [people who are not Black] think all black people are freaks, how they

see us in the video that song applies to all of us, but yeah they think all black people are like that,

you know, like to have sex and got a big butt" (Lisa, Interview, 12/07). The notion that all Black

women have large backsides troubled the girls when the issues of dating arose.

> Just like the girls in the video, like they act like they put they selves out there like they look for attention, like and boys see that and they maybe want to talk to them. Like a girl might wear to school a real short skirt and no legging and probably a have a big butt…. and it draw attention to her and then they try to talk to her. (Nicole, Interview, 12/07).

> They go to the girls who like, who got body, who look easy, who they think easy and they like would take something like that. They don't come to me. (Dee, Interview, 10/07)

> Because 'em songs. Them songs tell them to treat us like that. (Lisa, Interview, 1/08)

> It's all about the body. . . . They like chasing the bigger girl than a skinny girl. (Lara, Interview, 12/07)

The essentialist notion that all Black women have to have curvaceous bodies was a concept the girls struggled with as they looked for a male mate because their bodies did not meet the requirements of what the rap industry's standards considered a Black woman's body type. The males who interested these young women at HCC dismissed the girls because they did not resemble who the males considered a Black woman. Nicole stated that boys' gravitated to girls who were curvaceous; therefore, they took the attention away from girls who had less body. The youth also read that having a curvaceous body indicated that a woman was promiscuous. In an interview with Dee, she explained how she thought boys decided which girl they would like to have intercourse with because of their body.

Tina: Okay, but what about face, does face count?

Dee: Have you ever heard the song everything look good but her head.

Tina: Huh?

Dee: They [boys] don't care, you ain't gotta look good. You got a body they [boys] going to talk to you. You're not understanding the models are pretty, but they don't want them, they want the body.

Dee determined from her experiences that boys constructed desires for dating based upon sexual activity on particular criteria required of girls' bodies. For Dee, levels of facial attractiveness, personality, intelligence, or other aesthetics did not concern boys. Dee came to realize that being a Black woman and wanting physical attention by males meant having a body that males find attractive. In a group interview with Lisa and Dee, they further explained how boys treated them because of their body types and identified where these perspectives originated.

Tina: So do you think black women on television are represented well?

Lisa: No, not the majority of them because -

Dee: Not these days on hip hop videos.

Lisa: Yeah. They look like strippers and hoes.

Tina: How do boys treat you?

Lisa: Most of them think they going get a video girl.

Tina: They do?

Lisa: Some people you hang around in school, yes. They think you supposed to be a certain size, you supposed to wear what they [video girls] wear.

Dee: Yeah, they do.

Lisa: The boy they don't go for librarians or smart girls. Like they wouldn't go for me. They want me to look, you know, what they wanted in the video. Size, strippers dancing, and easy.

Dee: Uh-hm, they want you to look the same way.

Tina: How do you know that?

Lisa: Just the way he act towards you. Like if before you try to talk to them [boys] like we're sitting in the classroom and they know you might like them, they'll say, they'll start talking about, ooh I like that girl because she got that little slim waist and big booty. You know, stuff like that. It just, you already know if he like you, you know you don't look like that, you just step aside.

Dee and Lisa explained the idea that Black boys are only attracted to Black girls who embody a certain size and shape. For the girls, especially the 16- and 17-year-olds, the idea of being an attractive, authentic Black woman centered on their shape. Young teenage girls experience emotional devastation because of the notion that Blackness links directly to body shape (hooks, 2003a).

The data suggest that the teens in the study believed wholeheartedly in the idea of individualism and meritocracy. Shapiro (2004) defined meritocracy as "mandates that we should only get what we earn through ability and effort" (p. 72). Shapiro argued that meritocracy is the American way. Omi and Winant (1994) contended that merit is a "political construct" (p.130) which proclaims that "only individual rights exist, only individual opportunity can be guaranteed

by law, and only 'merit' justifies the granting of privilege" (p.130). The youth believed that the women in rap videos were solely responsible for the degrading, misogynistic images because they had a choice of whether or not they would participate in the videos. My observations and conversations with the teens led me to believe that they had no analytic framework to examine rap music as a sexist, racist site of education filled with contradictions. For them, rap is pure and gives Black people the space to express themselves in any manner they see fit.

Notions of Choice

Both the male and female youth expressed the idea that females in rap videos wanted to be there and chose that career path. They believed that objectification and degradation are a conscious choice that Black women make in order to appear in rap videos and/or make money. The idea of choice permeated the male and female teens' perceptions of the women in the videos.

Dee expressed her view of choice and revealed her lack of understanding systemic oppression: "You could have been in school being a lawyer or something and still making money enjoying your life. Instead you're doing it another way" (Dee, Interview, 1/08). In Dee's opinion, the women who participated in rap videos chose to be exploited. Dee assumed that the young women who materialized in rap videos chose to be there instead of pursuing other lucrative professions. Dee's idea of choice failed to address the fact that while women may have the option of choice, those choices are limited. hooks (1984) argued,

> Many women in this society do have choices, (as inadequate as they are) therefore exploitation and discrimination are words that more accurately describe the lot of women collectively in the United States . . . Under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women's behavior in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in other spheres. (p. 5)

Because of the idea of choice and meritocracy, Dee understood the concept that there is more than just one way to make money; therefore, she believed that Black women in the videos

chose to be objectified. Dee subscribed to individualistic and meritocratic ideology. The idea of meritocracy is "ingrained into the psyches of nearly all Americans" (Beachum & McCray, 2008, p. 56). Meritocracy ignores systemic oppression and solely blames individuals for their perceived failures. In an interview with Darrell, when asked about how he thought girls in rap videos were treated, he responded, "Oh, they be treating girls with respect. They want to be there" (Darrell, Interview, 10/07). I wanted to know why he thought that the women in the videos wanted to be there, so I continued to ask questions for clarity:

Tina: They do?

Darrell: Some of the videos, probably.

Tina: Have you seen videos where they don't treat girls with respect in the video?

Darrell: No.

Tina: What about what the girls wear in the video, do you think that's appropriate?

Darrell: Yeah.

Tina: Why?

Darrell: 'Cause they get-they get more viewers and stuff. People get to see them. They get paid.

Tina: How much do you think those girls are paid?

Darrell: Probably about $2000 a video.

Tina: Two thousand a video, is two thousand a lot of money?

Darrell: No.

Tina: What do they do with the money?

Darrell: Oh, probably go buy clothes and shoes and stuff, go to the mall. Or buy a car.

Darrell believed that the women in rap videos wanted to be there and wanted viewers. Darrell did not question the appropriateness of Black women in rap videos because, to him, it is apropos both for the rap video genre and for the Black women's desires.

hooks (2004) and Ralph (2006) argued that rap music made it acceptable to view Black women as objects for male pleasure. Meritocracy, patriarchy, and biological essentialism fuel this rationale. Darrell and others believed that Black women made conscious decisions to be objectified in rap videos because they possessed "the Black prototype" body and that Black women desired to do so. When I asked Reggie what he thought about Black women in rap videos and how he thought they were treated, he smiled and replied, "Ain't got nothing to do with me. They just, they wearing tight clothes and stuff and dance. . . . They want to be there" (Reggie, Intreview, 10/07). When I asked Reggie who he thought picked out the clothes for the women to wear in the videos, he said, "The girls" (Reggie, Interview, 10/07). Dave added, "Nobody holds them down, they having fun" (Dave, Interview, 12/07). They asserted that they did not find the portrayal of Black women in rap videos as problematic; they recognized the women's participation as acceptance. Reggie contended, "They dance for money with the rappers. . . . So they can be friends with them . . . let them be in more videos so they can be noticed. . . . Yeah and get money (Reggie, Interview, 1/08). When I asked Dave again about his ideas of choice and women being in rap videos, he responded, "They not forced to get in the video. Because you don't have to do that if you don't want to. They just do it for money or something" (Dave, Interview, 12/07).

The boys were not alone in their ideas about what it means to be a Black woman in rap videos who "choose" the video vixen path. Others expressed essentialist notions of choice for black women:

> We're being disrespectful to ourselves and to other people. We be looking like freaks, and giving it away for money. (Nicole, Interview, 1/08)

> We have common sense but we just don't use it at the time. We make wrong, we make wrong choices like we don't think before we do. We do, then think about the consequences. (Lara, Interview, 1/08)

Because these two young female teens consistently saw Black women degraded in rap videos, they conceptualized that Black women are unintelligent, lack self-respect, and make poor decisions. The teens' lack of exposure to Black women who counter the images of freaky, over-sexed, unintelligent, Black women also contributed to the teens' essentialized understanding of Blackness and gender. The absence of diverse representations of Black women led the teens to adopt an essentialist idea of Black womanhood. Star commented that "being Black is being wild, actin' a fool" (Star, Interview, 10/07). Lara stated, "Yeah, cause they know like blacks, African Americans will be the first . . . trying to make money" (Lara, Interview, 12/07). The youth assumed that Black women lack financially stable livelihoods. Therefore, they have to denigrate their bodies for money.

Yeah, they [video girl] getting money. (Lisa, Interview, 10/07)

Like they [rappers] have those girls, you know, in all those little bitty shorts. If you don't come out there, then you can't be seen. (Darrell, 11/07)

They just want to get paid. I think it's sad. (Star, Interview, 10/07)

Yeah, the [Black women] want to get money because you know these little teenage boys and stuff, that's all they really look for videos for girl have on thongs and be half naked. (Nicole, Interview, 1/08).

The teens believed that Black women lack money and have limited choices to obtain money. These finding also lend themselves to the ideology of classism, which hooks (2001) argued is a "pressing issue" (p. 5) not currently discussed in America. Class was not in the scope of the study. It is necessary, however, to trouble the issue because Black America, according to hooks, is the "face of poverty" (p. 4). The book *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*, by Shapiro (2004), illustrated the class disadvantages of African Americans compared to Whites. Shapiro argued, "Furthermore, the twenty-first century marks the beginning of a new racial dilemma for the United States: Family wealth and

inheritances cancel gains in the classrooms, workplace, and paychecks, worsening racial

inequality" (p. 183). The teens in this study linked class, lack of education, race, and body image

together to explain why the rap video genre exploits Black women. Class is one of the essential

pieces to understand how youth made meaning of the depictions of Black women in videos. The

teens' comments alluded to the notion of class: Black women lacked money so they had no

choice than to be exploited by male rappers. Ralph (2006) complicated male rappers' reasoning

for oppressing women when he argued that

> From rappers' own discussions of employment opportunities or 'life chances' one
> gets the sense that many of these artists are jealous of women. . . . By treating
> women as expendable and harnessing female capabilities for personal use –
> whether as 'commodities' or 'as objects of male pleasure. . . . In the sphere of hip
> hop, patriarchal ambivalence derives from increasing economic inadequacy
> during a time when men still partake of the illusion that their economic perform-
> ance is the most important component of virile masculinity, especially within the
> household. (p. 65)

The current state of Black America's economic standing fuels Ralph's position where "Black

teenagers face an unemployment rate of 57 percent and unprecedented levels of poverty while

impoverishment and hunger become the rule of the day" (Giroux, 1998a, p. 40). Thus, many

Black males face immeasurable economic hardships and retreat to patriarchal methods (diatribes

directed at women, viewing women as objects, abuse) as a coping method to deal with low class

status (Ralph). However, the teens, both male and female, subscribed to sexist and classist con-

cepts to explain their ideological beliefs about Black women. Class unmistakably influenced the

HCC youth because they took their signals from rappers who produced patriarchal ideas in their

music to secure their masculinity, as youth feared the perception of economically inadequate.

The study showed that youth conceptualized that Black women chose to be in an

exploitative position because they yearned for male attention and their own money. The youth

dismissed the notion that Black women are capable of acquiring wealth in their comments that

Blacks in general are uneducated in comparison to their White counterparts. I noticed while working and researching at the center that an overwhelming majority of the students' tutors were White females who drove high-end cars (BMW, Lexus, Honda) and often dressed in designer clothes. Even the teens or college students who tutored the HCC students were White and appeared to have affluent backgrounds.[5] The youth of HCC hailed from a community that was undergoing gentrification. Many of the Blacks in the neighborhood sold their homes and moved away. Several of the tutors were the same age as the HCC students. For instance, Lara's (16) tutor was 16. In contrast to Lara, Lara's tutor attended a prestigious private school, drove a high-end car, and was planning to attend a top-ranked college.[6] This situation created a Black/White, Smart/Dumb, either/or dichotomous thinking by the HCC youth (Hill Collins, 1991). Therefore, layered on top of their essentialist ideas influenced by the rap industry about what it means to be a Black woman, the White teenage tutors also shaped the youth perceptions about themselves. The White teens inadvertently shaped the ideas of intellectual inferiority for the HCC Black teens, especially the girls. In the next section, I explore the teens' perceptions of what it means to be White and, therefore, what it means to be Black in contrast. Because the teens conceptualized that there was only one-way to be Black–uneducated, freaky, oversexed—they believed that being White was the exact opposite.

<div align="center">Essentialist Notions of Black and White</div>

As I previously stated, the community center had an overwhelming number of White teenage volunteers. While interviewing Maxine one day when the volunteers were there, she

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[5] Without disclosing the location of the center and its financial donors, the center's tutors belong to one of the wealthiest churches in Atlanta. The church was known throughout Atlanta for having one of the wealthiest congregations in Georgia.

[6] Throughout my 3 years at the center, I have had countless conversations with the tutors at HCC. Often times we would discuss their plans for college, mainly because that is all I had in common with the youth. Therefore, I feel confident stating that Lara's tutor was attending an upper tier college and drove a high end car.

implicitly illustrated the either/or dichotomy that led to her essentialist ideas of White and Black

women in terms of education, economics, and social status. I quote this interview at length

because it shows Maxine's thought process and how she came to understand White and Black

intellectual positions.

Tina: I was looking back when I interviewed you before and you said something that I've got to ask some questions about. You said something that white women are smart because they don't show their bodies the way black women do on TV. Do you remember you said that?

Maxine: Oh yeah.

Tina: Why did you say that?

Maxine: Because like it's all about money and most of African American girls drop out of school and stuff and make the wrong choices. And it's all a part of life but you don't see the white women dropping out of school. They go all the way through and make straight A's and do what their parents want them to do.

Tina: When you say "we're" being -- who?

Maxine: Women, us women (pointing back and forth).

Tina: Us women, black women?

Maxine: Yes, us as black women are kind of like, we're -- how can I say this - we're giving people a sign how we want to be treated, how we represent ourselves basically.

Tina: How do you think we represent ourselves?

Maxine: Well, it depends on how you wear your clothes. So if you wear like some girls in the videos and stuff they wear like tube tops and stuff and then like real short shorts and then regular women wear long pants, not really tight.

Tina: What do you mean regular women?

Maxine: Kind of like basically white kids or sometimes black; it depends on half and half. So it's like, I don't know, it's basically like you see more black people wearing that than white.

