

5-2009

# "Hey Young World": Hip-Hop as a Tool for Educational and Rehabilitative Work with Youth

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

**“Hey Young World”<sup>1</sup>**  
Hip-Hop as a Tool for Educational and Rehabilitative Work with Youth

An Honors Thesis  
Presented by  
Heather Day

To the Department of American Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College  
New London, Connecticut  
May 1, 2009

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<sup>1</sup>Slick Rick. “Hey Young World.” *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* Def Jam, 1988.

# “Hey Young World”

## **Hip-Hop as a Tool for Educational and Rehabilitative Work with Youth**

**By Heather Day**

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dean Theresa Ammirati, and my two readers, Professor Audrey Zakriski and Professor David Canton, for all their support, energy, and insight while helping me make this vision of a thesis into a reality. Dean Ammirati, I know that hip-hop is not necessarily “your thing,” (or maybe now it is?) and for this reason it means even more to me that you offered to advise me on this, and approached it with an open mind and sincere interest for the subject at hand.

In addition to my advisor and readers, I have to thank Sarah Barr, Rebecca McCue, Tracee Reiser, Luis Rodriguez-Torres, and all the staff of the Holleran Center and OVCS for encouraging me since freshman year to follow my passions and to take the fullest advantage of my time at Connecticut College to grow as an individual and a community activist. Without the PICA program, this thesis would not have been possible.

I also want to thank three of my most phenomenal professors, Courtney Baker, Jennifer Fredricks, and Mab Segrest, all of whom went above and beyond to support me in my academic and extracurricular endeavors, particularly in the fields of hip-hop scholarship, youth advocacy, and frameworks for social justice, all key themes in my thesis. My thesis is truly a reflection of the cumulative work I have done over my four years at Connecticut College, and for that reason, the above names only scratch the surface of all those who have been influential to my work and to whom I am grateful.

Additionally, I want to thank Bakari Kitwana, Meggan Burnett, and everyone involved in the *Rap Sessions* program, an addendum of sorts to my thesis. Hosting this event at Conn was a wonderful experience for me, and I could not have done it without the tremendous assistance and support that I received from those on and off campus.

I would like to thank my friends who made it cool to be in the library at all hours, and my roommates who kept me sane throughout this long journey, and baked lots of cookies which helped.

Beyond the Connecticut College sphere, I need to thank the staff, women, and children at the many shelters, centers, and afterschool programs where I have worked over the years, and particularly those who I have referenced in this thesis: The ABC Mentors program, the Women’s Center of South Eastern Connecticut, and Art Start.

I owe a very big thank you to my fantastic mother, who trusted her daughter enough to let her listen to hip-hop in middle and high school and then study it in college. Thank you mom, for understanding that hip-hop would not corrupt me, but only serve to enhance my activist work. Additionally, thank you for becoming my unofficial third reader and providing such valuable editing and feedback on my thesis. Thank you also, to the rest of my family, who have also been open and supportive to hearing about the ways that I use this crazy thing called “rap” for something good.

And finally, in the words of hip-hop band The Roots, “Sometimes I wouldn'ta made it if it wasn't for you/Hip-Hop, you the love of my life and that's true!”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Roots. “Act Too Love of My Life.” *Things Fall Apart* Geffen Records, 1999.

## Dedication

I have many to thank for making this thesis possible, but only one group to which I feel a dedication is appropriate. I want to dedicate my thesis to the children I have worked and played with and loved over the years. There are too many to name, and out of respect I cannot name them anyway, but their faces, laughs, struggles, and passions are always with me. This is for the children at the first battered women's shelters where I volunteered and worked in Massachusetts. It is for the pre-teens and young teens that I have counseled, taught, and mentored at summer camps, summer schools, and extracurricular clubs in Western Mass. For the boys and girls at the Connecticut afterschool programs. The adolescents in New York City detention centers, foster homes, homeless shelters and in between. This is for the children in my immediate and extended family, across the country and around the world. All these youth hold a place in my heart. Some are avid hip-hop fans and show it in their shoes, their hair cuts, their slang, their notebooks, and their dance moves. Others may not connect to it as directly, but all are growing up with a need for inspiration, information, creativity, empowerment, love, and justice. To me, this is hip-hop.

I began this study out of a need: a need to do better work. I have seen countless young people struggling to survive physically, mentally and spiritually. These kids need better resources, stronger support, and more affirmation. And so often, hip-hop exists in the background, if not the forefront of their lives, an untapped resource. It has long been a passion of mine as well, and I wanted to examine the ways in which this complex culture and art, hip-hop, could be further taken advantage of to benefit our youth.

The goal of my thesis is to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which hip-hop can be developed into a tool for effective youth education and rehabilitation. I wanted to take something that I loved – hip-hop – and apply it to an issue equally close to my heart – youth development. My hope is that this thesis not only prepares me to be a stronger advocate for young people, but serves as a resource for others doing this work, and contributes meaningfully to a newly developing field of study and practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"People treat Hip Hop like an isolated phenomenon. They don't treat it as a continuum, a history or legacy. And it really is. And like all mediums or movements, it came out of a need."*

-Mos Def, rapper, actor, activist<sup>3</sup>

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed groundbreaking action and development in burgeoning social justice movements and hip-hop culture in America. Hip-Hop took the main stage, following powerful national movements for equal rights and representation for all races, genders, and sexual identities. Today it thrives across the US and internationally, as an art form and commercial endeavor. The term "hip-hop" encompasses the four original elements of graffiti, DJing, break dancing, and rapping, but hip-hop culture has expanded to also influence realms of fashion, film and television, advertising, literature, and athletics. A history of activism has inevitably influenced hip-hop culture as we now know it, and its power for political and social change has many manifestations. Still, there remains tremendous potential for hip-hop to grow as a constructive force for social change.

### *Hip-Hop's Roots in Social Activism*

A review of key activist events in the 1960s and '70s illustrates hip-hop's interconnected history with movements for social change. In 1966, the National Organization for Women formed, followed by the first women's liberation conference, held in Chicago in 1968. 1968 was the same year that the National Abortion Rights

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<sup>3</sup> Def, Mos. "Hip-Hop, Activism, and Social Change." *Change Methods: Hip-Hop Social Change Global Influences*. 2005. Provisions Library Resource Center for Activism and Arts. 1 May 2009 <[http://microsites.provisionslibrary.org/cmethods\\_wrap/hhactivism.html](http://microsites.provisionslibrary.org/cmethods_wrap/hhactivism.html)>.

Action League and the National Welfare Rights Organization were founded, and that Shirley Chisholm became the first black woman elected to the US Congress. The Civil Rights Act was passed and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, two extraordinary community and political leaders, were assassinated. Hip-Hop journalist and author Jeff Chang writes that 1968 “is the year that riots break out in Chicago, Washington D.C., [and] Cincinnati. The anti-war movement and the black power movement are at their peak.” In the Bronx, New York, Chang continues, “heroin floods the streets, the gangs come back and the fires begin” (“Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop Q + A”). A gang named “The Savage Seven” established itself in the East Bronx, and in 1973, with the leadership of gang member-turned-DJ, Afrika Bambaata, The Savage Seven transformed into the hip-hop influenced activist organization, “The Zulu Nation.”

1973 was the same year that Clive Campbell, having migrated to the US from Jamaica in 1967, hosted the first hip-hop block party. Known as “DJ Kool Herc,” Campbell opened the door for other hip-hop DJs, including DJ Lovebug Starsky, who coined the genre name, “Hip-Hop” in 1974. While the Bronx boogied down in ‘73, the first US battered women’s shelters opened in Tucson, Arizona and St. Paul Minnesota and Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* established a woman’s right to abortion. In the late 60’s and through the 1970’s the American Indian, Asian American, Chicano, and Gay and Lesbian Rights movements, as well as the Young Lords Organization, emerged on a national level. Hip-Hop was birthed at the end of the Civil Rights Era and grew and developed alongside the major landmarks of the women’s rights movement and other cultural movements for liberation. It was only natural that this new music and culture would contain elements of previous movements, often “remixed” to speak to a new

generation's own concerns, but maintaining the overarching goal (although the degree of intentionality is debatable) of creating change.

### *Hip-Hop as a Social Justice Movement*

Music has long functioned as a valuable element of social movements (Trapp). It fosters support, and organizes and educates people in both open and subversive manners. Erin Trapp describes what she calls “the push and pull of hip-hop;” its ability to push political systems and mainstream culture for change, as well as pull members into their movement to take action (1482). Social movements theorist Alberto Melucci states that “contemporary movements...force power out into the open and give it a shape and a face. They speak a language that seems to be entirely their own, but they say something that transcends their popularity and speaks to us all” (qtd. by Trapp, 1483). Hip-Hop exposes the hypocrisy in America's proud democracy, critiquing oppression and the lack of equal opportunities for disenfranchised members of the country. It is an investigation, and an indictment. Tupac Shakur (2Pac), now a hip-hop legend, accomplished this through an integration of soapbox style oration with rapping on his first album. In a song titled “Words of Wisdom,” 2Pac proclaimed:

This is definitely, ahhh, words of wisdom!  
AMERIKA, AMERIKA, AMERIKKKA  
I charge you with the crime of rape, murder, and assault  
For suppressing and punishing my people  
I charge you with robbery for robbing me of my history  
I charge you with false imprisonment for keeping me  
Trapped in the projects  
And the jury finds you guilty on all accounts  
And you are to serve the consequences of your evil schemes

Music is a tool for mass communication and, as a creative medium, fosters a space for independent thinking and the articulation of new and sometimes revolutionary ideas. It is often the medium seized by marginalized people to make their voices heard and messages understood. Trapp cites Doug McAdam who describes social movements as “a double-edged sword of threat and opportunity...[That is,] how disadvantaged actors rise above their subordinate place to respond to threats by exploiting opportunities, using nontraditional means of social protest to form a movement” (1483). Hip-Hop is one such “nontraditional means of social protest.” Hip-Hop is the phoenix that rose from the ashes, or as 2pac titled one of his best known poems, “the rose that grew from concrete.” From economically devastated and socially dismissed ghettos, there developed a music and culture, a resourceful and determined art form and political tool.

Hip-Hop can be better understood by contextualizing it within a history of activist organizations and social movements. However the hip-hop generation has developed a unique approach to this work. Differentiating the hip-hop activist movement from the more readily recognized civil rights movement, Chang explains that hip-hop activism “largely took place below the national radar. Capitol Hill’s diminished powers, big money lobbying and campaign financing...made it a less likely place than ever to go to get a problem solved...The life-and-death struggles were happening at the local level” (454). Derrick P. Alridge further clarifies this new strategy, observing that the hip-hop generation does not have a singular leader such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcom X, but instead “serve[s] in a “mass” leadership role that is not as easily identifiable or vulnerable to forces such as [those] that brought down black leadership during the [Civil

Rights Movement]” (233). This is to say that those who may not recognize hip-hop as a unified political force are having the exact reaction that the hip-hop movement desires.

Hip-Hop’s leaders are a broad-based amalgamation of artists, hip-hop entrepreneurs, scholars, and enthusiasts. In the 1980’s and 90’s, rap music spread rapidly across the country, showcasing its capacity for powerful social protest and quickly building this people power. Alridge explains that “in many ways, early hip-hoppers were not only the progenitors of a new form of black social critique – they also represented the voice of a new generation that would carry on and expand upon the ideas and ideology of the civil rights generation” (226). These two decades ushered in bold artists with important political messages in their music, including Public Enemy (“Fight the Power”), NWA (“Fuck tha Police”), 2Pac (“Keep Ya Head Up”), Dead Prez (“They Schools”), and KRS-One’s Stop the Violence Collective (“Self Destruction”). Female MC’s such as Salt N Peppa, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Lauryn Hill also made their mark towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, representing both strength and sensuality.

By the start of the new millennium, hip-hop had established itself on a national level as a voice for the people, organizing during the 2000 and 2004 elections and holding national conferences to address pressing social issues. However despite its activist roots and continued political presence, the genre has long been riddled with hypocrisy and has faced criticism for frivolity and negative messages. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a natural progression of hip-hop’s existing activism is foreseeable to address diverse issues such as violence, racism, poverty, and sexism– through a variety of mediums and environments. This thesis will focus primarily on violence and sexism, although all of the above issues are inevitably interconnected.

Hip-hop, too often the scapegoat blamed for creating or perpetuating aggression and misogyny, can and must be further developed as a tool for positive social change, starting with young people. The language of hip-hop uniquely resonates with many young people, achieving what past movements have for their youth in a newly relevant manner (Aldridge). In the last nine years, a variety of innovative programs have formed to mentor young people, interrupt cycles of violence, and utilize the power of hip-hop culture in reaching and teaching children and teens. Through an examination of hip-hop's influence on youth (Chapter 1), followed by a chapter devoted to hip-hop's healing potential (Chapter 2) and another exploring hip-hop's teaching potential (Chapter 3), this thesis aims to make interdisciplinary connections and further cultivate hip-hop's potential as a social movement.

### *The State of Our Youth – Hardship and Hip-Hop's Influence*

Chapter 1 will review existing studies on the relationship between youth exposure to hip-hop music and attitudes and behaviors regarding gender, violence, and activism. Examining the powerful impact that hip-hop has on young people, this chapter will lay the foundation for preceding arguments on the importance of formulating hip-hop into an constructive intervention tool. A brief review of the challenges faced by American youth displays the need for such a tool.

Young people in the United States face shockingly high levels of violent victimization and poverty, and show alarming drop-out rates in high school, which puts them at an even greater risk for additional victimization and continued economic difficulties. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) reports that a total of 5.2

million non-fatal violent crimes (rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) were committed against persons 12 and older in 2007, and that persons under 25 were victimized more frequently than any other age demographic:

1. Teenagers between 16 and 19 years of age experienced more than double the rate of victimization of the general population. NCVS reported an overall rate of 20.7 per 1,000 persons, while the rate for this age group was 50.1 per 1,000.
2. Youth between 12 and 15 years of age were the second most frequently victimized aged group (43.4/1000).
3. Young adults 20-24 years of age were the third most frequent victims of crime (35.2/1000) (Snyder and Sickmund).

Youth who witness victimization in their schools, homes, and communities have also been reported to show similar symptoms as those who experience violence directly. This includes internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety, as well as external symptoms such as aggression and anti-social behavior (Rosario, Salzinger, Feldman, and Ng-Mak).

Juvenile victimization and perpetration of criminal offenses are also positively correlated with poverty, and young people continue to comprise a disproportionate percentage of the low-income population. In 2002, one in six juveniles lived in poverty, with black and Latino youth again experiencing disproportionately high rates. OJJDP reports that although youth poverty has significantly declined since its 1993 peak, it still remains considerably higher than that of older Americans (Snyder and Sickmund).

Young people also struggle with substance abuse and mental health problems. The 2003 *Monitoring the Future* study reported that 51% of all high school seniors had

tried illicit drugs. This figure was 41% for 10th graders and 23% for 8th graders (Snyder and Sickmund). Furthermore, in 2002, youth aged 7–17 “were about as likely to be victims of suicide as they [were] to be victims of homicide” according to OJJDP (Snyder and Sickmund, 25). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health and Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that 13% of children and teens ages 9 to 17 experience some form of anxiety disorder; and almost half of these youth experience “a second anxiety disorder or other mental or behavioral disorder, such as depression.” SAMHSA reports that between 2% and 8% of adolescents experience depression, and the University of Michigan Depression Center adds that the likelihood for depression greatly increases as children transition into their adolescence (“About Depression”).

Just this brief overview of challenges facing today’s youth shows that there are staggering injustices and barriers to healthy development impacting young lives every day. Often it is low-income black and Latino youth who face the highest level of victimization in schools and communities. Hip-Hop is influential in the lives of many young people, and is particularly relevant to children in this demographic, who may grow up with parents playing hip-hop music (because they are of the original hip-hop generation), and may identify with the rappers who themselves come from similar communities facing similar struggles. Chapter 1 of this thesis will further examine the extent of this influence, and the ways in which hip-hop can the reinforce negativity as well as be a pathway to rehabilitation. Instead of fighting against hip-hop, many scholars and youth advocates suggest instead formulating it into an asset. As Don Elligan, author of *Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide for*

*Communicating With Youth and Young Adults Through Rap Music*, reasons:

“interventions with youth must acknowledge the prevalence and influence of trauma, peer pressure, and drugs on the development of youth and young adults.

Interestingly, these are also common themes discussed in music listened to by youth” (11). Three and a half decades of statistics show that these threats to young lives persist (Snyder and Sickmund). Hip-Hop provides a multitude of opportunities to generate new creative and culturally relevant solutions.

### *Hip-Hop Heals*

Chapter 2 will place hip-hop alongside the recognized creative arts therapies, examining the ways through which it helps accomplish the goals of rehabilitative work. This chapter will review existing programs as well as explore new developments for the burgeoning field of hip-hop therapy. In addition to viewing hip-hop as a descendent of the Civil Rights Movement, Alridge also locates it within the Blues tradition which he describes as “both a way [for rural black southerners to] interpret... their experience (explaining reality and change) and a means of coping successfully with the oppressive conditions of their lives” (234-5). Young people suffer daily from societal inequality and personal stressors and rap music presents a way to process, voice, and cope with these challenging experiences. Economically and emotionally, hip-hop offers a way out, if not at the least, a way through. Kristine Wright suggests that it serves “both as an expression of and an alternative to the urban woes plaguing [young people’s] lives” (1).

Hip-Hop arts often serve as youth’s primary positive coping tool when they are lacking other venues for support (Tyson and Baffour). It works as a therapeutic art form

through which one may find affirmation, inspiration, and clarity in the face of struggle. Elligan explains that “[an] interest in rap music can be seen as a strength that many youth have that is often overlooked and not utilized by those working with them to promote positive change in their lives” (viii, “Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide”). By cultivating this strength, therapists, as well as educators, and all youth advocates, may forge stronger relationships with young clients, building a rapport that will positively impact their work together.

Elligan argues that therapists should approach clients from “an area of familiarity and acceptance of their environmental circumstances (ix, “Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide”).” In the song “Joy,” rapper Talib Kweli insightfully rhymes about the struggles young people face, often unable to articulate them or be heard doing so. Kweli echoes Elligan’s call for connecting with youth in their own medium:

We gave the youth all the anger, it's just  
we ain't taught them, how to express it, and so it's dangerous  
You can't talk to them  
unless your language is relating to what they going through  
So busy ignoring them, you can't see what they showing you.

Hip-Hop is an art form and political organizing tool through which young people can constructively express themselves and begin to engage in transformative work.

Additionally, it is the language through which advocates like may begin allying forming intergenerational alliances, listening to and speaking with young people, and supporting them through all challenges and endeavors.

*Hip-Hop Teaches*

Finally, Chapter 3 of this thesis will focus on existing hip-hop education programs and the potential for further development of this field. Like therapists who view their clients' interests in rap as a strength, teachers too, can achieve greater success with students once they recognize the relevancy of hip-hop in many youths' lives and begin to integrate it into their teaching practices. Hip-Hop naturally provides a space for out-of-classroom learning and skill building, and this is beginning to be brought into the traditional classroom as well. There, it fosters community and play, two crucial elements to healthy learning and development (Weinsten; Ladson-Billings). Furthermore, hip-hop is a means through which traditionally disenfranchised students may be empowered and encouraged to succeed in their classrooms. Derrick P. Alridge commends artists such as Nas, A Tribe Called Quest, and Lauryn Hill, for making an effort to "put forward an educational philosophy for liberation in their work" (241). Music by artists such as these offers direct resources for education, while other elements of hip-hop may be incorporated into classwork in a number of creative ways to fulfill theories of culturally relevant teaching and reach students who are often marginalized by traditional educational practices.

Students of color are frequently subjected to discriminatory and culturally hegemonic educational methods which decrease their self-confidence and interest in classroom learning. Research has shown that African-American males in particular, are subjected to disproportionate disciplinary measures as well as teacher and administrative biases, and overwhelmingly Eurocentric curricula (Kunjufu). In effect, they have been statistically shown to perform worse in school than their female peers and peers of other races, evidenced in test-scores, trends in tracking, and drop-out rates.

Anthony Lemmelle describes black culture as “inextricably linked to resistance and protest” and this may come into play when black males perceive the injustice and irrationality of their school system and push back (qtd. in Bowser 97-8). Unfortunately such resistance often takes destructive and self destructive forms, which further perpetuate the cycle of criminalization (Kunjufu). Ronnie Hopkins asks:

If indeed [this] resistance and rejection of public schooling and mainstream culture provides autonomy and a sense of liberation, how can parents and educators who are interested in guiding American African males redirect their resistance to yield ‘successful’ and productive world citizenship and assist them in realizing their power, autonomy, and liberation (81-2)?

Resistance can be figured as a positive attribute when presented in an intentional and contextualized manner. Because hip-hop has historically functioned as an intervention in dominant discourse and as a rebellious voice against stereotypes and injustice, it serves as a valuable framework for channeling students’ resistance. While it is popular among young people of all races and socio-economic backgrounds, it is rooted in urban communities of color and continues to serve as testimony for the lives of many black and brown low-income youth. With a recognition of this history, Scherpf defines “rap pedagogy” as “a space of resistance to domination and in which the voices of pluralistic democracy and citizenship can be cultivated” (76). In other words, it allows for a truly democratic expression of diverse beliefs and concerns, working as the underdog to empower the traditionally disempowered.