Tina: You see more black people wearing?

Maxine: Tube tops and stuff on videos and stuff. You never see white girls on there.

Tina: Why do you think you don't see white girls doing that?

Maxine: Because they're smart and intelligent not to do that. They go through school and do what their parents ask and be what they want to be so

that they can be able to get where they want to be, not by doing pop, lock [dancing] and drop it [dancing] and stuff, making money.

Tina: So you think white girls are able to know the difference?

Maxine: Because they think before they do. What they do, it's like a plan, a life plan that they do that they have before they--they think before they do basically and they figure it out with their parents and themselves, and basically they go to good schools, get their education, be what they want to be, then think about what they can do other than being out there.

Tina: Okay, three white girls just walked by. What do you think about them?

Maxine: Intelligent, radiant, smart, um, very smart, because they go to a private school and you have to take tests to go in a private school, and the tests are very hard. I can say that from my understanding. And basically they're mindful and they listen, then always talk.

Tina: Do you think you're smart like those three girls that just walked by?

Maxine: Yes. I know I'm smart. I'm really smart.

Tina: So you know that?

Maxine: Yes.

Tina: Why do you think so highly of them [white girls]?

Maxine: I don't know, they [white girls] just are. (Maxine & Tina, Interview, 1/08)

Maxine's experiences with rap music, essentialist notions of Blackness, and being tutored at HCC led her to reason that Black women are uneducated, promiscuous, and poor decisions makers. Thus, by not seeing White women in rap videos, Maxine presumed that they are more educated and possessed the ability to make choices regardless of the male gaze. The youth perceived White women's absence from rap videos as empowering and served as a demonstration of their better decision-making skills when compared to Black women.

Maxine thought it was the White girls' choice not to appear in the rap videos. Lisa further explained the youth's essentialist notions of Black and White:

Like okay, take like the movies. They might have like the white students they might have on like blue jeans and long shirts but like the black people in a movie, they might have on little shorts and they play like the freak in the movie or

something like that. Like they have on the little halter tops and shorts. (Lisa, Interview, 1/08)

The movies that Lisa watched in the past informed her ideas of Black and White womanhood. Lisa and the teens took their cues of sexuality in terms of race and class from the clothes the women wear in the movies. To the teens, the rap video women have a certain cultural capital because of their class and race. A person's cultural capital is linked to their "ways of talking, acting and socializing, as well as language practices, values, and styles of dress and behavior" (McLaren, 1994, p. 198). As a result of the rap video women's dress, the teens perceived their cultural capital as low or inadequate. The clothes that Black women wear or do not wear informed teens of their character, morals, cultural capital, and sexuality. Lisa experienced watching movies that portrayed Black women as freaks. However, when juxtaposed to White women in Lisa's experiences, White women's dress was less revealing, which Lisa believed gave them high cultural capital. Nicole stated, "They [White women] not goin' be like that. They [White women] might have on a suit or something like dressy" (Nicole, Interview, 1/08). The way women dress in rap videos and movies informed the teens about Black and White sexuality. Nicole's experiences with White women led her to believe that they dress in a sophisticated, smart manner, and that White women make conscious decisions to dress like professionals, while Black women choose to dress promiscuously. The teens did not recognize the countless other reasons why White women do not appear in rap videos. For example, Stephens and Philips (2005) argued that

> Beliefs and attitudes about African American women's sexuality appear to be sanctioned by the culture that continues to embrace stereotypes about race and sexuality. This is made especially clear when one scans the media available for women. The good innocent, virginal continues to be an idealized image of womanhood associated with white females, but unattainable for African American females. Differentiating African American adolescent women's sexuality from white women's reinforces their positions as individuals standing on the margins of society, clarifying its boundaries. (p. 4)

The teens' remarks provided evidence of Stephens and Philips's claim. As rap videos and Black

popular culture depicted Black women as freaks, gold diggers, divas, and dykes in rap videos and

Black popular culture, Black teens internalized these images and created a Black/White duality

that fostered notions of inferiority to their White counterparts (Stephens & Philips).

> You don't see no white women taking up their shirts, it's usually, on those videos
> you see Black women. (Dee, Interview, 11/07)

> Because they're [White women] more intelligent. They [White women] think
> before they talk. . . . They get their education. (Lara, Interview, 12/08)

> And they [White women] don't need money like we do. . . . I think that the White
> people, they keep their body as a temple because they don't show their body off
> and all that. (Maxine, Interview, 1/08)

> They [White women] don't show cleavage - only cleavage they show, they
> cleavage they show is little bitty skirts but other than that, little shirts and stuff
> they won't. (Star, Interview, 10/08)

The findings of inferiority by the teens in the study suggest that the teens could have low self-

esteem when compared to White women. Fanon (1991) and hooks (2003a) argued that racism

has had a lasting trauma on Black people's self-esteem, which can lead to self-hatred. The ways

these teen read White women in rap videos influenced what they thought about Black women

because they compared the two races to gain understanding. The teens read that rap videos

portrayals of Black women as "freaks" demonstrate ignorance on behalf of Black women in the

videos.

To the teens, Black women were too revealing, uneducated, and poor decision-makers

when compared to White women. Because the overwhelming majority of rap videos only show

Black women, youth believed that White women were smarter and chose not to appear in rap

videos. They believed that White women denied offers to appear in rap videos because of their

intelligence.

Yeah, the white girls are in the back of the video (Nicole, Interview 12/08).

> Lisa: Probably cause they don't have no body, you know, like I ain't sayin' they
> don't have bodies but you know they're not like black women. (Nicole and Lisa,
> Interview, 1/08)

> Like Jezzy videos, stuff like that, you don't see no white girls really. Not really,
> but it be a few of them but it be really the black ones out there. (Dee, Interview,
> 12/07).

> I mean white people have videos; they don't be like black girls. Dancing for
> money. (Dave, Interview, 1/07)

> White girls take care of business (Maxine, Interview, 01/08).

These excerpts demonstrate the extreme levels of inferiority the HCC girls felt in comparison to

White girls. In *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem,* hooks (2003a) argued,

> The Black female body is the site where white supremacist thinking about beauty
> and blackness is reinscribed again and again. . . . These racist, sexist stereotypes
> are all pervasive. They set the standards in all mass media. . . . In black youth
> culture white supremacist aesthetics prevail. (pp. 47-48)

The HCC girls experienced the racism and sexism echoed by hooks' position on White suprema-

cist, racist, sexist stereotypes that are pervasive in rap music about Black women. The teens

observed while watching rap videos that the images portrayed Black women as unintelligent and

freaky with a body shape that labeled them promiscuous, whereas White women were absent

from the exploitation and believed to be smarter for their absence.

I would like to juxtapose these findings to those of Dr. Kenneth B. Clark. Clark argued

during the historical case, *Brown v. Board of Education,* that African American children "like

other human beings who are subjected to an obviously inferior status in the society in which they

live, have been definitely 'harmed' in the development of their personalities" (quoted in Combs

& Combs, 2003, p. 630). More than 50 years ago, Clark asked Black school age children to pick

between a White doll and a Black doll to determine which doll they thought was smarter and

more attractive. The children overwhelmingly selected the White doll and suggested the White

doll was smarter and more attractive. Clark's baby doll test results are still relevant more than 50

years later. The HCC teens viewed Black women who appeared in rap videos as inferior to White women because of what they saw and did not see in rap videos. Because of their essentialized notions of Blackness, Whiteness, and choice, teenage girls, especially between the ages of 16 and 17, dressed the part to establish themselves as "real" Black women.

Observations of Essentialism

"Actions speaks louder than words."

The youth made countless comments about the risqué dress and demeanor of Black women who appeared in rap videos. At times, I found difficulty in determining if their opinions about Black women referred to the women who participated in rap videos or all Black women. When they spoke about Black women they used the term "us" and "we," but I wanted to know if they thought about themselves the same way they read Black women in rap videos. When asked if they thought of themselves in the same manner they viewed Black women in videos and in their community, they, of course, did not. I am not sure if many teenagers would admit that they think they are inferior. However, my observations told a different story. The 16- and 17-year-old girls had the ability to express themselves through dress, as opposed to the younger girls (Star, Maxine) in the study. The younger teen girls told me that their mothers bought their clothes, which gave their mother's full control of the girls' dress. Therefore, I examined Lisa, Nicole, Lara, and Dee's (who told me they bought their own clothes) dress in this section to illustrate the internalized essentialism of Blackness. Even as the girls critiqued and ridiculed Black women for participating in rap videos, they listened to the misogynistic music and, at times, dressed promiscuously. I take my definition of their promiscuous dress from their words. In the previous section, the girls' articulated views of girls with their breasts and legs showing or voluptuous

body types as promiscuous Black women. I will use the teens' working definition of promiscuity to define their levels of participation in this image representation.

I observed the teens' appearance almost on a daily basis. I wanted to understand how the messages of rap influenced their dress. During the course of the year and a half, the Johnson girls also explained to me how girls at their school got attention from boys. Lisa explained that the girls got attention by "wearing 5-7 inch heals . . . They still put their little tight shirts on up under their tights, collar shirt so it smush and show their cleavage" (Lisa, Interview, 11/07). The girls claimed that other girls in school dress provocatively to get attention from boys because of what they saw the women in the videos wearing. However, my fieldnotes conveyed a different story. Below are excerpts from my observations centered on the dress of the teens, especially the girls.

> Lisa had on a pair of black boots with fur and a short dress that exposed her upper thighs. She also had on a tight top that was revealing and a light jacket. (Observation, 11/06)

> Lisa had on a V-neck shirt that exposed a lacy white bra. The look was intentional because the shirt had buttons that she did not use in order to show her bra. (Observation, 8/07)

> Lara had on a shirt she calls a "baby T." It is tight fitting and hugs around the wrist. She also had on some tight low-rise fitting jeans that accented her shape. (Observation, 12/07)

> I was walking outside after the kids finished their homework and I heard one of the boys tell Nicole, "You think you cute." I wondered why he said that to her, until I looked at her. She was wearing a very revealing top that was cut low at the chest. When the boy made that comment she smiled and told him to "shut up" (laughing). (Observation, 8/07)

Lara's and Lisa's choices of clothing contradicted their interview comments. For example, the girls' opinions implied that they worked hard not to be objectified as video hoes or freaks; however, their manner of dress (tight jeans, low-cut shirts, short skirts) suggested otherwise. Lara and Lisa made conscious wardrobe decisions to get boys' attention, even though they expressed in interviews their awareness of the issues associated with dressing in such a way.

While Lara and Lisa knew it was not in their best interests to dress in a revealing manner, they conformed to what rap established as the Black women's dress code (revealing shirts and pants). The girls' dress was not as risqué as the girls in the videos, but they opted to expose themselves in a similar fashion. The girls spoke with me on numerous occasions about boys who approached girls because of how much skin they showed. Hence, they shocked me when I saw them exposing skin and participating in the dress style they found denigrating for Black women.

The exposure of one's breasts and covering them with tattoos is another example of dressing to conform to what society and rap videos deem authentic Blackness.

> As I approached Nicole from a distance, I saw something on her chest. I thought maybe she had rash, so I asked her sister Lisa what was going on with Nicole's chest. She instantly started to laugh. Her laughter made me even more curious. So I walked over to Nicole to discover two fake tattoos on her chest. The tattoos were paw prints. I asked her why she had those fake tattoos on her chest and she started to laugh. However, I was not laughing. I asked her again and she said, "Oh, it's nothing." Then her sister Lisa said, "she want boys to look." I asked her was that true and see just starting laughing and shaking her head at me. I know I had a look of disappointment on my face, which probably made her resist talking to me any further about the tattoos. (Observation, August 07)

As a person who consumes rap music for pleasure and research, I have seen countless Black women in videos and in passing who have tattoos on their breasts. Female rappers like Little Kim, Foxy Brown, Eve, and Kia all have tattoos on their breasts. R&B singer Faith Evens also has a tattoo on her chest that represents her slain husband Christopher Wallace (Biggie Smalls). The image of Black women with tattoos is common in rap music. When I asked the girls if they knew of any women with tattoos on their breasts, they named the above examples. Nicole was not the only one with tattoos positioned in a conspicuous place.

> Lisa had on a very short skirt today with a pair of boots. On her upper thigh, she wrote her boyfriend's name in black pen with a heart around it. The marking did not surprise me, but I was shocked by where she decided to place his name on her body. The letters were bold and looked like a tattoo from a distance. When I asked her about it she said, "That's my boyfriend's name." I said, "I know that is

his name. It is on all your notebooks, but why your leg and that far up." She
laughed and said "Coach T, you funny." (Observation, 12/07)

The high skirt exposing her upper thighs and the name written on her legs are the ways Lisa lives out the messages of rap, which inform her appearance. These messages also instruct young girls on how to interact with males, how to dress, and which part of their body to display for the male gaze. Even though the girls ridiculed the Black women in the videos for their dress, they chose to dress in the same manner for multiple reasons.

The HCC teens embodied the notion that to be Black they had to expose themselves in a way similar to the girls who appear in rap videos and Black popular culture representations of Black women. The girls also thought that they would not be attractive to boys if they did not present themselves in the manner dictated by rap music. Dyson argued (2007),

> Society is teaching many men and women to believe that the only way to be an authentic man is to dominate a woman. To make matters worse, many young men see women almost exclusively in sexual terms . . . And popular culture ain't helping much. I mean, if all you're thinking about as a hormonally driven young male for twenty-four hours a day is the bouncing bosoms and belligerent behinds you see paraded endlessly on music videos, and you're almost exclusively focused on how women can serve your libido, you're not going to have a healthy understanding of women or yourself. If such images are met with opposing interpretations of black female sexual identity, they can negatively affect the self-understanding and self-image of young black men. (pp. 100-105)

The boys also developed detrimental ideas of Black womanhood through their consumption of rap music and videos. In the boy's minds, the purpose of Black women is for sexual conquests. For the boys to find girls attractive, the girls' body shapes and level of promiscuity had to match the women they saw in the videos. As a result, the young Black males had negative perceptions and sexual expectations of all Black women. This finding suggested that rap music had a role in how the boys viewed Black women because rap served as one medium (there are many others) with which the boys engaged and used to make meaning of women.

One day I observed Lisa and Dee listening to Piles. The girls laughed when I asked them what they were listening to. This made me curious. So I asked them if I could listen to their cell phone, which was playing a song by Piles called "Get You Wet." The song was sexually vulgar. For example, Piles (2007) says in his song "Get You Wet",

> Finna play wit dat pussy till I get ya moist, I cant fuck ya when ya dry cuz dat'll.
> [This lyric seems unfinished—i.e. cuz dat'll what?]