In the classroom, students’ resistance can be developed to draw out themes of social action and participatory democracy (Scherpf 78). Educating students on the history

of hip-hop arts as resistance, and integrating songs such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (one of hip-hop's first protest political songs) along with contemporary resistance rap, allows for this and does so with a medium that is culturally relevant for many African-American and low-income urban youth.

### Conclusion

This interdisciplinary thesis examines an artistic medium through a political lens, and attempts to address political issues through artistic means. This is a study of education, which takes a decidedly anti-oppression perspective, and a study of therapy, which posits that pop culture may be the starting place for healing. Drawing on such disciplines as history, sociology, human development, women's studies, education, psychology, and English, this thesis will examine the ways in which hip-hop both "reflects and shapes" society at large and youth culture specifically (Trapp 1493). What follows is an examination of the macro, meso, and micro levels of social problems impacting youth and the effect of music in mediating this impact, as well as close readings of hip-hop songs, and reviews of student responses and writings from the author's own fieldwork. It is hoped that this study will prove useful to those who wish to continue working with increasing efficacy on behalf of young people, and who, like this author, believe that the arts provide the key to doing so successfully.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**Hip-Hop's Influence on Youth and its Potential for Intervention: A Literature Review**

*Now who's these king of these rude ludicrous lucrative lyrics?  
Who could inherit the title, put the youth in hysterics?  
Usin' his music to steer it, sharin' his views and his merits  
But there's a huge interference - they're sayin' you shouldn't hear it  
Maybe it's hatred I spew, maybe it's food for the spirit  
Maybe it's beautiful music I made for you to just cherish  
But I'm debated disputed hated and viewed in America  
as a motherfucking drug addict - like you didn't experiment?*

- Eminem, "Renegade"<sup>4</sup>

Introduction

Hip-Hop, which began as a countercultural movement by low-income urban youths, has, over the past three decades, become a leading force in popular culture and a multi-billion dollar-a-year industry supporting a select number of celebrity rappers and many behind-the-scenes corporate executives (Watson). Its mainstreaming has resulted in an increased accessibility to, and influence on young people. Unfortunately, this commercialization has also resulted in the manipulation of messages and images for profit. Popular songs and videos, particularly since the late 1990's, have relied on misogyny, materialism, and hypermasculinity to gain radio play and sell albums (Hurt, "Issue Brief: Hip-Hop" 1). Hip-Hop has received considerable criticism because of these messages and their young target age group (Sullivan). However, numerous organizations

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<sup>4</sup> Eminem. "Renegade." *The Blueprint* Roc-A-Fella Records, 2001.

and individuals are beginning to recognize the ways in which hip-hop's artistic nature and cultural relevancy also make it a viable tool for positive youth development endeavors in educational and rehabilitative environments. This review explores hip-hop (primarily rap music) as an influential element of popular culture with the potential to instigate destructive habits but also the power to foster positive change amongst today's young people.

### *Who listens to rap?*

Hip-Hop music was once a challenge to find, and a treasure to discover, in select record stores or at independent street shops. Today it is readily available through nationwide retailers and in digital music catalogs. High numbers of American youth, across racial demographics, now report frequent exposure to the music. *The Black Youth Project*, a 2005 study on African American youth, found that 58% of black youth and 45% of Hispanic youth said they listened to rap music every day (compared to 23% of white youth). Twenty-five percent of black youth reported watching rap music programming on television daily compared to 18% of Hispanic youth and 5% of white youth. Despite these relatively low percentages for white youth, only 19% reported never listening to rap music, and according to the Simmons Lathan Media Group, 80% of hip-hop consumers are white (Cohen; Watson).

Some rap music continues to target those who suffer the intertwined injustices of racism and poverty. Studies have found that a segment of black listeners enjoy this music as a reflection of their own lived experiences (Krohn and Suazo). White youth may be intrigued for different reasons. Sullivan's 2003 study of adolescent attitudes about rap by

race concluded that many white rap fans listened as a risk-free way to experiment with an idea of black culture. She suggests that “(r)ap may allow white adolescents to satisfy their curiosities without ever having face-to-face contact or interpersonal relationships with any African Americans (617). Bakari Kitwana, author of, “Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop,” suggests numerous reasons for what he calls, “the rise of white youth obsession with hip-hop,” including a desire to ally themselves with a political movement, insecurities about their own white culture, and a genuine love for the art form, which is increasingly marketed towards them (36). While race may significantly impact young people’s motivation for listening to rap, a review of the available literature concludes that exposure has important effects on youth of all races and on young women as well as young men.

Rap music is pervasive in American society and accessible to youth of all ages; however, older listeners may be more impacted by some of the lyrics’ messages (Mahiri and Conner; Barongan and Hall). Pamela D. Hall examined differences by age in recall and recognition of four different categories of rap defined for the purpose of the study – “political,” “hip-hop,” “mainstream,” and “gangster.” Her study concluded that mainstream rap was the easiest to for all youth to understand, while gangster rap was better comprehended by the older group (ages 10-12) than the younger (ages 7-9). Mainstream rap is also the most accessible subgenre, frequently played on radio and shown on television, through music videos.

### *Hip-Hop’s Impact on Youth Concepts of Violence and Aggression*

Gangsta rap’s popularization in the early 1990s caused the entire hip-hop music genre to come under fire by popular media, certain white politicians, and some older black activists (Sullivan). They focused on elements of misogyny, materialism, and glorification of violence, including violence directed at police and at White America (figured as an oppressive institution). Young people continue to be exposed to numerous forms of violence, and many critics still argue that hip-hop only contributes to this victimization.

An Office of Justice Programs chart of violent crime rates by age of victim from 1973 to 2006 shows that youth and young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 have consistently faced the highest risk for victimization, with the 16-19 age group most frequently experiencing the highest rates of violence. Although overall victimization has decreased since the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of young people still experience violence and the subsequent trauma each year. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) reports that juveniles (persons under 18) were “the victims in 10% of murders, 70% of sexual assaults, 11% of robberies, and 17% of aggravated assaults reported to law enforcement” in 2006 (Snyder and Sickmund **print**).

Unfortunately, many youth are not only victims, but perpetrators of criminal offenses, as shown in this chart produced by the OJJDP .

While there are many factors that influence juvenile delinquency, OJJDP reported that the

**The prevalence of problem behavior among juveniles differs by gender, race, and age**

Behavior	Proportion of youth reporting ever engaging in the behavior by age 17					
	All youth	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic
Suspended from school	33%	42%	24%	28%	56%	38%
Ran away from home	18	17	20	18	21	17
Belonged to a gang	8	11	6	7	12	12
Vandalized	37	47	27	39	33	34
Theft less than \$50	43	47	38	44	38	41
Theft more than \$50	13	16	10	12	15	14
Assaulted with intent to seriously hurt	27	33	21	25	36	28
Sold drugs	16	19	12	17	13	16
Carried a handgun	16	25	6	16	15	15

“most closely related factor was the presence of friends or family members in gangs” (Snyder and Sickmund 72). A 2004 survey estimated a total of 24,000 youth gangs with 760,000 members. Youth with close connections to gangs were “least 3 times more likely to report having engaged in vandalism, a major theft, a serious assault, carrying a handgun, and selling drugs. They were also about 3 times more likely to use hard drugs and to run away from home” (Snyder and Sickmund 72).

Protective buffers included involvement in school or work. Youth who lack these connections are at a greater risk for engaging in these and other dangerous activities. In the year 2000, half a million young people dropped out of school, with dropout rates for Latino and black youth more than double those of their white and Asian peers (Snyder and Sickmund).

With many youth already at-risk for victimization, some critics of violent rap allege that its lyrical content is an additional assault. Such criticisms are often based on the lyrical content of many rap albums. Charis E. Kubrin examined the lyrics to over 400 songs from platinum selling rap albums released between 1992 and 2000, identifying trends in lyrical content, and found that 65% referenced a willingness to fight or use violence and 35% endorsed concepts of retaliation. Critics argue that, in addition to reinforcing negative attitudes, youth may seek to emulate the violent behavior about which these rappers rhyme (Hansen).

A correlation has been found between exposure to various forms of violent media and an increase in youth and adult violent behavior (Johnson, Jackson and Gatto). It is understandable then, that exposure to violent hip-hop would show this same correlation. Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto’s pioneering 1995 study divided a group of young African-

American males into three groups, exposing one to violent rap music videos, another to nonviolent rap music videos, and a third group to no music videos (controls).

Researchers gave each group two vignettes, the first of which detailed the story of a man who discovered that his girlfriend had kissed another man and responded violently to her and then to the other man as well. The researchers assessed participant responses to this vignette and found that “subjects in the violent exposure conditions expressed greater acceptance of the use of violence” (27). This group also exhibited higher probability to engage in violence and expressed a greater acceptance of the use of violence toward the woman in the vignette. Studies by Hansen and by Greeson and Williams have found similar correlations between exposure to violent music videos and youth aggression. These studies assessed participants’ reactions directly or soon after exposure to the material, therefore it is unclear whether they implicate long-term negative effects.

Additional studies have determined that rap music may have a more deleterious effect on adolescent behavior than other musical genres, negatively impacting violent attitudes and behavior as well as other aspects of youth’s lifestyles. Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington and Davies interviewed and surveyed 522 African American adolescent females. They found that adolescents with greater exposure to sexual stereotypes in rap music videos were more likely to engage in binge drinking, test positive for marijuana, have multiple sexual partners, and have a negative body image” (1-2). In another study using a test group of 1000+ majority non-white community college students in California, it was determined ,that adolescents who listened to rap music were more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol and to engage in aggressive behavior than were those who listened to other genres of music (Chen). It is unclear from these

studies, however, if the music motivated these actions or if youth already engaging in this behavior were then attracted to the genre. Chen reflects that, in the latter case, the content of much rap music may not cause but does reinforce youth's positive attitudes towards this destructive behavior.

Other scholars have attempted to contextualize the violence in hip-hop and youth involvement by considering the socio-historical factors that impact the genre and affiliated urban black culture (Kubrin). This approach considers what Kubrin calls "the street code," which is an alternative understanding of cultural rules developed by young African-American males in low-income urban communities. It is a response to popular media representations of power and to the experience of institutional and community violence and stress. Kubrin explains:

...[T]he the extreme, concentrated disadvantage and isolation of black inner-city communities coupled with the quantity and potency of drugs and availability of guns have created a situation unparalleled in American history...[G]iven the bleak conditions, black youth in disadvantaged communities have created a local social order complete with its own code and authenticity (363).

This code includes a respect for violence and being violent – most often with a gun – to gain respect, build reputation and avenge wrongs committed against one or one's friends or gang. It also includes an affinity for material wealth, sexual promiscuity and dominance as behavior that builds social status. While this code is certainly not descriptive of the behaviors or values of all inner-city black males, it provides a useful framework for understanding some of the reasons and rationale for the existence of gangsta rap and its black (as opposed to the also existent white) fan base.

Kubrin asserts that rap music's advocacy of the above values is more than just a *reflection* of the street code.; to vocalize this code is to recognize, make sense of, and validate an alternative social order and the lifestyle and people it represents. She writes, "The lyrics...provide sometimes graphically detailed instructions for how to interpret violent, degrading conduct and in doing so create possibilities for social identity in relation to violence" (365). The music becomes a medium for urban adolescents and young adults to articulate and sometimes embrace experiences with violence. In doing so, gangsta rap cannot be said to cause aggression; however, it may justify and reinforce it, affirming violent masculinities.

This contextualized understanding of gangsta rap provides a more nuanced perspective of its oft-lambasted weaknesses. In critiquing violent hip-hop, one must be careful to not further stigmatize or scapegoat urban black youth (Mahiri and Conner). A non-biased critique of gangsta rap and rap in general allows for the rappers' testimonies to be heard, and the issues they confront in their music to be taken seriously. As Richardson and Scott eloquently write, the "verbalizations of violence calls attention to structural and cultural injustices of the larger social system in America... Amidst the despair, gangsta rap breathes life into the inequities substantiated in statistical data and perpetrated against Black urban youth" (188).

It is important to acknowledge and confront the avoidance tactic of scapegoating hip-hop, and place equal, if not greater, responsibility on America's institutional practices and a national culture of violence. Misogyny in the entertainment industry is often explained by the quick phrase, "sex sells," and glorification of violence can be similarly understood as existing on a supply and demand basis. Hip-Hop artists have capitalized

on America's fascination with violence (perhaps black male violence especially). Individuals and organizations that wish to see hip-hop become less violent must first confront this broader problem (Richardson and Scott; Sullivan).

### *Hip-Hop's Effects on Youth Concepts of Gender and Sexuality*

Hip-Hop has the potential to denounce violence, but often reinforces it. Similarly, it has the ability to empower women, but often perpetuates their degradation. Gender and sexuality politics are often the basis of criticism against hip-hop, due to the rampant misogyny in many songs and videos. When Kubrin coded 400 + rap songs to identify their elements of street code ideology, 22% reflected objectification of women. Although this is the lowest percentage of all street code elements analyzed, the figure still represents almost one in four rap songs, and it is arguable that with the increased focus on materialism in 21<sup>st</sup> century rap, the prevalence of women-as-commodity has only increased (Kubrin).

In a 2007 article in *Ebony* magazine titled "Sex, Violence, Disrespect: What Hip-Hop Has Done to Black Women," Dr. Johnetta Betsch Cole, president of Bennett College for Women and president emerita of Spelman, two historically black colleges, admits that hip-hop is connected to patriarchal values of American culture but still holds it responsible for its rampant degradation of black women. Dr. Cole argues:

The lyrics and the images [in hip-hop] – and attitudes that undergird them – are potentially extremely harmful to Black girls and women in a culture that is already negative about our humanity, our sexuality and our overall worth. They are harmful to Black boys and men because they encourage misogynistic attitudes

and behaviors, and misogyny – woman hating – is not in the interest of men no less than women (94).

She theorizes that black men, oppressed by overarching American institutions, direct anger, hostility, and a need for control at black girls and women. Cole expresses concern for the future of black relationships and black families, if the destructive gender discourse of gangsta rap and mainstream rap prevails. She recommends that black people initiate reform by “[finding] ways to counter the low self-esteem that plagues many young people to the point where they demean themselves with words and images that are as powerful as shackles, whips and nooses” (96).

Other black female scholars express similar concern for the sexism in hip-hop transferring to unhealthy relationships between black men and women. Joan Morgan, a self-identified “hip-hop feminist” draws the comparison between hip-hop’s degradation of women and an abusive relationship between a black man and woman, where hip-hop is the abuser of the black woman, who continues trying to love it/him, as a part of her community. Morgan explains that she remains involved in hip-hop partially because “it takes us straight to the battlefield” of understanding black men’s sexism, as well as their anger and pain. Morgan asserts that “the seemingly impenetrable wall of sexism and machismo in rap music is really the mask worn both to hide and to express the pain...Hip hop is the only forum in which young black men, no matter how surreptitiously, are allowed to express their pain at all” (154). Morgan emphasizes that hip-hop, in its conflicted and abusive state, creates an opportunity to articulate this hurt, gain an understanding of it, and then begin to heal. She adds that it is not only black men who need to reevaluate themselves and their role in oppressing women. Women, too, she

declares, “need a space to lovingly address our failing self-esteem, the ways we sexualize and objectify ourselves, our confusion about sex and love, and the unhealthy, unloving, unsisterly ways we treat each other” ( 156).

Emerson expresses this view as well, stating that young people’s everyday lives and identity development are impacted by pop culture, negatively as well as positively. She asserts that “young Black women use popular culture to negotiate social existence and attempt to express independence, self-reliance, and agency” (115). In a 1998 study of fifty-six rap and R&B music videos, Emerson analyzed the empowering, degrading, and ambivalent representations of black women. She concluded that the videos most frequently emphasized black women’s bodies, represented black women as one-dimensional, and often filmed the female performers alongside male “sponsors” whose assumed legitimacy validated the women. However, Emerson also notes a number of positive music video portrayals of women, which included celebration of blackness, representations of women as independent and vocal, and examples of collaboration, unity, and healthy familial relations between black woman and men. Emerson found a frequent “juxtaposition of sexuality, assertiveness, and independence in the videos” (130). This suggests that hip-hop artists are in fact multidimensional and do not need to isolate their minds or their bodies exclusively, but can express both simultaneously.

Hip-Hop music contains problematic and challenging messages in relation to gender, and while this raises concern by many, others have recognized the genre’s potential as a medium through which to tackle difficult conversations. Music videos, for example, can serve as a valuable reference point to engage youth in discussion of race, gender, and sexual stereotypes. Stephens and Few researched young African American

adolescents' ideas about African American women's sexuality through an examination of eight sexual images – the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama (Stephens and Few). These terms are relevant within hip-hop linguistics and culture, and the images connote related ideologies about various identities. For this reason, the researchers utilized them to “[identify], “the meanings and values African American youth give to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, beauty, and interpersonal relationships in the context of sexuality” (254).

The study theorized that frequent exposure to hip-hop music and images of this nature directly impacted young African American's development and behaviors. The results varied by gender; both young boys and girls viewed lighter skin (portrayed more frequently and positively in music videos and mainstream media) to be more attractive. Girls did not acknowledge a personal preference for lighter skin, but commented that boys and men often prefer it. Similarly, some girls expressed an appreciation for non-westernized hair styles such as those worn by artists in the “Earth Mother” category; however, they clarified that they would not adopt the style as their own because boys did not like it. Girls also assumed that the boys were sexually attracted to the “Freak” and “Diva” images and felt pressured to be like those characters if they wanted attention from boys.

In fact, the majority of boys interviewed by Stephens and Few found the Diva image the most attractive. They note that this image is “projected as having Westernized features: long, straight hair, slim nose, slender body, and lighter skin. These features were all cited by the boys as attractive” (256). Boys also responded positively to more curvaceous body types, and tended to fragment women's body parts, when discussing

what they found attractive. Both of these findings reflect trends in hip-hop media: hip-hop magazines glorify (as well as objectify) curvaceous bodies and many hip-hop videos film in ways which fragment these bodies.

While this study reveals some damaging influences of hip-hop media on young African-American youth's concepts of beauty, research also demonstrates that hip-hop can be a valuable tool to engage youth in important dialogue about body image and sexuality. As a culturally relevant medium, it allowed them to discuss difficult topics more accessibly.

#### *Hip-Hop's Effects on Youth Dating Violence and Sexual Aggression*

The national culture of violence described by researchers and other scholars contributes to violence on the America's streets as well as in homes and in romantic relationships. Rap music has been the target of criticism regarding street violence as well as sexism and sexually-violent lyrics. Squires, Kohn-Wood, Chavous and Carter summarize current statistics for sexual assault and rape amongst teenagers:

Recent surveys from the Centers for Disease Control and data from the National Institute of Justice reveal that 11.9% of high school girls have been sexually assaulted, and 20% of high school girls reported being physically or sexually abused by a boyfriend (Centers for Disease Control, 2004; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, and Hathaway). Additionally, other national surveys report that 40% of girls aged 14- 17 reported knowing someone who had been assaulted by a boyfriend, and 32% of women who reported experiencing rape at some time in their lives were

12 – 17 years old when it occurred (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998) (725).

Researchers have explored the extent to which rap music may influence this abusive behavior, and positive correlations have been determined in several of these studies.

Barongan and Hall identify the misogyny within pornography and note that music classifiable as pornographic is not restricted from younger consumers in the way that pornographic films and magazines are. Furthermore, while other musical genres such as rock and heavy metal have been studied to reveal a negative, sexist impact on listeners, these genres are not as focused on lyrics as is hip-hop. For that reason, the effects of listening to sexual-violent hip-hop may have more serious effects listeners' ideas and behavior (Barongan and Hall).

Their study exposed a group of fifty-four, mostly white, college men to either violent or neutral rap music. All participants watched three video vignettes: the first portrayed a neutral condition between a man and a woman, the second portrayed sexual-violent condition, and the third, an assaultive condition. Participants were then asked to pick one to show to a female member of the research team who they were told was a fellow participant. 30% of the men who had listened to the violent rap showed the assaultive vignette while only 7% of the men exposed to the neutral rap showed this or the sexual-violent vignette. The men identified the woman's reaction as upset and uncomfortable, although she had been instructed not to react. This action could thusly be interpreted as intentional aggression on the male's part because he had shown her something that he knew would be harmful and believed this response had been achieved,

despite the woman's actual neutrality. The researchers concluded that exposure to violent rap made men more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behavior.

Another study by Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, and Reed examined the impact of exposure to rap music videos that sexually subordinated women but was not sexually violent. Thirty African American men and thirty African American women all between the ages of eleven and sixteen from an inner city youth club in the south were recruited for the study. After having watched either a selection of rap videos or no videos (control group), the researchers posed the same scenario used by Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto study, and assessed male and female attitudes about the vignette's main character using violence against his girlfriend. Men who had watched the videos did not show increased acceptance of dating violence in comparison to the males in the control group; however, the men's group overall had begun the study with higher levels of acceptance to dating violence than had the women. Exposure to the videos brought women's acceptance of teen dating violence up to the level of the men's acceptance, while the women in the control group maintained lower levels of acceptance.

The results of this study and Barongan and Hall's show that both expressly violent and non-violent but sexually exploitative rap music and videos have damaging effects on adolescents. Like Stephens and Few, Squires et al., recognized the relevant gender and violence issues in hip-hop, and then capitalized on the popularity of the medium and used it as a platform to engage youth in conversations about sexual and dating violence and gender roles. They conducted interviews with thirty-five African-American and biracial (one African-American parent) fourteen to seventeen year olds and probed the students for their views on women and men's sexual representations and

responsibility in sexual and dating violence. The three emerging themes were that 1) women were considered equally if not more responsible than men for abusive relationships and being abused; 2) both boys and girls “held a low opinion of most women in the world of hip-hop” due to their overt sexuality; and 3) some female students were ambivalent about the images of women in hip-hop (730). The researchers add, “Their discussion ... implied that women must observe a line between being too sexy and remaining feminine, yet staying strong. If a woman did not find the right balance, she was faulted for being the cause of her own doing” (730).

Both boys and girls tended to focus on women’s responsibility for keeping themselves respectable in order to be respected by others. While men who abused were explained as the products of their environment, the women were seen as making intentional choices and dressing a certain way to provoke abuse. The researchers concluded that although the adolescents “claimed immunity from media messages, their responses to the hip hop modules suggest that they and others have learned somewhere [these notions of victim blaming] “(733).

Hip-hop may not be the sole cause for violence, but it often contributes to a culture of violence and may arouse violent tendencies in listeners/viewers who have been socialized in this society. Similarly, while none of the present research can conclude that hip-hop alone causes otherwise non-violent individuals to abuse or accept abuse, it does corroborate the problem of existent sexism and abusive social messages already learned and internalized by young people. Alternatively, hip-hop can also subvert this oppressive social structure. This is evidenced by the success of Squires et al.’s and Stephens and

Few's discussion groups and other emerging therapeutic and educational programs which use hip-hop as a point of reference to engage this progressive work.

### *Hip-Hop's Effects on Positive Youth Identity Development*

A select few studies have examined the ways in which hip-hop facilitates youth identity development and positive inspiration and affirmation. Sullivan determined that many black adolescents who listened to hip-hop were likely to consider the music "life affirming," "truthful" and able to "[teach] them something about life" (615). Hip-hop culture and rap music are powerful mediums for resistance for marginalized youths because they represent experiences that are often ignored by dominant culture (Sullivan). Clay explains that youth of color in the post civil rights era are still experiencing racial injustice, and are able to use hip-hop as a tool for political protest and social justice activism. Clay's study observed and interviewed youth of color in two nonprofit organizations and identified two major ways in which they incorporated hip-hop into their lives: 1) They used it as an organizing tool for social justice campaigns and awareness raising work in their school communities and 2) They used hip-hop to develop and validate their own identities as activists of color. Adolescents named rappers as role models for their activism, recited lyrics to songs they had used to educate their peers on social injustice, and shared experiences of writing their own raps to express struggles they had undergone.

Clay concluded that youth could "subvert the commercialization and popularity of hip-hop music by using it to talk about...issues that affect their everyday lives" (117). Similarly, Taylor and Taylor found that youth were drawn to the familiarity of rap lyrics'

subject matter, and its “keeping it real” mantra. Hip-hop’s narration of stories otherwise untold, and its rebellious nature assists youth’s own desire to rebel from authority and an adult society that often marginalizes them (Taylor and Taylor).

Additionally, hip-hop, as a representative and narrative media, functions as a catalyst for identity formation (Clay). Clay cited previous studies’ findings that popular culture is “an important place for individuals to create meaning, identify and find community,” adding that this is “particularly true of teenagers [of the] ‘MTV generation’” (106). This identity formation has become an integral part of the hip-hop social movement. Previous social movements have focused on single issues; however, the hip-hop social movement is multifaceted and includes “both individual and collective identity formation and transformation” (Clay 109). Richardson and Scott similarly conclude:

The culture of hip-hop has become the nexus from which youth (particularly lower income Black youngsters) can create their values, define their selfhood, and express their heightened consciousness of violence and its implications against a social backdrop that has historically devalued their color and contributions (185).

As a generation facing multiple complex challenges, including exposure to violence, pervasive sexism, racism, and poverty, alongside underfunded and inaccessible educational and rehabilitation opportunities, young people are in great need of stronger and more abundant support and guidance. It is imperative that educators and service providers to examine new paths to meet the pressing needs of this demographic. Hip-Hop, a double-edged sword of positive and negative influence in young people’s lives,

must be further formulated into a constructive tool for social and political change and youth empowerment.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hip-Hop Therapy and Rehabilitation Work

*“Now this is what they call poetry in motion  
My soul bleeds on the paper, heart screams with emotion  
This my daily devotion  
That verses stay deeper than the ocean”*

– Ludacris, “I Do it for Hip-Hop<sup>5</sup>”

#### Introduction

Because of its popularity and powerful messages, a number of sources have recommended and implemented hip-hop-based therapy models. Hip-Hop Therapy capitalizes on hip-hop’s relevance to pop culture and to the lives of youth of many backgrounds. Couched broadly in the realm of Creative Arts Therapy, in practice it draws on many forms of therapy, including behavioral therapy, cognitive therapy, relational therapy, psychotherapy and solution focused therapy (Tillie-Allen; Raptherapy.net). Use of hip-hop has been shown to improve clinician-patient rapport and to support culturally sensitive therapy models.

Hip-hop culture derives from black and Hispanic cultures in the United States and the Caribbean and has historically represented the underclass in urban environments. Youth who feel marginalized for a variety of reasons often relate to this ‘music of the outsider’. Don Elligan, psychologist and author of *Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide for Communicating With Youth and Young Adults Through Rap Music* reflects on his experience using hip-hop with people of many different backgrounds and learning of their various reasons for connecting to the culture:

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<sup>5</sup> Ludacris. “I Do It For Hip-Hop.” *Theater of the Mind* Disturbing tha Peace, 2008.

Unlike many cultures given by birthright, the culture of hip-hop is adopted. The reasons for adopting the culture are as diverse as are the people who migrate to hip-hop. One of the more common stories shared with me that explains this migration to the hip-hop culture includes becoming entranced by the melody and beat of the music. Others report that the lyrics speak to their experiences growing up in certain conditions, while some romanticize the lyrics of the rappers to which they enjoy listening, even though the lyrics do not express their experience (53, “Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide”).

For a variety of reasons, hip-hop pluralistically unites young people and gives them a shared interest while also recognizing diverse cultural backgrounds. Henderson and Gladding reflect that the “creative arts are a positive force in transcending cultures and advancing growth...While differences in cultural background emerge in creative expression and interpretation, unity, harmony and positive interactions dominate the process” (183). Hip-Hop’s therapeutic values cross barriers of race, age, and background, as long as the clients relate to the music (Kobin and Tyson).

In my work in the summer of 2008, with a group of 12 teenage boys in a non-secure detention (NSD) facility in New York City, I integrated elements of dance, music, and creative writing into a hip-hop-centered curriculum. The participants were black and Hispanic, between the ages of 12 and 17, and in the facility temporarily while they had open court cases for arrests related to drugs, weapons, robbery or other charges. By using these artistic tools and involving participants’ favorite songs and artists, the group was able to engage in challenging personal development and media literacy activities from a starting point of familiarity, comfortably and interest. Throughout this chapter, I will be

sharing examples of other hip-hop therapy case studies as well as my own experiences to further illustrate the implementation and success of these tools.

I will first position hip-hop therapy within the genre of the Creative Arts Therapies and examine the ways in which art facilitates healing and therapeutic personal expression. This proceeding subsection of this chapter examines existing hip-hop therapy programs across the United States which address topics such as anger management, violence prevention, overcoming substance abuse, and fostering healthy relationships. Finally this chapter argues that hip-hop therapy is particularly useful because its cultural relevancy encourages youth to continue practicing the skills learned in therapy sessions, once they have finished treatment and are on their own.

#### *Hip-Hop and Creative Arts Therapy*

Hip-Hop's four elements: rapping, dj-ing, graffiti, and break dancing, are all adaptable to theories of Creative Arts Therapy. *The National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Associations* currently recognizes art therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, poetry therapy, and psychodrama as disciplines which can be used:

[d]uring intentional intervention in therapeutic, rehabilitative, community, or educational settings to foster health, communication, and expression; promote the integration of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social functioning; enhance self-awareness; and facilitate change (“National Coalition for Creative Arts Therapies”).

Art Therapy exercises that involve drawing, painting, and stenciling can easily be adapted for a graffiti art aesthetic. Dance therapies may be expanded to include break dancing and other forms of hip-hop dance. Music therapy in which the clients create their own music can include the art of beatboxing (creating beats with one's mouth, at times accompanied by clapping, stomping etc) and or dj-ing (creating original instrumentals using clips of previous records or by mixing computerized sounds such as drums, horns, and keyboard). This study focuses primarily on the use of hip-hop music, or "rap," therefore this chapter examines the ways in which rap music can be and is being used as a therapeutic medium similar to some of the above cited disciplines, particularly music therapy and bibliotherapy (a form of therapy which uses poetry and other forms of literature).

Music has been shown to affect listeners in powerful ways. Used across cultures and throughout history to define the celebratory or somber tone of a ceremony, convey a memorable message or story, and facilitate religious and spiritual healings, music strongly impacts human thinking, learning, and feeling and is an effective tool for therapeutic interventions. Psychoanalytic perspectives have argued that the music a person chooses to listen to at any given moment indicates their psychological state (Díaz de Chumaceiro). Don Elligan, a pioneer practitioner in rap therapy, began the practice after noticing that many of his clients had a strong affinity for the music genre. He explains, "Many of the lyrics that clients would come into my office reciting, lyrics that I once took for granted and assumed to be a youthful whim, were in many cases the single most important metaphor for their challenges, conflicts, and fantasies" (iiiv, "Rap Therapy: A Practice Guide"). Similarly, it has been argued that music activates the id,

ego, and supergo, surfacing unconscious or previously unarticulated emotions (Lefevre 336).

Hip-Hop as music therapy is a liberating and interactive medium through which youth can process the challenges they are facing. In describing the therapeutic benefits of music, Lefevre writes:

Music is often used instinctively for cathartic expression, providing an outlet for stifled or repressed emotions. Listeners may experience their own conflict situations as mirrored musically, with the musical structure holding and containing their intense feeling. In musical performance, this may be even more direct as the whole body becomes involved, particularly with singing where the sound is produced entirely in the body and rhythmical music where the beat needs to be experienced physically. (336)

On a physical level, hip-hop is about head nodding, pounding tables with fists to the beat of the music, snapping fingers, and stomping feet. This full-body-involvement in music- and dance- based therapies facilitates expression of internalized conflicts and release of pent up emotions (Lefevre 337). Hip-Hop therapy may include simple exercises such as listening sessions in which clients and therapists share songs of particular significance with one another and enjoy experiencing the music together. Lefevre explains:

The social worker's agenda might be for important conversations to take place to inform care planning...What should not be lost is the value which comes from seemingly 'doing nothing', of enjoying each other's company in musical ... play. What may seem relatively insignificant to the worker can form a keystone for the building of the child's future resilience. (341)

Hip-Hop music engages the body and stimulates the mind in both critical and emotional manners, and integrating it into therapy can strengthen therapist-patient relationships. Lyrical analysis of rap lyrics can be instrumental in engaging discussions of clients' own challenges in life. However, less analytical work such as playing a song loudly, chanting a chorus in repetition, or dancing to the beat of a favorite hip-hop song, can be equally transformational. In my work with teenage boys at the NSD facility, I reserved the last 15 minutes of every workshop to play songs which participants requested and let them perform karaoke style. Clients also engaged in dance-offs and freestyle ciphers (and exercise in which clients take turns rapping spontaneously over a beat without writing anything in advance). This time allowed the youth to release energy, sort out their ideas over a beat, demonstrate their knowledge of songs or dances, receive affirmations from their peers, and connect to something already familiar to them.

Incorporating hip-hop music, with which clients are familiar and through which they find affirmation, can provide what Lefevre calls a "secure base" for patients. It is particularly useful if the client and therapist can connect over a shared interest in hip-hop. "Choosing songs which are known to both worker and child offers 'a safe musical starting point from which to begin to explore the potentially unsafe world'" (339). Furthermore, the hypothetical nature of lyrics enables clients to work out personal issues in a third-person or metaphorical context which they may find less intimidating than directly addressing the challenges in their own lives (Lefevre).

In a New England after-school program for children with backgrounds of homelessness and domestic violence, I used therapeutic hip-hop strategies to engage a group of middle school students in discussion of violence and social change. Two pre-

teen African-American boys had previously joked about being in gangs and enthusiastically mimicked gang signs and slogans. To follow up on this, I first played the song, “Self-Construction,” a collaboration by many hip-hop artists as part of rapper and educator KRS-One’s “Stop the Violence” campaign. This segued into a discussion of various forms of violence and the reasons people engage in violent behavior. We discussed the life of Tookie Williams, the founder of the Crips gang who, while in Death Row, began activist work to discourage youth from joining gangs and to reduce inter-gang conflict. Students brainstormed many problems in the world which they wanted to change and then worked on a graffiti style mural to express their ideas about the social issues most important to them.

With hip-hop instrumentals playing in the background, the two previously mentioned students wrote raps about ending street and gang violence. One wrote from the perspective of someone in jail for violent acts, having difficulty leaving that lifestyle behind, and articulating his goals for his future (punctuation minimally edited):

People got popped and dropped. I did the crime now got to do time. Mad about it sick without. I’m down for life. I’m looking for a lady trying to raise a baby trying to get married and have my life and have the write. I miss all my peoples love the city bad things happen, lots of people rappen.

By using music, art, and biographical study, the students effectively challenged these issues in an external medium and did not become defensive about their original ideas.

Creative Arts Therapies allow clients to work through challenging issues in an externalized medium. Poetry-based bibliotherapy connects to the lyrical elements of rap music and enables clients to address their issues through discussing other authors’ work

as well as through writing their own pieces. Collins, Furman and Langer link poetry therapy to cognitive therapy, the latter of which focuses on the principle that thoughts can be powerful enough to determine a person's emotional state, behaviors, and world view (183). Without adopting a victim-blaming mentality, this approach empowers patients to recognize the ways in which their thinking patterns affect their frame of mind and their subsequent actions, and then the ways in which they may alter their thinking patterns to be less self destructive. Poetry can facilitate this process of recognition and then serve as an objective, more detached medium through which to discuss the client's irrational beliefs without provoking defensive reactions. Collins et al explain:

[W]hile being the "poet," the client feels free to write about a thought or an idea 'as if' it either is owned by another or has a life of its own. The therapist then has the opportunity to discuss with the client how this thought that appears in a poem actually impacts the client him/herself. Sometimes these thoughts can be perceived as taboo by the client, but once engaged in a web of words, the client feels safer to address them (183) .

In my hip-hop workshops, I used a series of music videos by deceased rapper 2pac, as well as poems from a book of his own work as a teenager, to facilitate conversations about contradictions within oneself. The collection of music videos show multiple sides of the artist: 2pac as a family man, as someone with a political consciousness, as angry and instigating conflict, and as a partying misogynist. An excerpt of his poem, "In the Depths of Solitude: Dedicated 2 Me," reads:

...A young heart with an old soul  
how can there be peace  
How can I be in the depths of solitude  
when there R 2 inside of me

This Duo within me causes  
the perfect opportunity  
2 learn and live twice as fast  
as those who accept simplicity (5)

I asked clients to discuss the videos and the meaning of the poems. They analyzed the many sides of 2Pac that existed simultaneously and discussed how it was possible to be many things at once. Elligan explains that artists' contradictions can be "utilized to help clients integrate the duality of their experiences and begin to promote an understanding of the complexity and multidimensionality of their existence in a puzzling and confusing world" (169, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide"). Clients were next prompted to discuss their own contradictions, their strengths and weaknesses, and how these could be catalysts for learning. Finally, clients then selected lines from 2Pac's poetry or song lyrics to use as writing prompts for their own poems or raps.

One client, who had previously told me he rapped, but had been quiet and declined to share his writing in group, gave his rap to me and strongly requested that I read it after the workshop ended (this was an option I had provided for shy clients). He used the beginning lyrics of 2Pac's song "Changes" (I have italicized 2Pac's lines) and wrote:

*I see no changes I wake up every  
Morning and I ask myself Is  
Life worth living? Should I blast  
Myself? Sometimes when I think  
I just want to Tap myself I can't  
Find success with out help  
Deep feelings bring out the anger  
In me on the block got it tated  
For free Don't want no hands just  
Leave me be freedom is close talk  
On wall street a poetry job look  
I'm free  
life is short so make it long*

my Rhymes, my thoughts, This  
is my song

His writing and willingness to share it with me, demonstrates the ways in which listening to another artist's reflections can work as a model to inspire or encourage clients to express their own personal reflections. In this piece the client expresses his contradictions of knowing that he 'cannot find success without help,' but also feeling at times that he 'just wants to be left alone'. He also articulates his hopes for the future, pursuing a poetry career.

The literary devices found in both poetry and rap such as "metaphor, imagery, sound, rhythm, and economy of expression" (Collins et al. 182), enable patients to creatively articulate the core of their experiences. Through the artistic medium, clients externalize problems facing them and then examining these problems through discussion of their art work. Unfortunately, upon my next visit to the NSD site, this client had left. However, the fact that the creative arts produce a tangible product (a written or visual piece or a recorded performance) allows clinicians and patients to examine the material together without direct interrogation of the patient him/herself. McMurray and Schwartz-Mirman describe this as "the triangular connection between the patient, the creative process and the therapist," in which each party's interaction with the other is equally important to the work of the session (32). Working in this triangular manner reduces patient defensiveness and builds patient-client rapport.

A hip-hop adaptation of bibliotherapy, such as the example of the 2Pac workshop, would use materials such as rap lyrics and biographies of hip-hop artists, as well as hip-hop fiction and relevant hip-hop magazine features to further client rehabilitation. Activities can include hip-hop inspired narratives and lyrical creative writing exercises,

discussion of song lyrics and of magazine features, exploration of the challenges and triumphs faced by artists in their biographies and by characters in hip-hop fiction, and exercises that connect clients' own lives and experiences to the stories in the music and literature. Nakeyshaey M. Tillie-Allen, a practicing hip-hop therapist, stresses the importance of lyrical content in music therapy which engages hip-hop:

[Hip-Hop Therapy]'s emphasis on lyrical content allows practitioners to explore their clients' self-concepts, influences, relationship, and goals...Many youth take pride in being able to tell their stories and may like Hip-Hop because it often discusses 'street reality' and gives voice to issues that might otherwise be silenced. (31-2)

I led another workshop at the NSD site, in which songs were used as prompts for an autobiographical writing and art exercise about clients' lives and neighborhoods. We first listened to and discussed three rap songs: "On My Block" by Scarface, "My Life" by Pharoahe Monch and Styles P, and "Flashback" by Papoose. In "On My Block," Scarface rhymes,

On my block, we got some 'Nam vets shell-shocked  
Who never quite got right, now they inhale rocks  
On my block - it's like the world don't exist  
We stay confined to this small little section we livin in  
On my block, I wouldn't trade it for the world  
cuz I love these ghetto boys and girls  
born and raised, on my block...

Using this framework, one of the clients wrote the following verse, expressing his frustration with his own "block" (unedited):

My Block is a set up  
My Block got me fed up  
full of feens and drugs  
Apartments full of rats and bugs

My block is where cops love to raid  
My block is full of dudes who drop out 9<sup>th</sup> grade  
My block is full of gang  
bloods, crip, even latin kings  
Cops don't help my block  
If they did I wouldn't be locked up

Like Scarface, this client expresses a sense of confinement by calling his block a “a set up” that makes him “fed up.” He describes the drug scene, run down apartments, and gangs in his neighborhood, and lastly the lack of police assistance to remedy these problems and help keep young people like himself out of negative situations. The goal of work of this nature is not for clients to mimic existing raps, but instead to have a model that inspires and directs their own self expression. This client goes beyond merely mirroring Scarface’s example, using the song’s framework to express the issues relevant in his own life and community.

Other clients followed the theme of Papoose’s song, “Flashback” to list memorable experiences in their lives thus far:

Flashback! I remember:  
When I first got lock’d up.  
[I] seen 5,000 \$  
My first fight.  
First day of school.  
A time when I heard gunshots  
Scored winning basket in b-ball  
When I [saw] someone die.

Flashback! I remember:  
My first fight.  
My first boo boo.  
When I first move into my apartment.  
When I was a good boy  
When my mother use to cook for me  
When I first got locked up.  
When I use to talk to my father.

Having already been exposed to the rapper’s example, clients were able to share pieces of their own stories, including positive memories such as a successful sports game, negative experiences like a first fight or first time seeing someone die, and experiences of nostalgia or regret such as times when their mother cooked for them

and before they got in trouble with the law. Song lyrics are often powerful catalysts to begin personal sharing in a fun and nonthreatening manner.