After hearing just a verse of the song, I instantly pulled out my digital recorder and started to interview the girls about the song and Piles. When I asked the girls if they liked Piles, Lisa said, "I don't really know, I don't really know. He cute" (Lisa, Interview 12/07). Dee stated, "Like it, I just know the chorus part, it's dirty, but what else we going to listen to" (Dee, Interview, 12/07). Lisa then stated, "He a freak, but I love it" (Lisa, Interview, 12/07). When I asked Lisa why she thought Piles wrote such sexual songs she said, "He's just trying to sell, that's what he's doing. Because he knows these kids are goin' have sex and be freaks" (Lisa, Interview, 12/07). In the past interview, Lisa and Dee condemned the girls who participated in rap videos and labeled them freaks, but they openly admitted enjoying and dancing to sexually explicit music. Dee and Lisa found enjoyment in male rappers whom they labeled freaks, but they criticized women whom they labeled freaks.

Throughout the study, the teens had a double standard for male rappers and Black women. If they saw a Black woman in a rap video or in a movie wearing provocative clothes, the teens perceived those woman as freaky or as a hoe. When male rappers' lyrical content discussed sex and having sex with multiple women, the teens celebrated and accepted their lyrics. Many of the youth made comments that disregarded hypersexual lyrics by males and behavior in videos that degraded women. Below are excerpts from both male and female teens that ignored male rappers' vulgar behavior because they believed that is how Black males are to behave.

They [male rappers] freaks, but they cute. (Nicole, Interview, 1/08)

All dudes grab on girls butts and be nasty. They don't care. (Dee, Interview, 12/08)

You have to be like that to them girls, if you want to be in the videos with them. (Reggie, Interview, 11/07)

The girls like it so they [male rappers] do it. (Dave, Interview, 10/07)

Both male and female teens excused males for hypersexual behavior and scolded women for similar actions. Many of the men in rap videos appear without a shirt on their upper bodies and their pants hung below their waists. The teens considered it socially appropriate for Black males to dress in this way. When I asked Darrell why the males in the videos wore their pants below their waists with their shirts off, he laughed and said, "That's the style" (Darrell, Informal Interview, 10/07). I asked Lisa the same question and she said, "That's just how they dress" (Lisa, Informal Interview, 11/07). The youth did not question or find the male rappers dress problematic or inappropriate. Their dogmatic double standard position led them to accept and glorify misogynistic and hypersexual behavior by males. hooks (2004) argued that this double standard is rooted in "imperialist white-supremacist patriarchal mass media [that] teaches black males that the street will be their only home" (p. 27). Thus, the White-supremacist patriarchal ideology is embedded within Black popular culture, and without "self-consciousness" (hooks, 2004, p. 83) and critical thinking it is nearly impossible for youth to combat this destructive double standard for Black males because of the daily images in rap music that perpetuate this double standard. I also discovered that their love and enjoyment of rap music beats were the youth's reasons for ignoring the music's diatribes. As teens interacted, consumed, and took pleasure in rap music, they began to condone the lyrics and images they initially found problematic. Youth analyzed the degrading, violent, misogynic lyrics of rap and then ignored

their own criticisms and participated in the lyrical content because of the infectious beat and popularity of rap.

The Beat of Hegemony

From my observations at HCC, it appeared that the teens engaged more with the beat of rap music than its lyrical content. When the images of rap were not available, the teens referred to the beat. This finding is problematic because the music's messages take on a latent, secondary meaning in juxtaposition to the primacy of the beat. As youth found pleasure with rap music because of the beat, they consented to degrading diatribes about Black culture, even as they brilliantly critiqued it. I read their consent to the misogynistic, sexually explicit, bellicose lyrics as revealing of a hegemonic structure at play within rap music and Black popular culture. McLaren (1994) defined hegemony as

> a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression. . . . Within the hegemonic process, established meanings are often laundered of contradiction, contestation, and ambiguity. (p. 183)

As I observed and interviewed youth at HCC, I noticed that the beat became the initial attraction of rap music, as did the fact that many of the songs were easy to dance to. Thus, the lyrical content went unnoticed as the teens naively complied with misogynistic, violent, degrading music. The teens functioned within the hegemonic paradigm because they all agreed that they adored rap music, but they ignored its problematic messages.

In "Keepin' It Real: Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity," Andreana Clay (2006) recognized that "in conversations, many of the youth said that it was the 'beats,' not the lyrics, that are important to them about hip-hop" (p. 109). Many of the teens in this study echoed Clay's findings that the beat drove them to listen to and accept degrading lyrics.

> They [male rappers] call us the "H" stuff and you get kind of offended, but I don't
> know why. We still listen and dance because we like the beat. (Star, Interview,
> 10/07)

> When I first heard it, I listened to the whole song. Then I just start laughing. I was
> like, he nasty. And like now . . . I didn't listen to it, I listen to the beat. (Nicole,
> Interview, 12/07)

> You listen to it and if a boy come up to me and did like, and I can turn it off.
> (Lisa, Interview, 12/07)

By listening to the song for the beat, youth are also consuming the problematic lyrics of rap

music. The students admitted that when they first heard an explicit song, they were taken back by

the lyrics; however, the beat of the song kept them listening.

Lisa admitted that she would not listen to degrading songs if a male was present. The fact

that Lisa stated she would not listen to sexually explicit rap music in the presence of males is

insightful. Lisa feared that males would think she was promiscuous, which could have social

ramifications. Her intuitiveness not to listen to sexually explicit rap music around males illus-

trated the complex world in which she lived, as she enjoyed rap by herself or with her girl

friends, but she knew the unspoken ramifications for listening to explicit rap with males. Lisa

knew that males would label her a freak or a ho, much like the video girls for their participation.

Nevertheless, by listening to the song, Lisa consented to the message. Maxine realized that male

rappers degrade Black women in rap songs. Just like Lisa, however, she listened to the song

because of the beat. The students repeatedly admitted that they did not know the song lyrics and,

at times, only knew the chorus, but enjoyed the beat.

> So you don't think about it at all, just the beat (Dee, Interview, 10/07)

> Oh, I like the beats and stuff, all that other stuff, I don't know (Darrell, Inter-
> view,10/07)

> I don't like it, I just. I don't like it, I like the beat. I just don't like the fact that
> he's talking about it and all that. Like Soulja Boy –I like Soulja Boy –The real

version is not good. I don't like it because it's talking about sex . . . um, degrading women. (Maxine, Interview, 10/07)

Dee admitted that she does not think about the degrading lyrics. Her love for the beat superseded her understanding that the music is problematic. Dee also liked to dance like many of the HCC youth. Both males and females danced at the center, regardless of the music's lyrical content. Because it is a community center, the environment restricted much of the music to their personal mp3 players. Therefore, the students would pass around their mp3 players so everyone could hear the latest song and dance to it. Darrell acknowledged that he did not concern himself with the messages of rap; he just liked the beat. Maxine spoke passionately about her dislike of rap music because it degrades women: She repeated the phase "I don't like it." Maxine resisted rap's message when it degrades women. At times, during interviews she refused to partake in music by Soulja Boy that is sexually explicit. According to my observation, though, Maxine's resistance was not a consistent dissent to rap's messages.

> Maxine loves to dance. She and Star know all the latest dances including the Soulja Boy, who has become extremely popular. Even through Maxine has stated she does not like Soulja Boy, she and Star dance to the song every time one of the students has it in their mp3 players. (Observation, 1/08)

My field notes and observations addressed many of the students' conflicting and contra-dicting ideological stances. Maxine wanted rap music to change. She stated that she did not like rap music that degrades women and is sexually explicit, but she continued to use Soulja Boy as a medium for social engagement. Emerson (2002) argued that sexually explicit music "limits the autonomy and agency of Black women" (p. 120). When Maxine danced to Soulja Boy, she con-tradicted her dislike for misogynistic rap music. Therefore, her participation led to her consent of the music. Maxine's consent is an example of hegemony defined by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971). Gramsci defined popular culture within the context of political analysis. He recognized the power of the dominant group and how, over time, the oppressed began to accept

their subordinate position in society; he called this hegemony. Where marginalized groups *consent* to their own oppression, Storey (1998) stated that the relationship between popular culture and hegemony is the "site of struggle between the forces of 'resistance' of subordinate groups in society, and the forces of 'incorporation' of dominant groups in society" (p. 14). Maxine has accepted and thus consented to the degrading lyrics of Soulja Boy.

Many of the youth stated that they found the lyrics of rap music explicit and vulgar; however, their cell phone ring tones were sexually explicit. They consumed rap in multiple ways–cell phones, mp3 players, radio, videos, and the Internet. Each Internet music site provided the beat to the music in which they escaped while doing their homework or searching the Internet. I wrote about the teens' escaping in my field notes.

> Dee, Lisa, and Reggie did their homework while listening to music today. All three would bob their heads while doing their homework humming the beat of the song. Reggie also tapped his foot. They would smile at certain parts of the song and sometime smile at each other. (Field notes, B. Love, 11/07)

The beat served as the background for many of their daily activities, especially homework. I observed students' dancing at times with no music playing, just the beat they carried in their heads. They hummed the beat as they danced. I witnessed students dancing from the computer lab to the homework station, even when they did not have a portable music player. They identified with the beat of the music first; the lyrics really were an afterthought. I assumed they only hummed the beat because they knew the words were not appropriate at the center. However, the beat was a fundamental part of their daily activities.

The beat of the song influenced a resounding number of comments, which led the youth to consent blindly to the messages. Even when the youth expressed their discontent for the lyrics, they maintained the beat of the music kept them listening.

> It's just they cute. Like I don't know, I listen to the songs because I think how cute they is but they've got some songs on there that's nice, they're nice. I like the beat and stuff. (Lara, Interview, 11/07)

> It's a song called Prostitute . . . He say he okay if his girl is a prostitute, oh, and I forgot how it go, but the beat . . . I'll bring the CD tomorrow . . . Prostitute like, he—well, who actually been with her, he don't care as long as he got her. (Darrell, Interview, 09/07)

> Because of the beat. The beat and the way he talks. Yeah. I don't like it, I just –I don't like it, I like the beat. It gets me hype. (Reggie, Interview, 10/07)

> Yeah, but I don't like the words, I like the beat . . . Sometimes you don't understand what they be saying, so fast. (Maxine, Interview, 11/07)

Obviously, the teens maintained that the beat of the song was the driving force behind why they listened to the song. Yet, they acknowledged the presence of the lyrics. Youth explained that they did not know many of the words to a particular song and did not even like the rappers.

Adams and Fuller (2006) argued, "It is imperative that we as a society move beyond the beat and seriously consider the effect that negative imagery produced in misogynistic rap can have on the African American community and society at large" (p. 12). The beat of the song masks the explicit lyrics of rap music and the negative imagery consumed by youth who enjoy the songs. Because the youth engaged with the beat, their ability to evaluate the lyrics is challenged. However, when I asked the teens to express their thoughts about rap music, the youth critiqued rap's messages with intellectual rigor. The authenticity of rap's message also concerned the youth. The teens expressed their beliefs that, in some cases, it was doubtful that the rappers' hardcore lyrics matched their lifestyles.

The youth's responses to questions about the significance and purpose of rap music focused on the betterment of the Black community at large. Their comments also spoke to the impact and influence of rap music. The youth demonstrated the ability to analyze rap; however, they lacked the understanding that they have the capacity to evoke change. To the teens, rap

music was monolithic, there was only one style of rap, and that style was a violent, misogynistic, and materialistic genre of music. Conversely, the teens saw rap through multiple lenses of Black expression. In some cases, the teens challenged rap's meaning of hegemonic White culture. On the other hand, the teens understood rap as essentialized notions of Blackness and were unable to reject the images and sounds of rap. I explain their conflicting stances and positions on rap music by what Phillips (2006) called the "postmodern condition" (p. l). Phillips (2006) defined the postmodern condition as

> cultural hybridizations and mestizaje, combined with global Westernization; moral indeterminism; the increasing impact of simulacra on psychological processes; and the increasing indeterminacy or complexity of identity. (p. l)

Phillips's definition of the postmodern condition is the reality that we all live in. Popular culture, among many other factors, influences identity, which is complex and a hybrid of multiple constructions of self, and, especially for the HCC youth, Black popular culture was the most influential popular subculture. Therefore, the postmodern condition made it possible for youth to critique rap and, at the same time condone, enjoy, and find pleasure in its messages.

When asked about what they thought it meant to be Black, all the youth stated that to be Black is to be beautiful, smart, athletic, and have the ability to dance. They essentialized their ideas of what it means to be Black on multiple levels depending on the question. The data showed that the teens contradicted themselves as they struggled to make meaning of images of Blackness that they understood as authentic, even when images glorified violence or degraded women. The teens resisted labeling the Black race as violent or oversexed, but they accepted rappers' lifestyles as representations of these labels, rather than actualizations. The postmodern condition allows these fluid and contradictory ideas because of the hybridizations of culture and the contradictory nature of Black popular culture (Hall, 1983).

While the youth found the beat extremely important, they often contradicted themselves, as they possessed the ability to look beyond the beat and examined rap using their critical thinking skills. They were able to examine rap music; however, the youth lacked the skills to take action with the issues within the music. Their surface-level examination of rap's messages was insightful, yet they had no conception of the steps required to move beyond their contradictions. The teens admitted that messages embedded within rap were sexually explicit and problematic, but they failed to take action against rap because of its popularity, their monolithic classifications of rap music, and their youthful mindsets that were grounded in the "white-supremacist patriarchal domination" (hooks, 2004, p. 7); therefore, hooks contended that contradictions are the norm in Black life.

<div align="center">Developing Critical Consciousness</div>

As stated above, the teens possessed critical voices but lacked critical action. Hegemony stifled their critical consciousness through systemic strategies to keep that consciousness underdeveloped. The teens could articulate without hesitation the issues surrounding rap music that connected to broader issues facing the Black urban community. However, the idea of possessing what Freire (2000) called *conscientization*, or critical consciousness, was absent from their critique of rap. According to Freire (2000), there are three levels of consciousness: intransitive consciousness, semi-transitive consciousness, and critical consciousness. Boyles (2005) explained that intransitive "means noncritical (in)action" (p. 220). These individuals felt as though they could not do anything to change their existence. They felt defeated and became content with their circumstances–an aspect of the postmodern condition in relation to hegemonic powers. Hall (1981) argued,

> Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in the struggle. It is the

arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. (p. 65)

The contradictions of the youth are part of the struggle in the postmodern condition. Hegemony and resistance are consistent in that the two harmoniously co-exist to create complex identities of which the HCC youth struggled to make sense. Semi-transitive consciousness individuals are "individuals who see the world as chargeable" (Boyles, p. 220) but they are reluctant to do anything about it. The last form of consciousness is critical consciousness. Critically conscious individuals recognize that there is a problem embedded within society that needs to be addressed through dialogue and action (Shor, 1987, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987). The youth of HCC functioned at the level of intransitive consciousness. The teens articulated the issues surrounding rap, but they believed that there was nothing they could do to change the music. So they enjoyed the beat, consented to degrading lyrics, and took no action to change their positions within a culture fueled by sexist and racist problems.