### *Hip-Hop Therapy Addressing Anger and Violence*

Connecting rap music to youths' own lives, hip-hop therapy functions as an effective form of behavioral therapy and psychotherapy as well. Certain songs' lyrics express positive instructional messages while the lyrics in other songs reflect negative behaviors and enable clients to examine them critically. Tillie-Allen writes:

[Hip-Hop Therapy] practitioners encourage clients to learn about themselves and to seek ways to change potentially destructive behavior patterns. Many of these destructive behaviors – sex, violence, crime, drugs, and gang activity, for example – are frequent themes in Hip-Hop music. Using that lyrical content presents HHT practitioners an opportunity to discuss and break down the destructive behaviors with youth in an attempt to introduce and construct positive behaviors (32).

Self described “Rap Therapist” Don Elligan outlines a five step process to rap therapy. His method begins by assessing the clients' specific interests in hip-hop music and culture and planning ways to incorporate this material to future sessions. The following four steps build alliances with clients by discussing the music; challenge their thoughts and behaviors by using lyrics from their favorite rappers; ask them to “write raps about the desired change you have set up as a goal;” and lastly, continue discussing with and gathering feedback from them so as to monitor and maintain their progress (65, “Rap Therapy: A Culturally Sensitive Approach”).

Elligan shares a case study of one client whose behavioral problems decreased significantly through rap therapy sessions. The client began rap therapy after his father was murdered and he began fighting in school and being disruptive in classes. In early sessions, the client expressed his dislike for his teachers and a willingness to use violence with anyone who challenged him.

When asked why he frequently argued with the teacher he responded “because I hate that stupid bitch.” When questioned about his conflicts with some classmates he responded, “if a nigga bothers me, I gotta bubble his lip” (33). The first rap that the client shared with the clinician included this excerpt:

You got damn parents are a trip  
The streets got your baby because you are full of that bullshit  
You tell your kids that drugs would fuck their health  
and your doing it your got damn self  
... I walk around and say:  
Fuck school, fuck curfew, fuck homework and motherfuck the cops  
I never walk down the clock without my gun cocked (33, “Rap Therapy: A Culturally Sensitive Approach”)

Elligan praised the client’s creativity as a writer and lyricist, and then challenged him to write a rap about one of his parents. After a series of sessions and Elligan modeling a rap of his own, the client finally wrote a rap to his mother, expressing his love for her, imagining her feelings about his father’s death, and apologizing for the trouble he’d caused. Elligan reports that this was the client’s first time speaking about the death of his father, and the first time, according to his mother, that he told her he loved her. Future sessions showed marked improvement in mother-son communication on the subject of the client’s father. Furthermore, Elligan reports that, “the frequency in [the client’s] angry outbursts [at school] decreased....Following one month of maintenance, [his] ...anger management skills improved substantially” (35, “Rap Therapy: A Culturally Sensitive

Approach”). In future sessions, Elligan transitioned his work with this client to focus on improved behavior in school and cooperation with school assignments and homework.

Elligan’s rap therapy program is one of a growing number of hip-hop programs that address patients’ violent behavior and transforms rap into a tool for enhanced consciousness and violence prevention. Successful youth violence prevention programs practice cultural sensitivity of client racial and ethnic backgrounds and account for dominant popular culture (Wright and Zimmerman 242). This combination has proven to work especially well in multicultural settings because “[t]he youth culture...may provide a common denominator for multicultural context and may be the central focus for making an intervention culturally sensitive” (Wright and Zimmerman 242). The use of music by artists of the same racial, ethnic, class, or geographic background as clients can be affirming and useful when clients articulate their own experiences. Particularly for clients whose histories have been underrepresented by popular media and educational outlets, showing this cultural heritage to be equally valuable as the dominant culture can be engaging and facilitate important healing. Henderson and Gladding use the example of teaching African values and proverbs to a group of misbehaving African American boys in an inner city school for successful behavior modification (185). Rap lyrics can be similarly employed.

In some cases, teachers or therapists may find that their students only seem to enjoy anti-social rap, which promotes violence and risky behavior (Elligan, “Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide”). It is important that therapists respond to this in a way that supports clients rather than criminalizes them, and assists the goals of the session:

One must have a certain level of comfort with this antisocial content in order to eventually alter the person's rap interest to include positive or educational lyrics in rap music. A comfort level with the antisocial content of rap music can be developed by keeping in mind ...[that the] goal is to use rap music to teach youth lessons that may otherwise be difficult to teach because of the content or because they are not willing to listen to the lesson since they think it does not apply to them or it is too out of date (70, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide").

Anti-social rap, such as a 50 Cent song threatening to kill someone, can be used to begin a discussion of threats and violence. Additionally, a more pro-social song by the same artist, i.e. one which promotes positivity or reflects on the consequences of antisocial behavior, can also be used to transition clients into more progressive thinking patterns. Artists with a catalog of both anti- and pro-social rap include 2pac, Jim Jones, David Banner, T.I., DMX, Notorious B.I.G, Jay-Z, and Eminem. Elligan writes:

The heterogeneity found in different rap artists' recordings can be utilized in a therapeutic way just as the specific content of a particular rap can be utilized. The diversity found in the lyrics of an artist's song speaks to the multiple identities and interests found in humanity (169, "Rap Therapy, A Practical Guide").

The same technique can be used with client's own raps. One young male client, Mike, came to Elligan with anger management issues and originally presented anti-social raps that he listened to and had written. Elligan gave Mike positive feedback on his written material for its creativity and Mike's courage to share it. He then asked him to try writing a positive rap about the same subject. Mike

responded so well to this exercise, that Elligan's subsequent sessions with him involved many more rapping exercises about anger management. Elligan reflects:

Once you are able to get the person to write a rap that is a shift from his or her baseline thought process, it becomes the anchor for the rest of your work together. The shift in Mike's thinking was very powerful because it became his vision and determination for change. He had finally taken on the responsibility of wanting to improve his anger management skills as opposed to having it be the interest of some external source (73, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide").

In addition to it often being an important implementation of culturally sensitive therapy, rap therapy has other benefits for the therapy process. It allows clients to let their guard down and form a relationship with the practitioner around a topic of familiarity. It also allows the practitioner to determine the extent to which rap positively and/or negatively influences clients' lives and the behaviors which cause them to be in therapy (Elligan 67, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide").

The *Young Warriors* program, conducted in several Midwestern schools and youth development settings, also uses hip-hop as a reference point for engaging young people in critical discussions of violence, with the goals of reducing destructive behavior and enhancing academic performance. Geared towards young African American men, the program presents lyrics and songs to guide participants in critical readings of these texts (Watts, Abdul-Adil, and Pratt).

Media literacy is particularly useful because it allows for intervention through mediums that have great potential to negatively influence youth when left unaddressed. As discussed more fully in Chapter 1, rap has been described as "a double-edged sword. It can cut in the direction of uplift and increased political

sophistication, or it can cut in the direction of rationalizing or even promoting an antisocial lifestyle” (Watts et al. 48). Watts et al., like many others in the field, argue that young people will continue their involvement with rap music, therefore a perceptive, resourceful trainer uses this medium in strategic ways to engage youth in critical work (48). The *Young Warriors* program addresses race, gender, culture, class, history, and community action and development and plans to develop a “civic learning” component as well to channel the clients’ knowledge and activist potential into the work of changing social systems.

The authors note that the program aims not to give participants the ‘correct’ messages about hip-hop media, but rather to develop their skills to critically analyze this content and then draw their own informed conclusions. Both pro-social and anti-social rap songs are used to engage participants in this process. Watts et al. explain that youth are often more receptive to prosocial rapper’s challenging antisocial behaviors than to this same content presented directly by group facilitators. One such rapper, Common, teaches prosocial behavior directly through his lyrics, using “critical consciousness to critique gangsta rap’s highly glamorized ‘thug’ persona.” In doing so, the authors write, “he illustrates our primary educational goal for the adaptation stage – helping young men assess the morality and long-term viability of coping with injustice through criminality” (46).

By building critical consciousness, the program ensures a sustainability of the work done in sessions for clients after they have completed the program. Once analytical skills are cultivated, clients can continue to question the media’s influence on their ideas and resist negative modeling in their own lives.

Raptherapy.net, the website for hip-hop therapist Rebecca Sanford, describes similar programming that integrates hip-hop and anger management

therapy. Sanford's programs are led in foster homes and other social service agency locations. The website describes their technique as "an innovative new method of psychotherapy to treat adolescents who are resistant to traditional models of therapy. At its core, Rap Therapy utilizes creativity to assist young people in developing, verbalizing, and implementing the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors necessary to achieve their dreams and goals." The *Reconnecting Adolescents and Parents (RAP)* anger management group combines elements of group and family therapy. Sessions with parents and youth assist families in addressing the conflicts that have arisen due to the adolescents' anger and behavior challenges ("Raptherapy.net").

Sessions that are exclusively for adolescents aim to "explore anger causes and triggers as well as develop skills for handling and appropriately expressing anger at home, school, and in the community." They begin with a review of hip-hop history, followed by a discussion of the current state of hip-hop. Participants are guided in exercises which teach them to critically analyze the messages in rap music and videos, and finally, group sessions review previous participants' written pieces, and begin to record their own. Sanford, like Elligan, tries to present pro-social songs by popular artists who also produce anti-social. Showing anti-social music this alternative challenges participants' concepts of what can and cannot be rapped about and may be better received than pro-social songs by more obscure artists. In email communications, Sanford shared another technique which she found worked particularly well:

I encourage the youths to bring in songs that have special meaning for them. This often is the most impactful technique. Music has a magical and therapeutic quality to it that can give you words when you don't have them

and can help you feel like someone understands. It's truly spectacular to see what some of the youths bring to the group and how the group processes these songs (Day).

In addition to creating new therapeutic programming with a hip-hop focus, existing clinical programs can be revised to include hip-hop activities. Greg Stazko claims hip hop “has the potential to be used both as a socially transformative tool and a coping mechanism, but has been grossly underutilized as a clinical tool” (v). Stazko’s dissertation, *A Model for Violence Prevention Programming Incorporating Hip Hop Music as an Intervention Strategy*, proposes the integration of hip-hop music into an established successful anger management program to enhance its relevancy and efficacy for participants. He notes that many of the most successful violence prevention programs, “Adopt a cognitive behavioral framework, focusing on issues such as problem solving skills, cognitive distortions, teaching social competence, and fostering prosocial behavior” (8).

Stazko’s proposed program acknowledges rap music’s “difficult to escape” image of violence and misogyny, but also the fact that it has the ability to facilitate community and personal transformation and thus be applicable to therapeutic goals (11). Like the *Young Warriors* intervention, Stazko’s proposed program would utilize both “violent” and “pro-social” songs as teaching tools (38). Prosocial, transformative rap includes songs in which artists articulate their own success through struggle and encourage listeners to remain hopeful, and to set and strive for goals to improve their own lives and communities. “Violent” rap includes songs that illustrate examples of destructive behavior and often represent this behavior as ‘cool.’ Prosocial songs do not ignore the negative realities of young people’s lives, but rather, they “acknowledge the reality of participants’ worlds,

[and] aim to facilitate discussions about the psychological, emotional, and systemic effects of violent behavior” (Stazko 38).

Stazko’s 12 week program includes exercises to: Examine the ways in which individuals may unknowingly perceive the same situation in different ways (thus leading to conflict); generate personal and group goals; build skills for self-control when facing potentially angering situations; facilitate an understanding of the ways in which anger effects participants physically, mentally, and emotionally; build self-affirming mantras; identify alternatives to violent behavior; and systematize and practice problem solving. Each session incorporates at least one rap song to illustrate the goals of the week, and keep participants engaged. By building off an existing program, Stazko argues that an integration of hip-hop with therapy is feasible and can be developed “quickly and easily” in conjunction with programs already proven to be successful, further strengthening their efficacy (39). It is recommended however; that group leaders have at least a basic familiarity with hip-hop music and culture in order to successfully lead sessions and engage with participants.

While the field of hip-hop therapy has only begun to develop in the last 10 years, there are now a number of programs which utilize the music and culture to address issues such as behavior modification, interpersonal and community violence, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activity, and parent-child relationships. There is very little information available however, on the use of hip-hop to rehabilitate young people that have been traumatized by violence in their own families. Between 3 and 10 million children witness domestic violence every year, and as a result, are at greater risk for internalized and externalized disorders (“For Caregivers”). Many are in therapy as a direct or indirect result of this

trauma. However, explicit connections between hip-hop therapy and therapeutic programs for youth that have experienced domestic violence or teen dating violence are yet to be seen.

The problem of domestic violence raises issues of the mis/use of language, manipulated sexuality, gender stereotypes, power and dominance, un/healthy relationships, and learned violence. It seems reasonable that hip-hop music would be a powerful tool through which to examine these topics and facilitate healing for youth who have been exposed to violence in their own homes. Youth from abusive families are more likely to become abusers or to be abused as adults. Therefore, therapeutic work with this demographic functions as a rehabilitative measure, but also as a preventative one that interrupt intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse.

Many of the tools used in existing hip-hop therapy programs are also applicable to work with youth that have witnessed domestic violence or are in abusive relationships themselves. Using a song to spark conversation about a client's personal challenges, or having a client write their own life-experiences through raps are two examples of exercises of this nature. Although there is little information on current work in this area specifically, Elligan does describe two case studies with women who have been in abusive relationships. Many of the methods he uses with these women can also be adapted for work with children who have witnessed their parents' violence.

Elligan begins by clarifying and assessing the problems that bring clients to therapy. For one participant, "BarBara," who connects her history of abuse to her diminished self-esteem, this includes a standardized self-esteem evaluation, which is re-administered at the end of treatment to assess improvements. Elligan plays

songs which may relate to participants' own experiences and serve as jump-off points for further dialogue and analysis. For "Amy," a woman staying in a battered women's shelter, Elligan uses R&B singer Ashanti's hip-hop influenced song "Unfoolish," which tells the story of a young woman who has conflicted feelings of attachment and distain for her abusive boyfriend, but ultimately chooses to leave him. With BarBara, Elligan asks what songs she can name that relate to her experience. She names Mariah Carey's "Butterfly" as a song that provides inspiration for her. BarBara explains, "The butterfly is me and I'm trying to develop into all I can be. It ain't easy, but with hope, and like I said prayer I can do anything" (120, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide").

With Elligan's guidance, clients are able to elaborate on the connection between the songs and their own experience. They are then asked to write their own raps. Themes or questions included, self-love, self-esteem, positive qualities about oneself, how to avoid abusive relationships in the future, maintaining self-respect in relationships, and one's relationship with oneself. For children, who may still struggle with notions of remaining silent about what they have witnessed, lyric-writing can also serve as a way to begin telling their own stories, and articulating for the first time, how it has made them feel about themselves, and about the abuser and the abused. Instead of writing about how to avoid abusive relationship in the future, youth, depending on their age, may want to write about the kind of parent or boyfriend/girlfriend that they want to be someday.

When client's shared their raps, Elligan responded with strong positive reinforcement, and then asked questions to explore the content of their writing. Songs and videos were used throughout ongoing therapy to advance discussion and analysis. Elligan also provided original writing prompts of his own for

clients' own lyric writing and personal development. The writing towards the end each woman's therapy focused on developing goals for future healthy living and reinforcing constructive behaviors which moved clients closer to meeting said goals. BarBara's final rap read:

I have learned how to keep it real  
And how good it feels  
When a sister makes no deals  
With how she feels  
I've learned what I am the pilot of mind  
I won't become the victim of a crack dealer's line  
All the worthlessness, self-doubt, self-pity, and fear  
Has been left far behind  
I am keeping my head up and reaching for the stars (126, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide").

In hip-hop therapy clients are able to create this self affirming content for themselves rather than having it created for them by the therapist. Client's own raps remain with them after therapy ceases, providing encouragement and serving as reminders of their goals. Additionally, clients develop the skills and confidence to write new raps to continue clarifying future challenging situations on their own. It should be noted that facilitators not trained specifically in domestic violence advocacy may consider referring clients to trained specialists for some of the challenges they are facing. Elligan referred one of these patients to a trauma counselor to address issues beyond his realm of expertise.

#### *Additional Hip-Hop Therapy Program Profiles*

Hip-Hop therapy empowers clients as masters of their own destiny, and in group settings, facilitates team building amongst participants. Furthermore, it is a useful tool for therapists attempting to build bridges of connection with individual clients. Kobin and Tyson note that using hip-hop to strengthen therapist cultural

competency can “increase the likelihood of building good rapport with clients and might improve the chances for positive treatment outcome” (346). Henderson and Gladding report that practitioners are increasingly working with clients of diverse backgrounds and it is useful for the practitioners to develop an appreciation of cultural differences and strengths (183). Furthermore, by familiarizing oneself with art forms specifically relevant to a client’s culture (such as hip-hop for many young people), therapists can enhance their relationship with clients and therefore provide more effective treatment (187).

Blake Le Vine, LSW calls himself “The Rap Therapist” and reports that he began using hip-hop music in therapy as a way to connect to clients who doubted that he, “a white preppy social worker” had anything in common with them. Le Vine describes their surprise upon hearing him rap. “They begged me to stay and teach them how to rap. In the next few months I taught them how to rap and it was amazing. They opened up about things they never talked about before” (“Rap Therapy – The Movie”). Le Vine now uses rap therapy frequently for group sessions with adolescents in foster homes. A number of other practitioners are also using rap music in therapeutic work in group homes, counseling sessions, prisons, and schools across the US.

Similar to Le Vine, Nakeyshaey M. Tillie-Allen, LSW calls herself the “Hip-Hop Therapist.” Tillie-Allen founded the *Hip-Hop Therapy Project*, “a social wellness center that utilizes Hip-Hop music and culture, along with psycho-therapeutic and psycho-educational concepts, to serve as a culturally sensitive catalyst for personal and collective change for those who embody, embrace, enjoy, and are most affected by Hip-Hop” (“The Hip-Hop Therapy Project”). Tillie-Allen uses hip-hop therapy directly with youth, and also trains agencies, schools,

businesses, and non-profit organizations in how to use hip-hop as an effective tool to engage youth and young adults. Tillie-Allen's *Hip-Hop Therapy Project* utilizes the music and culture to facilitate workshops on such topics as life skills, behavior management, parenting, relationships, sexuality, continuing education and careers, family, and conflict resolution ("The Hip-Hop Therapy Project"). Her website notes that hip-hop therapy can be particularly useful for professionals working with youth referred to therapy involuntarily because it reduces their initial apprehension and resistance.

Lauren Collins, LSW is the founder of *Hip Hop Heals*, another program using hip-hop music to engage young adults in personal development and rehabilitation. Collins began integrating hip-hop into therapy sessions upon realizing its relevancy in so many of her clients' lives. The *Hip Hop Heals* program works with groups in prisons, schools, and rehabilitation facilities. Workshops include "Songs as Triggers" and "Smoke and Mirrors." The former examines the ways that listening to music or being in an environment with music affects people and the dangers of hip-hop songs triggering relapse to drug and alcohol abuse. The latter examines the glorification of "gangsta" and "drug dealer" lifestyles as represented in hip-hop ("Hip Hop Heals"). The sessions focus on distinguishing hip-hop fantasy from reality and debunking myths of violence, drugs, and rapping as dominant paths to success. Like Tillie-Allen, Collins also found that integrating hip-hop into the sessions reduced tensions projected by patients required to attend therapy sessions involuntarily. Clients who did not initially have an interest in hip-hop were still able to appreciate the relevancy of the subject matter and its potential connectedness to their own lives ("Hip Hop Heals").

*Beats, Rhymes, and Life*, a program pioneered by T. Tomas Alvarez III, LSW in 2004, offers trainings and consulting services to those interested in hip-hop as an engaging medium for work with at-risk teens. *Beats, Rhymes, and Life* also leads rap therapy programs in California high schools. The organization's goal is "to foster mental wellness and promote positive youth development through the use of popular culture and media literacy" ("Beats, Rhymes, and Life"). Their website explains, "Rap Therapy does not pathologize youth for their interest in and expression of Hip Hop culture, but rather, uses it to help foster a therapeutic relationship and facilitate change and development." The organization also produces an online youth magazine with participant work, and has assisted participants in producing hip-hop albums and music videos. One participant in the program reflects, "I have some place to come and tell my story. Outside no one wants to hear about your problems, in here I got people listening to me and giving me feedback and I think that what guys really need, more support. We are mostly stranded and alone." By providing programming for youth in a number of schools and also serving as a center for research and educational programming for therapists, teachers, and advocates in related fields, *Beats, Rhymes, and Life* significantly strengthens the movement for hip-hop activism and a community building ("Beats, Rhymes, and Life").

#### *Hip-Hop Therapy's Sustainability for Clients*

Hip-Hop music is a common coping tool for youth because it articulates a reality of pain and hardship with which many young people identify, and also provides an escape into fantasy – the life one would like to live, free from worries and struggle. Tyson and Baffour theorize that young people enter therapy with a

set of “tools and resources” or “strengths” which they’ve developed and use on their own to cope with challenging situations. Building on patients’ arts-based coping tools is a particularly useful method for brief therapy work. Because this approach capitalizes on strategies that youth have developed on their own, patients are likely to continue using these tools after therapy sessions conclude.

In a study of 108 adolescents in a Southeast acute-care psychiatric hospital, Tyson and Baffour determined that 71% named an arts-based strength as their primary method of coping with their struggles. Arts-based strengths was the most frequent “first strength” followed by “play sports/physical activity.” Amongst arts-based strengths, “listen to music” was the most popular “first strength” and within that grouping, “rap music” was the most common genre self-reported. Writing was listed as the second most common “first strength” with poetry as the most popular style, as well as stories, music lyrics, and journals. Other clients named drawing, coloring/painting, playing instruments, singing, and rapping as their “first-strength” coping tools (221-2).

Tyson and Baffour write, “some youth may naturally turn to the arts for comfort and healing in times of crisis, and by supporting their creative intelligence for doing so, therapists not only further encourage this practice, but also affirm the value and worth of clients as self-directed individuals” (223). Cultivating clients’ arts based strengths is useful in short-term treatment programs to affirm the positive coping tools that youth have already developed. This form of therapy is sustainable because clients can continue cathartic art-making in future times of crisis when they may not have access to therapeutic professionals. It should be noted that many of the most popular self-reported “strengths” relate closely to the hip-hop arts.

## Conclusion

In 2006, hip-hop producer J.Dilla passed away, suffering from a rare blood disease. Dilla had produced hit records for many of hip-hop's most successful artists, particularly those who used the music to express an alternative message of positivity or political awareness. In a tribute song to the influential producer, phone-messages are shared intermittently between verses and choruses. One artist, Busta Rhymes, leaves a message for Dilla, in which he eloquently expounds upon hip-hop's therapeutic potential:

Now, you know, this is serious thing behind the music that we doin'  
It's like, music, for me man, it mean, it means everything, feel me  
You know when we going through, our personal strifes in life  
You know what I'm sayin', we get up in that studio  
close that door, be lockin' ourselves in, that little four-wall space man  
Get in the vocal booth and become whoever you wanna be  
Express whatever you wanna feel, you know what I mean?  
When you going through your most frustrating time in life  
You know what I'm sayin', you can realize that  
When you can't find nobody else to speak to  
You can speak through the music  
Help other people feel your pain, your struggle, your passion  
You know, what you live and die for, your values in life  
You know what I mean?, music man  
Is the voice of every being in the universe  
What God has provided for us to communicate, when all else fails  
It's what allows us to be able to connect  
With touching our hearts and the soul of the streets ("Music is for Life")

Busta Rhymes articulates the power of music to transform pain and frustration into creative expression that both is at once therapeutic to its author, and a medium to build empathetic connections with others. As this chapter demonstrates, many therapists are beginning to formalize these natural therapeutic elements of hip-hop music. A literary and rhythm-based art form, rap music can be integrated into models of creative arts therapies, while drawing on other forms of therapy as well. A number of programs have been proposed and implemented

to address anger management, violence prevention, conflict mediation, and healthy relationships. By using pro-social as well as anti-social songs, facilitators can address topics such as drug and weapons use, aggressive posturing, motivation, and self-care. While violence prevention programs have not yet expanded to address the needs of youth who specifically witness family violence, it seems reasonable that the techniques of existing programs, and use of similar songs, would be helpful to this demographic as well.

As a prominent popular culture, hip-hop infuses the lives of many youth already. By developing it as a constructive rehabilitation model, therapists and group facilitators are able to meet young people where they are, and forge stronger relationships based on this shared interest. It has proven to be an especially successful medium for participants who exhibit resistance to traditional forms of treatment. Furthermore, by building on clients' existing interest, hip-hop therapy strengthens youth's existing coping and problem solving tools which they may then continue to use after therapeutic sessions have ceased.

Present advocacy for hip-hop therapy is based on multidisciplinary theory, case studies, and a limited number of quantitative studies. Work of this nature has just begun to take form in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and is presently scattered amongst various projects across the US. However, as the field continues to expand, a more formalized and standardized formula may develop to unify programs of this nature and guide therapists and youth advocates looking for a creative and culturally relevant approach to rehabilitation work.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Hip-Hop in the Classroom

*“When you're DJing and playing all types of music, you can take your audience to wherever you want to take them,” Bam says. “We're always trying to come with titles or certain songs to make people say, ‘Well, what the hell is he talking about?’ hoping that they hear the music or shake their butt or get down but also to make them think. We want to deal with the fifth element of hip-hop — which is knowledge, culture and overstanding — to get people back out there thinking, reading again and researching, because too many of us have gotten too relaxed”*  
– Afrika Bambaata, hip-hop pioneer<sup>6</sup>

#### Introduction

“If only you knew the material for your test as well as you know those rap lyrics!” This oft-exclaimed phrase by parents and educators alike expresses a frustration with youth who know the entire genealogy of Lil’ Wayne’s musical catalog but fail history exams. There is the similar challenge of students who refuse to write 5-page essays, but carry a notebook of handwritten lyrics with them at all times. How does a teacher respond to a student who refuses to speak in front of the class, but commands a captive audience of friends and peers at lunch time, passionately performing a favorite hip-hop song?

Hip-Hop’s strong relevancy in the lives of many young people enables it to be a valuable asset to therapists and also educators working to successfully empower and educate youth of diverse backgrounds. Innovative education methods become particularly pertinent when one considers the present drop-out rate for high school students and disproportionately for students of color.

Advocates for culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy (Gay; Ladson-Billings), radical education, or critical pedagogy (Giroux and McLaren), and Paulo Freire’s

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<sup>6</sup> Murphy, Bill. "Return of the Funk Renegade." *Remix Magazine*. Nov 1 2004. Web. 30 Apr 2009 <[http://remixmag.com/artists/remix\\_return\\_funk\\_renegade/](http://remixmag.com/artists/remix_return_funk_renegade/)>

closely related liberation pedagogy argue that students' cultures, life experiences, and unique skills must be 'pulled-out like mining' (Ladson-Billings 34, "The Dreamkeepers") and capitalized on through class work. These perspectives assume that all students have the ability to succeed if they are taught in ways which recognize their unique skills and needs. Students who know and actively engage hip-hop have likely developed skills in writing, public speaking, memorization, research, mathematical and literary understanding of rhythm and meter, social analysis, and/or teamwork. By valuing the cultural sites where students first cultivate and exercise this knowledge, culturally responsive teachers validate students' realities, encourage them to transfer their skills to traditional materials, and instill in them self-confidence as capable members of intellectual communities.

This chapter examines the potential for hip-hop education to fulfill culturally relevant pedagogy. The first part of this chapter will discuss the ways in which hip-hop, as a creative art and popular recreational medium, can facilitate hands on and multisensory learning and the concrete actualization of ideas in fun and engaging ways. Rooted in a history of communication and awareness raising, hip-hop is, at its core, an educational force. Hip-Hop functions as an entertaining informal teaching tool in communities, therefore bringing it into the classroom can engages students and excite them about the learning process. The second part of this chapter will review existing implementations of hip-hop education and also recommend potential developments for the movement as it expands. Part three reviews this author's own field work with middle school students and a hip-hop media literacy curriculum.

## Part I: Theorizing Hip-Hop Education

### *Culturally Relevant Teaching*

Paulo Freire stresses the importance of critical consciousness and the transformative power of language. He writes, “To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (88). Hip-Hop music engages this transformative naming process. Rappers powerfully articulate the state of the world, the United States, local communities, and the self. Hip-hop songs transmit information to masses of people and by naming conditions, provide the starting point for reconceptualization and actualization of a more just state.

Critically relevant pedagogy empowers all people as “knowers” capable of producing and transmitting knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge is “continually recreated, recycle[ed] and shared by teachers and students...not static or unchanging (Ladson-Billings 81, “The Dreamkeepers”).” Educators both facilitate collaborative, dialogic (interactive) knowledge production with students, and encourage critique of socially constructed existing ‘knowledge’ (Ladson-Billings 81, “The Dreamkeepers”). Henry Giroux explains:

The discourse of student experience is not respectful of abstract, universal claims to the truth. On the contrary, it...supports a view of pedagogy and empowerment that allows students to draw upon their own experiences and cultural resources and that also enables them to play a self-consciously active role as producers of knowledge within the teaching and learning process (148).

Other tenets of culturally responsive/relevant teaching include:

- Use of varied instructional strategies geared towards multiple learning styles
  - A collective approach which fosters a classroom sense of community, shared responsibility, and achievement
  - Affirmation and curricular study of diverse cultural heritages
  - High standards and expressed confidence in all students' ability to succeed
- (Gay).

This pedagogy directly counters what Gloria Ladson-Billings terms “assimilationist teaching” (“The Dreamkeepers”). The former draws upon collaborative teaching and learning methods with a focus on classroom and neighborhood community investment and student critical engagement with texts. Conversely, the latter relies on hierarchal teacher-student roles, individual rather than group achievement, and reflects Freirean banking pedagogy. Tenets of banking education include that:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it (Freire, 73).

Such education works to reinforce the status quo binary of powerful/disempowered or oppressor/oppressed. Freire reasons that the more students are kept occupied with “storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (73). In other words, banking education, which focuses on depositing predetermined (rather than constantly regenerating) knowledge, prevents students from developing critical thinking

skills and challenging hegemonic structures in and beyond the schooling environment. This allows oppressors to maintain positions of dominance and control.

A hegemonic pedagogy centralizes and prioritizes Eurocentric histories and values and in turn, devalues or denies other histories (Gay 208). Radical education theory assumes that “the language of schooling is implicated in forms of racism that attempt to silence the voices of subordinated groups ... whose cultural capital is either marginalized or denigrated by the dominant culture of schooling” (Giroux 143). Students’ response to experiencing this system is often resistance, either in the form of various degrees of withdrawn participation or external disruption. Such reactions by students are evidenced in increasingly disruptive classrooms, disciplinary and special education overloads and misclassifications, and smart children turning their backs on formal education. Geneva Gay argues that teachers who practice a banking method of education contribute to “cultural hegemony, personal denigration, educational inequity, and [the] academic underachievement” of their students. She suggests that this achievement gap can begin to be reversed when educators acknowledge students’ lived experiences and cultural identities, and “deliberately create cultural continuity in education ethnically diverse students” (25).

Integrating popular culture into the classroom is one way of creating this cultural continuity, and developing a learning environment that is entertaining, affirming, and enjoyable. Nearly 40 years after its inception, hip-hop is one of the most dominant forces in pop culture and a meaningful part of many young people’s lives. K. Leigh Hamm Forell affirms this: “Through rap rhymes and hip-hop lifestyle, young people everywhere are empowered to connect with their

world, experiment with language practices, and narrate the story of their own reality. Hip-hop, thus, can be understood as a primary discourse for this generation's adolescent youth and young adults" (29). It is the responsibility of culturally competent educators to seek out pathways to radical teaching which incorporate relevant youth culture such as hip-hop.

Many educators may consider hip-hop to be a negative influence in their students' lives; however moving beyond this hesitancy is imperative to student success. Geneva Gay cites the work of Juan Aragon who argues that teachers are "culturally deprived" due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of minority cultural heritages. She writes that education reform must begin by addressing this ignorance and bias. The positive results of culturally relevant educational reform are evidenced in qualitative studies of radical teachers' classrooms and schools (Ladson-Billings), as well as in the quantitative data of standardized test scores of their students (Ladson-Billings; Gay).

### *Hip-hop Creates Incentive to Learn*

Mary Stone Hanley describes the common experience of working with an evidently smart student who is doing poorly in school. Hanley profiles a middle school African American girl who has been suspended numerous times and risks not graduating to high school, but reads independently about and confidently discusses hip-hop related subject matter. Hanley reflects, "The contradiction between her obvious intelligence and her school performance led me to wonder how hip hop, this distortion of what I understood to be music, could hook this youngster and engage her in such ardent learning" (37). Hanley began to explore hip-hop as an educational tool by confronting her own biases and educating

herself on hip-hop music, lyrics, and culture. By increasing her knowledge of and first-hand experience with a culture that holds such significance for her students, she was then able to integrate it into her classroom and build stronger connections with those students.

Ernest Morrell and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade describe a similar experience as English teachers in an urban high school in northern California. They write:

We ultimately decided that we could utilize Hip-hop music and culture to forge a common and critical discourse that was centered upon the lives of the students, yet transcended the racial divide and allowed us to tap into students' lives in ways that promoted academic literacy and critical consciousness (88, "Promoting Academic Literacy").

Freire's theory of co-intentionality is actualized when teachers become students of hip-hop and students are able to be relative authorities on subject matter, i.e., teachers in their own right.

Students enthusiastically engage in the pursuit of learning when there is a clear incentive, that is, when they understand its relevancy to their own lives (Weinstein). Two reasons why students may not see relevancy in formal education and therefore exhibit recognizably academic skills in hip-hop but not in traditional classrooms, are that hegemonic pedagogies 1) Do not empower them as knowers and 2) Do not speak to their experiences and interests. As Freire explains, "The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students" (72). These methods reinforce a strict authoritarian dynamic and stifle student engagement.

Classroom learning must be multicultural in content and collaborative in method, a co-intentional process between teacher and students. This builds students confidence and counters the negative effects of traditional, hegemonic, banking methods. In the latter formula, Freire theorizes, students internalize the opinions the oppressors hold of them as unintelligent and incapable of learning:

They call themselves ignorant and say the “professor” is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen...Almost never do they realize that they, too, “know things” they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men. Given the circumstances which have produced their duality, it is only natural that they distrust themselves (63).

For students who identify with hip-hop culture, integrating it into classroom pedagogy enhances cultural relevancy and can restore students’ trust in themselves and in their ability to “know things too” (63).

Hip-Hop’s impact on student self-confidence is illustrated in an account by scholar Susan Weinstein, who studied a group of four teenagers who had formed a rap group called the “Maniacs.” Weinstein observed the joy with which the Maniacs described their rap activities and discussed hip-hop, a culture to which they felt deeply connected. Weinstein reflects, “This connection is what makes hip hop so powerful for youths: They know and care about it because it’s *theirs*” (276). These students were able to navigate a hip-hop discourse involving “established norms, conventions, and standards” as experts (Weinstein 276). Their mastery of this brought them confidence and pleasure. While teachers may seem to be the experts on Shakespeare and Dickens, students are the experts on TI and Eminem. Creating a space for them to recognize the existence of and value in

their knowledge, or if they already are aware of this, the important realization that their school environment welcomes it also, is a critical step in creating a productive classroom dynamic.

A teacher who introduces hip-hop to his or her classroom sends the message that youth culture is valued rather than disdained. Young people are criminalized, pathologized, and delegitimized by stereotypes of teenagers and on multiple levels, depending on their race, gender, class, nationality, and sexual identities. An African-American male student, coded as low-income and heterosexual, may be subjected to teacher biases that assume him to be threatening and anti-intellectual. If he expresses an interest in hip-hop, a genre which is similarly stereotyped, this may be further reason for prejudiced teachers to condemn him and predict delinquency rather than academic achievement. By valuing hip-hop, teachers counter this schoolhouse-to-jailhouse pipeline and communicate that the student's interests are valuable, he is valuable, he is an important member of the class (Kunjufu).

Introducing hip-hop into the classroom creates a space for affirming and enjoyable learning. Weinstein argues that bringing pleasure into the learning environment is instrumental in creating a productive educational space in which students find the material relevant and willfully engage it. She reasons:

Pleasure takes time – time for creative processes to unfold; time to experiment and fail and revise and try again; time to linger, to think, to talk, to share...[In] deciding that we cannot afford the time that pleasure – that immersion in the processes of learning – requires, we are, however inadvertently, making a much larger decision: that we don't believe that

different ways of thinking about, understanding, and engaging with the world are either possible, useful, or desirable (274).

While play is considered a valid learning tool for young children, Weinstein argues that the cognitive process which play induces, involving “engagement with learning, attention to detail, and a desire to excel,” is important for all age groups (275).

Adoption of hip-hop pedagogical tools builds trust and sets the groundwork for a successful rapport and classroom dynamic between teachers and students and between students and their peers. Conversely, teachers who reject hip-hop based on negative stereotypes, risk condemning students who identify with hip-hop and in doing so, further condemn and alienate those youth (many of whom are likely stereotyped and condemned already due to their social locations) (Giroux). Valuing and incorporating hip-hop in the classroom encourages students to become more invested in conscientious and positive participation in class work and activities, and builds their self-confidence as knowers, not merely receptacles for the teacher’s knowledge.

### *Hip-hop as Methodology*

Hip-Hop’s popularity makes it an exciting hook to interest students in the study of traditional subjects, and furthermore, hip-hop’s own content facilitates education for critical consciousness. Additionally, hip-hop represents possibilities for socially just teaching philosophy and methods. Freire states that “the whole activity of education is political in nature” (qtd by Shor 27). Therefore, liberatory pedagogy must be implemented not only through the content taught but in the teaching methodology as well.

Hanley argues that a hip-hop pedagogy “provides an alternative form of instruction.” She uses the example of an open mic session, which students recognize as being affiliated with spoken word poetry and rap. An activity of this nature is able to “[create] ruptures in the notions of what is appropriate in the classroom and increases the possibility of transformation” (Hanley 42). Using hip-hop, a subversive counterculture in origin, allows for this rupture and for a decentering of knowledge. Rather than exclusively valuing Eurocentric content and privileging the teacher as the only member of the classroom capable of knowing, this rupture recognizes that knowledge exists in many spaces, including those spaces that students know most intimately. This disruptive nature of a hip-hop pedagogy redefines “knowers” and affirms students’ individual and cultural knowledges

Elements of hip-hop which may serve as pedagogical models include remixing, freestyling, cipherng, and call and response. Hip-hop’s core is resourceful, eclectic, creative expression, and these elements have been integral throughout its development. The first hip-hop block parties in the early 1970s took place on the streets of New York City, where young kids pulled together any and all materials necessary to make their parties successful. Hanley describes this scene: “[DJs] hooked their equipment to any electrical source, sometimes a hot-wired light fixture in an empty lot, and began to play music. Young people could dance continuously, a phoenix of pleasure among the ruins of the South Bronx” (37). The art of emceeing adopted this same “work with what you have” ingenious philosophy; rhythms were created by foot stomping, hand clapping, and beatboxing. Rappers (also referred to as “emcees”) formed spontaneous ciphers, tight circles where hip-hoppers crowded together and one by one began to

freestyle rhyming couplets and then verses. At block parties, DJs began looping (playing continuously) the short clips of funk and soul songs that isolated drums beats (known as the break), and these sounds became the basis for hip-hop music. The sample has remained a vital element of hip-hop music production, maintaining a thread of cultural and historical connection to one's predecessors within the genre and between hip-hop and other diverse genres. Today, albums from funk and soul to rock and jazz artists continue to be scoured by contemporary DJs and music producers looking for unique and catchy lyrics or instrumental clips to sample for new songs. Other producers skip the search through decades-old records and instead sample rap albums from five years or five weeks ago. Beats are circulated on the internet and burgeoning rappers lay down freestyles over the instrumentals first used by their hip-hop idols. In hip-hop, sound and meaning are continually and collaboratively recreated. Remixed.

These processes of remixing and sampling, as well as freestyling and cipherring, translate into engaging pedagogical tools which embody Freire's "liberatory classroom." In this model,, in which students and teachers are equally engaged in the processes of giving and receiving knowledge:

Teachers and students ...co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement (69).

The hip-hop cipher, like the liberatory classroom, relies on committed involvement from all parties. A balanced give and take of information is achieved by democratically “passing the mic.” Participation in exercises of call and response demonstrate the importance of multiple voices working in unison to create a strong rhythm and song or, in the classroom, a strong learning environment and production of new knowledge. Hip-hop’s ‘work with what you have’ philosophy translates to multidisciplinary teaching practices, in which students and teachers identify and integrate educational resources from all facets of their lives.

Weinstein asserts that the classroom must allow space for play and experimentation for youth of all ages. What she argues for is, essentially, pedagogical freestyling, cautioning that “a premature emphasis on form, structure, and organization in classroom activities ... may eliminate the possibility for students to play with new ideas – to be deeply creative” (279). Pedagogical freestyling encourages curiosity, intellectual risk taking, and experimentation with different identities and work styles in order to discover those that work best for each individual. Freire asserts that liberatory endeavors can only be accomplished through praxis, the inclusion of both reflection and action (51). Implementation of an actual freestyle cipher in the classroom merges theory and practice by allowing students to verbally freewrite and rearticulate classroom content in their own words, in an active, full body exercise.

The concepts of remix and sampling allow for what Jeff Rice calls a “cutting and pasting” pedagogy. This is one in which students and teachers are empowered by the ability to move things around, rearrange and reformulate knowledge in ways that best speak to their reality, or the ideas they wish to

articulate. Beginning with what is available – the city lamppost electricity or yard sale Marvin Gay records – hip-hop pedagogues extract and reorder, cut and paste, to create meaningful works of art and scholarship. Knowledge is not to be passively accepted, but continually challenged, questioned, and reformulated (Ladson-Billings, 163, “But That’s Just Good Teaching!”) like guitar riffs and drum breaks.