I will argue in chapter 5 that the teens' intransitive consciousness was due to their lack of exposure to critical pedagogy in the classroom. The teens' remarks were insightful, but these articulations revealed their limited critical thinking skills. Currently, teens are educated in a public education system that perpetuates education that is concerned with a "scientific proof" of knowledge, testing, social control, drill and still teaching (Newman, 2006). This educational paradigm ignores critical thinking and critical pedagogy, and it leaves youth mentally unprepared to examine contradictions and monolithic notions of Blackness in rap music and mainstream popular culture.

The following quotations illuminate the power of popular culture as a site of education as the teens revealed their ability to consume, conceptualize, and problematize rap music and the

lifestyles of rappers. What they lacked was the critical consciousness needed to engage them in a dialogue that challenges their thinking and helps them discover a path to action.

> Like they need to change what they talking about. They [rappers] probably not like that for real but they know that young people don't do that and want to sing it and stuff because of the beat and stuff and they doing it mostly because of money . . . Future kids that doing drugs, so they're sending out future things so what the police and the government and the President is doing, building more jailhouses than schools and after school because people are going to drop out, they know people are going to drop out and go to jail. (Maxine, Interview, 08/07)

> They [rappers] stupid, you know, the police gonna be looking at you like yeah, he might do it for real because he rap, so they're going to be doing background checks and all that junk up on you trying to catch you and put you in jail. (Reggie, Interview, 10/07)

These comments make it apparent that the youth have the ability to negotiate not only rap, but also social issues around the music and urban life. Reggie claimed police purposely target rappers for incarceration, which indicated that he was aware of racial profiling and the xenophobic ideology of the criminal justice system (Wacquant, 2005). Wacquant argued that society has "a generalized fear of blacks in public space" (p. 21). Reggie also thought rappers are "stupid" because they do not understand their social and economic position, which makes them a target for racial profiling. Reggie questioned whether rappers understand their visibility to the police.

Maxine's notions that rap needs to change and her understandings of the social issues that plague the Black community were insightful in that she used contemporary politics to address some of the current sociopolitical issues Black America faces. The fact that Maxine thought in regard to future generations showed her keen intellect and concern for others. Maxine was not self-absorbed when discussing ideas about her community and the future of youth. For example, she referred to the crushing dropout rate in America's schools. In 2004, Children's Defense Fund found, "Almost one in ten teens ages 16 to 19 is a school dropout… Blacks are still almost twice

as likely as Whites to be high school dropouts —the same as in 1963." Giroux (2003) candidly echoed Maxine's statements:

> Although there can be little doubt that racial progress has been achieved in many areas in the last 50 years, it is also true that such progress has not been sustained. This is particularly evident in the dramatic increase in black prisoners and the growth of the prison-industrial complex . . . exorbitant school drop-out rates among black and Latino youth (coupled with the realties of failing schools more generally). (p. 125)

The youth's remarks demonstrated that they were aware of the many ways in which the current social system in the United States sustains inequality through racial profiling, a failing educational system, and the like, as Giroux highlighted them. Youth were aware of oppression. However, they failed to critique rap music for its contradictions and its responsibility for transmitting problematic images. The teens became complacent and content with the oppressions they experienced through rap music and Black popular culture. They saw and understood oppression all around them, but they did not think they could actively resist it, as I will explain below.

For the youth, rap music provided the basis of their oppression. They conceptualized rap as an unmovable mountain of oppression. When asked if they could change the sound or images of rap, all teens argued that they were not the agents of change needed for rap music. Dee stated, "What can I do, it's everywhere you go" (Dee, informal interview, 01/08). Lisa commented on the social repercussions associated with attempts to take action against the music: "If you say turn it off, then you lame" (Lisa, informal interview, 01/08). Nicole passionately speculated, "Everyone dances to the music, how would it looked if you don't dance" (Nicole, informal interview, 01/08). Freire (1994) wrote,

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. . . . However, the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are

immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle
for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risk it requires. (p. 47)

The pressure to conform to what society and rap music says Black men and women should be is quite powerful and hegemonic. The youth feared the risk of being "uncool" if they rejected rap music. Therefore, they enjoyed the beat and ignored their critical consciousness because of the fear of being an outcast. Fear was the driving force of their conformity: They wanted to fit in and be cool. Learning the latest dance and listening to the most popular rap song was the cool thing to do.

There were countless times during interviews that I did not know a particular song the youth cited. When I asked for clarity, I shocked the students because I did not know the song. The students believed that rap music was universal and that I should know the references, especially because I am Black. They often looked at me disappointedly and remarked, "Coach T, you don't know that song?" or "Coach T, where have you been?" One day, Lara told me that I was lame and dumb for not knowing the music. She said it in a joking manner, but her words spoke volumes to the pressure to "fit in" and not question the music. The teens questioned my "Blackness" because I did not know the music and, therefore, tried to influence me through the same hegemonic pressure to conform to rap that they experienced. The youth found the pressure for conformativity and recognition to what they consider "Black" overwhelming on a social level. The teens felt that their peers would ostracize them if they rejected rap music.

The teens were also able to express thoughts about rap music and violence:

Like violence. Like they [rappers] be talking about how they got guns and then
you know a teenager might think they can have guns, they [rappers] go get a gun
to feel protected. They [rappers] talk about they might want to go to jail then
come rap about how they was in jail. You know, like they be some of them songs
have a negative impact on children because they want to be just like the rappers.
(Lisa, Interview, 12/07)

Yeah, talking about killing people and stuff (Lara, Intreview, 11/07)

They [rappers] like talking about guns. (Darrell, Interview, 10/07).

Lara's, Lisa's, and Darrell's comments about violence represented their ideological perspectives about rappers and gun use. Lisa linked rappers' gun use to the notion that rappers carrying guns may influence other youth to follow their example. Dyson (2007) stated, "There's a preoccupation with the gun because the gun is the central part of the iconography of the ghetto" (p. 91). Black youth's obsession with guns and violence, according to Dyson, is a staple of the urban settings. Lisa linked guns and violence to rap music and rappers. She spoke to the perpetual violence that takes place in urban communities because of the belief that males need a gun to be fully masculine. "What you hear in a lot of the lyrics of gangsters and hardcore rappers are descriptions of the physical effects of gun violence on the larger community . . . The gun is the most lethal means of undermining the masculine stability that many rappers desperately seek" (Dyson, p. 92).

According to Lisa's critique, the connection between the representative violence of guns and rappers associated directly with this connection to rap's negative impact on youth like herself. Lara understood the large-scale significance of rap music. Lisa realized that rap is more than just music, that it has the power to persuade youth to commit violent acts and be materialistic and/or misogynistic. Lara acknowledged the power of rap. Kunjufu (as cited in Beachum & McCray, 2007) contended, "The American phenomenon known as hip-hop can affect youth in both positive and negative ways" (p. 56). Lisa understood rap music as negative and violent. She had not made the conceptual leap to use rap music as a positive device to educate her peers about why not to engage in violence because she had not discovered her own ability to be an agent of dissent and reject the negative messages of rap.

The participants' comments demonstrated their ability to listen to rap for pleasure, but also to have an objective stance to examine the music. The teens understood that the negative

influence of rap music and the negative lifestyle of rappers can encourage teens to be violent, to

bear firearms, to drop out of school, to use illegal drugs, and to do similar things. The teens used

their analytical skills to examine the world outside of rap. In the previous comments, multiple

teens expressed their abilities not only to consume rap music but also to critique it, which is an

important aspect of critical pedagogy, especially as rap is a site of education. However, their

critical consciousness did not penetrate deeper complexities because they lacked a will to take

action or reject the music in fear of being "uncool." Teens were unconscious of the systemic

oppression that creates and surrounds rap. Black youth understood rap music as a representation

of Black culture in contrast to White culture. For them, Black signified everything that was

unconstructive, and White was the exact opposite. The youth blamed these debasing messages on

rappers. Nevertheless, they ignored their critical consciousness because of rap's popularity.

When asked what kind of messages they thought rap music transmitted, they all contend-

ed that rap sends out a message that diminishes the Black race by promoting a negative percep-

tion of Blacks. The youth also questioned the mass media's portrayal of Blacks in comparison to

Whites. They were able to analyze mass media for its embedded racism and mortifying portrayal

of Blacks on television.

> Oh, they're sending a bad message to kids and about Blacks. (Reggie, Interview, 11/07)

> They try to say all black people eat chicken, and macaroni and cheese, cornbread. Talk about collard greens, all black people eat collard greens. That's what people think. They think just 'cause a lot of us do it, that all of us do it. That's what I'm trying to say. (Dave, Interview, 12/07)

> You never see white people saying I'm a hood. You know, only us. (Lisa, Interview, 1/08)

> Yeah, like you always think white people want to be all cocky and always helping out and stuff cause most of them are. They all aren't like that, but that's what they show. (Lara, Interview, 1/08)

The passion and strength in the teens' words showed that they had not only examined Blacks in the mass media, but also what they saw disturbed and displeased them. In addition, they read the significance of race in the different representations of Blacks and Whites in the mass media. The teens questioned why mass media depicted Blacks more often in a negative manner in comparison to Whites. Lisa questioned why White people never take on the affirmation of "I am so hood." Lisa searched for equal racial portrayals of Whiteness as she found in her perception of Blackness. Dave and others further criticized the mass media for the disproportionate representation of Blacks as nefarious. Darrell said, "They see us people on TV, that all the black people be doing is fighting" (Darrell, Interview, 10/07). Reggie echoed Darrell's images of violent behavior by Blacks on television: "Like they think whatever you show them. If you show them violence, they gonna think you're violent" (Reggie, Interview, 10/07). Both of these comments speak to the keen critical thinking skills of the youth. The youth also suggested that

> Like you know in Africa is right now, they got TVs and stuff. They show you like old movies of Africa, so you're gonna think that they don't have anything. I used to think that, too. (Dave, Interview, 1/08)

> If you look on TV, all white people are rich. (Reggie, Interview, 10/07)

> Like you watching TV, People TV, they show stuff like Black people and Black people helping out other people and all that stuff. You watch BET they show hip hoppers doing bad things and showing girls and all that stuff. (Reggie, Interview, 10/07)

There exists a substantial amount of research that examines the disparities in how the media depicts both Whites and Blacks that validates the teen's statements (Oliver 1994). Watkins (2006) argued that "blacks are underrepresented in many areas of the mass media [and] they are overrepresented in television sports broadcasts and crime and violence portrayals" (p. 2). The teens' remarks about the racism embedded in mass media are the teens' reality and experiences as they watch television with a critical eye. It is important to keep in mind that youth construct

identities at the "intersections of school and society" (Proweller, 1998, p. 13). Therefore, what society tells them about their race is a site of education. Youth had identified and internalized racism in popular culture; however, they had not developed the critical consciousness to reject and counter racist messages because of hegemonic oppression and the fear of rejection by their peers.

During the study, the police arrested Atlanta-based rapper T.I. (Clifford Joseph Harris, Jr.) on federal gun charges, and the courts sentenced him to house arrest until his court date. Many of the students referred to T.I. as an example of poor decision-making and a negative role model for youth. Prior to his arrest, T.I. was a local hero. However, the teens expressed dis-appointment in T.I. and his gangster image.

> That's not the only way they gone get their money but that's how they want to make themselves be a gangster, you know, and theirself be hard Like T.I, I don't like him no more cause you know he made himself as a gangster. (Reggie, Inter-view, 1/08)

> Not T.I., he got locked up. T.I., I like him but he's a bad influence so that's it. Because he's in jail. And what he did wasn't called for. Like he shouldn't have did it. . . . And he got everybody disappointed, all his fans and stuff. He was kind of looking for it, making new CD's and stuff. Now that he's going to do time because he's in jail, he gone be there a while. (Star, Interview, 11/07)

> It's all about money basically. They [rappers] really don't care. Oh, they're [rappers] sending a bad message (Lara, Interview, 1/08)

> Nothing wrong with being – I mean yeah, ain't nothing wrong with being soft. T.I. has to be hard. (Reggie, Interview, 1/08)

T.I. is just one example of a large group of rappers who dramatize and romanticize selling drugs and being a gangster. Reggie understood T.I.'s rapper image as a façade and a means to sell records when he stated, "That's not the only way they gone get their money but that's how they want to make themselves be a gangster, you know, and theirself be hard" (Reggie, Interview,

1/08). Reggie implied that T.I's gangster image is a ploy to sell records. Yet Reggie questioned

the authenticity of T.I.'s pugnacious image. McLeod (1999) argued that in the realm of Hip Hop

> Authenticity is invoked around a range of topics that include hip-hop music, racial
> identification, the music industry, social location, individualism, and gender and
> sexual roles. . . . Keepin it real and various claims of authenticity do not appear to
> have a fixed or rigid meaning throughout the hip hop community. (pp. 138-139)

In direct connection to McLeod's definition of authenticity, Reggie had his own ideas of what

"keepin it real" means in relation to rap music. According to McLeod, authenticity is fluid and

can change meaning dependent on the culture of that location or person. For Reggie, it was not

about what a rapper says, it was about how the rapper lives. Reggie and others critically

examined the authenticity of the rappers and their music in contrast to rappers' lives. This skill is

important if students are going to examine popular culture beyond a surface level and take

action.

Lara suggested that money was the primary reason for T.I's hardcore image and that

rappers are not cognizant of the messages they send because wealth is rappers' real concern. Star

spoke about her disappointment that T.I was possibly going to jail. Her disappointment demon-

strated that she liked T.I. prior to his gun charges and felt saddened by his poor judgment. Star

realized T.I.'s gun charge as a collapse of his career. The fact that many of the teens questioned

T.I.'s image and reasons for making records showed they were aware of and concerned with the

message of the music. The teens did not applaud T.I's fall from greatness through criminal

activity. Reggie and Star looked upon T.I.'s message of violence and criminal activity as

discreditable, and the fact that the rapper's art form became a reality disappointed them.

All of these students' learned their ideas of race, class, and gender culturally, which had

become part of their lives. The messages in Black popular culture teach these cultural norms,

which is rooted in "glamorize[d] brute patriarchal maleness" (hooks, 2004, p. 27). Critical

pedagogy is the missing piece in their education. Black popular culture informed these teens about the ills of the Black race. Daspit and Weaver (1999) contended that if teachers taught students to critique popular culture they would have the ability to challenge their subordinate positions within popular culture. The teens of HCC had a critical eye when examining rap music and the mass media; however, they lacked the ability to critique and challenge rap music and the mass media in order to "constantly remake their own identities in response to ever changing postmodern worlds in which images construct reality and access to information implies political and economic power" (Daspit &Weaver, p. xv).