The hip-hop practice of problematizing the existing presentation of information, remixing and reformulating it, facilitates a critically-conscious study of history in the classroom. Rice writes, “through the complex juxtaposition of ...isolated sounds, samplers construct new forms of meaning” (456). These methods may be applied to readings of history which draw connections between past and present trends (the idea that history, like a resurfacing sample, repeats itself): How would students envision remixing the present for a stronger future? What information would they sample from history to inform their remix?

In addition to enhancing the study of history, hip-hop may also be used to teach critical writing skills. The “pedagogical sampler,” Rice explains:

...looks at the various distinct moments she has collected and figures out how these moments together produce knowledge. Just as DJs often search for breaks and cuts in the music that reveal patterns, so, too, does the student writer look for a pattern as a way to unite these moments into a new alternative argument and critique (465).

Students, like hip-hop artists, cultivate the skills to collect information from diverse sources and then arrange selected excerpts – textual clips – to best support their argument.

Teachers constrained by state-wide curricular requirements can also apply a hip-hop pedagogy to this content and remix it to convey the same information in new and innovative manners (Ladson-Billings 163, “But That’s Just Good Teaching!”). In doing so, teachers are able to challenge hegemonic and outdated educational frameworks and instead model for their students, critical consciousness and creative agency (Ladson-Billings 163, “But That’s Just Good Teaching!”; Stovall 590).

### *Use of the Creative Arts in Education*

Art as an essentially *create-ive* medium (one which creates, or produces something), empowers the artist to design and actualize visions of the world as he or she envisions it. It enables the artist, as creator, to construct affirming representations of selfhood as well. Hanley contextualizes art-making in an academic environment:

Creating art is a process of transforming material, perspectives, and concepts... An artist must shape meaning in a medium and yield to its idiosyncrasies. Hence, self-expression is a reflective process that connects cognition and affective and intuitive knowing. It also involves imagination, creativity, cultural knowledge, expressiveness, and skills in observation, sensory awareness, problem solving, hypothesizing, risk taking, decision making, focus, and concentration, and patterning (Hanley 41).

Epistemologically, art provides a site for creating, processing, and communicating knowledge. Hip-Hop is an artistic medium in which things are made (song, dance, instrumental, mural), and it therefore provides an opportunity to merge theoretical

idea-building with hands on manifestations of these ideas. Information is given significance through students' rearticulation or reappropriation in a medium relevant to them.

*Create-ive* arts were used as a processing tool in a hip-hop workshop series conducted by this author. In the closing workshop session, students' cumulative understanding of the material was assessed through the group creation of a collage. (Appendix A). Participants found magazine clippings from popular hip-hop publications and combined them with their own written commentary to discuss popular representations of masculinity, femininity, gendered sexuality, materialism, violence, and power. Much of the preceding workshops had been discussion-based and students responded positively to the change in medium (from verbal to kinesthetic). They were able to represent what they had learned in a visual medium and in their own words while also garnering praise from one another for artistic talents and creativity.

Student art work included a music video model's body cut into sections and rearranged with noticeable gaps. The student wrote, "Put the [pieces] back together!!!" which reflected class discussions of the fragmentation of women's bodies in hip-hop music videos. Another student cut and pasted a picture of a group of men posing in camouflage clothes and wrote, "They think they are tough because they are in a gang." While students also completed written evaluations of the workshop series and responded directly to content-based questions assessing their comprehension, these traditional methods were balanced with a creative one. In the collage activity, the hip-hop magazine images served as prompts to draw out students' knowledge in an open-ended, active, and visually stimulating format.

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Teachers, scholars, and activists across the United States are pioneering innovative programs which utilize the hip-hop arts to effectively implement culturally responsive pedagogy with students of all ages. Having outlined the theoretical arguments for hip-hop education, the following sections of this chapter will explore its existing and potential application in the fields of mathematics, science, history, literary arts, and media literacy.

## II Application of Hip-Hop Education

### *Hip-Hop in the Classroom*

Hip-Hop has served as a medium for informal education since its inception. On street corners and at block parties, emcee's delivered both light-hearted and politically powerful messages to their audiences. Graffiti artists, break dancers, and DJ's sent this message through visual imagery, corporal embodiment, and sound. Activists and educators have recently begun to adapt hip-hop's elements and its messages for formal educational purposes – taking it from the corner to the classroom. *The Hip-Hop Association Inc's* educational branch, *H2Ed*, published the first *Hip-Hop Education Guidebook* in 2007.

Authors Runell and Diaz describe their philosophy of hip-hop education:

It is a layered approach founded on social justice education, embedded in hip-hop culture, relying on critical pedagogy and community activism to teach hip-hop as subject, hip-hop as pedagogy to teach another subject, and/or hip-hop as the warm-up hook or bridge to draw students into the class (15).

This definition demonstrates the comprehensive nature of hip-hop education. It is a framework applicable to a diversity of disciplines and environments.

### *Math and Science*

Catchy lyrics are particularly useful to assist students in memorization of foundational information in such subjects as math and science. A number of educators and educational companies have produced math-rap albums and videos to teach such concepts as addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, fractions and decimals, the number line and negative numbers, order of operations, and geometric shapes. Interactive hip-hop lesson plans allow for a dialogical teaching and learning experience even when the subject matter is that which must be memorized.

*Spark the Mind* is one such educational company that has begun to use hip-hop as a teaching tool for mathematics, with a particular focus on early math skills that require memorization for automatic recall. *Spark the Mind* reasons, “We remember best when facts and skills are embedded in natural, spatial memory, and in a real-life activity (“Smart Shorties”).” Hip-Hop music stimulates the brain’s natural ability to recognize patterns. By combining factual information with auditory patterns, hip-hop songs about math are an effective way for students to learn and retain basic facts (“Smart Shorties”).

Furthermore, teaching through hip-hop songs allows students to sing and dance to the music and write their own lyrics, making the learning process interactive and participatory. *Spark the Mind* produces a hip-hop music series entitled “Smart Shorties,” in which students act as emcees. The first album is comprised of 13 tracks, and each one teaches a different multiplication table.

Integration of this music into math curriculum has been shown to raise student test scores significantly (Mentzer 4). Songs use instrumentals from popular hip-hop tracks, therefore connecting to a home/community culture with which many students identify. Students are also introduced to the production side of beat making which further applies mathematical skills to real world activities. Music producer Alex “Al E. Cat” Nesmith stays that he often meets children who want to be music producers. Nesmith asks first about their math skills, “[b]ecause there’s so much of it involved with creating music, the tempo, the beat...They are going to need to know what to set their quantization on- should it be  $1/4$ ,  $1/8$ ,  $1/16$ ,  $1/32$ ? If they don’t understand division, they won’t understand music” (Boles 1).

In addition to teaching math through the creation of hip-hop songs and instrumentals, the study of social issues relevant in students’ lives and communities may also facilitate mastery of math concepts. Exploration of the ways in which hip-hop has impacted the economy, or scenarios of profit and expenses in the music industry, can also facilitate engaging and culturally relevant studies of percentages, decimals, and statistics (Runell and Diaz 128-39).

Just as songs about math facilitate memorization of basic concepts, songs about science can assist students in memorizing such foundational information as the planetary system, the ecosystem, the periodic table, and the metric system (“Flocabulary”; Shapiro 1). One organization applying hip-hop to science education is FMA Live!, which “uses original music and dance moves performed by professional actors, videos, and interactive scientific demonstrations to teach students about Newton’s laws of motion and the universal law of gravity” (“A Hip Hop Science Education Concert” 78). FMA Live! produces songs and videos for classroom use and also performs concerts combining rap and physics across the

US. While memorization is often conducted with a banking/assimilationist approach, even this work can be achieved through entertaining, participatory methods which build on students' existing knowledge and interests.

Hip-Hop dance has been used in science teaching as an aid for memorization and kinesthetic processing. It is equally rich material for the study of physics concepts such as gravity, motion, velocity, speed, and energy. Tatiana Forero Puerta, for example, has designed a lesson plan to teach anatomy through a study of the human body break dancing. Here, students simultaneously learn dancing, as well as vocabulary for dance positions and for parts of the muscular system. Smith explains that the integration of hip-hop performance and academic content “fosters the creative use of knowledge synthesizing the left and right spheres of the brain thus integrating knowledge and creativity into kinesthetic activity” (2). Similar to students who rap along with math and science based songs, students who are able to apply their understanding of anatomy to actual activity (dancing), are more likely to retain information.

### *History*

Just as with math and science, hip-hop is able to engage students in innovative lesson plans for social studies topics. *Flocabulary* is a publishing company which collaborates with widely respected hip-hop artists including producer 9<sup>th</sup> Wonder and rapper Akir to produce hip-hop albums and accompanying text books. Materials cover language arts, history, math, and science. Their website explains: “Music and rhyme are proven memory aids. Rap music is essentially mnemonic devices with catchy rhythms. Rap songs are ideally suited to storytelling and conveying detailed content because of their strong

emphasis on lyrics” (“Flocabulary”). As a device for storytelling, rap works particularly well in social studies education. Students are able to learn the story of a historic war, revolution, ancient empire or document creation for example, in the same entertaining manner that they learn the stories that rappers tell in popular hip-hop songs.

*Flocabulary* produces materials for both US and world history. Each song describes a different historical period, theme, or event. Songs on the US History album cover such content as “American Indian Civilizations and Columbus’ Arrival; The Constitution and the Federal Government; The Causes of Southern Secession and the Civil War; The Social Changes of the Twenties; [and] The Civil Rights Movement” (“Flocabulary”). *Flocabulary* also uses the hip-hop technique of sampling to include the voices of historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and quotations from speeches by Abraham Lincoln, Fredrick Douglass, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. These speeches are laid over hip-hop instrumentals and integrated into the songs.

Accompanying textbooks guide students through close readings of each song to provide additional information on the historic themes. The textbooks mirror classic history books, yet each paragraph begins with the song lyric that inspires it. For example, the line “Separate isn’t equal, when in practice./My school is a shack. *Mine is a palace!*” from the song “Let Freedom Ring,” is accompanied by an explanation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision which it references. Teacher resource books provide quizzes that stress reading comprehension and key vocabulary mastery. This blended approach, which combines hip-hop teaching materials with traditional ones such as textbooks and quizzes, enables students to connect to material and engage with it immediately,

yet also prepares them to understand and succeed with traditional teaching methods that they are more likely to encounter in future classes.

Similar to *Flocabulary's* close reading approach, existing hip-hop songs which reference pertinent issues can also work as ice breakers for lesson plans. Hip-hop songs that reflect urban environments are catalysts for socio-historical study of cities and social welfare. Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" can serve as a springboard for study of Reaganomics and the effects on urban America. The third verse of Nas's 2003 single "I Can" shares the history of ancient African empires and urges African-Americans to be proud of the accomplishments of their ancestors. The verse begins:

...Before we came to this country  
We were kings and queens, never porch monkeys  
There was empires in Africa called Kush  
Timbuktu, where every race came to get books  
To learn from black teachers who taught Greeks and Romans  
Asians, Arabs and gave them gold. When  
Gold was converted to money it all changed  
Money then became empowerment for Europeans  
The Persian military invaded  
They heard about the gold, the teachings, and everything sacred  
Africa was almost robbed naked

Here, hip-hop facilitates culturally relevant teaching by presenting history in a manner that is multicultural and affirms the accomplishments of all peoples.

When students believe that academic material concerns them, they are more likely to positively engage in class work and retain information.

Rather than using hip-hop to teach other histories, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell posit hip-hop itself as a historical entity to be contextualized and explored. The educators form multidisciplinary lesson plans which integrate elements of the language arts, social sciences, and media literacy. Their curriculum begins by contextualizing poetry and poets in their historical periods. The historical/literary

periods covered included, Elizabethan, Romantics, Civil War, Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement, and Post industrial Revolution in the United States. The authors explain that they intentionally

[placed] rap music and the post industrial revolution right along side these other historical periods and poems so that the students would be able to use a period and genre of poetry they were familiar with as a lens with which to examine the other literary works and also to encourage the students to re-evaluate the manner in which they view elements of their popular culture (90, “Promoting Academic Literacy”).

In this way, hip-hop itself is better understood by accounting for its socio-historic influences, and this method of critical reading and analysis transfers to students’ work with other genres of literature and other historic periods. By beginning in an area of student familiarity and then moving to related traditional subjects, Duncan-Andrade and Morell’s curriculum fulfills Frierian pedagogical goals of recognizing the knowledge that students bring to the classroom from their own experiences and then integrating this and their strengths into curricular pursuits.

### *Literary Arts*

Elements of hip-hop have been formulated to engage students in a variety of academic subjects; however one of the most frequently made connections is between hip-hop and literary studies. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell identify three objectives for hip-hop education: 1) to cultivate the “critical and analytical skills that [students] already possess,” 2) to empower students to transfer these skills to their work with canonical texts, and 3) to enable and encourage students to apply these skills beyond the classroom as culturally aware and media literate citizens

(90, "Promoting Academic Literacy"). Students who identify with and participate in hip-hop culture have often developed skills in poetic composition, public speaking, and literary analysis outside the classroom. Hanley tells the story of a hip-hop workshop she observed in which students who might have been stereotyped as unknowledgeable about literary terms, showed great command of these tools through rap. The workshop leader, a rapper and educator, listed the following poetic devices on the board: simile, metaphor, imagery, alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, meter, rhythm, and rhyme scheme. Students were asked to define the words and to the author's surprise, a student dressed in hip-hop style clothes was able to explain the meaning of each term. She continues, "[l]ater in the workshop he took words from participants and teachers and improvised poetry in rhythm and rhyme about the trials of being young and black in a white world and about boring education, and corrupt politicians. He got a standing ovation from everyone" (39).

In the scenario, a bridge is formed between traditional studies of literature and the student's own study of hip-hop (as well as the student's own beliefs and life experiences). Hanley's initial bias caused her to assume that a student who identified with hip-hop would not be academically invested or particularly knowledgeable; however, it was this very interest in hip-hop that seemed to spur his literary talents, or at least compliment them. It can be inferred that his familiarity with the literary terms is due to his recognition and usage of them in rap music.

A number of teaching resources are being developed to build this bridge for teachers and students. *Flocabulary's* "Word Up" series uses catchy, content-based rhymes to teach vocabulary, reading comprehension, critical thinking, SAT

preparation, and Shakespeare for grades 3-8. The authors explain that hip-hop music's repetitive nature enhances students' mastery of literary concepts. "Few students can successfully learn a word after having read or heard it once ...Consequently, researchers have found strong evidence in favor of providing students with multiple exposures to new words... in many different formats (text, audio, video)" (4). Similarly, Alan Lawrence Sitomer and Michael Cirelli's "Hip-Hop Poetry and the Classics" provides lesson plans which review key literary elements by juxtaposing classic texts with hip-hop song lyrics. Examples include exploring imagery in Langston Hughes' "Harlem: A Dream Deferred" with those in "Juicy" by the Notorious B.I.G, or personification in Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" and in Common's "I Am Music" ("Hip-Hop Poetry and the Classics")

Teachers who are constrained by school curricular requirements and standardized test preparation may find lessons such as these useful in ultimately improving student analysis of traditional texts. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell explain that hip-hop lyrical analysis introduces students to the discipline of critical reading and multiple lenses of critique. They state, "Once learned, knowledge of this language of interpretation can be applied to any text. A metaphor is the same whether for Nas or T.S. Eliot" (22, *Using Hip-Hop Culture as a Bridge*).

Other teachers with more flexibility may want to use hip-hop songs as primary texts for analysis rather than segues to works by Eliot, Shakespeare, or other canonical authors. Those who advocate for an increased value of hip-hop literature argue that it "should stand on its own merit in the academy and be a worthy subject of study in its own right" (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 89, "Promoting Academic Literacy"). Songs such as Blackstar's "Hater Players," Lupe Fiasco's "Instrumental," and The Roots "Hurricane" intricately incorporate

such literary elements as simile and metaphor, assonance and rhyme, imagery, narrative, and personification. Hip-hop lyrics of this nature work excellently as original texts for literary analysis.

When integrating existing (that is, not specifically made for educational purposes) hip-hop into the classroom, teachers should elicit student expertise in selecting songs and artists. As with literature, a combination of classic and contemporary selections exposes students to a range of works and is more likely to capture their interest. One of these contemporary rappers is Lil Wayne, a highly successful and popular artist from New Orleans. Wayne intersperses theatrical skits with rap lyricism in his 2008 song “Dr. Carter.” He plays a doctor and converses with his nurse about emcees who are dying from a lack of rap skills.

The theatrical dialogue, or skit, before the first verse reads:

Nurse: Looks like its going to be a long day.  
Lil Wayne: Uhhh, another one? What we got?  
Nurse: Your first patient...  
Lil Wayne: Yeah?  
Nurse: Is suffering from a lack of concept...  
Lil Wayne: Uh-Huh.  
Nurse: Originality...  
Lil Wayne: Ugh...  
Nurse: His flow is weak...  
Lil Wayne: Another one...  
Nurse: And he has no style  
Wayne: Ugh...  
Nurse: What you got for him?

Wayne then launches into the first rap verse in which he proceeds to prove his own rap skills by comparatively treating these ‘weak emcees:’

OK. Let me put my gloves on and my scrubs on.  
Dr. Carter to the rescue. Excuse me if I'm late,  
but like a thief it takes time to be this great.  
honestly, just wait. Your style is a disgrace,  
your rhymes are fifth place and I'm just grace.  
One, uno, ace.

The second part of the skit and the beginning of verse two read:

Nurse: Good afternoon, Dr. Carter

Lil Wayne: Nurse.

Nurse: I don't know about this one. His confidence is down, vocab and metaphors needs work, and he lacks respect for the game.

Lil Wayne: Uhhhh... Let me see...

Nurse: You think you can save him?

[Verse 2]: Lil Wayne

Okay.

Respect is in the heart.

So that's where I'ma start.

And a lot of heart patients don't make it...

Here, Wayne, by proxy of the nurse, notes the importance of a confident delivery, advanced or creative vocabulary and clever metaphors to the art of rapping. An unskilled rapper who continues to participate without investing artistic and literary effort “lacks respect for the [rap] game.” Wayne furthers the medical metaphor by diagnosing this patient with a heart condition because “respect is in the heart.”

The rapper-patients in the first two verses are in such critical condition that they are un-savable, even by Dr. Carter. However, Wayne's heroism comes through in the conclusion to the third verse and following skit:

Wait, as I put the light down his throat.

I can only see flow.

His blood starting to flow.

His lungs starting to grow.

This one starting to show.

Strong signs of life.

Where's the stitches here's the knife.

Smack his face his eyes open.

I reply with a nice

“Welcome back Hip Hop, I saved your life.

Wayne uses the homonym “flow” to denote a rapper's ability to rhyme skillfully and rhythmically and to mean blood flow, as the patient is revived and his vital signs begin to return. In this rap, Lil Wayne uses clever narration through

an extended medical metaphor to communicate his self-congratulatory message as well as deliver a literary critique of weaker emcees.

Rap places particular emphasis on the ability of skilled lyricists to use similes and metaphors in their rhymes. Use of “Dr. Carter” in the classroom can spark student discussion of important elements in hip-hop and in poetry and the similarities and differences between the two literary forms. Having students first identify the use of these and other literary devices in hip-hop songs places them in a position of knowledgeability and comfort which then may give them more confidence and a strengthened understanding to deconstruct and analyze poetry texts that teachers present later on.

Hip-hop works as a link to the language arts when students are able to analyze hip-hop texts alongside traditional ones. Hip-hop may also be used to encourage the development of students’ own literary voices. In addition to the programs which teach basic academic subjects, *Flocabulary* has designed a curriculum for teaching the art of freestyling. The authors reason, “The basis of rap is rhyme, and an emcee is just a painter creating a picture with rhyming words, a poet with flow. It might sound obvious, but one of the best ways you can excel as an emcee is by picking better rhyming words” (1). By identifying the skills needed to master freestyling, an activity that many youth greatly value, this program gives students motivation and reason to strengthen their literary proficiency. Songs also provide prompts for students’ creative and critical writing, allowing them to continue an exploration of the subject matter or adapt the theme of a song to express their own interests and concerns. For example, students could maintain the chorus of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5’s “The Message,” and write their own verses for a present day remix, or transform Nas’

song “If I Ruled the World” into a narrative describing a world in which they are in charge.

The conundrum of students who seem so adept at learning hip-hop but struggle to master literary studies in school can be better understood by contextualizing literacy. Summarizing the work of many authors, Weinstein writes, “Reading, writing, and verbal communication are all deeply contextualized activities that can only be understood by exploring the people, places, and powers that surround and infuse them” (272). Hip-hop is often one of these surrounding factors that deeply influence students’ understanding of language. Weinstein complicates the popular definition of literacy as a static have or have not, calling for the term to be pluralized as *literacies* to stress the ‘multiple nature of literacy,’ in this case, including hip-hop literacy (272).