When youth engaged in a conversation that related to their everyday lives, they were able to think critically about what they were consuming. Buckingham (1998) argued that teaching popular culture is an "extension of progressivism" and that teaching popular culture is an "authentic part of students' experiences" (p. 8). It is evident by the comments of these teens that they consumed and then examined rap music in a critical manner when they engaged in dis-course. The close-knit daily interactions with popular culture generate a myriad of experiences for teens to draw from as they discuss rap music. Thus, youth are not only able to consume rap, but they are also able to articulate the problematic issues within rap music because of they are in constant interaction with the text. The idea that youth can consume a problematic genre of music and be critical is a new phenomenon to the study of youth and rap music. These teens were able to make meaning of complex, controversial issues of race, class, and gender through discursive activity about rap music. The intellectual rigor that their comments conveyed illustrated that these teens were not "cultural dopes" and had the ability to "engage in a project [or text] . . . and established some point of identification with them" (Hall, 1981, p. 59). The youth in this study were able to grapple with complex ideas about race, class, and gender. However, their comments

were not without contradictions. Black popular culture is a site for inconsistencies, and hegemony stunted the teens' critical consciousness for fear of peer rejection.

The next two findings discuss students' views of academics and their teachers' teaching style. Below the study's findings will shift from youth's perceptions of rap music to their perceptions of achievement. The data did not draw a relationship between youth's views on rap music and achievement, nor did it discover the ways youth read their teachers' views on rap music that could influence teaching. However, I felt it was important to include the next two themes in the research write up because they address salient issues in the realm of African American achievement.

The Hidden Curriculum

Have you ever sat in a class full of white and Asian kids? The teacher gives you no love. They love them kids. (Dee, Interview, 1/08)

As I interviewed youth about the messages of rap music, their perceptions about education and their teachers emerged. During homework time, the students would talk about which teachers gave a lot of work, which teachers they disliked, and which teachers they thought were unfair. It was routine for me to help students with their homework before I interviewed them. I listened attentively while students discussed their teachers, and I became curious about why they had such a strong dislike for their teachers. These informal conversations eventually led to structured interviews and prompted my interest into their world of education. The students' remarks were candid and gave me a snapshot into their lives at school. It was not in the scope of the research to examine students' school experiences; therefore, I have no school-based data that supports the students' perceptions of teachers within the classroom. The observational data that I collected only represents the students' lives at HCC. Thus, data of students' interactions with teachers is not present in these findings.

What I did discover were resounding feelings of inferiority from Black students taught by both Black and White teachers. The students readily identified racism and discrimination in the classroom. Hirschfeld (1995) suggested, "By three years of age, children have a much more adult-like understanding of race, and particularly racial essentialism, that previous scholars have credited them with" (p. 83). My findings show evidence of the notion that children can process racial distinctions. What is catastrophic about these racial distinctions is that they take place in the classroom, a place were democracy is critical to the foundations of public schooling. Giroux (1988b) argued,

> Schools are now defended in a political language as institutions that provide the ideological and material conditions necessary to educate a citizenry in the dynamics of critical literacy and civic courage, and these constitute the basis for functioning as active in a democratic society. (p. xxxii)

The great American educator John Dewey professed, "Democracy is more than a form of government. It is a way of life" (Newman, 2006, p. 178). Giroux and Dewey believed that the principles of democracy upheld in schools across America foster democracy through valuing students' personal voices. This valuing helps students develop power, responsibility, and authority to promote critical literacy and civic engagement. It is our schools' duty to teach all children the power of their voices so that they may foster democracy. In this study, I found students felt that teachers did not want their voices and sometimes their presence in the classroom because of the color of their skin. The data revealed students' read their teachers' social relationships and interactions as racist and as showing signs of favoritism. Students also felt that the teachers discriminated against them because of their skin color and ethnic groups.

Teachers' social relationships with students are a vital part of education. These social relations are embedded in the classroom and have learning outcomes (McLaren, 1994). Education critical theorists (Apple, 1995, Giroux & Penna, 1988; McLaren) argue that the teacher-to-

student relationship is part of the schools' curricula, which transmits hidden messages to students and also informs students about "instructional environment, governance structures, teachers' expectations, and grading procedures" (McLaren, p. 191). Critical theorists formally referred to teachers' messages that are not a part of the official curriculum as the "hidden curriculum," which Giroux (1988b) defined as

> The unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning and in both the formal content that social relations of school and classroom life. Even more they will have to recognize the function of the hidden curriculum and its capacity for undermining the goals of social education. (p. 23)

Teachers unknowingly transmit their values and notions about race to their students (King, 1991). Teachers can unconsciously notify their students of their sexist, racist, and discriminatory beliefs by their classroom behavior, but these values become real life experiences for students that internalize feelings of inferiority or discrimination (King, 1991). The teens in this study shared anecdotal stories about their experiences in the classroom dealing with perceived racism and discrimination. There were times during the interviews when the remarks of one or more teens amazed me. Their intellect did not amaze me. I never questioned that. I was amazed when a teen would let down his or her austere character. For a time, the students were innocent kids again with fears, pains, and disappointment directed at adults. These moments were special to me. There would be times, when I tutored Lisa or Dee, and they would smile when they understood a concept and felt confident about what they just learned. There were moments when Darrell or Dave would make a joke and everyone would laugh; I enjoyed this time with the teens the most. I saw the innocence in their eyes and the hurt they experienced at school with the feelings of rejection and inferiority.

Below is a transcription of a group interview with Lisa, Dee, and myself. I share this interview at length to show the power of their words. It reminds me that these teens have dreams,

and we as educators are the dreamkeepers who have the power to turn their dreams into night-

mares. I omitted some sections for continuity because several times during this interview there

were interruptions.

Tina: You've got to get up even earlier to be a teacher. School starts at 7:30, the teachers got to be there at 7:00 o'clock. You're getting there at 7:30, you don't see all the back work that goes into it.

Dee: Yeah, so . . . Some teachers, I went to school at 7:00 o'clock one time and no teachers were there. I'm talking about our class was empty. I see teachers coming in, like Ms. Porter, she come in when the bus be first be pulling up. I see her getting out of the car.

Tina: Do you think teachers take school serious?

Dee: I don't know what they take serious. They take certain classes serious. Like if you gotta – I don't even want to say that, never mind. I don't know, it depends on who all in the class or what all they do or –

Tina: What do you mean if you gotta do what?

Dee: Nothing . . . So it depends on – If you have – their race. If you have a class full of -

Tina: You can say White or whatever.

Dee: Caucasian and Asian and different minority kids in the class and the percentage is like 1% African American, they gonna teach that class, but if you got a whole half full class of Black kids in a class and then like one White kid is in the class, you not gonna do no work at all.

Tina: So you're not going to do any work because of the kid or the teacher?

Dee: No, cause of the teacher.

[Ms. Kim came to tell us that it was time for dinner. I picked up the conversation after dinner.]

Tina: Okay, let's finish our conversation. Now you were telling me about teachers that don't want to teach classes that are all African-American students. Why not? Why do you think they don't want to teach?

Dee: Because of the stereotypes.

Tina: What are the stereotypes?

Dee: That kids [Black kids] are bad and won't like learn, but that's not true, but if you Black and don't have money, you don't want to learn.

Tina: So what do the teachers think about you?

Dee: I don't know what my teachers think about me on that level. . . . But that's what you think they think about . . . Some of them do.

Tina: Now are these White teachers or Black teachers?

Dee: They can be any teacher, I mean, it don't matter.

Tina: How does it make you feel knowing that teachers might think that about you because you're Black?

Dee: It made me feel bad like I need start a civil rights movement or something, I don't know. No, I'm just playing, but it make me feel weird like my teachers don't want me to come to school, I mean, to not learn.

Lisa: Yeah . . . They want me to come to school and play. They want to see me fail. They don't want to see me become what I want to be when I get older. They want to see me fail, basically.

Tina: Is there favoritism at your school?

Dee: Sure.

Tina: Why do you think that?

Dee: Because they may put an image out saying that they want to learn more. Like uhm, last night I was looking at TLC and they showed a program on the world's smartest boy and he was from Korea, I think—yeah, he was from like over there and he was—I mean, they just give good looks for theirselves. Like if they go to school, they go to school for—to focus and to, you know, be the best. That's their image. Their parents push them to be the best, but . . .

Tina: So you think our—so what do you think?

Dee: I mean, my parents push me to be the best because they see something in me. They see that I can strive to be whatever.

Tina: How do you think our image—how do you think African-American's image differs from the Korean boy's image you saw?

Dee: Because we out gang banging and doing stuff we ain't got no business doing, being locked up by the police and chased by baby mommas and threatened by baby daddies and all this crazy, nonsense stuff instead of trying to be in school reading a book. (Dee, Lisa, and Tina, Interview, 11/07)

I felt it was important to share this interview at length because of the girls' emotions and candid answers to questions dealing with race and educational access. As the interview progressed, the girls became more passionate about telling their experiences with teachers and the feelings of being inadequate. My memo tells the story about how I felt after the interview.

I can't believe the girls feel this way or maybe I can. I remember teachers telling me that I would never make it to college, so I guess I am not surprised. I felt like they wanted me to do something about their school and their teachers. They were

so eager and afraid to tell me how they felt about school. The whole time they were talking, they keep looking to each other for support. These kids want more. They want to be educated and loved at the same time, and today I see that in their eyes. I knew it, but today I saw it. (B. Love, Memo, 11/07)

As a cultural worker, I feel it is important to link the social structure conditions of youth to their learning and their ability to learn (Hall, 1988). The above interview exposes the feelings of inadequacy Black students face in the classroom. Lisa and Dee felt that both Black and White teachers discriminated against Black students because of the pervasive stereotypes that label Black students "unteachable" (Perry et al., 2003).

In *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*, Perry et al. (2003) passionately addressed the ideological assumptions of teachers that foster discrimination in the classroom. I quote their remarks at length because they illuminated the current ideological position in education that is leaving Black students behind their White and Asian counterparts because of educational discrimination:

In other words, there is a belief system and a behavior system in education, and in the supporting academic disciplines, that provide the rationale for the continuation of brutal pessimism with respect to African students, and for inappropriate pedagogical responses to the African condition. Not only do these ideological positions exist, but the more important problem is that, in general, educators are in denial about their existence. Hence, the need for explicit documentation of the savage inequalities, and the need for staff development and education of educators and the public in general about savage inequalities. (p. 141)

Perry et al.'s words speak to the ideological assumptions about Black students that Dee and Lisa had internalized. To them, their teachers blatantly demonstrated that they did not want to teach Black students. When Dee stated that she felt her teachers only wanted to teach students who are "Caucasian and Asian" and that she was so upset that she wanted to start her own civil rights movement, she addressed the hurt she felt everyday in the classroom. Dee believed that her teachers felt she was less capable than her White counterparts because of the color of her skin as well as perceived negative stereotypes about the Black race. Dee's classroom experience is one

that made her feel inferior to White and Asian students. Lisa read that her teachers wanted her to

fail because of the color of her skin. Lisa and Dee dissected their teachers' comments, move-

ments, relationships to other students, and changes in teaching style to determine their teachers'

low levels of expectations and discrimination. These lived experiences discouraged Lisa and

Dee, and they believed that other Black students were to blame for the favoritism teachers gave

to White and Asian students. These two youth believed that teachers wanted them to fail and that

teachers' general expectations of Black students are low. Lisa and Dee were not the only students

that voiced their opinions about teachers favoring White students over Blacks.

> Probably the white people they expect to do good before you. They talk to them
> first. (Nicole, Interview, 11/07)

> But if you doing you work and they doing their work or whatever and both of you
> raise your hand they gonna most likely pick on the white person because the
> students in general like how they see the black population, they see Black kids,
> skipping class, they don't want to do their work, they come in there and they be
> very rude and they don't pay attention and you see like most of students, they
> probably do their work if they white. (Lara, Interview, 01/08)

> Them [white students] the ones they [Teachers] like-they're the ones they pick
> out. (Reggie, Interview, 12/07)

Because of their teachers' interactions with White students, Nicole, Lara, and Reggie internal-

ized that teachers expected White students to do well in school and gave them more attention

because of that expectation.

The teachers were not the only ones contributing to their feelings of discrimination and

inferiority. White students' academic success at Nicole's school also was a factor. When I asked

Nicole if she knew any high achieving Black students she said, "Not personally, but they in our

school" (Nicole, Informal Interview, 1/08). Nicole had limited interactions with high achieving

Black students, which also helped facilitate the notion that teachers only cared about White

students. Black students like Nicole and others in the study only saw White students achieving.

The teens expected White students to do better in school than Black students. According to the teens, the Black students who surrounded them often skipped class, were discourteous to teachers, and seemed to disidentify with school. The youth also stereotyped and essentialized Black students as unteachable. The teens in the study did not want their teachers to label them as unintelligent like their Black peers. They resisted the label of unintelligent and observed when a teacher discriminated against them by changing their teaching style depending on the classroom demographics.

The idea that Black students were inferior to Whites and that teachers were apprehensive about teaching when they were faced with a class full of Black students was detrimental to students' ideas of achievement. The students read their teachers' teaching style and thought that their teachers changed their style when teaching Blacks students as opposed to a classroom of White students. Lisa explained,

> I probably got like two classes with like white people in it and but the class with all the black people, they be the ones that like they be in my class where I hear the most noise and I can't concentrate the most. And that be the class that I just be like man forget this junk. Sometimes I do that cause that's when the teachers stop teaching. That's when she gets distracted and she start telling people like sit down and do your work- and I'll be like I don't want to do this no more, I ain't fixing to do it, nobody else ain't doing it. They be making me mad sometimes when the teachers stop teaching. If they don't want to learn, keep going. You gonna have some proof that you was teaching, somebody was learning. (Lisa, Interview, 01/08)

> They [teachers] stop teaching when they see us. (Nicole, Interview, 12/07).

> They [teachers] look funny at us. (Dee, Informal Interview, 1/08)

Lisa's experience was that when a teacher could not control his or her class, she or he stopped teaching and focused on discipline. That classroom situation discouraged Lisa and made her want to give up on her education. Students read teachers' classroom management styles as discriminatory. According to Lisa, the students who were disruptive at her school were usually

Black. When I asked Lisa if she knew any high achieving Blacks students, she said smiling, "Yeah, myself." Lisa's grades were exceptional and she took various Advanced Placement (AP) classes in preparation for college. She had a broad high school experience as an AP and general education student. When I asked Lisa what her AP classes were like she said, "They different, we get work done." When I asked her why she thought her AP classes were different from her non-AP classes she stated, "Because it's only a few Blacks in those classes . . . you can hear in those classes" (Lisa, Informal Interview, 1/08). As a result of her classroom experiences, Lisa decided that in order for her to complete her work and learn, there had to be a small number of Black students in the classroom. Lisa subscribed to the teachers' stereotyping that informed her ideology of Black students.