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell offer a broader definition of “school-based literacy that encompasses cultural values, self-awareness, and the development of a critical consciousness” (3, “Using Hip-Hop Culture as a Bridge”). Because “literacy is culturally framed,” students who struggle in school may do so because of a cultural disconnect rather than a lack of intelligence (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 5, “Using Hip-Hop Culture as a Bridge”). Instead of blaming students for their lack of engagement in traditional school curricula, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell argue that this should be addressed as a failure on behalf of the schools to build intercultural bridges in their teaching methods and content.

### *Media literacy*

Hip-Hop, in addition to utilizing many literary tools and providing an engaging medium to express academic information, has historically served as a

counternarrative to the mainstream stories that a society tells. Hip-hop is most often adopted by a society's most marginalized people as a way to speak back, speak for and represent one's own self. While this music has many strengths, its high value of freedom of speech results in controversial and problematic material as well. For these reasons, hip-hop music and related hip-hop videos are rich sites for teaching and exercising media literacy. Hip-Hop inspired media literacy curriculum has included student analysis of rap violence in comparison to similar community violence and student creation of rap cds to deliver alternative messages (Mahiri and Conner). Other classrooms have incorporated performance poetry, which, because of its link to hip-hop, encourages students to express their frustrations with such topics as sexism and racism, and also enhances their literary, social, and public speaking skills (Squires et al 2006). Still other programs have used songs from students' favorite artists to explore social studies and intertwined subjects of race, class, and gender (Stovall 2006).

Because hip-hop functions as a counternarrative, it performs the work of media literacy by producing readings of hegemonic society, which identify often covert methods of misinformation and oppression. In "Thieves in the Night," the duo Blackstar, comprised of underground rappers Mos Def and Talib Kweli, comment powerfully on internalized racism amongst African-Americans. More broadly, the song questions the messages that we often unconsciously absorb and the deception that we unwittingly perpetuate. Mos Def raps:

Yo, I'm sure that everybody out listenin' agree  
That everything you see ain't really how it be  
A lot of jokers out runnin' in place, chasin' the style  
Be a lot goin' on beneath the empty smile  
Most cats in my area be lovin' the hysteria  
Synthesized surface conceals the interior  
America, land of opportunity, mirages and camouflages

More than usually – speakin’ loudly, sayin’ nothin’  
You confusin’ me, you losin’ me  
Your game is twisted, want me enlisted -- in your usury  
Foolishly, most men join the ranks cluelessly  
Buffoonishly accept the deception, believe the perception  
Reflection rarely seen across the surface of the lookin’ glass  
Walkin’ the street, wonderin’ who they be lookin’ past  
Lookin’ gassed with them imported designer shades on  
Stars shine bright, but the light -- rarely stays on

A close reading of this song introduces students to the idea that the master narrative is in many ways deceptive, and yet we often reproduce it, “believe the perception.” By recognizing the “synthesized surface” and examining the “mirages and camouflages” students (and teachers) may begin to deconstruct micro and macro systems of oppression as they impact their lives and the media to which they are exposed. Having established an understanding that media has the ability to send influential messages, positive and negative, they can begin developing skills to identify and critique those messages.

Hip-hop’s messages can be divided into two (sometimes overlapping) categories of media literacy usage: 1) hip-hop that is read for its socially conscious content and 2) hip-hop that is read for problematic social issues which it reflects. In the former category are many artists outside of mainstream radio-promoted hip-hop, who are sometimes referred to as “the underground.” However, more popular mainstream artists occasionally produce socially conscious songs as well. The chart below presents a diverse collection of artists from the mainstream and the underground, as well as from many regions of the United States, and the songs of theirs which provide commentary on pertinent social issues:

Artist	Song	Social Issue
Lil Wayne	Georgia Bush	Hurricane Katrina
Swizz Beats and Various Artists	Stand Up	Sean Bell/Police Brutality
Eve	Love is Blind	Domestic Violence
2Pac	Brenda's Got A Baby	Teen Pregnancy
KRS-One and Various Artists	Self Construction	Stop the Violence Movement
Kanye West	Diamonds From Sierra Leone Remix	Conflict Diamonds
Lupe Fiasco	He Say She Say	Single Mothers, Fatherhood
Mos Def	New World Water	Environmentalism

Similar to close readings of texts for historical or literary content, these songs can be critically listened to and read for their social commentary. KRS-One, a hip-hop pioneer, activist and self proclaimed “teacha,” is the founder of the *Stop the Violence Movement* which has focused on ending community violence in urban areas. KRS-One united a number of popular hip-hop artists for the 2008 collaboration song, “Self Construction,” which raises awareness of and criticizes violence. On the song, mainstream artist Nelly raps:

It's like we livin' in that you can't stop me era  
 Like man when I see you Ima pop you era  
 Like we ain't learned nothing from the 2Pac era  
 From the B.I. terror  
 Take a look in the mirror  
 Gets your hands out your pockets like man  
 It's time we get up get out and get sumthin' get a plan  
 You know, a plan not a scam  
 I'm talkin' sumthin' beneficial in helpin' the next man

His verse critiques a violent culture in which people are reckless and have not heeded the warnings of past violence and death in hip-hop (“B.I.” references the Notorious B.I.G and his fatal feud with West Coast rapper, 2Pac in the late 90’s). Nelly urges listeners to “look in the mirror” and take action to ‘help the next man.’

After listening to a song like “Self Construction” students should first be asked general questions about their reaction to the song, such as “what lines or verses stand out to you and why?” From here, a more focused discussion can take place. For “Self Construction,” students may be asked if they agree or disagree with Nelly’s description of our violent society and why. What does he mean by the “‘you can’t stop me’ era/... ‘man when I see you Ima pops you’ era”? What are the consequences of violence? If people are aware of these consequences, why does violence continue? What would “a plan” for effective violence prevention and community restoration look like? Media literacy exercises which discuss social problems should both inform students and also empower them to make change.

There is value in introducing students to songs such as “Self Construction” and the others listed above, which are positive and educational. However many youth are most frequently exposed to mainstream hip-hop, which, instead of debunking social ills, often reflects and reinforces them. Media literacy studies provides the equally valuable opportunity to tackle some of hip-hop’s most conflicted work as well. In doing so, students are able to make informed choices as to the type of music or type of hip-hop that they choose to listen to and support. Those who continue listening to violent and misogynistic hip-hop will at least be more aware of the music’s “mirages and camouflages” and be more fully empowered to accept or reject these notions.

Songs such as Notorious B.I.G’s “Unbelievable,” Cam’ron’s “Killa Cam” and “Weather Man” featuring Jim Jones, Lil Wayne, and Stack Bundles, exhibit excellent manipulation of literary terms, but send messages which promote drugs,

violence, and misogyny. The following is the beginning of Jim Jones' verse in "Weather Man:"

1. I'm fittin' to make it rain so getchu an umbrella
2. We also make it snow we cocaine gram sellers (That Yayo)
3. Ballin gettin' high dolla's from the sky (balllllin)
4. Big reefer cloud got it storming inside (drizzlin)
5. Foreign outside I'm usually foreign when I drive (Speedin)
6. A buck sixty feels like you soaring in the sky
7. Blowing money on the liquor (Twisted)
8. At the strip joint blowing money on the bitches (Let it rain)
9. We standin' on the bar throwing money like a pitcher (Get money)
10. But nigga I ain't slippin got a fully-loaded trigga
11. And that can cause a heatwave (getchu clapped haa)
12. That mean you diggin' you a deep grave
13. Nigga's jump yo ass have 'em missin you for 3 days (Where he at?)

In this excerpt, Jones cleverly uses many weather related metaphors; however most of them refer to materialism, violence, and drugs. In criticizing problematic rap, it is important that educators do not slip into a habit of criticizing their students by extension. That is, condemnation of a hip-hop song that a student values may be perceived as condemnation of that student. Instead, teachers should facilitate collaborative analysis of songs of this nature, and identify strengths, such as creative use of metaphors and the musical production, as well as specific examples of problematic content.

Problematizing differs from condemning in that the former necessitates open-minded and creative investigation while the latter monopolizes the ability to know, and closes doors to further inquiry. Freire makes the distinction between problem-posing education and banking education. The latter "resists dialogue," and is an "immobilizing and fixating force" (83-4). The former "regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition ...[it] bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality" (83-4). Problematization raises questions while condemnation gives a non-negotiable answer. To problematize a

rap song is to suggest that ‘something is off’, and to then engage the class in co-intentional dialogue which raises and rigorously explores questions on such topics as gender, race, criminality, consumption, abuse, and power, aiming to better understand that ‘something’ and its implications.

For the above excerpt of Jones’ verse, the following questions could be raised and posed by the class and teacher for collaborative investigation: Reading and listening to this passage, what images come to mind? What words describe the overall lifestyle that Jones details in this verse? Is it intriguing? Cool? Why? How is the weather metaphor used throughout the verse? How would the song be different if Jones did not frame it as an extended metaphor or did not use any metaphors? Doing a close reading of lines 7 – 10, what functions do alcohol, women, and guns play in building and supporting the image that Jones creates? How does Jones represent himself as powerful, and how can this representation be further understood by considering class, race, gender, and sexuality?

Questions of this nature focus on specific elements of the lyrics so as not to over generalize, and present broad-based and open-ended inquiries which work toward students gaining a deeper understanding of the song’s socio-political significance and of the larger societal issues which its messages point to. A discussion of coded masculine-power in the song, for example, can lead to a discussion of this topic as it manifests in other media or facets of life. Shor describes Freire’s problem-posing methods and states that “through problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions” (26). Therefore, questions raised in critical dialogue about rap songs should be discussion starters that may spur more questions. The answers that come most

readily should be questioned and investigated as well, as they may represent learned ideologies and misinformation.

Hip-hop enhances the cultural relevancy of a classroom by including the voices of marginalized youth of color and those who have become successful through hip-hop entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, it remains ruthlessly male-dominated, often patriarchal and misogynist in content, as well as homophobic. There is a small selection of female emcees such as Queen Latifah, Lauryn Hill, Eve, and Lil Kim, who have represented feminist perspectives throughout the decades, however the vast majority of hip-hop lyrics are authored and delivered by men. Feminist hip-hop songs such as Eve's previously cited "Love is Blind" and Queen Latifah's "U.N.I.T.Y" can be used in the first category of media literacy – that which reads lyrics for their direct social commentary. A small number of songs by male rappers such as Talib Kweli and Common are also feminist in content. However, the majority of gender-based media literacy in hip-hop can be derived from a meta-analysis of hip-hop that reflects and perpetuates sexism.

Byron Hurt's film, "Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes [BBR]" investigates hip-hop's problematic relationship with gender politics through the use of scholar and fan interviews, statistics, and music videos. The ABC Program research study conducted by this author in Fall 2007 adapted an existing BBR high school curriculum for use with middle schoolers. Part III provides a brief overview and analysis of the study

### III "Hip-Hop Heads" Research Study

In September, 2007, I designed a research proposal, which was approved by the Connecticut College Internal Review Board, for a multiple session study of

a hip-hop critical literacy curriculum with middle school students. The research objectives were to:

- Assess youth attitudes on gender roles and hip-hop's gender and violence politics.
- Assess ability of interviews and 4 week curriculum to:
  - Increase student awareness of gender and violence issues in hip-hop
  - Increase student skills in media literacy and critical thinking
  - Encourage proactive, anti-sexist and non-violent involvement in hip-hop.

The project's field work/data collection took place in the fall of 2007. Written and oral interviews were conducted with small groups of students at the beginning and end of the study. These interviews drew on the work of previous research studies which explored gender, violence and hip-hop (Squires et al.; Watts, Abdul-Adil, and Pratt; and Kobin and Tyson). Students were asked to rate their interest in hip-hop and the extent of their exposure to and knowledge of it. They were shown photos of rappers and asked to give information about these artists to further assess these criteria. The opening oral group interview included a brief exercise in song analysis (Lupe Fiasco's "Hurt Me Soul") which led to a guided discussion of student's opinions about gender, gender in hip-hop, and gender-based violence.

Byron Hurt's film, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes* (2006) and the accompanying lesson plans were also adapted to assist in creating the four one-hour long workshop sessions conducted with the youth. These sessions explored the history of hip-hop and youth views about its present state, masculinity and hip-hop, violence against women and hip-hop, and media literacy through music video

analysis. I facilitated and audiotaped each session. Additional program mentors involved with the afterschool program assisted in activity implementation and kept notes on dialogue, mood in the room, body language, group dynamics and other elements of the sessions that they found relevant to record.

### *Demographics and Initial Attitudes*

Students were drawn from an afterschool mentoring program held on a small New England college campus and comprised of youth from the local urban, low-income community. Students and their parents were notified of potentially upsetting or controversial content to be included in the study and both parties signed consent and assent forms respectively, for participation. Participation was voluntary, and eleven students completed both the beginning written and oral interviews and the initial evaluation. Throughout the course of the study, two of these students chose to discontinue participation and two others ceased attending the mentoring program and therefore participation this study as well. The remaining seven students, ages 12-14, completed the program through to the closing written and oral interviews. After each session, students received two pieces of candy as incentives and to thank them for their participation, and after the final session students received colorful certificates of completion (Appendix B).

This final group was comprised of five boys and two girls (although a number of the sessions had an additional female participant who ceased program attendance mid-project). Four students identified as Black or African American, two as Hispanic or Latino, and one as Black/African American and White. All but one student had two or more C's (out of eight class marks) on their first quarter

report card and all but two had three or more C's and/or D's and/or F's. Three reported living with both parents, two with only one parent, one with a mother and stepfather and one with a mother and grandparents.

Students reported weekly exposure to top 40 and hip-hop music anywhere from 1.5 hours a week to 105 hours a week (youth self reported their music exposure; therefore, numbers may be distorted). When asked how often they "question, analyze, or talk about the meaning of words and images in hip-hop music and videos with [their] peers, family, or other adults" there were four "sometimes", three "rarely" and one "never" responses. These answers may have been partially determined by the degree to which music was a part of their life, i.e., if they did not listen to music or discuss it in general very often, then they would not often analyze it in these ways. Four out of seven (all African-American) students stated that they liked hip-hop/rap, and six out of seven reported listening to hip-hop/rap frequently. Four out of seven reported listening to MTV and or BET.

Students were given pictures of fifteen hip-hop artists or groups ranging in degree of mainstream popularity and peak years of relevancy (Appendix C). Each photo had three blank lines for writing information about the artists and students were asked to fill in as many of the blanks lines per artist as they could. Three students left this section entirely blank or wrote judgments but not facts about the artists pictured. All of the remaining four students (all African American) were able to name Soulja Boy, Young Jeezy, Jay-Z, Nas, and Lil Wayne among other popular rappers. These are all rappers who, with the arguable exception of Nas, produce content that is primarily entertaining, often violent or sexual, and rarely pointedly political or positively uplifting. Rappers who fit in the categories of

'pointedly political' or 'positively uplifting' included Common who was identified by only two students, and Talib Kweli and Lauryn Hill, each of whom were only named by 1 student. The two students who named Common also wrote that he was a "poet." This evaluation took place weeks after the BET Awards Show in which Common was nominated for five and won two awards and this may have contributed to the students' recognition of the artist. It is still noteworthy that very few students recognized Common or other positive artists. Other facts offered for various rappers included their status as fathers and/or husbands, their jail records, their drug use, their regional location, song titles, and the fact that they rapped, sang, danced or produced.

### *Content and Results*

The beginning interviews were similar in many ways to the conversations chronicled in a study by Squires et al. in which students exhibited victim blaming tendencies and disgust with the way women were portrayed in hip-hop. Unlike the participants in the Squires et al. study, the ABC mentors group agreed that it was never okay for a man to abuse a woman physically or verbally in a romantic relationship. However, they still tended to put the pressure on 'her' to change the situation and reform promiscuous behavior. Students needed prompting to consider men's role in hip-hop exploitation, as well as to consider men's role in dating and sexual violence. In the opening and closing interviews, some students noticeably giggled and made side-comment references to their own lives or the lives of young people they knew when questioned about abusive relationships. They were reluctant to discuss this further or openly.

The workshops attempted to teach the concept of victim blaming and encouraged students to question men's roles and institutions' roles as much as if not more than they already questioned women's. A second concept emphasized throughout the sessions was that of the "Man Box" presented originally in Byron Hurt's film. The Man Box is a set of stereotypes about masculinity that confine men, or 'box' them in. Students responded well to this concept, confidently stating that it was better to be outside the Man Box than inside it. They noted that hip-hop songs teach things like "don't cry" and promote "death" and "shooting." Students placed these statements in a column of the classroom blackboard that they labeled "unuseful." When asked how to prevent the pressures of the unuseful man box, students offered "programs for kids" and "religion." I led the group in recreating a Man Box of 'what it really means to be a man.' They labeled this "useful." In it were the following brainstormed items:

Keep job, sex with permission/protection, stay with wife, take care of children, no violence, no selling drugs, no hustling, not saying bad words, respect women and each other, don't look for trouble.

Students were very invested in discussing the concept of "hustling" which is popular in hip-hop and has both positive and negative connotations. It can be interpreted as dangerous, illegal ways of making money, such as drug dealing and prostitution, or positive entrepreneurship, such as owning a record label or legally selling products. Students struggled to understand the concept of "materialism" as a potentially negative element of hip-hop. Many believed that hip-hop songs and artists that flaunted wealth and material possessions were positive because they represented financial success.

The final workshop session allowed students to apply their skills and the information learned in the preceding workshops to analyses of music videos,

which they presented to the class. Working in pairs of two, and one independently, students were given worksheets with guiding questions for a close reading of music videos (Appendix D). Common's "The Light" represented a non-stereotypical and a healthy romantic relationship, and Christina Aguilera and Lil Kim's "Can't Hold Us Down" featured women speaking out/back to the men who had degraded them. The song also questions the gender double standard concerning sexual promiscuity. Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'" was chosen for its representations of misogyny and material, and for the video's fragmentation of women's bodies, and 50 Cent featuring Akon's "Still Will (Kill)" was chosen for its representation violence and hypermasculinity. I began the session with a ten minute introduction to video analysis by offering my own readings of short clips from other music videos, and reviewing targeted vocabulary. Students were then aided by the facilitator (myself) and assisting mentors to critically read their video and prepare a presentation. Each student was able to stand in front of the class and give their presentation, affirming their knowledge and their ability to teach as well as learn. One student who had written notes analyzing Common and Erykah Badu's video with the prepared worksheet wrote [unedited]:

It does seem less degrading because it doesn't show da camera showing the back of her a\*\* or boobs or n-e thang else up close [and] it shows her face and her flexing her [muscles]. [They're] outside of the box because they don't show a lot of her body [and] also he don't show that [he's] a playa, that got a lot of money and he says that he'll treat her like his equal. It shows that in a relationship you should treat eachother as equals not 1's better.

This student was able to articulate advanced concepts of fragmentation, respect and degradation, and relationship equality, and confidently presented this material to the class. In final evaluations, the majority of participants listed this as their favorite workshop. They enjoyed the interactive use of media and the ability to present and have everyone's attention and respect.

Closing interviews aimed to assess how well each research goal had been achieved. Small groups of students listened to an excerpt from a second song (Lupe Fiasco's "Daydreaming") and were guided through a close reading of the lyrics, which led to loosely guided discussion concerning their opinions on gender, gender in hip-hop, and gender-based violence. Their responses still reflected a degree of victim blaming tendencies and disproportionate attention to women's promiscuity; however students responded with some recognition to references of previous workshop material and discussions that countered this line of thinking. They challenged each other to think differently about these topics as well. When asked, some participants reflected that this project did change the way they listen to and think about hip-hop, causing them to consider the messages about women more carefully.

In the closing written interview, I asked students again if and how the project had impacted the way they listen to hip-hop and were given multiple choice answers from which to choose. Three students circled "Yes, I am more aware of the lyrics in songs and the images in videos now and try to listen to more conscious rap and watch videos that do not support male/female stereotypes or violence." Four students circled "Yes, I am more aware of the words in songs and the images in videos now, but I still listen and watch them about the same amount as before. One student circled "No, I did not listen to a lot of hop-hop before, and

still do not.”

### *Project Evaluation*

The curriculum had a positive impact on students overall, as evidenced by their ability to identify studied concepts in the magazines used for the final collage, and by their reported shift in listening habits. Students encouraged one another to think more critically about the messages in hip-hop music and expressed a desire to change the negativity in the music. The subject matter was highly demanding for middle school youth; however they were persistent and engaged, largely because the hip-hop subject matter excited them.

This project managed two responsibilities, 1) a formal research study 2) an element of an after school program’s weekly curriculum. As the project coordinator, I juggled roles as a researcher/neutral facilitator and a teacher with intentions to guide students in a certain learning direction. It is possible that some student responses were geared towards pleasing perceived teacher desires. Other complications to the study included incomplete or inaccurately completed written interviews and assessments by students in cases in which they did not properly understand the question given. In discussions, many vocabulary words needed to be clarified for this group and there is the possibility that their responses in group discussions were also impacted by misunderstanding the subject matter. The workshop sessions were not able to incorporate sufficient discussion of hip-hop’s strengths and positive artists as evidenced by student’s lack of response to questions on this subject at the end of the study.