The findings suggest that in addition to teachers changing their teaching style according to race dynamics, teachers' expectations of Blacks students, and the students' expectations of one another also influenced achievement. The teachers and the Black students had low expectations of each other. The students did not think the teachers viewed them as smart or capable of learning, and the students had low expectations for each other because they believed the stereotypes that labeled them rude, unteachable, disrespectful, and unintelligent. The hidden curriculum encompasses the teacher-student relationship as a factor for learning outcomes as well as the school's overall culture to engage students. Teachers' expectations are a crucial part of achievement. If students think that teachers have low expectations, then the students will often times become a by-product of that assumption (Perry et al., 2003). According to Perry et al., "Black students [are] mindful of their race and stereotypes about it [because] Blacks have many experiences with the majority 'other group' that make their race salient to them" (p.115). Hence, the racial divide in our society makes Black students accustomed to recognizing the stereotypes

that label them inferior. It is hard to determine the teachers' positions because that was not the focus of the research; however, the students' experiences serve as one of the complex issues of race and discrimination in schools.

Some of the teens in the study were disruptive at the community center. I feel it would be misleading of me not to discuss the students' behavior at the center. The HCC administrators suspended Lara and Darrell that school year (2007) for fighting and disturbing the school environment. With the exceptions of Lisa, Maxine, and Star, HCC had suspended all the students in the study from the community center for fighting or showing disrespect to adults during the 3-year span I was at HCC. Therefore, it would be naive of me to negate the notion that HCC youth are part of the discipline issues that affect the learning outcomes in the classroom. Nevertheless, what they experienced in the classroom was "real" to them, whether they were part of the problem or not. Their experiences are an element of the hidden curriculum that standardized tests cannot measure or grade. This hidden curriculum represents the ideas, values, and beliefs that no one discusses in the school, but this curriculum is woven into the school culture's fabric. These values are transmitted two-ways. The teachers transmit values about what they think is important in the classroom and whom they think will learn. Students internalized their teachers' belief systems to create a productive or unproductive learning environment. What teachers say and do not say become part of the curriculum, as Dave and Reggie explained in a group interview.

Reggie: The teachers be telling you that you going to jail and stuff
Tina: They told you that?
Reggie: Not me, but I heard Ms. Lee tell this boy in my class that.
Dave: Yeah, they think we going to jail.
Tina: Why do they think that about you guys?
Dave.   I don't know . . . The kids in our school are bad and be fighting.
Tina: Do they tell all students that?

Reggie: Naw, just us.

Tina: What do you mean by us?

Dave: The Black ones. (Dave, Reggie, and Tina, Interview, 09/07)

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (2000) argued that

> Self–deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (p.63)

Freire's words are powerful and illustrate what can happen when teachers, the most important figures in the classroom, degrade students. The remarks that Dave and Reggie heard a teacher express to a classmate became a permanent stitch in their minds. It serves as a reminder of low expectations, discrimination, and the culture of the classroom.

> It's probably like the most students act up that will be the black students and they probably think like, in general, all of them are bad and they don't like to do their work. (Nicole, Interview, 01/08)

> They [teachers] think we all a like – bad. (Dee, Informal Interview, 01/08)

> Okay my class is half-white so me and another African American boy, we're the only two out of the class of 25 that do our homework. So, the teacher think we don't do our homework anyway, so if you do it, you do it. If you don't, she don't care because you African American. (Dave, Interview, 01/08)

> That if you sit by somebody that's bad, they going to consider you bad because you're sitting next to them. . . . Yeah, they're going to judge you, yeah, because you hang out with that person. (Reggie, Interview, 12/07)

Essentialism is the final ideology that is present in these findings. The students believed that all teachers thought of Black students in the same way because of the negative stereotypes that followed these students in and out of the classroom. Black students thought of themselves in the exact way that racist ideology suggests they are. The students believed that Blacks are uneducated, rude, and disruptive. The teens classified all Blacks as unintelligent. The hidden curriculum informed their concepts of what is intelligent because they took their cues from their

teacher. When a teacher favors a particular group more than another, the group that feels

discriminated against will observe that teacher's every move, comment, and teaching style

change. Consequently, the students will adjust their behavior to counter the feelings of inferiority

(Perry et al., 2003; Steele & Brown, 1995). Below the teens express their feelings about learning

from the margins within the classroom.

> I'm not going to say this lady is racist or anything, but like in my sociology
> class—it was psychology or sociology, one of them I took in tenth grade, we was
> kind of like, on different sides of the classroom, but it's like I guess that's how we
> chose to sit . . . Anyway, yeah, and the teacher will answer—go over their [White
> students] answer one of their questions before she come to like the side where the
> black people . . . I mean, it ain't trying to be racist, but it like, she probably had
> that mindset. (Lisa, Interview, 12/07)

> They [teachers] think that we're [Black youth] dumb, you know, bad. (Reggie,
> Interview, 1/08)

> And you just feel so small like you feel like you're out of place. I sit in the back
> and I didn't even get in front of the class. (Dee, Interview, 12/07)

Teachers have the ability to foster learning or hinder it. These three youth experienced the class-

room environment with what they believed to be a racist teacher. Lisa did not want to admit that

her teacher was racist, but that was her only rationale for her teacher's behavior.

A classic example of the hidden curriculum is when teachers "unconsciously give more

intellectual attention, praise, and academic help to a particular group of students, these uncon-

scious actions grant power and privilege to the group the teacher establishes as dominant"

(McLaren, 1994, p. 191). Because of the teacher's actions, Lisa read the teacher's ideological

beliefs to be those of a racist. Reggie felt that his teachers believed that Blacks students were

unintelligent. Reggie's beliefs stem from various places: teachers' remarks and teaching style,

and other Black students that have low expectations. He also grouped the ideas of "dumb" and

"bad" together. This combination feeds into the ideology that Blacks are not only unintelligent,

but also belligerent and unteachable for multiple reasons. This type of thinking subscribed to a

racist ideology that Blacks are incapable of learning and do not want to learn. Reggie's

perceptions of Blackness in terms of education were problematic for many reasons. He could

begin to withdraw and disidentify with education because of his perceptions of his teacher's

expectations (Perry et al., 2003). The last two excerpts by Dee illuminate the notion that teachers

privileged particular students and left others feeling inferior. Dee's words quoted at this section's

outset are powerful as she spoke about feeling small in the classroom and out of place while

competing with her White and Asian counterparts for academic access. Dee did not want to sit in

the front of the class because of her lowered self-esteem, and she determined that her place in the

classroom was in the back.

For Black students, self-esteem is a major indicator in determining academic success and

students' identification with academics (Crocker & Major, 1989; Osborne, 1997; Perry et al.,

2003). According to Steele (2003), Black students have a greater risk of disidentifying with

academics because of stigmatic, "negative group stereotyp[ing] via personal failure" (Osborne,

p. 728). Research suggested that the youth like those at HCC will disidentify with school because

of the hidden curriculum, which places boundaries on their education (Cappella & Weinstein,

2001; Ogbu, 1992; Osborne, 1995, Steele, 2003). However, there is a growing amount of

research that contends students have the ability to "disprove" or debunk academic stereotypes

and use academic stereotypes as motivation to achieve (Gayles, 2005, 2006; Osborne, 1997;

Sanders, 1997). Dee and others did not disidentify with school as the next section of this chapter

shows through an exploration of how students' responded to academic stereotypes as they felt

ignored, belittled, and unwanted in the classroom.

In a utopian educational system, all students should be educated without bias. An

unbiased education aims to foster students' ability to find their voices and feel empowered from

a democratic standpoint. Unfortunately, this system does not exist. As teachers, we educate students from our own epistemologies (Crotty, 1998; McLaren, 1994). In other words, our beliefs and values influence the way we teach. These beliefs stem from outside the official curriculum. However, these beliefs and values pose equal influence over our students as much as the official curriculum (Apple, 1995, 2004; McLaren). HCC youth internalized their teachers' hidden curriculum as racist, stereotypical, and discriminatory. These messages leave students learning from the margins of the classroom. Students' awareness of discriminatory teaching created moments of resistance for the disenfranchised students. Instead of mentally withdrawing from school because of educational discrimination, many of the older teens in the study expressed overcoming racism by "proving" teachers and individuals outside of education wrong in their negative assumptions. The high school youth in the study spoke about resisting teachers' pessimistic beliefs about Black youth and reconstructing teachers' notions of them personally as opposed to the group of Black students. Teens at HCC did not attempt to debunk the negative stereotypes of the Black students at their school. Yet, they deliberately tried to distance themselves from other Black students in order to demonstrate to teachers that they did not possess the same value system about education as their Black peers. The youth articulated moments of achievement in response to racism and educational discrimination (Sanders, 1997). Individual students resisted low teacher expectations and attempted to distinguish themselves from other Black students as students who wanted to achieve.

<div align="center">Achievement in Response to Racism</div>

The idea of "proving" teachers wrong and resisting the negative stereotypes of the teachers resonated with HCC older youth. The middle school students (Maxine, Star) did not talk about moments of resisting racism from teachers. However, all students did express instances

when they challenged negative assumptions and made conscious decisions to "disprove" the racial stereotype (Gayles, 2006). I surmised from my data that many students felt they entered the classroom with teachers who believed that they were intellectually inferior to their White and Asian peers, and they used this pessimistic ideology as motivation. The reason I stated the HCC youth had moments of resistance is not to romanticize or overdramatize their acts of resistance. Giroux "reminds us not all acts of student misbehavior are acts of resistance. In fact, such 'resistance' may simply be repressive moments (sexist, racist) inscribed by the dominant culture" (as cited in McLaren, 1994, p. 195). I make this point to draw a distinction between the resistance demonstrated by the HCC youth and other well-known documented analyses of resistance. For example, Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labor* is a classic analysis of how working class boys, or as Willis calls them, "the lads," resisted white-collar jobs or desk jobs for working class, manual labor jobs. The youth in Willis's study made a conscious effort not to reproduce social class status.

I cannot claim from my data that the youth of HCC attempted to disrupt stratified systems of oppression perpetually. There existed moments when the youth tried to resist teachers' and non-educators' ideas about Black students. The youth still believed that the Black students surrounding them were unteachable, but they wanted to "prove" that they were not like "those" Black students and that they could achieve or perform in a manner that distinguished them from other Blacks. Willis (1990) discussed symbolic creativity as a method of resistance and recon-ceptualization of mass culture through a manipulation of the popular–this leads to an "emancipa-tion" of other/both the oppressed individual and/or a community as a way to manipulate hege-monic control/ideologies. The excerpts below illustrate the teens' attempts to reconceptualize

teachers' belief systems about them as individuals in relation to the group in a creatively

symbolic fashion.

> Say there's a lot of students in the class and there's like a class clown, there's lots
> of people that laugh at him, so they [teachers] think you like him. You have to
> show them you not like him (Reggie, Interview, 12/07)

> Yeah, prove them [teachers] wrong because they think we all like that (Nicole,
> Interview, 1/08)

> Well, a lot of my teachers, like a lot of my teachers, they be like, oh, she ain't
> going to do no work and I be like, and I be like wanting to prove them because I
> don't like that. I'm the one that do my work. We are so different and then they be
> like—they be thinking I'm not going to do my work and then when I do my work
> they still be like, well. (Lisa, Interview, 11/07)

The above excerpts revealed how the teens understood education as Black, urban youth who

attend public schools. The teens' candid remarks about education and race questioned the state of

education for Black, working class youth. The HCC youth's experiences with public education

taught them that they are inferior to their racial counterparts. However, the quotations above

illustrate that youth found ways to resist the negative racial stereotypes placed on them and

"prove" educators wrong about their intellectual ability. Their voices are powerful and exemplify

resistance.

Reggie resisted the class clown pathology. He did not want his teacher to associate him

with behavior that is unproductive in an academic setting. Reggie commented on the notion that

students have to demonstrate to teachers that they are not similar to "them," meaning other Black

students. Reggie internalized his teachers' belief about Blacks; however, he did not want them to

see him as one of those unteachable students. Lisa expressed her frustration as teachers labeled

her as a student who does not do her work. She wanted to show her teachers that she was capable

of doing the work and that she was not like the other students in the classroom. Lisa also wanted

teachers to draw distinctions between her and the other Johnson girls. Lisa had the highest grade

point average out of her two sisters, had taken various AP classes, and had one of the highest

grade point averages at the center. In the summer of 2006, Upward Bound selected Lisa to parti-

cipate in the program for high achieving students. However, with all of Lisa's accomplishments,

she could not avoid the unteachable student label. Lisa made a conscious effort to differentiate

herself from her sisters and her Black classmates. Even as Lisa separated herself from her peers,

she felt as though it was not enough that her teacher considered her an achieving student. Lisa

felt that no one really recognized or praised her efforts. Others echoed Lisa's challenge to

debunk stereotypes as a tool to foster achievement.

> Yeah, and then you have a teacher that like, you know, that do the—they show you like—like when they help you with your work you find out like you know more than what you thought you knew. (Dee, Interview, 1/08)

> Yeah, you do because you feel proud like, dang, I didn't know I knew that. (Nicole, Interview, 11/07)

> And you got put in the class with a whole bunch of kids that's really smart and you go in there and you feel so small…But I pass and I end up answering more questions sometimes then they did. (Lisa, 1/08)

> I like being challenged…Give me a challenge, I will sit down and complete it, I mean, till it ain't funny. (Lisa, Interview, 12/07)

The acuminous statements by the teens debunked the work of John Ogbu (1978, 1992), who

argued that "as a response to racial discrimination and limitations on their educational and

occupational opportunity, African Americans have failed to develop a strong academic

orientation" (Ogbu as cited in Sanders, 1997, p. 83). The teens internalized the stereotypes of

urban, Black youth and used it as motivation to achieve.

Critical theorist Giroux (1998a) documented the notion that some teachers are racist and

internalize mass media stereotypes that portray urban, Black students as unintelligent, unteach-

able, and disengaged with education. However, HCC students resisted these stereotypes and

wanted to achieve in the face of racism, which illustrated their ability to challenge and shift their

socially prescribed identities.

> That motivate me to do my work like to prove a teacher wrong to show like I can do it. That motivate me to do my work. I try to do better than them [White students]. (Dee, Interview, 12/07)

> To prove like people wrong who say we can't do something. (Maxine, Interview, 10/07)

> Yeah, stuff like that motivate me. I'll be paying attention…And I still be like the one that's really still want to do my work or whatever and they call me like teacher pet because I do my work, whatever. I don't care…I mean, I be ready to prove them wrong. I'll be ready to turn in my work and I mean, you know, listen and paying attention and then-see, I'm like one of the teachers then because I'm like one of the ones that's going to do my work and-so other people play, they see like I know how to move away from them a little. (Lisa, Interview, 01/08)

Each student above used negative stereotypes and racial assumptions as a motivation tool to

achieve. However, this study was ethnographic in nature, and governing institutions limited

where exactly I could observe the teens. As a result, I have no indicators of their academic

achievement. None of the students were seniors in high school; therefore, I could not track their

college admission and the community center did not have high school students' grades on file.

What is important are the youth's experiences that resisted educational discrimination and how

the youth reconceptualized their academic identities to challenge teachers' assumptions. The

notion that only White students were high achievers and that she wanted to "prove" teachers

wrong inspired Dee. Dee's comments demonstrated her strong academic identification and

ability to conceptualize Blackness outside of essentialist and monolithic labels. She and others

felt they had the academic ability to "prove" teachers wrong and achieve no matter the classroom

situations. Lisa described how she felt when she challenged the classroom norms and low teacher

expectations in front of her classmates. Lisa's peers chastised her for completing her work. They

called her "teacher's pet," and she used that as motivation to surpass her classmates academically.

In a group interview with Dave and Reggie, they explained how individuals outside of school walls stereotyped them, and how they codeswitched to counter negative assumptions. Dave stated, "You come from Atlanta, like Bankhead or something, they think you act crazy. That represents only one person . . . Like when I tell them we're from Bankhead, you can tell them [White people], but show your good side" (Dave, Interview, 10/07). Dave was also a high achieving student who was motivated by racism and the stereotype that Atlanta Blacks are "crazy." Reggie's sentiments echoed Dave's when he stated, "They think we crazy, but I know how to act when I am around them [White people]." Reggie and Dave demonstrated that they know how to "code switch." Richardson (2002) suggested, "Codeswitching is also a valuable resource since each language represents a way of knowing and expressing the world. Style/code-switching allows Black people to move between worldviews" (p. 691). Code switching is also "a shift between different language systems; with reference to dialects, it refers to the change between overall dialect systems, such as that between a standard and vernacular dialect" (Wolfram, 1993, p. 300). Reggie and Dave rejected the notion that they have to perform a particular way because they are Black youth. When faced with racism they debunked monolithic notions of Blackness and dispelled myths about the urban, young, Black males.

Conclusion

Education is a vital issue within this study. Thus, formal education does not limit the term education; it is the understanding that students are being taught inside and outside the classroom. One of the primary agents of education is Black popular culture. The Black popular culture of choice for the teens of HCC was rap music. Their affinity for rap influenced their ideas about

race, gender, intellectual ability, sexuality, and teachers' perceptions of urban youth. Their experiences with racism, sexism, and stereotyping were their reality. The youth throughout the study expressed feelings of intellectual inferiority on multiple levels. They felt intellectually inferior watching television, watching rap videos, and sitting in the classroom. Nevertheless, they found strength in proving teachers wrong who did not view Blacks as intellectually capable of achieving. Rap music and formal education led these youth to believe that the Black race is inferior, nefarious, and detached from mainstream society. The youth had a detrimental under-standing of Black popular culture and formal education, shaped by their experiences watching rap videos and learning from the classroom margins, which challenges all educators to become critical of themselves, as well as the images they ignore and include in the classrooms daily.

The students of HCC have spoken to the power of racism and the power of resistance. These youth entered the classroom with the feeling of defeat as they assumed that their teachers did not want to teach them because of their race. However, these youth had the desire to achieve and "prove" their teachers wrong in the face of discrimination. Their ability to recognize and reconceptualize racism and discrimination is astonishing and speaks to their critical thinking skills.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this 16- month study was to understand how nine Black, urban youth made meaning of the messages of rap music in their everyday lives. These understandings of rap music are important to the field of education because they inform educators as to how youth make meaning of who they are. As this study has shown, the youth of HCC utilized the messages of rap to inform how they understand their own race, gender, sexuality, and intellectual ability. The way the youth in this study conceptualized the images and sounds of rap music is a testament that music shapes the way youth view themselves, their race, gender, sexuality, and intellectual capacities. This study documented the influence of rap music's pervasive and explicit messages, which provide an essentialized narrative of what Black culture is to youth. The purpose of Chapter 1 was to introduce the current study, its importance in educational research, and myself. Chapter 1 provided readers a synopsis of my life story; it disclosed my passion for rap music and Hip Hop culture. In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature that aligned with the findings of the present study, and examined quantitative and qualitative peer reviewed studies germane to the current study's population. I outlined the methodology of the study in Chapter 3. I examined why ethnography was the methodology of choice, my data collections procedures, and introduced my research location and participants.

In Chapter 4, I presented the eight major themes of the study, which are Biological Essentialism & Blackness, Notions of Choice, Essentialist Notions of Black and White,

Observations of Essentialism, The Beat of Hegemony, Developing Critical Consciousness, The Hidden Curriculum, and Achievement in Response to Racism. Thus, the study's findings indicated that youth at HCC believed that Black women were intellectually inferior to White women; that White women had the choice not to appear in rap videos; that to be a Black women one must have a large backside and be promiscuous; and the beat of rap music supersedes its lyrics. Therefore, youth ignored their critical thinking skills: teachers' classroom management styles fostered students' feelings of racism and discrimination, and students resisted their teachers' racist and discriminatory classroom practices. These findings indicated that Black youth's perceptions of self were centered on feelings of inferiority and White patriarchy. The findings suggested that Black youth struggle to digest rap as a genre of music that is rooted in racism and sexism, and they see rap as an absolute truth of Black culture. The study presented here indicates that youth perceived rap messages as absolute truths, which informed youth to deem Black youth as oversexed, promiscuous, unintelligent individuals. As Black youth engaged with rap, this study's findings suggested Black youth are at greater risk of internalizing the racial and gender stereotypes that rap music perpetuates, which becomes the tool through which youth create a lens to understand their race, gender, and sexuality.

In this chapter, I review the findings of the study, the significance of the findings in the realm of educational policy, and their contribution to educational research. I discuss the limitations of this study in order to continue research of marginalized groups who are often ignored in educational research. I end the chapter by discussing the need for pedagogy that can help students critically examine rap as a form of entertainment that transmits messages rooted in racial, sexist stereotypes. I argue for critical pedagogy and critical media literacy as two paradigms that can help youth decode the hidden, destructive messages in rap.

Review of Findings

The findings of this study are eye opening. They speak volumes to the struggles of urban, Black, southern youth. As I concluded in the previous chapter, youth at HCC used rap music as a framework to understand their Black experiences. To the youth at HCC, their experiences of being Black are rooted in monolithic, essentialized notions of Blackness that Black popular culture, most specially rap music, projects to youth. Findings indicated that Black female youth concluded that in order to be considered an authentic Black woman they must possess a large backside and a promiscuous character. As youth engaged with the images of rap, they read the images as bona fide examples of Black womanhood. My findings indicated that as youth read the messages of rap they labeled Black women Freaks and Hos. Thus, the exposure to the words and images of rap provoked Black youth to dress and act out these labels because they understood them as authentic Black representations. These debasing terms became the narratives for Black youth, especially adolescent girls who consumed music videos.

The youth of HCC compared themselves to their White counterparts in various areas throughout the study, which heightened their feelings of inferiority. As the youth in the study watched rap videos depict Black women as Freaks and Hos, they saw the absence of White women in the videos as examples of better decision-making skills. Youth assumed that White women made the conscious decision not to appear in rap videos because they valued their bodies more than Black women did and that White women had more lucrative career options than Black women. The youth read rap videos as a space of empowerment (White) or exploration (Black). As a result of this binary condition, when youth watched rap videos they presumed that White women made the conscious choice not to participate in rap's demeaning portrayal of women. Therefore, youth were left with the assumptions that White women were smarter and valued their

bodies more because they were not seen in videos. The notion of choice was clear: Black women chose to be degraded in videos because of their lesser intelligence and natural body type.

Racism, sexism, and classism permeated throughout the study when the youth engaged in conversations about rap music. However, the findings suggested that these oppressive states were not limited to the space of rap music and Black popular culture: They reached as far as the classroom. The youth expressed beliefs that they felt their teachers were racist and discriminated against students of color. They made these assumptions by dissecting their teachers' classroom management styles and interactions with students of a lighter hue. The students watched and listened to teachers base their styles of teaching on their students' skin color. In essence, the youth of HCC perceived that their teachers educated or taught their White or Asian students while they disciplined the students of color. As a result of learning from the margins, the youth of HCC attempted to resist their teachers' stereotypical beliefs about Black students and wanted to disprove their teachers. The youth spoke at length about proving their teachers wrong and trying to show their teachers that they were not like the "other" Black students. Therefore, the youth believed the racial stereotypes about Blacks and tried to distance themselves from those who exhibited stereotypical behavior.

My findings are layered and embedded with notions of racial and gender essentialism. The life narratives of HCC youth are rooted in oppressive mindsets, which portray a one-dimensional view of Blackness to youth who engage with rap music. The sounds and images of rap have been marketed to Black youth as the "real" representation of Black life. Thus, youth used rap to draw connections between what they were experiencing and what they were learning from rap music. Without the educational tools to be critical of rap, they conceptualized rap as the Black narrative for the Black experience. The findings speak to the issues urban youth face

everywhere who engage with rap daily without a critical eye, blind to the contradictory nature of Black popular culture. As my findings suggest, Black youth have internalized rap's racist and sexist messages as authentic Black culture. The youth of HCC lived their lives under the contrived lie of rap music, and an absence of educational intervention may prevent them from being able to examine rap as critical thinkers (hooks, 2003b; Giroux, 1997).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is found in the experiences of youth who search for meaning in the complex space of rap music. For 16 months, I examined the lives of nine Black, urban, southern youth for how they read the messages of rap music. The lives and experiences of these nine youth were at the forefront of the research. The collective story HCC youth told was one of confusion and absolute truths. The images and sounds of rap music provided youth with problematic sexual schemas that became their conceptual map for life. This map is important to the narrative of all youth, specifically urban youth. The findings revealed the nuances of how youth engage with rap and add to the literature that examines the lives of urban youth. The nuances are critical to educators because it is important that they stay current in understanding how youth read the mass media images they consume because these continually changing popular culture images serve as a site of education.

Giroux (1997) argued that Black, urban youth are "pushed to the margins of political power within society and denied "opportunities for self-definition" (p. 23). As this study shows, Black youth are defining themselves by and through rap music and Black popular culture. The findings address the need for education that helps students examine rap, which professes racism, sexism, and self-hatred. If Black, urban youth define themselves as inferior, promiscuous, and poor decision makers, and if they reject critical thinking because of a fear of alienation from their

peers, they are on a destructive road that will leave them with limited life choices–jail, or exploitation as a video ho.

Contribution to Educational Research

This study adds to the abundance of research that suggested "students of color who have not experienced academic success in schools" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 466) need a curriculum that is "culturally responsive" (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Jordan (1985) asserted, "Educational practices must match with the children's culture in ways which ensure the generation of academically important behaviors" (p. 110). I contend that rap music can be a platform for what Ladson-Billings (1995a) called "culturally responsive" or "culturally relevant pedagogy". In her examination of eight exemplary African American teachers, Ladson-Billings concluded that these teachers included students' experiences outside of school into the classroom and argued for culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom, which she defined as a pedagogy that

> not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. (p. 164)

According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), culturally relevant pedagogy assists students in finding and affirming their cultural identities and creates the mindset to become critical of injustice, inequities, racism, classism, and sexism. Cultural relevance is a true attempt to narrow the achievement gap. Billings (1994) argued,

> the notion of "cultural relevance" moves beyond language to include other aspects of the students and school culture. Thus culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one's history, culture or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture or background distorted. . . . The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a 'relevant black

personality' that allows African-American students to choose academic
excellence yet still identify with African and African-American culture. (p. 17)

As this study has shown, urban, Black youth are in dire need of a pedagogy that embraces their experiences outside the classroom and challenges oppressions.

This study also contributes to the burgeoning body of educational research that avoids "lenses of deficiency and hopelessness, which are much too prevalent in urban education research" (Evans-Winters, 2005, p. 5). Traditional research frameworks have bolstered research that "regularly target the victim and ignore the role of social structures in our society" (Evans-Winters, p. 6). Hence, the present study was concerned with examining the lives of youth from a perspective that analyzed social structures alongside youth's perceptions. As suggested by Tillman (2002),

educational research and practices that reflect a cultural paradigm emphasize
cultural solidarity, education for self-reliance in the African American
community, and specific ways in which cultural knowledge, practices, and values
that characterize the historic and contemporary African American experience can
be drawn upon to improve the education of African Americans. (p. 1)

This study takes it cue from scholars like Evans-Winters (2005), Gayles, (2005, 2006), Payne (1994), and Tillman, who stress the need for research that aims to diversify the representations of Black youth in order to improve education for all. Past research has examined Black youth from paradigms (cultural deprivation, cultural deficit) that stress the deficiency and reinforce White racial superiority (Evans-Winters; Foster, 1999; Smith 1999). This study adds to research that is not only concerned with the experiences of Black youth, but also understanding embedded social structures that perpetuate injustice, inequalities, and oppressive mindsets.

The research also adds to the body of literature that examines how youth engage with Black popular culture, and more specifically rap music. As I stated in chapter 2, there are various studies (Dimintriadis, 2003; Emerson, 2002; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell &

Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Nelson, 2000; Stovall, 2006; Stephens & Few, 2007; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2005) that investigated how youth understand rap music; however, many did not address the social structures that explain why youth read the text of rap as the authentic Black experience or as a representation of all of Black womanhood. This body of work addresses the complexities of growing up urban and Black, comforting notions of self that are rooted in images and sounds of inferiority and White patriarchy. The current study illustrates that youth read rap music in multiple ways, which influence various aspects of their lives. The findings of this study show that youth used the messages of rap to make decisions about whom they would date, whom they would associate with at school, what music they would listen to, their dress, and perceptions of self as young, urban, southern, Black youth. These findings enhance the body of literature that exists and add valuable aspects to the current literature, which strengthen our understanding of urban, Black youth as complex individuals struggling with images and sounds of oppression.

<div align="center">Implications for Educational Policy</div>

The findings of this study call for candid dialogues about race in the classroom. As youth of all races, genders, and sexual orientations use rap music as a site of education, it is important that educators help youth critically examine the racist, sexist paradigms embedded within Black popular culture before youth internalize these messages. Watts-Jones (2002) defined the term, "internalized racism," as "a way of referring to the phenomenon of people of African descent, or people of color having taken in and internalized aspects of racism" (p. 592). It is apparent that the youth of HCC absorbed daily the negative stereotypes they consumed while engaged with rap. Ownership of racial epithets is detrimental to the well-being of HCC youth, as it interferes with their chances to be productive citizens. Watson (1999) stated that it is difficult for Blacks to

speak about and address issues of internalized racism because of the shame that is associated with being labeled inferior. Educational policy must address the issues of shame and inferiority students of color internalize as they live in a multimedia world that reminds them daily of their inferiority. Many scholars (Brown, 1998; Buckingham, 1998; Ferguson, 2004; Kellner, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2006; Lewis & Jhally, 1998) have argued that to combat internalized racism and many other oppressive states, educational policy needs to infuse critical media literacy within pedagogical tactics in order to help students examine the messages of the media. Lewis and Jhally stated that "the goal of media literacy is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers" (p. 109). Lewis and Jhally's assertion moves individuals to a greater sense of democracy as people challenge "scripted and defined" (p. 109) narratives about all groups of people.