Continuations of this work would expand study of hip-hop’s positive qualities and potential, and focus on reinforcing key vocabulary. It is important

that media literacy curriculum empowers youth as agents of social change, rather than overwhelms or discourages them with the gravity or breadth of the social problems studied. Furthermore, seven is not a large enough number or participants to have a representative sample, so while much can be learned from these students' behavior and responses, future studies would need to be done with larger groups to support any conclusions drawn.

### Conclusion

Just as the arts are a useful medium for therapeutic intervention, they have long been recognized and employed as a tool for education as well. Arts education fulfills the kinesthetic learning needs of many students, and provides a gateway to creative thinking and the actualization of student ideas and academic theory. Introducing hip-hop arts into the formal classroom can be viewed very similarly to the movement to incorporate it into therapy. In addition to being valuable as an art form, hip-hop represents elements of popular culture and urban black and Latino culture that are relevant to many young people. By beginning the teaching process with student's own knowledge and lived experiences, teachers have a greater likelihood of building strong rapport and engaging students in a successful and enjoyable learning process. When students believe that classroom content is relevant to them, they are more likely to succeed, and there is the potential to close established achievement gaps. Susan Weinstein writes, "despite the panic over low test scores, low standards, and low skill levels, children and teenagers from across class and ethnic or racial categories eagerly read and write when they see a purpose to it and when they get something out of it" (273).

A culturally relevant and liberatory classroom engages students with its content but also with methods that are collaborative and democratic (Scherpf). Freirean pedagogy theorizes that students often internalize notions of inferiority, and that this can be overcome by recognizing their own expertise and value as intelligent contributors. Gay writes that “culturally responsive pedagogy is *liberating* in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing” (35). Once empowered to share their own knowledge in the classroom environment, students participate with more insight, interest, and intellect.

Bringing students’ lived experience into the classroom additionally creates a space to critically examine the challenges in students’ lives and the greater social structures influencing them. Introducing popular culture into the classroom facilitates the strengthening of students’ ability to critically understand the media which surrounds them. Shumway explains that “the purpose of teaching popular materials is not to get students to change their responses to them, but to teach them how to read both the material and their responses critically” (229).

Such work in hip-hop media literacy as well as more traditional disciplines including math, science, English and history, is taking place across the US. A select number of curriculum guides and internet resources have been developed to demonstrate the existence of hip-hop education, as well as make it possible for more educators to begin participating in this work. As evidenced in my own research study, as well as those conducted by other scholars, hip-hop, as an affirming and engaging medium, often enables low-achieving students to succeed at academically challenging content. With its expansion across the US, hip-hop has developed a vast catalogue of artists and songs that tackle nearly every topic

imaginable to connect to students and enhance lesson plans. Although some traditional educators may be wary of the hip-hop medium, continuing documentation of this work and its success will assist in overcoming those biases and enabling hip-hop education to deepen the extent of its work and expand its reach.

## CONCLUSION

*From Englewood to a single hood in Botswana  
I see the I in We my nigga, yours is my drama  
Standin' in front of the judge with no honor  
My raps ignite the people like Obama  
The karma of the streets is needs and takes  
Sometimes we find peace in beats and breaks  
Put the bang in the back so the seats can shake  
Rebel Cadillac music for the people's sake*

- Common, "The People"<sup>7</sup>

"Hip-Hop," a term coined by DJ Lovebug Starsky in 1974 to describe the musical genre of rap, has since developed into a powerful, multifaceted force in American culture. It impacts numerous arenas of American life including advertising, entertainment, fashion, visual and performing arts, literature, and sports. Undoubtedly, youth of diverse cultural backgrounds are exposed to hip-hop in many mediums and studies have demonstrated its significant influence on their lifestyles, including attitudes and behaviors. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators and advocates are beginning to ask how hip-hop can be developed into a tool for positive youth development. In regards to classroom hip-hop integration, Forell comments, "[m]ost likely, it's already there and simply requires recognition, celebration, and incorporation into formal activities" (31). David R. Shumway adds, "Students need to be able to read the social meaning of mass cultural products, and this ability does not develop naturally from exposure to them" (226). This reasoning is also applicable to youth rehabilitation efforts; young clients who are immersed in hip-hop music and culture may benefit from a therapeutic intervention which acknowledges this existing force in their lives and examines its possible risk factors, as well as its potential for healing.

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<sup>7</sup> Common. "The People." *Finding Forever* G.O.O.D., 2007.

The decision to bring hip-hop into educational and therapeutic endeavors is a way of responding to an element of youth culture that can no longer be ignored, nor dismissed as a fad. Hip-Hop, like any cultural force, changes over time, but it is not going away. Embracing it can accomplish a number of goals for youth work. Hip-Hop is a tool which can actualize culturally relevant praxis; build bridges between youth interests and educational/therapeutic content, in the process building rapport between youth and adult practitioners; enable learning to come from youth rather than be imposed on them by adult practitioners; and finally, foster education/therapy that is meaningful, fun and engaging.

Work of this nature highlights the unique value of youth subcultures, yet does not hesitate to also problematize them. Students may initially react negatively to a perceived critique of their own lives or of their beloved popular culture (Giroux and Simon). Henry Giroux and Roger Simon reason, “youth have cause to be wary of...making their private and lived voices the object of public and pedagogical scrutiny” (247). It is therefore the responsibility of youth advocates to be receptive to student reactions, and develop balanced and flexible programming that incorporates youth feedback and allows for youth leadership.

Additionally, youth advocates should not attempt the integration of hip-hop culture into their work without first gaining some personal familiarity with the content (Shumway; Elligan, “Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide”). Geneva Gay explains, “Educators ...need to analyze their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules, and regulations that have made it difficult for them to teach ...children successfully” (26). While hip-hop is one tool for working more effectively with youth, advocates must also consider the societal inequities their students face, as well as how they themselves may have adopted and perpetuated

biases as a result of privileges on the basis of such factors as age, race, and class. With this awareness, advocates are far better equipped to work for truly equitable youth development.

### *Looking Ahead*

The preceding chapters of this thesis have established the strong influence that hip-hop has on many young Americans, as well as the need for stronger services to meet their pressing needs in education and healthy development. Chapters 2 and 3 outline arguments for hip-hop based therapy and education respectively, as well as existing implementations of this work. While hip-hop therapy can easily be considered an additional element of the creative arts therapies, and hip-hop education may be viewed as a contemporary application of Freirean pedagogy, these theoretical frameworks have not yet been widely adopted. Hip-Hop is still greatly stigmatized and this may pose a challenge for future development in these areas of the hip-hop movement.

However, young people's passion for music and pop culture is not new. Elligan historicizes youth involvement in hip-hop music, observing:

Each generation of youth has had a special connection to music. The belief that music speaks to their experiences, challenges, passions, fears, and hopes is in many ways the cornerstone of being an adolescent or young adult...Music enjoyed by youth has historically been radical and in opposition to adult values and norms (13, "Rap Therapy: A Practical Guide").

Interestingly, as the original hip-hop generation (defined by Bakari Kitwana as people born between the years of 1965 and 1984) transitions into adulthood, more

authority figures are also hip-hop fans and able to be advocates for its integration into professional and political arenas. These high-power hip-hop advocates may be the key to hip-hop activism (including its educational and rehabilitative endeavors) becoming better understood and more widely accepted. While this work presently exists in fairly disconnected pockets of the US, having the hip-hop generation in greater leadership roles nation-wide creates the possibility for a more unified movement.

In January of 2008, as the United States was immersed in the historic election season that would end with the election of the country's first black president, BET's news correspondent Jeff Johnson sat down with then candidate, Barack Obama to discuss hip-hop's role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century political landscape. Johnson asked first if Obama liked hip-hop, to which he replied "Of course," listing Jay-Z and Kanye West as examples. He stated, "Honestly, I love the art of Hip-Hop. I don't always love the message," and proceeded to note the problematic violence, materialism, and misogyny present in much of the music. Johnson continued, "The reality is that hip-hop can engage the very people that you have to deal with about education and incarceration. Would there be a place [in your White House] to explore how hip-hop can be effectively used?" To this, Obama confidently responded:

Absolutely, I don't think there is any doubt that it can be. I've talked to artists about how, potentially, to bridge that gap. I think [there is] potential for them to deliver a message of extraordinary power that gets people thinking, and the thing about hip-hop today is its smart, its insightful and the way that [rappers] can communicate a complex message in a very short space is remarkable... What I always say is that, hip-hop is not just a mirror

of what is. It should also be a reflection of what can be...art can't just be a rear view mirror, it should have a headlight out there, pointing to where we need to go ("What's In It For Us?")

With these remarks, Barack Obama countered a history of political figures targeting hip-hop exclusively as a negative force. Instead, the soon-to-become 44<sup>th</sup> President presented himself ultimately as an ally of hip-hop culture. He acknowledged its positive aspects first, before carefully critiquing its negative ones, and then designated hip-hop as a leader in social change efforts, noting its strong focus on communication and oration. Within this framework, Obama explained his belief that hip-hop must do more than provide testimony on the problems facing urban America, and instead become a directive voice for reform.

Now that he is in office, Obama has many challenges to face, but should make a continued effort to keep the support of and connection to the hip-hop community. If this positive relationship is maintained, one must consider the potential for shifts in the hip-hop activist movement:

Will it remain the grassroots, dispersed collective that Chang described in 2005, or will it develop into a more mainstream, centralized movement that works with, rather than against, national government to achieve reform?

While the potential unification of the hip-hop activist movement would undoubtedly strengthen the work of practitioners who are currently scattered and fairly isolated from one another, it presents the risk of creating a homogenized and diluted form.

In an article for the Jan/Feb 2009 edition of *Colorlines* magazine, Chang commented on this state of opportunity and change, asking the presumably unspoken question on the minds of many people in the Obama era:

What do we do when we win? It's a question that community organizers, people of color, the hip-hop generation, those of us so used to being the underdog have not been able to ask ourselves much in the past four decades. ...And now the question is suddenly the main one on the table. It undergirds the other questions we want to answer: How do we bring the troops home, reverse economic injustice, dismantle corporate consolidation, ensure diversity of media representation, embrace immigration, establish national healthcare, expand educational opportunity, colorize the green economy, abolish prisons and begin rehabilitating our people and our country" ("What Do We Do When We Win?")?

One such organization tackling hip-hop political reform is the 2004 established *Hip Hop Caucus*. The Caucus's Advisory Board is comprised of 18 US Congressional Representatives and their key issues address many of Chang's suggested areas. The *Hip Hop Caucus*'s campaigns include *Urban Poverty*, *Urban Planning*, *Climate Change*, *Healthcare*, *Public Education*, and *Criminal Justice* ("Hip Hop Caucus"). Organizations of this nature are equipped with the political leverage to lobby for greater support of education and rehabilitative initiatives on a federal level; however, in seizing this newly relevant pathway, the hip-hop movement must not disband its numerous ground level troops.

Chang's "we" includes political organizations like the *Hip Hop Caucus*, that can make meaningful contributions to education reform and further development of youth rehabilitative programs through federal legislative efforts. However, the hip-hop movement must necessarily encompass, and moreover nurture, individual and community efforts as well. This locally-based activity works in the hip-hop tradition of galvanizing people on the street level.

By continuing to honor its grassroots origins while expanding its political lobbying and enhancing its nation-wide image, the hip-hop movement will continue evolving into a respected, effective, and inspiring force for social and political change.

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“This guy is not very smart because he was sliding his [credit] car down girls butts”

“They think they are tough because they are a gang”

“He think he’s the Hip Hop boss”

“He think he’s cute because he’s young”

“They are Hip Hop singers”



“Stereotypes” “Music Videos” “[fragmentations]”

“this is what we talk about when we say that woman’s are being [too] much expressed”

“fragmentations” “[stereotypes]”

“sometimes this rapper is really nasty like the song I’m in love with a stripper”



“Bad: Porn iz Degrading [Private] area!!!”  
 “Alicia Keys Getting Caught in ... R.E.A.D.ING”  
 “Put the [pieces] together!”

“He’s a good rapper and does not degrade”  
 “Showin his chain so it seems that he’s ballin’”

“He slides cards through girls butts”  
 “She showing off her boobs...She’s in the mag. cause the way she looks”



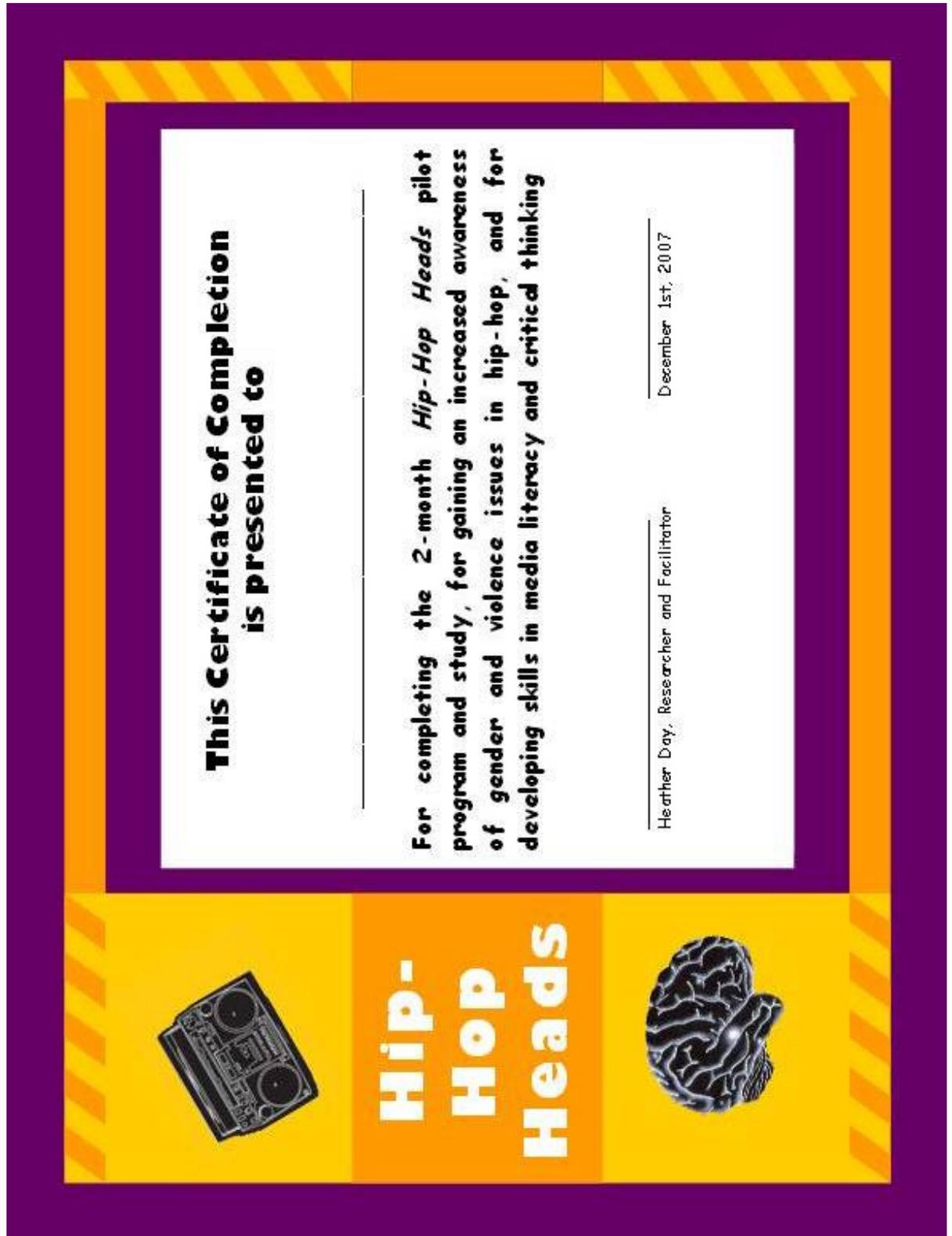
“I think that men wear so much chains so they can show how much money they get and how they show it off”

“Even rappers can have good families”

“I think that a family can be happy together...and can still be rappers”

“I think these 3 pictures ... show how women are [shown] and they want men to look and [?] them”

APPENDIX B: Certificate of Completion



## APPENDIX C: Artists Worksheet

List 3 things about each of the following people or groups of people. If you cannot list 3, list as many as you can think of (1 or 2 things).



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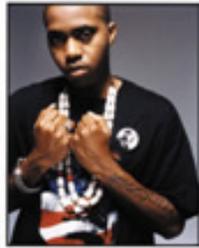
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## APPENDIX D: Worksheet for “The Light”

### - Worksheet: The Light – Common

#### Background

Common is a rapper from Chicago and is now signed to rapper Kanye West’s music label. He used to go by the name “Common Sense.” His music used to be more violent, sexist, and homophobic but then he changed. This song came out when Common was dating neo-soul singer, Erykah Badu, who is featured in the video. Most music video directors (and major film directors) are men. What difference does it make, that this video was directed by a woman, Nzingah Stewart?

#### Video

The video starts by showing a music record and later shows music tapes. There are many shots of ordinary objects – fish, lava lamp, leaves, flowers, butterfly, faucet, candles. The Egyptian “ankh” is shown which symbolizes the combination of male and female energy, and the life/death/rebirth cycle. Erykah Badu is also shown playing an African instrument called a “kalimba.”

**--How are these props different from popular props in music videos (cars, money, many women, alcohol)?**

**--What is the location of this video (a home) and how does that add to the meaning of it and of the song?**

It is not on a cruise ship, or in the club, not in a mansion, not exclusively in bed, not in prison or on the street...

**--Does the videos portrayal of men and women fit the stereotypes or go against them? Give specific examples.**

We see a woman’s foot, then her hair – natural in dread locks – then her mouth and eyes. Later we see her look into the camera and smile – this happens twice.

**--Her body is still shown in fragments but do you think it is objectifying her or is it different than fragmentation of women’s bodies in other music videos? Does it seem less degrading than in video’s like “P.I.M.P” and “Thong Song”? What is different?**

**--Are Common and Erkykah Badu inside or outside of “the box” in this video?** Think about the way they are filmed and the things they do: she flexes her muscles and puts on multi-colored toe socks, he peels an apple and puts a blanket on her at the end of the video for example.

*“It’s important we communicate, tune the fate of this union to the right pitch, I never call you my bitch or even my boo, there’s so much in a word and so much more to you”*

**--What is Common saying here? What does this song and video teach the listener/viewer about healthy relationships and how men should treat women?**

## Lyrics

Yeah..

[CHORUS]

There are times.. when you'll need someone..  
I will be by your side..  
There is a light, that shines,  
special for you, and me..

Yo, yo

I never knew a luh, luh-luh, a love like this  
Gotta be somethin for me to write this  
**Queen**, I ain't seen you in a minute  
Wrote this letter, and finally decide to send it  
Signed sealed delivered for us to grow together  
**Love has no limit, let's spend it slow forever**  
**I know your heart is weathered by what studs**  
**did to you**

**I ain't gon' assault 'em cause I probably did it**  
**too**

Because of you, feelings I handle with care  
Some n\*\*\*as recognize the light but they can't  
handle the glare

**You know I ain't the type to walk around**  
**with matchin shirts**

**A relationship is effort I will match your**  
**work**

I wanna be the one to make you happiest, it hurts  
you the most

They say the end is near, it's important that we  
close..

.. to the most, high

Regardless of what happen on him let's rely

[CHORUS]

Yo, yo, check it

**It's important, we communicate**  
**and tune the fate of this union, to the right**  
**pitch**

**I never call you my b\*\*\* or even my boo**  
**There's so much in a name and so much more**  
**in you**

**Few understand the union of woman and**  
**man**

**And sex and a tingle is where they assumin' it**  
**land**

But that's fly by night for you and the sky I write  
For in these cold Chi night's moon, you my light  
If heaven had a height, you would be that tall  
Ghetto to coffee shop, through you I see that all  
**Let's stick to understandin and we won't fall**  
**For better or worse times, I hope to me you**  
**call**

**So I pray everyday more than anything**  
**friends will stay as we begin to lay**  
**this foundation for a family - love ain't simple**  
**Why can't it be, anything worth having you**  
**work at annually**

Granted we known each other for some time  
It don't take a whole day to recognize sunshine

[CHORUS]

Yeah.. yo, yo, check it

It's kinda fresh you listen to more than hip-hop  
and I can catch you in the mix from beauty to  
thrift shop

Plus you ship hop when it's time to, thinkin you  
fresh

Suggestin beats I should rhyme to

**At times when I'm lost I try to find you**  
**You know to give me space when it's time to**  
**My heart's dictionary defines you as love and**  
**happiness**

Truthfully it's hard tryin to practice abstinence

The time we committed love it was real good

Had to be for me to arrive and it still feel good

I know the sex ain't gon' keep you, but as my  
equal

it's how I must treat you

**As my reflection in light I'ma lead you**

**And whatever's right, I'ma feed you**

Digga-da, digga-da, digga-da, digga-digga-da-da

Yo I tell you the rest when I see you, peace

[CHORUS]

(I'll) take my chances.. before they pass..

.. pass me by, oh darling..

You need to look at the other side..

You'll agree..