According to Kellner and Share (2006), critical media literacy can foster dialogues that critically analyze "relationships between media and audiences, information and power" (p. 59). As my study illustrates, there is a dire need for educational policy that focuses on a curriculum inclusive of critical media literacy. Kellner and Share argued that implementing critical media literacy is not an option in today's multimedia world and an educational system driven by standardized high stakes testing: The implementation of critical media literacy is necessary to empower students "to create their own messages that can challenge media texts and narratives" (p. 60). As my study has shown, Black culture corporate marketers, who sell rap to young Blacks and subscribe to racism and sexism, inform youth of what it means to be Black and help create part of their life narrative in the areas of race, sexuality, and education. However, the youth of HCC were aware of the unjust social structures that perpetuate the labeling of students of color as inferior. They internalized these images and labels as authentic representations of Black

culture, which they felt called upon to mimic in order to be considered Black. This mindset is destructive and disempowering, which is why educational policy must embrace pedagogy that helps students of all colors challenge essentialized paradigms and create new narratives from a "multiperspectival approach addressing issues of gender, race, class, and power" (Kellner & Share, p. 59). However, before critical media literacy is infused into the classroom, we need educational policies that encourage teachers to use popular culture in the classroom. It is critical that teachers explore the influences of popular culture in the classroom. An effective critical pedagogy embraces popular culture and helps build the foundation of democracy as students engage with popular culture as thinkers and people equipped with the tools to challenge essentialism or predetermined narratives.

Buckingham (1998) argued that teaching popular culture is not an easy task because teachers have to relinquish some of their classroom power because the students become the experts of the material. Therefore, the pedagogical strategies shift as the direction turns toward the "students' exploration of their own cultural investments and concerns" (Buckingham, p. 9). Many would argue that it is counterproductive for teachers to infuse popular culture into classroom time; however, it is a disservice not to equip students with the tools to challenge the dominant ideology that fosters racism, sexism, and classism. Educational policy makers and school officials who ignore popular culture as an educational tool reinforce existing inequalities and labels of inferiority.

Educators must make time to infuse popular culture and its critique in their classrooms. The way Black students in this study conceptualized themselves due to rap music is problematic. Pedagogy that disrupts and contests some of the messages rap music youth receive from rap music can help youth be critical thinkers. There are many ways educators can use the issues

within rap music to foster learning outcomes that will align with state standards. For example, a teacher could use consumption, which is a chief aspect of rap music, to explore the world of economic exploitation. Thus, a teacher could create a social studies lesson that examined major sneaker giants like Nike and Adidas and the production of shoes overseas. Students would begin to learn how much Nike or Adidas spends to make a pair of shoes, how much Nike pays the people to make the shoes, labor laws, exploitation of works, and net profit sales against production cost. This one lesson would include multiple disciplines (math, social studies, economics), while asking students to question rappers' tendency to glorify consumption of sneakers. Teachers can also use rap music as a way to address stereotypes. As this study shows, youth believe that Black women's body types and sexuality defined their being. The classroom can be a place that debunks stereotypes, while simultaneously providing students with a myriad of examples of Black women of different body types and representations of sexuality. This discussion could take place in Health class.

Integrating the social, cultural, health, and economical issues embedded within rap music in the classroom can interrupt students' essentialist notions of race, sexuality, and consumption. The educational implications of integrating rap music in the classroom are endless; however, teachers must begin the hard work of becoming comfortable with popular culture and Black popular culture. We need workshops that teach teachers how to understand their positionalities as educators. Workshops that also grapple with teachers' misconceptions of Black popular culture will be helpful as teachers begin to feel comfortable with the music and the culture to discuss it in their classrooms. Educational polices have ignored the power of popular culture far too long; it is time that educators grapple with the issues that their students face everyday in the classroom.

Limitations

Qualitative research within the boundaries of higher education can be challenging because researchers never know what the data will reveal. However, as a researcher, under the direction of a university, I had to follow the rules and guidelines that the university established for me at the beginning of my study, regardless of what may have needed to be examined after the data analysis. Therefore, I was bound by the parameters of the research context, HCC. Themes emerged from my data analysis that revealed my participants' experiences outside of the community center, experiences with their classroom teachers and school officials, which I did not have access to because of the community center boundaries enforced by preset guidelines. My participants described to me at length interactions and conversations they overheard or engaged in with educators that they perceived as racist. As I coded and analyzed my data in order to illustrate findings, it was apparent that my participants were experiencing notions of essentialism at school from the most important figure in the school building–the teacher. I was limited in my analysis of the experiences of my participants because I could not go into their schools, sit in their classrooms, and observe their interactions with their teachers. As I interviewed the students, their perceptions of their teachers were rooted explicitly in racism and discrimination. The students wholeheartedly believed that their teachers did not want to teach them because of the color of their skin. I felt compelled to tell the story of the youth and their feelings of inferiority inside the classroom; however, the story is not a full picture. I was not able to gain access to the students' schools, observe the student-teacher relationships, and possibly interview the teachers to seek out their perceptions of the students in the study.

Another limitation of the study was the population and the location of the study. All nine participants of the study were Black and lived in Atlanta, Georgia. The participants provided rich

data that illuminated the experiences of these nine youth; however, that created a limitation because multiple ethnic groups do not inform the research. When I selected the nine Black youth to participate in the study, HCC was overwhelmingly comprised of Black students from one central community. There were several Latino/Latina students who attended HCC, but they did not meet the age requirement of the study. Therefore, one ethnic group and one community in Atlanta, Georgia inform the study. Thus, the research is limited to a single racial perspective of rap music and education. The research is also limited in terms of class: All the youth in the study came form working class families. The study does not represent youth from middle class homes and how they read the messages of rap. Affluent youth may read the messages of rap in ways that contradict or concur with the youth of HCC. The population of HCC was not diverse; therefore, a lack of diversity limits this study.

Future Research

Various research projects are needed to continue the work of investigating how youth make meaning of rap music. It is also important that the research be diversified in its approach through the inclusion of multiple groups and perspectives in order to get a fuller picture of how youth and teachers read the messages of rap. In this study, I investigated how nine Black youth understood rap; however, there is much more work that needs to be done. Research is needed that examines how students in other regions of the United States and abroad make meaning of rap music because rap transcends race, class, gender, and national borders. The stories of all youth are important to understanding rap's impact and influence in today's growing technological world that is driven by mass media. In addition, research is needed that addresses how teachers make meaning of rap music. An important theme in the current study, one incomplete and

inconclusive because of the boundaries of the study, reveals that teachers' perceptions of rap music may influence their teaching.

Thus, the gap in this study is an investigation into the relationships of students and teachers as they interact with rap music in the background of youth's ideas of self. In this study, I found that youth viewed themselves through a racially stereotyped lens and felt their teachers' did as well. Research is needed with teachers inside school buildings that examines how teachers interact with one another, how they manage classrooms comprised of students of color, and the disciplinary actions that occur. Also, research must investigate teachers' perceptions of Black popular culture before it can be implemented within the schools. Teachers cannot teach youth how to examine Black popular culture if they to do not understand the oppressive social structures embedded within mass media.

Conclusion

> Pedagogy as a critical practice in which students learn to be attentive and responsible to the memories and the narratives of others disappears within corporate and test-driven learning. Unfortunately, the reductive transmission, or banking approach to pedagogy under-scored in Bush's reform cancels out some of the most important aspects of critical teaching: making knowledge relevant to students' lives. (Giroux, 2003, p. 87)

After volunteering for the past 3 years at HCC and spending a year and a half as a researcher, my data have led me to one final conclusion: There is a dire need for critical pedagogy and critical media literacy within the educational system. Over the past 3 years, I have interacted with bright, talented, resourceful, and resilient teens who have changed the way I view the intersections between rap music and education. The findings of this study illustrate that students are not afforded an education that fosters critical thinking about rap music and they internalize negative stereotypes about themselves. This study was not meant to change rap music. It served as a tactic to understand how youth make meaning of rap music and to inform

educators of the ways in which they can provide an education that helps youth deconstruct rap music. I now see the need for critical pedagogy more than ever.

Burbules and Berk (1999) pointed out that "critical pedagogy authors would argue that by helping to make people more critical in thought and action, progressively minded educators can help to free learners to see the world as it is and to act accordingly; critical education can increase freedom and enlarge the scope of human possibilities" (p. 1). There is a lack of the development of critical thinking skills throughout the educational system. Giroux (2003) suggested that our nation's schools are

> bereft of financial support and confronted by myriad problems that include overcrowded classrooms, crumbling school buildings, chronic shortages of classroom materials, demoralized teachers, and budget shortfalls. Many of the nation's schools are in dire straits and can no longer provide a decent, quality education, especially to those children who live in poor rural or urban areas. (p. 72)

These issues impede the learning process and prevent students from developing the skills to become critical of rap music. The current educational system fails to empower urban youth because it does not encourage them to be critical of the rap music. Giroux (1988a) argued that the aim of the critical educator should be "to raise ambitions, desires, and real hope for those who wish to take seriously the issue of educational struggle and social justice" (p. 177). Youth at HCC struggled with their ambitions and desires in the face of rap music, racism, and sexism. According to Giroux, the educational system has the same fears as society has of students of color. Giroux (2003) explained this fear adeptly:

> Schools increasingly resemble prisons, and students begin to look more like criminal suspects who need to be searched, tested, and observed under the watchful eye of administrators who appear to be less concerned with educating them than with policing their every move. Trust and respect now give way to fear, disdain and suspicion. Moreover, this perception of fear and disdain is increasingly being translated into social policies that signal the shrinking of democratic public spheres, the hijacking of civic culture, and the increasing militarization of public space. . . . In many suburban malls young people (especially youth of

color) cannot even shop or walk around without either appropriate identification
cards or in the company of their parents. (p. xvii)

Educators of various races have been led to believe that urban students are incapable of

learning and are destined to a life of crime or poverty. The remarks of youth at HCC about

education and rap music reveal deeply rooted constructions of racism, classism, essentialism, and

White patriarchy. Therefore, by refusing to employ critical pedagogy in our classrooms, we

choose to fail our urban youth while they consume music without the skills to critique and

challenge calculated vehicles of oppression. Critical pedagogy will never be infused into urban

classrooms until Black urban youth are deemed worthy of education rather than incarceration

(Giroux, 2003). Currently, youth are taught in an educational system that is test-driven and based

on minimal competency standards. Alfie Kohn (2000), an outspoken critic of standardized

testing, stated, "In short, our children are tested to an extent that is unprecedented in our history

and unparalleled anywhere else in the world" (p. 2). Sacks (1999) contended that "test-driven

classrooms exacerbate boredom, fear, lethargy, promoting all manners of mechanical behaviors

on the part of teachers, students, and schools, and bleed school children of their natural love of

learning" (pp. 256-257). The critical skills HCC youth used to deconstruct rap music as they

consumed and enjoyed it are astonishing. One would have to wonder the impact it would have if

these students were taught in a school that fostered their critical thinking possibilities.

Additionally, our educational system fails to equip girls with the critical thinking skills to

counter sexually explicit, misogynistic lyrics. Throughout the study, the female participants had

insightful remarks about the state of rap and women in rap. However, they fell short when it

came to their actions because their critical thinking skills were underdeveloped. These girls could

not dismiss the music of Piles and others who degrade women because of their lack of critical

consciousness and their lack of positive female role models who conceptualize societal positions

for Black women other than the video Ho or the Freak. The music of rappers represents more than just music: It represents Black women in problematic raced and gendered ways. The mapping of Black women's representations did not start with rap music, but to Lisa, Dee, Maxine, Lara, Star, and Nicole, this was all they knew. For these girls, the Freak and the Ho represented Black womanhood and determined what they could become.

The study represents a body of knowledge that illuminates the pride, fear, and beliefs of nine Black, urban youth in Atlanta, Georgia, who engaged with rap music as they grew into adulthood. Their beliefs about themselves as people centered on notions of essentialism grounded in negative racial and gender stereotypes. Their words are powerful. The youth address the myriad of issues that they face as they enter the world unprepared, naive, and believing that their role in society is to dance, be promiscuous, dress with little to no clothing, learn from the margins of the classroom, be noncritical, and be defined by rap music.

In conclusion, this study calls for the end of an educational system that does not prepare students to examine rap music or other texts they consume. I am a lover of Hip Hop culture and rap music, and I have acknowledged throughout this study the issues within the music that confront urban, southern, youth from Atlanta, Georgia. With these issues in mind, I am still a teacher, mentor, and researcher who embraces Hip Hop as an art form that expresses the dreams, fantasies, fears, and hopes of Black Americans. The art form of Hip Hop is here to stay; the faces of rappers may change throughout the years, the sounds may fade or amplify, but rap's influence on youth culture is unavoidable. Thus, this study is not meant to be an attack on rap music or rappers; it is a study that attempted to understand youth's perceptions of rap music as aspects of their everyday lives. This study sits within the confines of educational research with the intent to make meaningful suggestions to educational policies that can improve the education of our

youth. Youth need an educational system that is willing to embrace and challenge rap music and not merely persecute youth for their musical preferences.

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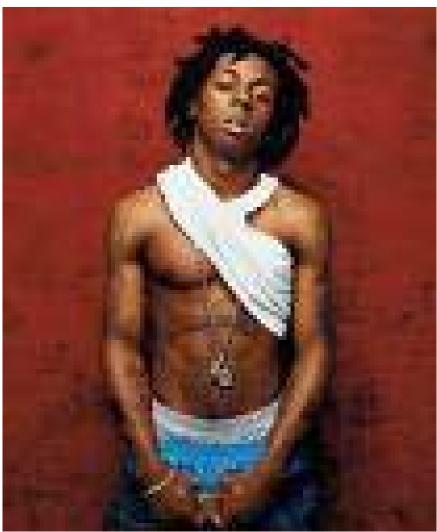
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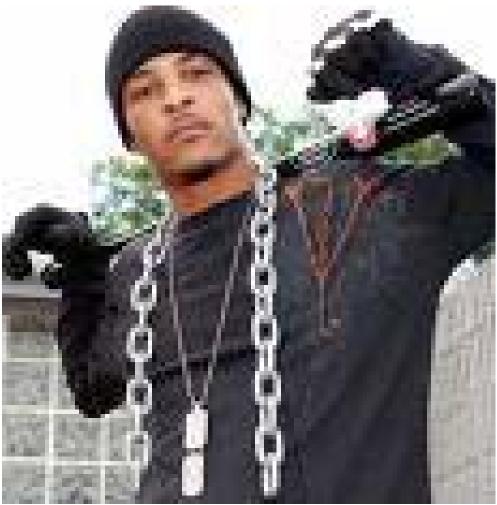
APPENDIXEX

I saw this picture of Lil Wayne on a computer screen at HCC.

Picture of Lil Wayne that was used as a screen saver.

Picture of Destiny Child.

Picture of T.I that the girls at HCC passed around.

A picture of Young Jezzy that was a screen saver.

A picture of a pair of sneakers that the youth passed out during dinner at HCC.

A pic of rapper Plies that the girls of HCC passed around.

A picture of Soulja boy that I observed on a computer screen